Teesdale School
& Sixth Form

PAST to PRESENT

The Journal of the
Teesdale History
Research Group

Volume 5, issue 1, Autumn 2026

TEESDALE HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP

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This journal is the product of the work of the Teesdale History Research Group that is made up of students from Years 9 to 13.

The articles in the journal represent the personal opinions of the authors and do not represent the views of Teesdale School as a whole.

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Foreword

Professor Anne Lawrence-Mathers, Professor of Medieval History, University of Reading

The Meanings of Halloween

As this special edition of the History Journal impressively demonstrates, Halloween has become a festival rich in both rituals and meanings. It is not only an event in its own right but also, at least for much of its history, the prelude to a prolonged 'Christian feast of the dead' (as Ronald Hutton called it in his 1996 book, Stations of the Sun). It has always brought together multiple layers of meaning, and has triumphantly overcome disruptions like the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, certain themes have been recognisable for over one thousand years.

The 'eve' part of All Hallows Eve (to give it its full name) was taken literally with special night-time services attended by congregations who dressed in black and carried torches to church. Music was played and church bells were rung until midnight, to give protection and support to the souls of the dead. The living were also comforted, with gifts of special food and drink. Halloween was always noteworthy for taking place in the dark, with special flames and fires. The emphasis for Christians was on showing care for the dead, accompanied by feelings of fear, especially since many medieval churches had images showing souls being tortured in Hell by monstrous, gloating demons. Light from candles and torches flickering over such images at midnight, as the bells rang, would add emotional force to the prayers of members of the congregation as they tried to invoke the help and protection of the saints.

Thus, care for the dead was mingled with fear for the living. The idea of Hell and its demons, and of a night dedicated to the dead, obviously has links to modern Halloween rituals and costumes, even if the monsters are now drawn more from popular culture. The threats of darkness and Winter already appear in fragments of evidence from early medieval Britain. The Anglo-Saxon historian, Bede, who preserved much of what little is known about Anglo-Saxon paganism, recorded only that November was called 'Blood Month' and that it began with the slaughter of cattle and feasting of a sort of which he disapproved. The onset of November remained important for Anglo-Saxon Christians, with the feast of All Saints (1 November) marked in the majority of surviving church calendars. It is even possible that Anglo-Saxon influence on the Emperor Charlemagne helped to fix the feast of All Saints on this date.

All this helps to explain why so many stories of

threatening spirits making terrifying appearances at graveyards, crossroads, and other ill-omened places, take place at Halloween. However, it is also the case that this night could be especially threatening for women. From the ancient world, the Christian Bible and medieval chronicles we have multiple stories alleging that female witches were experts in summoning spirits and contacting the dead. Perhaps most famous is the biblical Witch of Endor but she had many later echoes. For women vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft, attendance at church services, generous alms-giving (if they could afford it) and staying in well-lit places, would perhaps be the safest ways to spend Halloween.

Halloween: Secular, Pagan or Christian?

By Elsie P (Year 11)

Most partaking in the joys of Halloween in modern times do so without any religious strings attached. However, trick-or-treaters don't know that some of the traditions are passed down from many different groups of people, creating Halloween as we know it today.
The first recorded festival associated with Halloween is Samhain, an ancient, pre-Christianity Celtic tradition frequently perceived as the true origin of Halloween on November 1st. For Pagans, it marks the end of the autumn harvest, the light half of the year, and the beginning of the winter, the dark half. It's considered a time where the veil between the living and the dead is thin, allowing spirits to pass through. On Samhain eve, many Celts prepared dinner for their ancestors and used the skulls to protect them from demons. The traces of these rituals are seen today in decorations and meeting family or friends, but most of our modern customs are developed later.

Halloween as we know it has evolved beyond the pagan roots. The name "Halloween" is the contracted form of "All Hallows Eve", the eve of All Saints' Day, which is a Catholic celebration of all the Christian saints and martyrs who don't have their own named day. It originated with Pope Boniface IV, in the early 7th century but this date was May 13th, when it is still celebrated by some orthodox Christians. In the 8th century, Pope Gregory III decided the 1st of November was the date of All Saints' Day for western Christians, the same day as Samhain. This was on purpose, as many early church missionaries attempted to erase Pagan and earlier native traditions by absorbing them. On All Saints' Day, families visit graveyards, go to mass, and celebrate the saints. Again, this has similarities to Halloween, for example, after All Saints' Day, beggars going to houses to receive charity led to people visiting others in disguise and demanding "soul cakes", as part of a game called "guising" or "souling". This has evolved into the costumes and sweets of trick-or-treating as we know it.

Not only has religion and faith changed celebrations, but international influences have also blended into the traditions we see today. For example, the Irish legend of Stingy Jack, who was welcome neither in heaven nor hell after tricking the devil, doomed to wander the countryside forever with a single burning coal the devil gave him to light the way, which he put in a carved pumpkin. This evolved into the use of pumpkins to make Jack-o-lanterns and across Britain, people used turnips (as they were cheap and grew easily) to carve scary faces and place in doorways. This was to frighten away Jack and other wandering evil spirits, who were said to roam in Halloween, linking back to Samhain. Also, apple bobbing developed from the Roman worship of Pomona, the goddess of fruit and trees, as her symbol, incidentally, is the apple.
To conclude, Halloween is many different traditions from all around the world which have evolved together to create the day as we know it, from pagan rituals and Celtic folklore to ancient Christianity and Roman mythology.

The Victorian Reinvention of Halloween, 1870 -1900

By Isabella (Year 11)



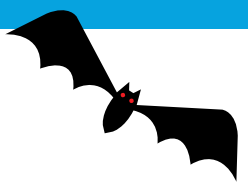
In the 21st Century, Halloween is a tradition celebrated every year on the infamous date of October 31st. It is a day of trick-or-treating, dress up, horror movies and pumpkin carving; a day very much celebrated by everyone in possession of a costume and an imagination. However, the modern-day tradition of Halloween stems in part from the influence of Queen Victoria and upper class Victorian society, especially in the way we know and love it today.
Victorian society strayed from the original religious and satanic connotations of Halloween and wove it into their own opportunity for fun and celebration. It became a tradition and an excuse to socialise and have fun among the upper and middle classes. This new perception of Halloween mainly came from the use of periodicals in the 1870s and 1880s. These were a modern-day equivalent of gossip and advice magazines that greatly entertained the rich among Victorian society. It was from this influence that allowed for such a new perception in Halloween, with many now allowing themselves to think that the celebration could be one full of games and partying. Queen Victoria controversially (as she was head of the Church of England and so therefore should have seen Halloween as demonic and a Pagan ritual) celebrated Halloween to a great extent by travelling to Balmoral Castle every year with her children and throwing parties that contained bonfire lighting, torches and dressing up. In hindsight, it was no wonder society wished to mirror the opulence and excitement that Queen Victoria herself embraced when it came to the holiday.

The night was also celebrated greatly by young middle- and upper-class girls, who managed to turn the Halloween focus onto matchmaking and love divinations. They would take part in games such as looking into a mirror at midnight to see if the face of their future husband would appear into it or bobbing for apples as a group with the first person to catch one being destined to marry first. In doing this, they managed to turn the evening away from the spooky and supernatural connotations and instead focus on their future husbands. But as well as games, pranks were also a common theme in Victorian parties. Some included shaking tables or doors to mimic a ghost, and in the countryside a more extreme action was common, such as stealing equipment or placing wagons on barn roofs.

Decorations also played a key part in the atmosphere and imagination of the costume party setting. Colours of red, orange and gold were a common theme, and Jack-o-lanterns were distributed throughout the party. These lanterns would morph into the pumpkin lanterns we enjoy today as part of our own celebration. Of course, a party also isn't complete without a themed menu, and although today we tend to stray towards sweets and chocolate, the Victorian celebrations would see masses of apples and nuts consumed as part of the evening, as well as cakes. These cakes were often baked with a single coin, button and ring inside. This cake would be given to the single and unmarried

members of the party. Whoever got the ring in their slice would be promised to be married first. Whoever received the coin would be entitled to immense wealth, and the owner of the button would be predicted a life of spinsterhood and being single. This was yet another fortune telling game the partygoers played that turned the evening to one of matchmaking and speculations.

Overall, Halloween used to be a time of fortune telling and superstition, brought to popularity and fame by Queen Victoria and the periodicals of the late 1800s. It was from their influence that the roots of Halloween flourished into a night of fun and excitement among every man, woman and child from the upper classes and into the population of our world today. After Queen Victoria's death and towards the 1910s, the ritual began to evolve into a children's festival as adults began to move towards the new and changing world that was full of a new industrial sector that changed the way they worked and lived. The periodicals that advertised so well the amazement of the Halloween parties in the 1870s shifted towards history and intellectual topics. Although the celebration was still relevant, it was more of a childish holiday than a collective one, and so from that stems the celebrations for children today.



The Ghost of Catherine Howard

by Chloe S and Edie F (Year 12)

Catherine Howard was heavily intertwined with Henry's lineage before ever having married him. She shared a common ancestor, her great grandmother, with Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour, two of Henry's wives. Even before her time as his fifth wife, she had already led a tragic life in the hands of men with too much power.

By the age of twelve, she was already heavily involved with her music teacher and the MP for Huntingdonshire, Henry Manox. Years after the relationship, Catherine confessed to having been persuaded to pursue an intimate relationship with him. However, both Catherine and Henry continuously argued that the relationship never became sexual. After two years of their relationship, Catherine cut him off once he began boasting too proudly about their involvement in each other; he was never able to fully repair and reconnect this relationship.

Soon after, Catherine became invested in a relationship with Francis Dereham, a secretary. They had planned to marry and were so certain that the engagement would go through that they had been heard calling each other husband and wife. That was until Henry VIII first encountered her in, what is likely to have been, 1539.

It is believed that Henry would have met Catherine in 1539 when she was serving in the court of Anne of Cleves, Henry's fourth wife. The following year, Henry's annulment with Anne was solidified and he remarried to Catherine in august that year. Henry's infatuation with Catherine caused quite a scandal; the French ambassador stated that 'the King is so amorous of her that he cannot treat her well enough and caresses her more than he did the others.' Furthermore, despite the low chances of her ever bearing him children due to his ill health, Catherine developed a harmonious relationship with Elizabeth and was well-liked by Edward. So, her marriage to Henry appeared to be successful and born out of genuine affection, at least on Henry's side.

The marriage between the two was very one-sided, with 30 years between them. In fact, Catherine had an affair with someone else; however, Catherine's involvement in the affair is questioned. It is believed that Catherine began her relationship with Thomas Culpepper, a member of the privy council and a known sexual predator, in 1541, after he began accompanying the married couple during their travels. In a letter addressed to Thomas, Catherine flatters him by romantically saying "yours as long as life endures". This letter is often interpreted as a desperate attempt at easing the tension with an angry suitor.



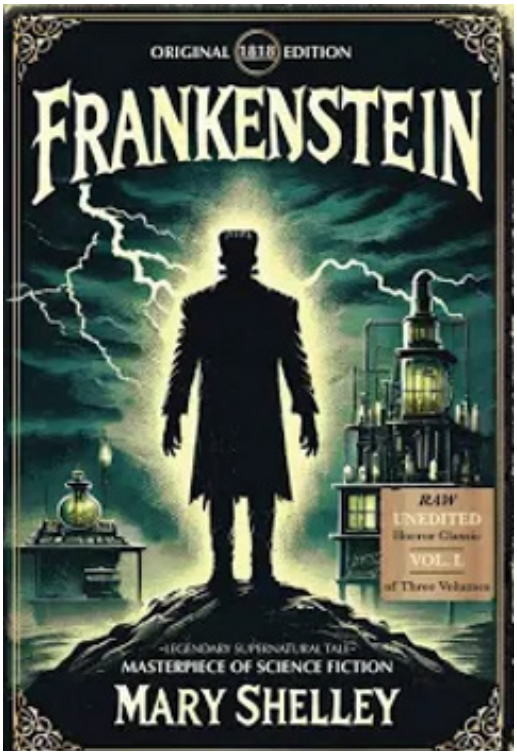
Catherine also began to receive invites to Thomas' chambers that same year.

In October that year, Thomas Craner reported the affair to Henry who then investigated by interrogating Jane Boleyn. Boleyn admitted to helping to conceal and facilitate the meetings between Catherine and Thomas. Following this, Catherine was interrogated and confessed to Henry the experiences she had in her past, revealing that she was not as chaste as was believed. As a result, Catherine was sentenced to death in November 1541, causing Henry to fall into a depression from which he never fully recovered.
In 1542, a new bill was passed that stated that a queen must always be honest about the chastity of her past. If a queen was found to have not disclosed her chastity and purity, she was guilty of treason. Catherine was condemned as a traitor to the crown and so was executed the following month. It is believed that she was only 18 at the time.
However, Catherine was not silent when she was condemned. In fact, her presence in the art gallery at Hampton Court has been rumoured to haunt it ever since. Henry had made strict precautions to avoid seeing Catherine when she was told about her sentence as he feared that seeing her would be all it took to convince him to pardon her. He requested that she be restrained and held in a room away from him when she was informed of her sentence. However, that did not stop her desperate attempt at freedom. It is said that her response to her arrest was to burst out of the room in which she was restrained, and sprint along the corridor, screaming for mercy from Henry. Her desperate attempt was fruitless, and she never saw Henry again before she was beheaded.
However, her shrill and haunting scream still echoes through the hall to this day, and her ghost relives her last attempt at life forever. There have been many coincidences reported in this hallway at Hampton Court. It is reported to be noticeably colder in this area than anywhere else in the house. Interestingly, the art gallery is the most likely place that a medical incident occurs; it is the room where the most medical attention has been required. These medical incidents vary massively, but the most notable is one event from 1999: two women fainted in exactly the same place, on the same evening, but on two separate tours of the palace. It is coincidental that this is the area where screams have been reported by many tourists; it is believed to be the century old echo of Catherine's desperate pleas.
In 2003 CCTV footage was recorded of a fire door, which required a handle to operate, bursting open violently without anybody near it. Although nobody was found in the gallery at this time, a figure in period costume appeared briefly in the footage.

Catherine Howard's story was a tragic tale that was constantly sabotaged by men with too much power and entitlement. As a result, her life was cut short. But in death, her execution lingered over Henry's conscience and diminished his happiness until his last moments. And, in the same way she haunted Henry, she haunts the halls of Hampton Court, reliving her final plea for mercy forever.

The Monsters of the Anthropocene

By Meadow S and Owen U (Year 12)



This article looks at how changing societal fears birthed specific monsters—such as Frankenstein's monster depicting a fear of unchecked scientific revolution, Godzilla portraying Japanese nuclear anxieties to begin with and now a manifestation of survivor's guilt.

Frankenstein the novel written by Mary Shelley and published in 1818 explores themes of human made monstrosity. In 1816 Shelley started writing the novel whilst staying near Lake Geneva in Switzerland alongside Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Polidiori. Byron had challenged them to write the best ghost story, inspiring Shelley to write the classic novel. Shelley emerged victorious, with her magnum opus, Frankenstein.

Shelly was inspired by the 19th century industrial working class and the unchecked ambition of capitalism as well as the altering human condition due to rapid industrialisation, thus the novel is a profound literary critique of the horrific reality of the Industrial Revolution. She uses the novel to warn against the terrifying effects of the unchecked, cancerous growth of technological progress and mechanisation. The horrific conditions of the industrial revolution included forcing children as young as 5 into dangerous, gruelling jobs with highly mortality rates. Children were forced to work to help support their families, enduring working in deadly conditions up chimneys and operating lethal machinery. The horrors continued as rapid urbanisation led to continuous disease outbreaks as cities lacked proper sanitation, clean water, or waste removal, causing deadly outbreaks of cholera, typhus, and typhoid. Frankenstein serves as a cautionary tale against the Industrial Revolution, and the horrific conditions it created, reflecting society's deep anxiety over rapid technological progress, factory-driven manufacturing, and the ethical costs of unchecked science.

Godzilla, or Gojira, debuted on November 3rd, 1954, with the release of the Toho Studios feature film of the same name, directed by Ishiro Honda and with special effects done by Eiji Tsubuarya. A giant monster, or daikaiju, the character has since become a global pop culture icon, appearing in 33 Japanese films by Toho, five American films, and various other forms of media. Godzilla has been dubbed the King of the Monsters, a descriptor first used in the Japanese film 'Godzilla, King of the Monsters!' from 1956, the American remake of the original 1954 film- and this descriptor is certainly an apt one. Gojira has represented many things throughout their (the monster may be a man in most Western-

made media, but the original creature was genderless) time in the spotlight, but the original creature was a reflection of Japanese fears and anxieties surrounding nuclear weaponry in a post-Hiroshima and post-Nagasaki world.

At the very beginning of the original film, Honda and Tsuburaya recreated the American nuclear test Castle Bravo, which sets the tone of the film from the outset- this is a story about a nuclear-affected world. Preceding Gojira's destruction of the boat at the start, a bright flash of light is seen on screen, which is a very obvious mirror of the bright light of a nuclear explosion. During his rampage through Tokyo later in the film, Godzilla wreaks havoc with fire just as much as with his massive size, resembling the firebombs that were used by the American military during their campaign through Japan, which practically burned Tokyo to the ground due to most of it being constructed with traditional Japanese methods, being wood and paper. The people who manage to survive this rampage are then left to contend with radiation- Honda makes it clear that Godzilla is meant to be an allegory for nuclear weapons. The film's main character, a palaeontologist named Dr. Yamane, explicitly blames the disturbance of Godzilla and the destruction he causes on hydrogen bomb testing, which again proves the allegory of the nuclear fallout.

One of the other main characters is a physicist called Dr. Serizawa, whose secret project is the Oxygen Destroyer. This device destroys oxygen atoms in water, killing all organisms through asphyxiation, whilst also vaporising the bodies. Though Serizawa hopes to harness the device to create energy, he has been unsuccessful, and the thing he fears most is that its existence will be revealed to the public or the government- whether American or Japanese, since such a device would become the next frontier of the nuclear arms race. He is adamant about never using it, and while he eventually does in order to stop Godzilla, he promises it will never be used again by destroying his notes and taking his one life at the end of the film. The anxieties expressed in the film about nuclear weapons reflect Japan's wholly unique experience as the only nation to have ever be targeted by such weapons, and, at the time, its position caught between two superpowers rapidly expanding their nuclear arsenals.



A History of Grave Robbery
By Nancy R (Year 11)

Grave robbery: the act of illegally uncovering a burial site with intent to steal still occurs to this day. Reasons for such acts have partially developed to fit with societal nuances in their respective periods, starting well before it is currently believed prime in the late 18th to 19th century, where its most famous stories have emerged.
Origins of grave digging can be seen as far back as ancient civilisations such as Egypt (recognised as an enterprise problem from the early dynastic period of 3150-2613BC), Chinese dynasties, Mesopotamia, and many others. Egyptians were renowned for their frequent robbery of the tombs of wealthy and aristocrats tunnelling through soft rocks till they reach a sealed door they can desecrate or even through the ceilings of the chambers. The most frequent perpetrators were even the tomb guards or diggers themselves. Economic motivation pushed this due to corruption in power and rising inflation with common political fragmentation, environmental challenges, and prolonged instability in the economy driving ancient Egyptians to such crimes.
In the Valley of Kings, 64 out of the 65 chambers were raided by ancient Egyptians even before the tomb raiding by westerners occurred in the late 19th to early 20th century with the only one not affected being, famously, that of Tutankhamen. Even the sacred mummy

wrapping was removed to take amulets and jewellery. Similar events were seen commonly in the latter empires emphasising the significance of the crime, especially with more widespread beliefs of the sacredness of death and a need to be prepared for the afterlife.

Developing overtime, we in the west have more common knowledge of Victorian grave robbing, now, still, with monetary intent but also the need for bodies with new curriculums in medical schools and a lack of corpses to dissect. Grave robbery became more of the economic gain of selling corpses rather than what came with them as less people in Christian Europe felt a need to bury the deceased in lavishness and physical goods. Medical schools and their associates cared little for where bodies came from and often under the table deals were done.

The first case of body snatching occurred in 1319 Bologna, Italy by four medical students to study the human body, one of the first places where dissection became legalised. This stayed infrequent in terms of theft until the boom in popularity in the late 18th century as changing acknowledgement of teaching needed to become a doctor became widespread, following on from the inquisitive and old humanist nature of the renaissance as well as an increase of medical knowledge. 'Resurrectionists' (a more formal name for the Victorian grave robbers) became a widespread service enacted by organised crime groups, such as the Borough gang and the infamous Burke and Hare. It entailed the stealing of fresh corpses (even pre buried ones) then a sale at a premium to medical schools. Robbers typically sent spies to funerals to map out fresh dead or even (in the case of primarily Burke and Hare in Edinburgh, 1828) escalate to killing. Such acts sparked outrage and terror in the public, leading to preventions by loved ones and laws to criminalise it through the local riots when graves were found disturbed.

As a brief aside that links to public sentiment, Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein' is believed to have been influenced from the elevated levels of this crime and public outcry. Shelley lived near and often visited St. Pancras church yard where her mother was buried and was frequented by resurrection men the messages of unchecked greed and malice within the story aligns with her personal connection to the fear and public belief at the time showing that her work reflects on real life struggles despite its fictional narrative, which is unknown to most readers.

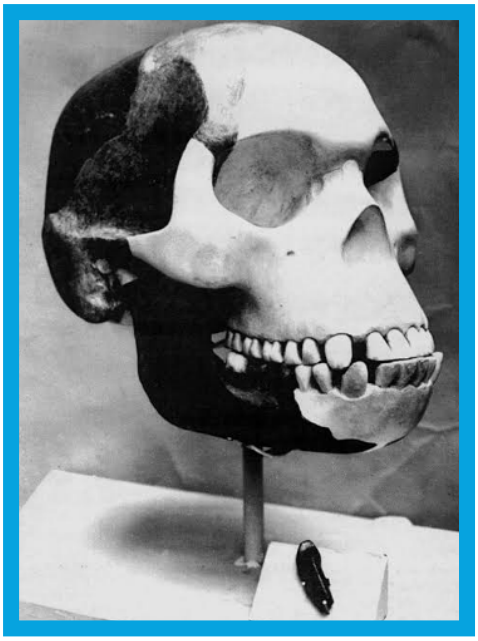
Deterrents varied based on wealth with the rich being able to afford 'mort cages' (iron cage style contraptions to protect a coffin) or heavy iron railings making criminals unable to access bodies. The poorer had to rely on night watchmen or local volunteers in the community to oversee graves until the corpse had decomposed enough to be useless to the crime groups.

The case of R vs Lynn (1788) set foundations for the explicit criminalisation of grave robbing when the King's bench ruled that the removal of a body from a grave for dissection was illegal as it was 'contra bonos mores' (against good morals). This helped create the Burial act of 1857 which was landmark in criminalising body snatching going against pre-1788 laws saying that the dead were not property so could not legally be stolen. The Autonomy Act of 1832 further helped diminish the occurrence and market for body snatchers as it helped legalise unclaimed bodies from workhouses to be studied as well as allowing a person to donate their body to science; the first time where dissections of those who were not criminals (vivisections) in the UK to be done. This effectively stopped the selling and stealing of bodies for the expansion of medical knowledge.

These statutes were immensely successful in restricting and abating body snatching but some aspects of it have been rising in prominence. Remains can be sold from a few hundred to upwards of a few thousand, leading to its popularity in online forums and to miscreants. Investigations by the Southern Australian authorities discovered that the bones had arrived decades previous to their selling largely from India and Bangladesh consisting of the remains of the 'unclaimed, uncaste, and the poor.'

Grave robbing has been a practice from ancient eras to current times with developing motivations and societal opinion. It highlights the desperation people can get to in economic hardship and how exploitative organisations can be with the vulnerable. Different laws have decreased appearances significantly from its prime, but its growing occurrence should make authorities revisit sanctions and preventions before the market expands.

Spooky Skeletons: Misreading the Past, Misled in the Present
By Miss Viktorija Saviciute



Halloween is, at heart, a festival of disguise. For one night a year we put on masks and enjoy the thrill of not quite knowing what is real. Lately, the rest of the year has started to feel rather similar. In March 2023, an image of Pope Francis striding about in a dazzling white puffer jacket fooled millions. The Pope had not, in fact, entered his streetwear era, and the picture had been made by AI. It feels like a uniquely modern horror, but historians might politely disagree. The past is full of things that looked real and were not, and of real things that were badly misunderstood, and the ways we were fooled then are remarkably similar to the ways we are fooled now.

It helps to distinguish between two monsters. The first is honest error, what we now call misinformation: a mistake made in good faith by people who lack the evidence to know better. The second is deliberate deception, or disinformation: a falsehood crafted to fool. Both have haunted the study of the past, and both are thriving today.

The first monster is well illustrated by the "Red Lady" of Paviland. In 1823 the Reverend William Buckland, Oxford's first Reader in Geology, excavated a skeleton from Goat's Hole cave on the Gower Peninsula. The bones were stained red with ochre and surrounded by ivory ornaments. Cute accessories, Buckland reasoned, meant a woman, and his belief that humanity post-dated the Biblical Flood meant she could not be especially ancient, so he placed her in the Roman period. Later speculation embroidered the tale further, casting her as a local woman of questionable reputation. In fact, Jane turned out to be a John - a young man who died around 33,000 years ago. Buckland was wrong about the sex, wrong about the date by roughly thirty millennia, and wrong about the story. Yet he was not lying. He had no radiocarbon dating, no DNA, and no idea how deep human history ran, so he filled the gaps with what he already believed.

Deliberate deception works by exploiting that same instinct. In May 2023, a fake image of smoke rising beside the Pentagon spread so quickly that American share prices briefly dipped before the local fire department confirmed nothing had happened. On closer inspection, the railings in the picture melted into one another, but very few people looked closely. A century earlier, Piltdown Man succeeded in exactly the same way. In 1912, amateur collector Charles Dawson announced that he had found, in a Sussex gravel pit, a skull with a large human braincase and an ape-like jaw, the missing link in human evolution, obligingly discovered in England. In 1953 it was exposed as a human cranium paired with an orangutan jaw, its teeth filed down by hand - Frankenstein's monster proving British racial superiority. Like the Pentagon's melting railings, the file marks had been there all along and were visible under a microscope. Nobody looked very hard, because Piltdown

told British scientists exactly what they hoped to hear: that big brains came first and that Britain had a leading part in the story.

The darkest form of distortion, however, is the one directed by those in power. When European colonists encountered the vast stone city of Great Zimbabwe, many refused to believe that Africans had built it, crediting Phoenicians, Arabs or even the Queen of Sheba. Excavations in 1929 confirmed its African origins beyond reasonable doubt, yet the white minority government of Rhodesia later pressured historians and guidebooks to obscure them. This was state-sponsored disinformation, the past rewritten to justify the present. The temptation has not gone away. In 2025, under an executive order titled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History", the US National Park Service was ordered to remove a famous 1863 photograph of a formerly enslaved man's heavily scarred back, one of the most powerful pieces of evidence of the brutality of slavery. Officials argued that exhibits dwelling on the negative distort the national story; many historians argued that removing them does exactly that. Whether it is a Rhodesian guidebook or a national park sign, the question that matters stays the same: who benefits from this story?
It is comforting to imagine that we have left the age of Piltdown behind, that modern audiences, armed with science and a world of information would never be taken in so easily. The evidence suggests otherwise. The hoaxes have become slicker, and the information more effortlessly presented, but the instinct to believe what fits has hardly changed at all. Perhaps then, constant questioning is a habit worth keeping long after the masks come off.

Why do we enjoy being scared?

By Darcey G (Year 12)



The fight or flight response is the body's automatic, natural survival reaction to perceived danger or acute danger. Historically, a fight or flight response evolved over millions and millions of years as our ancestors had to fight off predators or run to safety. The Neolithic Revolution (the major shift in human history when people stopped living as nomadic hunter-gatherers and began farming and settling in permanent villages) meant we now encounter less predators and therefore, this survival mechanism is used less often.

However, this is not to say that it is not used at all in today. Although modern humans rarely need to escape predators, the same biological response is still used today, such as for perceived threats such as horror films or haunted houses. This makes you wonder; if fear has helped humanity survive in dangerous situations, why do millions of people voluntarily seek it out. Every year, billions of pounds are spent on cinema tickets, haunted houses and horror themed experiences, with the intention of being spooked.

The difference is, unlike our ancestors, modern audiences know that there is no real threat.

This allows them to experience the biological responses of the fight or flight response; the rush of adrenaline, increased heart rate and heightened senses, while remaining in a safe environment. The reason it feels good is that once the perceived danger has passed, the brain releases dopamine and endorphins, chemicals that create feelings of pleasure and relief, this explains why many people describe horror films or haunted houses as exciting rather than frightening.

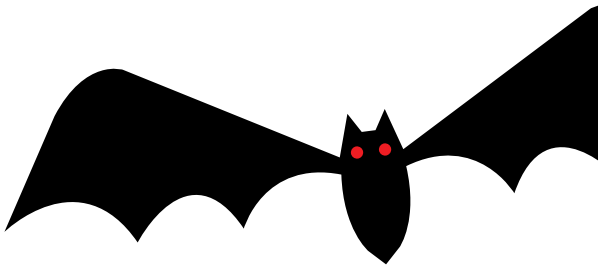
The Witch – Cultural Roots and Differences

By Jeh K-P (Year 11)

When most of us in the West picture a witch, especially around Halloween, we see the same familiar character: green skin, pointed hat, broomstick, stirring a cauldron under a full moon. It's a picture stitched together from old European stories, the witch trials of the early modern period, and western Hollywood films and media. That image has almost nothing to do with the witches that have lived in Indian history for millennia.
Here they go by many names, dayan, daayan, chudail, tonhi ,reaching back to the older Sanskrit word dākinī. However, these figures have never been just villains. They sit somewhere between supernatural threat, a bearer of spiritual power, and a convenient way to keep certain women in their place. Ancient scriptures such as the Atharva Veda, written more than three thousand years back, have hymns and spells relating to women who are said to cause illness and misfortune through invisible means. In stories like the Bhāgavata Purāna and the Kathāsaritsāgara, dakinis show up as fierce, flesh-eating companions of the goddess Kālī. They hang around cremation grounds, fly through the night, and change shape whenever they like. At the same time, in Tibetan Buddhist traditions the same figure turned into something quite different—a "sky-goer," a wisdom being who could pass on the deepest teachings. The dakini was always terrifying yet strangely sacred.

Witch-hunting itself goes back a long way in India, though it rarely looked like the formal trials of Europe. Most accusations started in villages and were settled by local opinion or by a mob. The records get clearer under British rule, when the Santhal witch trials of 1792 occurred being one of the first we can point to with certainty. All through the nineteenth century colonial officers wrote about hundreds of cases, especially in the central and eastern regions of India. Some noted that more women may have been killed as witches than died by sati (a historical custom in which a hindu widow would immolate herself). One common punishment was "witch swinging"—hanging the accused upside down, stuffing chilli paste into her eyes and beating her until she confessed or simply died. The British eventually banned the practice and tried to stop the local witch-finders, but the beliefs themselves never really went away.
And they still haven't. Between 2000 and 2016 the National Crime Records Bureau counted more than 2,500 murders linked to witchcraft accusations. Almost all the victims were women including widows, older women, or those from lower castes, the ones easiest to blame when the harvest failed or someone fell ill. The violence remains concentrated in places like Jharkhand or Assam. In those regions the Indian witch is not a Halloween costume. She is still a real category used to justify exclusion and often murder.

Hence, that is why the Western Halloween version feels so strange next to this history. The commercial witch is a playful scrap of European fears that once caused real harm turned into seasonal fun. Indian traditions never got that kind of reset. In many rural areas the dayan is still spoken of with genuine dread, a contrast to the cities of India which has only recently borrowed Halloween as a light-hearted, shoppable festival that has little to do with older local fears. One, a night of costumes and sweets; the other is a continuous, unbroken thread of myth, spiritual power, and gendered violence that runs from ancient spells right up to today's crime statistics. The Indian witch refuses to fit neatly into the Western picture. To understand her story, you must look past the green skin, pointed hat and broomstick, and instead see the older, darker, and still unfinished narrative written across Indian history.



The Evolution of the Witch

By Miss Rebecca Theaker

From hags to hashtags.
The year is 1590. Women across Europe and the wider world are being terrorised and prosecuted by men who seem to fear their very existence. Cruel terms used to slander women, challenging their looks, their femininity and their role in society are commonplace. Violence against women and girls is a growing endemic.

Sorry reader. I seem to have mistakenly used the wrong year. I'll start again...

The year is 2026. Women across Europe and the wider world are being terrorised and



Violence against women and girls is a growing endemic.

There are striking similarities here, even with a nearly 500 year gap. One of the key differences though is a label used to describe women of both time periods, and what that term means to the women of then and now. Witch.

In 1590s England, being a witch was a terrible career move. So bad in fact, you would never apply. Don't worry, your neighbour would apply for you, usually after a small slight such as the death of their cow. It might even be something more minor. The incident that kick started the Pendle Witch Trials of 1612 was a begging teenage girl, Alizon Device, merely swearing under her breath at a man. Riches and status didn't protect you either. King Henry V, short of cash to fund his war with France, accused his stepmother Joan of Navarre of witchcraft in order to confiscate her lands and wealth. Don't think too harshly of him though, on his deathbed he did retract the accusation, and she was released from prison, only 15 years later! If foolish enough to sign yourself up to the 'witching trade' the interview process may involve being pricked with pins, stripped and searched for any kind of birthmark, or dunked in a pond. Sink and you were innocent (and dead). Float and you were guilty (and also dead). I'd personally avoid that post if it appeared on LinkedIn. However, today, some women apply voluntarily for the role of ''witch'', with a ring light and sometimes an influencer discount code.

The label was never ours

One of my all-time favourite historians, Ronald Hutton's great insight in The Witch (2017) is that the witch was never one thing. She was a composite: part harmful magic, part nighttime flyer, part devil worshiper, stitched together by anxious authorities and communities. Nobody self-identified as a witch. Why would you? The word was an accusation, not an edgy personality.

The accused were typically older, poorer and classed as socially awkward, which is to say, women with no clear place in the strict societal hierarchy and patriarchy they found themselves in, and with often no one to defend them. If a woman was inconvenient, problematic or in possession of something a man wanted, there was a name for it. Witch.

Around fifty thousand women were executed for witchcraft across Europe. England hanged about 500. Contrary to popular belief, nobody in England was burned for witchcraft. This wasn't due to men taking pity on the convicted and gifting them a small mercy of a quick death, but more the legal procedure behind 'burning'. Only a convicted heretic could be burned, those convicted for witchcraft in England did not legally qualify. Magna Carta of 1215 actually 'forgot' to include the legal elements of placing a woman on trial. The famous 'a jury of your peers' was only written for men. So, putting women on trial 'legally' could be a bit of a sticking point. Although, in Scotland between 2,500 - 4,000 were tried for witchcraft, and around two-thirds of those are thought to have been executed, usually by strangling and then burning at the stake. The German statistics are even worse and make for absolutely grim studying.

The rebrand

None of the above sounds appealing to me. However, some women in the modern day seem to be reclaiming the word witch. Reclamation took a while, no pun intended, but it has been a slow burner. My husband (who shall remain nameless) recently told me of an awkward encounter during a meeting at work. As the meeting was coming to a close, one female member offered to 'do a tarot reading for anyone interested'. Husband laughed.

The others did not. She then proceeded to pull a pack of tarot cards from her bag. He was confused, and probably worried about being summoned by HR. Better than being summoned by the devil, I suppose... He asked me if I knew anything about this. “Are women witches now?”

Well, Victorian suffragist Matilda Gage romanticised the witch as a ‘persecuted intellectual and herbal healer.’ A theory that has stuck and is often applied to the white witch vs black witch concept. Gerald Gardner, a retired civil servant, built Wicca in the 1950s which presented witchcraft as a surviving pagan religion. This also gained traction. Modern cults and covens began to form. Doreen Valiente and her “Charge of the Goddess” work, gave her the title of the mother of modern witchcraft. Concepts of female empowerment through the seasons, the Wheel of the Year and “Harm none and do as you will” all started to grow. By 1968, the feminist group WITCH was hexing Wall Street in protest against the patriarchy and capitalism. WITCH standing for ‘Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell’. The label had officially changed sides. Women were adopting the title, not running scared from it.

Enter the algorithm

Now the witch is growing further. She has merch. WitchTok has millions of views, tarot decks fly off shelves. You can buy a “protection candle” for someone you love, or “hex” a hated colleague. Shirts on Etsy showing cartoon half naked women dancing around fires with captions such as “They can’t burn us all” and “Girls will be girls” are increasingly popular. One of my favourite mugs depicts a cat in a witch’s hat, “feeling cute. Might curse you later.” Scoff if you like, but interest tends to spike when life feels precarious. When the economy, housing market and the world news cycle all feel unmanageable, pulling a card and setting an intention is at least something you can control.

The manosphere is also thriving, and its portrait of women as manipulative, scheming and dangerous would be instantly recognisable to the author of the Malleus Maleficarum, one of the most famous Medieval witch hunting books. If you’ve never heard of that title, I’ll give you a more recognisable one. “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” comes from the King James Version of the Bible. The saying, not ‘suffering’ women to live doesn’t actually feel so distant. With violence against women and girls still at epidemic levels in the UK (the ONS figures make for appalling reading), it is hardly shocking that many women choose to embrace the very label once used to destroy them. The recent shocking and horrific trial of Lindsay Clancy, a US mother accused of killing her children in a state of psychiatric breakdown (or psychosis as her defence claims) can easily be compared to a modern-day witch hunt. Weeks later, the Cornell 7 case became public. An anonymous Jane Doe reported to her Ivy League college campus a heinous sexual assault including 7 males. Two males were excluded from the college, the other 5 made to write essays as their punishment. Her punishment? She dropped out of college, receives death threats daily and lives in fear for her life and her family. Witch.

Analogy, not ancestry

To be clear though, Ronald Hutton would loudly argue today’s witches are not descendants of the accused, with the affection of a historian who knows exactly where the bodies are buried. But the pattern rhymes. Then, the witch was what a frightened society called women it couldn’t control. Women were disposable. Now, she’s what many women call themselves when society still hasn’t sorted itself out in 500 years. She wants to reclaim some of her ‘natural’ power. In the UK today, one woman is killed every three days by a man she knows. Women are still considered disposable.

So, Witch, please. Whilst the hat is optional. The grievances are comparable.



The Ghosts of Soviet Russia
By Jess P (Year 12)



Behind the closed doors of soviet Russia, the government were physically wiping people from history, photo by photo. Artists would use methods like negative scratching, emulsion painting, aerography, photomontage and negatives stacking with double exposure. Scalpels cut purged and useless figures while airbrushed made idols more idyllic as a way to manipulate the proletariat into their grasp.

Before he became the spectre of Leon Trotsky, Lev Davidovich Bronstein adopted Marxist principles as a teenager, driving him to leave University and co-found the South Russian Worker's Union where illegal strikes sent him exiled to Siberia. Upon escape he used a forged passport under the alias of a jailer from his prison, Leon Trotsky. London, headquarters of the Russian underground revolutionary movement, was the safest place for him to go, and there he met Vladimir Lenin and joined his Marxist newspaper, Iskra (the spark).
During the failed 1905 revolution, Trotsky rose to power as the leader of the St. Petersburg worker council. He joined the Bolsheviks in 1917, becoming a prominent military director before leading the Red Army.

However, following Lenin's death in 1924, Trotsky fell into a power struggle with Stalin. While Trotsky wanted a global communist revolution led by the working class, valuing open debates in order to better the lives of the Proletariat, Stalin was hungry for a national dictatorship built on total obedience through fear and manipulation. Ultimately, the regime expelled Trotsky from the Bolshevik party in 1927 and exiled him from the Soviet Union in 1929. He travelled through Turkey, France and Norway, then made permanent residence in Mexico before a Spanish member of Stalin's secret police, Mercader, struck him in the head with an ice axe, assassinating him.

From 1927, the effort to remove Trotsky from history was born.
Most well-known, Trotsky was removed from "Lenin's speech in Sverdlov Square" captured by G.P. Goldstein and "second anniversary of the October revolution" taken by Leo Leonidov. If Trotsky could not easily be cut out of a photo, the state banned the image entirely.

Alexei Stakhanov was the perfect embodiment of Stalin's economic focus on technical mastery and human drive. On August 31st, 1935, he mined 102 tonnes of coal in under 6 hours which the state labelled an act of heroism even though he had a support team helping him and was given all the credit in a stunt directed by his mining manager.
However, his fame came at a cost as his simple, uneducated background was exploited to forge an idol and inspiration for the proletariat and drive an industrial surge.
The state used airbrushing to photoshop Stakhanov on propaganda pieces to make him more idyllic and of greater social standards to manipulate people into wanting to become him and therefore work harder. Stakhanov was taken to Moscow and surrounded by a golden cage.
He was given a luxury apartment, high end furniture, appointed chief in The Ministry of the Coal Industry and welcomed into elite Moscow social circles. But he was trapped.

Being forced into a bureaucratic role as an uneducated miner put pressure of Stakhanov and the fear of what Stalin would do if he slipped up caused him to fall into significant alcoholism and the constant surveillance by the NKVD was a never-ending reminder of his lack of freedom.

Eventually, the state exiled him back to the Donbas region, and Russia forgot him for 25 years while he struggled to adapt to being isolated from his family and the trauma of being a celebrity at the hands of Stalin. His alcoholism grew and he would sell his furniture to afford it. Consequently, he had a stroke which left him with multiple speech disorders. He received the Hero of Socialist Labour award in 1970, then spent the last 7 years of his life in care before slipping on an apple peel, having a heart attack and dying aged 71. Despite Stakhanov never being cut from a photo, the state did make him disappear. When they had finished with him, they never spoke of him again until 1970 and they let him wither, isolated and struggling.

Afterword

Nightmare on Pennsylvania Avenue

By Dr Simon Henderson



In 2012 the Tim Burton produced, Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter, was released. The fictitious Lincoln, played by Benjamin Walker, embarks on a mission to rid America of vampires; purifying the nation from a fictitious foe far less of an existential threat than the actual enemy of Lincoln's time, slavery. The sixteenth president has long been at the centre of supernatural imaginings in the White House. After the death of her son, Willie, in February 1862, First Lady, Mary Todd Lincoln, held several seances in the East Wing and claimed to be able to communicate with her little boy from beyond the grave. Spiritualism grew in popularity during the fratricidal upheaval of the civil war, as Americans sought to make sense of the carnage all around them.

Maybe for this reason, or maybe because of his prominent position in the formation of American national identity, there have been alleged sightings of Lincoln's ghost at the White House. Legend has it that Winston Churchill, whilst staying with the Roosevelts in the 1940s, encountered Old Abe in the bedroom named after the former President. There have been others who claim to have seen an apparition of Lincoln at the windows of the East Wing. Perhaps this speaks to the image of Lincoln as a father of modern America, a comforting figure who guided the United States through its greatest challenge. The fiery trial of civil war.

During Halloween celebrations in the final months of the Obama White House, Barack and Michelle answered the call of trick and treaters and the President sat in the Oval Office in conversation with an actor playing the part of Lincoln's ghost. Within a fortnight of the faux ghoulish festivities, the Obamas, the Democratic party and a sizeable proportion of the American electorate, awoke after a generationally terror-stricken night. Donald Trump's first term was supposed to be an aberration, but four years later the nightmare returned.

Now, with Halloween to be closely followed by the 2026 mid-term elections, all the evidence suggests another fright night for 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. This political thriller, could see the tables turned, but what could the constitutional ramifications be?
At the time of writing all indications are that the Democrats will win back the House of Representatives and have a good chance of taking a slim majority in the Senate.
The coalition of voters that supported Trump in 2024 has been slowly eroded by the financial reality of inflationary pressures squeezing the cost of living. There was always a contradiction inherent in a multi-millionaire real estate baron winning the support of blue-collar voters in swing states by promising to protect American jobs and restore the nation's

manufacturing power. Trump blasted his predecessors for their 'dumb wars,' and vowed to put America first by avoiding unnecessary foreign entanglements. In this context the commander-in-chief's self-indulgent war with Iran is even more difficult to understand. Since the start of the conflict and the choking of the Strait of Hormuz, international trade has been struggling to breathe freely. The most obvious impact has been on oil prices. Americans have seen diesel increase by more than $2.5 a gallon and regular fuel go up by over $1.5. The prices at the end of September were at an all-time high. The leap in inflation saw the Federal Reserve increase interest rates for the first time since 2023. The president's erratic and constitutionally questionable tariff policy has also added uncertainty to the economic picture. All the while, Trump's tone-deaf assertions that the economy is booming, and the stock market is close to its highest ever value, is turning off the very voters who put him in the White House. It is not just in the rustbelt and mid-west where the polls look nightmarish for the administration. In Texas, rock solid safe Republican territory, the Democrats are running tied in the gubernatorial race. There has not been a Democrat governor in Texas since 1995.

Now some might point to the cautionary tale of notoriously inaccurate polling in past elections where Trump has been on the ticket. The difference today, however, is that Trump has become more mainstream, people are de-sensitised to his weekend ranting and ramblings on Truth Social. Telling a pollster that you are planning to vote Republican and support the president is not something that the average American may feel as cautious about as they possibly did in the past. Added to this, these mid-term elections are obviously about the administration in power, but the president is not actually on any of the congressional tickets. Nevertheless, the polls are all pointing to a mid-term horror show for the White House.

Should the Republicans lose both the House and the Senate that would leave Trump as a lame-duck president with two years until the next presidential election in 2028. How would he respond? If the war with Iran drags on and the consequential economic pain intensifies will members of his own party turn against the president? The Democrats will undoubtedly push forward plans to impeach Trump, but they would need some Republicans to join them to remove him from office. With term limits meaning he cannot stand again without amending the Constitution, some on the red side of the aisle might decide they have to save the party from defeat in 2028 and recalibrate the power at the heart of the Republican machine.
Trump has consistently shown contempt for constitutional rights and the check and balances at the centre of its framing. Challenging the judiciary, seeking to silence elements of the press, and sowing distrust of democracy in alleging electoral fraud are all hallmarks of his political modus operandi. If the midterm elections deliver a fright night for the president three days on from Halloween, the political fallout could trigger a constitutional nightmare.



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