



# Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft

*Robin Briggs*

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Witchcraft has always intrigued the imagination, sparking visions of Macbeth's hags, complete with heathland and bubbling cauldrons. But throughout European history, particularly from the 14th- to the 17th-century, ordinary people were tried and put to death for witchcraft, often in a brutal and grotesque manner. So who were the witches? What were their practises? Who believed in them? What was their place in society? Why were they so feared? How were they accused, tried and executed? Robin Briggs attempts to answer these questions, broadening his scope as he looks beyond the persecutions themselves, to concentrate upon the society they illuminate. Between 1560 and 1660, more people were tried for witchcraft than at any other time in history. The detailed records of many of the trials have allowed the author to build up a description of life among the European peasantry some 400 years ago: the minutiae of social life, daily activities, neighbourhood and kinship ties, the pervasive force of superstition and family relationships.

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