

Folk Beliefs Linger On: Killing a Witch in 1875



Folk beliefs are incredibly persistent, lasting across centuries, and can erupt under the right circumstances centuries after most people thought that mindset had faded into oblivion. To the people sharing an outmoded belief-set, their behavior makes perfect sense, though it will seem odd or irrational to people who have left that folklore-informed worldview behind.

I recently read of this odd thing that happened in rural England in 1875: a woman was attacked and killed for being a witch. 1875 is hardly the witch-hunting era, and seems a strangely modern period in which to be actively persecuting witches. This incident brings up both social dynamics and folk beliefs, which I talk about in this blog post.

I'm not posting the article at this site, because this particular post covers historical events and is not strictly in the world-building camp subject-wise. That said, I do think the underlying dynamic is worth thinking about in constructed worlds, and that's why I am linking to the article here.

Here is the question it raises: **What long-entrenched beliefs from olden times still linger, and will erupt in times of personal or social stress in a future era?** This case study of Ann Turner, stabbed to death with a pitchfork, might be illustrative of the larger patterns at work here.

A quote:

"Fear and ignorance are a combination that bode ill for anyone who is the unfortunate target of this state of mind. Add to this the willingness to put someone in a category and belief sets that prescribe how to deal with that category, and we can (as shown) end up with murder."

Not that your persistent folk-beliefs need to lead to murder, but the fact that they linger on for potentially very long periods of time (centuries) does have some interesting implications for social behavior.

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