

Witchcraft victim

Ritchie Graham

d.1592

Ritchie, described as a magician, was caught up and destroyed during one of the darkest episodes in Scotland's past.

Many ordinary men and women suffered in witch hunts, trials and burnings of the 16th and 17th centuries – not least because King James VI had a grim fascination with witchcraft.

Among them were the 60 so-called North Berwick witches.

They were accused of using magic to raise a storm in the hope of sinking the ship carrying James and his bride, Anna of Denmark, to Scotland after their honeymoon in Scandinavia.

Ritchie and the others, who included a schoolmaster, a midwife and healer, and a former lady-in-waiting, were said to have performed magic spells at conventions attended by the Devil.

While none of them lived in North Berwick, its old kirk was alleged to have been a gathering place.

Torture was used to extract confessions and persuade the accused to denounce others.

Personal, family and political jealousies all played a big role.

Rival groups at court used the case to damage their enemies.

In 1591 Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell, who had links to Ritchie, was called before the Privy Council and accused of being the witches' ringleader.

He was imprisoned at Edinburgh Castle but escaped.

Ritchie was executed as were many of the others.

- Read the Oxford DNB biography here: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/69951.html>.