Witches and magic

1. All sorts of people believed in witches. In 1597 King James VI of Scotland (who became king of England in 1603) wrote a book about witches and demons and the horrible things they do to people.

2. Witches were said to have ‘familiars’ – animals such as cats and toads, as a link to the world of magic.

3. In order to test whether or not a woman was a witch, people would perform a ‘ducking’. This was throwing the ‘witch’ into a pond of river with their hands and feet tied. If they escaped, they were a witch. If they did not, they usually drowned!

4. Many people went to whom they thought were witches to ask for potions, or spells to say, to make people fall in love with them.

5. Shakespeare had a curse inscribed above his grave to discourage grave robbers from digging up his remains. The inscription reads: ‘Good frend for Iesvs sake forbeare, / To digg the dvst encloased heare. / Bleste be ye man yt spares thes stones, / And cvrst be he yt moves my bones’.

6. There are four witches in Macbeth, not three. Hecate, Queen of the witches, appears in a scene that is often left out when the play is performed.

7. Many people believed the stars and planets controlled their lives. Romeo in Romeo and Juliet says he fears ‘some consequence yet hanging in the stars’ will do him harm.

8. When a baby was born women delivered the baby. ‘Doctors’ or astrologers were paid far more to be at the birth and study the stars to work out how they would affect the baby’s life!

9. Many respectable scientists spent a lot of time, and money, trying to turn lead into gold! This process of transforming matter into gold was called alchemy.

10. Elizabeth I’s astronomer, Dr John Dee, spent a lot time working out the language of the angels and he even thought he could speak to them.