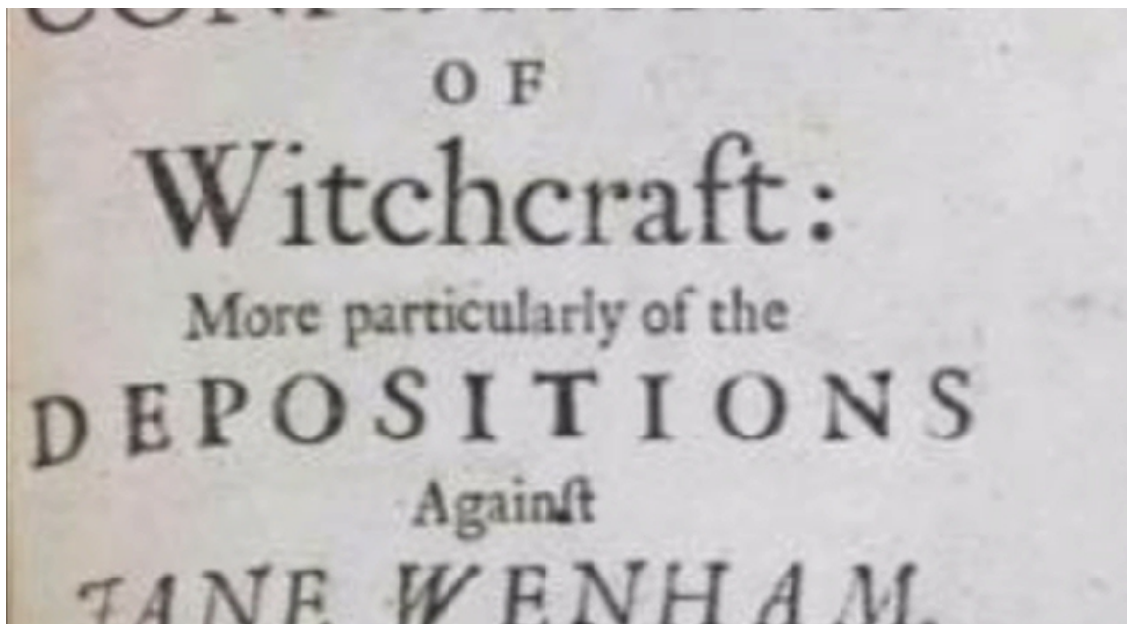


Jane Wenham



The 12th of July will see the unveiling of a memorial stone by the Bishop of Hertford in St Mary's, Walkern in memory of Jane Wenham. Known as the 'Witch of Walkern' much has been written about the sad plight of Jane, an elderly woman, convicted on trumped-up charges of witchcraft in 1712. The judge at her trial, Sir John Powell rebutted the lurid and fanciful claims of those who stepped forward to accuse Jane of dark arts with the words, "*There is no law against flying, nor broomsticks, nor muttered prayers.*" Testimony from her accusers that she had been seen flying on the Devil's back and that her arm, when punctured with a pin, drew no blood, failed to convince the judge. The jury however were of a different mindset and determined otherwise, they found Jane guilty, leaving Sir John no choice but to sentence her to death. At odds with the jury the good judge would not let things lie. He secured a reprieve of the sentence and on appeal, Jane was pardoned by Queen Anne. Tormented by her Walkern neighbours, she moved to Hertingfordbury where she lived out her later years in peace.

Jane's story has lived long in the memory of Walkern Village. The image of a witch on her broomstick atop the 'Welcome to Walkern' signs at the entrance to the Village represent a cherished piece of history. It both intrigues the visitor and reminds the resident of an uncomfortable chapter of unneighbourliness. It must be acknowledged that the clergy at the time were at the forefront of ostracising someone who was at best misunderstood, and at worst, outed for failing to fit in with perceived norms. Poor and maligned, she became an easy victim for those determined to rubbish any challenge to comfortable conformity. Yet Jane was a spirited woman, and it was her sometimes forthright character that led her to fight for her integrity and indeed for her life.

The new memorial brings into sharp focus our own re-evaluating of history and of those stories and lives that speak to us in our own day. Jane's story emphasises the importance of our need to be vigilant in caring for the needs of the vulnerable. It accentuates too the need to be wary of the propensity of prejudice to raise its ugly head when a crowd loses its sense of perspective. Above all perhaps, Jane's courage is a tribute to all women who have fought the battle for equality between the sexes in society down the centuries, and an encouragement to everyone to never forget that all that one must do to allow evil to triumph is nothing.

In Memory of

Jane Wenham

resident of Walkern

convicted of witchcraft

pardoned by Queen Anne

1712

"Let true justice prevail"

Deut 16:20

God Bless.

Revd Mark Bailey