

## The Trials Of Cats In Medieval Times

Cats have been companions to man throughout history, but not always as a beloved companion.

In ancient times, the cat earned its keep by helping to reduce the population of rats and mice that raided precious grain stores. In ancient Egypt, the cat was adored and celebrated - even mummified along with their human companions.

Medieval man, however, had an entirely different opinion of the cat.

Up until Medieval times, the cat had been elevated to a high status. She was even worshipped in some places, like the German states, where cats were associated with Freya the goddess of love and fertility.

But medieval man was superstitious, believing that witches and demons walked the earth doing evil deeds. The church became a central part of medieval life and in its quest for power, preached that the old ways of worship were evil.

The church took a dislike to the old Freya rites and in 1484, Pope Innocent VIII instructed the Inquisition to burn the Freya heretics as witches - along with their cats.

During the 16th and 17th centuries over 175,000 supposed witches were executed in Germany and France. Along with them went thousands of cats.

Medieval man thought the cat had supernatural powers and any misfortune was blamed on them. Anything from sour milk to an outbreak of disease was blamed on our furry friends. Cats were even thought to be witches in disguise, running in the darkness of night to perform evil acts. Cats were burned, boiled, stoned, flayed, stabbed, gutted, dropped from high places, hanged, impaled and buried alive with an almost religious fervour.

To own a cat during these times was risking one's life as many an old lady was accused of witchcraft simply because she kept a cat as a companion. Throughout these bleak times, however, some did remain loyal to the furry feline.

Millers and Sailors still saw great uses for the cats to rid their respective areas of vermin and others kept their fondness for cats as well. As time went on, more people of influence began to keep cats (even Cardinals Wolsey and Richelieu kept cats as pets) and the tide began to turn in the cats' favour.

Finally, but the 18th century, cats were no longer persecuted and cats as companions began to make a comeback. Today, of course, cats are widely accepted as the loving companions and, while they don't typically enjoy the status they did in ancient Egypt, they are adored and cared for as loving pets.