Capturing Witches: Histories, Stories, Images
400 years after the Lancashire Witches

Lancaster University
17-19 August 2012

Summary: 2012 will mark the 400th anniversary of the trial and execution of the Lancashire Witches. This conference is part of a year-long programme of events which will take place in Lancaster and the surrounding area. This interdisciplinary conference uses the Lancashire witches as a focal point to engage with wider questions about witchcraft, and in particular how witchcraft is theorised and represented in and through history and across cultures.

Witchcraft and Human Rights

One of the four distinct “streams” of the conference will focus on the impact that the belief in “witchcraft” is having on the ability of individuals from across the world to enjoy their human rights. Widespread abuses of human rights continue to take place in diverse countries, cultures and societies due to the belief in so-called “witchcraft”. The most vulnerable members of society – women, children and the elderly – are often the targets of serious abuse. According to Phillip Alston, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Summary or Arbitrary Executions: “In too many settings, being classified as a witch is tantamount to receiving a death sentence.” However, to date this issue has received neither vigorous academic analysis nor adequate attention from human rights organizations.

The conference presents a unique opportunity to develop an understanding of the driving forces behind 17th century witchcraft accusations and to draw parallels with the modern-day witch-hunts and resultant rights abuses that take place in countries around the world today.

We wish to attract a wide variety of international speakers from diverse backgrounds, including academia, civil society and media, as well as those who have suffered witchcraft related human rights abuse. Applications for papers need not focus overtly on academic studies of the issues. Proposals for contributions which go beyond the conventional academic format are welcome. All proposals should fit under one or more of the following headings:

1. Policy and Implementation
2. Advocacy and Education
3. Media and Representation
4. Identifying and Surviving Witchcraft Related Rights Abuse

Proposals (paper: 250 words, panel/other format: 500 words) including a 50-word bio for each contributor should be sent to the conference team by 1 December 2011 to capturingwitches@lancaster.ac.uk. Decisions on submissions will be made by 31 January 2012.