

# Walpurgisnacht

Now to the Brocken the witches ride;  
The stubble is gold and the corn is green;  
There is the carnival crew to be seen,  
And Squire Urianus will come to preside.  
So over the valleys our company floats,  
With witches a-farting on stinking old goats.

By Dr Leo Ruickbie  
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—Goethe, *Faust*

## 30<sup>th</sup> April

Walpurgisnacht is derived from the Pagan spring ritual, known to the Druids as Beltane, when the arrival of spring was celebrated by the lighting bonfires at night. The Christian Church tried to subvert the old customs by supplanting the feast day of one of its saints on this ancient festival.



Saint Walpurga was an English missionary, born in Wessex,

England, around 710 CE. Together with her brothers, Saint Willibald and Saint Winibald, she travelled to Württemberg to assist Saint Boniface in Christianising the heathen Germans. She lived in the convent, founded by Winibald, of Heidenheim near Eichstätt, where she died on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 779 CE – not the 30<sup>th</sup> of April.

## St Walpurga

## The Witches' Sabbath

“It has recently come to our ears, not without great pain to us, that in some parts of upper Germany, as well as in the provinces, cities, territories, regions, and dioceses of Mainz, Köln, Trier, Salzburg, and Bremen, many persons of both sexes, heedless of their own salvation and forsaking the catholic faith, give themselves over to devils male and female.”

Mass delusion or shamanic survival? The Witches' Sabbath in popular folklore and historical trial documents was the gathering of the Devil's disciples to honour their dark god and blaspheme Christian rites. Despite the many confessions of attendance most of these were extracted under torture to fit pre-existing theories of what witches were supposed to do.

—Innocent VIII, 1484

But the idea and Walpurgisnacht live on.

## More

For more about Witches, Witchcraft, the Witches' Sabbath and Wicca see:

- ★ Leo Ruickbie, *Witchcraft Out of the Shadows: A Complete History*. London: Robert Hale, 2004. ISBN 0709075677. Available from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).
- ★ For news, events, courses, info and free downloads visit [www.witchology.com](http://www.witchology.com).

Regen auf Walpurgisnacht hat nie ein gutes Jahr gebracht.  
(Rain on Walpurgisnacht never brought a good year.)

Traditional sayings:  
Ist die Hexennacht voll Regen, wird's ein Jahr mit reichlich Segen.  
(If it rains on witches' night, the year will bring much that's right.)