

The Popish Plot: The Conspiracy That Was Invented

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Titus Oates's fabricated claims of a Catholic plot to kill Charles II triggered persecution and executions. The supposed conspiracy was imaginary, but the machinery that punished its accused participants was real.

STATUS	Fabricated conspiracy with documented persecution
CLASSIFICATION	STR
MATERIAL	England
DISPOSITION	PUBLIC / SOURCED STORY
CATEGORY	Strange Files
RECORD TYPE	Secrets & conspiracies
STORY HISTORY	1678-1680s

THE ACCOUNT

In 1678, Titus Oates offered England an account of a concealed Catholic conspiracy against Charles II. The accusation arrived in a climate ready to fear such a plot. Once believed, it gave ordinary religious identities and associations a sinister second meaning. The danger supposedly hiding behind daily life became the explanation for new suspicions, and the demand to expose it produced terrible consequences for those accused.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

The Royal Collection Trust identifies Oates as the fabricator of the Popish Plot; its collections include an image of his later punishment in the pillory. Historical accounts distinguish his false assassination allegations from the actual political and religious conflicts of the period. Oates was convicted of perjury. The prosecutions and deaths generated by the panic belong to documented history, while the conspiracy he described does not.

WHY IT STAYS WITH US

This is a secret-plot story in which belief creates the danger it claims to uncover. An accusation can gather authority from repeated public attention, even when the underlying narrative is false. Its historical chill comes from the distance between the weakness of the evidence and the strength of the institutions willing to act on it.

WHERE THIS TELLING COMES FROM

Titus Oates in the Pillory

Royal Collection Trust

<https://www.rct.uk/collection/659521/titus-oates-in-the-pillory>

Titus Oates and the Popish Plot

History Today

<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/titus-oates-and-popish-plot>

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