



Cats hold a mysterious and significant place in the folklore of the United Kingdom. Across the centuries, they have sparked legends, superstitions, and tales that vary from dark omens to symbols of good luck. This journey into British cat folklore reveals how the people of the UK have viewed these animals, the myths that surround them, and the beliefs that continue to fascinate today.

Cats as Guardians Against Evil

In many parts of the United Kingdom, cats are revered as guardians against evil. People believed that black cats, in particular, could ward off spirits and protect households. In some regions, sailors considered black cats on ships as lucky charms that protected them from storms and misfortune. This belief became so common that many sailors would even pay high sums to have a black cat on board for good fortune during their voyages.

Black Cats: Symbols of Fortune and Misfortune

The perception of black cats has always been a mix of positive and negative associations. In England, a black cat crossing your path could either bring fortune or signal bad luck, depending on the region. In the north of England, especially, people saw black cats as bearers of good luck. Newlyweds received black cats as gifts to ensure a prosperous and harmonious marriage. Meanwhile, in other areas, a black cat's appearance during the night could evoke fears of witchcraft or supernatural occurrences.

Cats and Witches: A Mysterious Bond

The association between cats and witches remains one of the most enduring images in



British folklore. During the witch trials of the 16th and 17th centuries, authorities often viewed cats as “familiars” or animal companions aiding witches. Black cats, in particular, became linked with witchcraft, thought to assist witches with their spells and magic. Tales circulated that witches could shape-shift into black cats, using this disguise to evade detection or spy on others. This fear embedded itself deeply into British folklore, giving rise to the iconic image of a black cat by a witch’s side that endures even today.

The Grimalkin: Britain’s Supernatural Cat

The Grimalkin, an eerie and mystical creature, appears frequently in British folklore. People described this supernatural feline as a ghostly cat that prowled graveyards and haunted old ruins. This legend took on such strength that many towns in Scotland and northern England warned travelers about the Grimalkin’s presence. The Grimalkin also became associated with curses, and encountering one at night was considered a bad omen, often linked to imminent death or misfortune.

The Legendary Cat Sìth of Scottish Folklore

In Scottish mythology, the Cat Sìth, or fairy cat, stands out as one of the most fascinating mythical felines. Described as a large, black cat with a white spot on its chest, the Cat Sìth roamed the Highlands. According to legend, this creature could steal souls. People believed it would pass over the bodies of the dead, taking their souls before they could reach the afterlife. To prevent this, mourners would guard the deceased vigilantly. They would play games, tell stories, and keep watch to distract the Cat Sìth, ensuring it did not approach the body.



Cats as Symbols of Prosperity and Luck

While some tales carried darker themes, many regions in the UK viewed cats as symbols of prosperity and good fortune. In Wales, for instance, owning a black cat meant an end to financial hardship, as the cat brought wealth and success to the household. Farmers across Britain often welcomed cats as they kept pests at bay, which helped secure crops and food stores. As a result, cats earned their place as cherished members of rural households, providing both practical help and spiritual protection.

The Manx Cat: Legend of the Tailless Cat

The Manx cat, a breed native to the Isle of Man, brings its own legend. This unique, tailless cat supposedly lost its tail when Noah closed the ark's door as the flood began. In their haste to get onboard, the Manx cat allegedly lost its tail, leading to its distinct appearance. This tale grew over time, and today, the Manx cat symbolizes resilience and adaptation, embodying the spirit of the Isle of Man's people.

Cats and Weather Folklore in the UK

In many areas of the UK, cats also served as predictors of the weather. Folklore suggests that when a cat sits with its back to the fire, a storm is on the way. If a cat scratches at furniture or walls, heavy rain is expected. These weather-related beliefs demonstrate how closely people observed their feline companions, considering their behavior as indicators of natural events. Farmers and rural communities often relied on these signs to prepare for



changing weather, trusting the instincts of their cats.

Cats in Modern British Culture

Today, many of these beliefs persist in British culture, even as superstitions have softened over time. Black cats remain symbols of both mystery and luck, featured prominently during Halloween and in popular culture. The bond between cats and the British people endures, with felines celebrated as companions, symbols of independence, and creatures of mystery. Cats continue to captivate the imagination, appearing in everything from literature to art and cinema, keeping the spirit of folklore alive.

All In All

The folklore surrounding cats in the United Kingdom offers a rich tapestry of myths, legends, and beliefs. These tales reflect the deep connection between people and their feline companions. Whether seen as protectors, omens, or supernatural beings, cats have left an indelible mark on British folklore. Their mysterious presence in myths and stories reveals the unique place cats hold in human imagination—a place filled with wonder, reverence, and respect.

References

Here are a few authoritative references you can use for information on cats in UK folklore:

1. Briggs, Katharine - *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language* (1970): This comprehensive dictionary explores British folk tales, including beliefs and superstitions related to animals, especially cats.
2. Evans, Anne Ross - *Folklore of the Scottish Highlands* (1976): Provides insight into Scottish mythology and the Cat Sith legend, a supernatural cat in Scottish folklore.



3. Opie, Iona, and Peter Opie - *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959): Discusses superstitions and beliefs held by children in the UK, including some about cats, which can often reflect broader folklore.
4. Simpson, Jacqueline, and Steve Roud - *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (2000): This dictionary covers a wide array of English folklore, from witchcraft associations to superstitions surrounding black cats.
5. Briggs, Katharine M. - *British Folk Tales and Legends: A Sampler* (1977): Offers stories and legends from British folklore, including the Grimalkin and other supernatural cats.
6. Toll, Simon - *Black Cats & Evil Eyes: A Book of Old-Fashioned Superstitions* (2008): Details superstitions and their origins, including those related to black cats and their role in British culture.
7. Henderson, William - *Notes on the Folk-lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders* (1879): A historical perspective on northern English folklore, often citing superstitions about animals, including cats, as both good and bad omens.
8. The Folklore Society - *Folklore Journal*: Published by The Folklore Society, this journal includes numerous articles on animals in British folklore, including studies on cats as symbols and supernatural beings.

These references cover the historical roots of cat-related folklore across the UK, providing a foundation for the legends and superstitions explored in the article.

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