

# Myths, Legends, Books & Coffee Pots

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Friday, 19 January 2018

**In the Time of The Pied Piper of Hamelin By Mary Ann Bernal. #history behind the #fairytale #Germany @BritonandDane**

## In the Time of The Pied Piper of Hamelin

By Mary Ann Bernal



Most people are familiar with the Brothers Grimm tale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. As the story goes, when the Piper did not receive payment from the town of Hamelin after he had rid them of their rat problem, he absconded with the children who were never seen again.

Was this fairytale that was meant to scare children fact or fiction? As with many fables, there is some truth to the story relating to events occurring in the thirteenth century.

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Hamelin (Hameln as it is called in German) is a town on the river Weser, located in the Lower Saxony region of Germany. The settlement arose around the Abbey of St. Boniface that had been founded by the monks of Fulda in the latter part of the eighth century.

Fulda, in central Germany, was a flourishing city built on the Fulda River. During its heyday, it was well-known for its great library, but the school was an important seat of learning, drawing students from afar. A Benedictine Abbey was established towards the end of the eighth century and became a renowned missionary center. A replica of the Old St. Peter's Basilica in Rome had been built to properly honor the relics of St. Boniface buried within the crypt. Pilgrims journeyed to the church praying for miracles. As time passed, the coffers were overflowing and these funds were used to set up daughter houses such as the Abbey located in Hamelin.

Even though Hamelin was a prosperous corn-trading mill town, the majority of people lived in poverty. Famine and disease plagued the less fortunate who could not feed their children. There was also the constant threat of war with nobles trying to annex more land to their territories. Add an infestation of rats to an already volatile environment caused concern among government officials. The logical thing to do was seek the services of a professional rat catcher.

Enter a piper, who convinced the officials he could rid the place of the vermin with his music for a fee. While skeptical, the bureaucrats agreed, and much to their surprise, the man was successful. However, they refused to pay him. The piper threatened to take all the children if he was not paid for his services. When payment was not received, the piper, true to his word, left the town along with the children.

According to historical accountants, the children of Hamelin did disappear and there have been many theories over the years as to what truly happened.

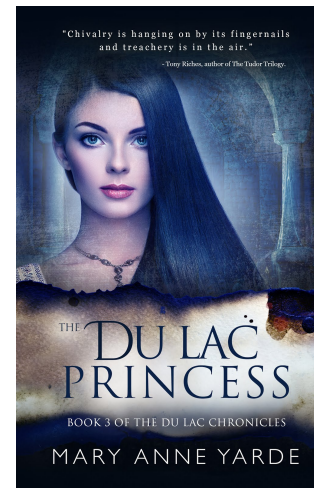
As in the Hansel and Gretel fairytale, it has been stated that parents had no problem getting rid of their children for a multitude of reasons. It is possible that the Pied Piper story was created to take attention away from the parents' culpability and place the blame elsewhere.

Rats with their plague-carrying fleas may have caused the children's demise, but the pestilence had yet to run rampant throughout Europe during the period in question.

Another theory suggested that the children may have run off to join the Children's Crusade on their own volition. The Crusade was established to free the Holy Land from Muslim occupation. Whether or



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not children actually reached Jerusalem is up for debate, but reports of bands of poor people, not necessarily lone children, had been seen wandering throughout the region at that time.

Since the legend references the children dancing to the tune of the Pied Piper, suffering from a dancing plague, referred to as St. Vitus ' dance, has also been suggested. This illness might have been caused by the toxicity of ergot fungi, but again, this is conjecture.

Of interest, is the mention of three disabled children (lame, deaf and blind) that were allegedly left behind.

The finer points vary, depending on which version is followed.

Whatever happened to the children remains a mystery but modern Hamelin continues to keep the legend alive. A major tourist attraction, the town is renowned throughout the world.

On any given Sunday from May through September, re-enactors bring the fairytale to life. If you visit off-season, there is a museum that features an animated film of the story.



In today's Hamelin, images of rats are everywhere, on the cobblestones and doorways. In the sixteenth century, the Rattenfaengershaus (rat catcher's house) was built and is located in the old town. A plaque references the fable. No music is played around the rat catcher's house out of respect for the missing children, but there is singing during Christmas time in the main square. There are also specialty "rat" foods and drinks such as rat's blood champagne that is made with blackcurrant juice. And there are a plethora of rat-themed souvenirs. River cruises and hiking also lures the modern-day tourist to the region.



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The missing children have not been forgotten over the centuries because the legend continues to enthrall its audience.

References

[Pied Piper ~ Wikipedia](#)

--> [Hamelin Town Replica ~ Wikipedia](#)

--> [Piper House ~ Wikipedia](#)

Rat whistle 5"x4 made from clay ~ Courtesy © Elisabeth Marrion Printed with permission.

**Mary Ann Bernal**



Mary Ann Bernal, author of *The Briton and the Dane* novels and the *Scribbler Tales* series, is an avid history buff who also enjoys science fiction. She is a passionate supporter of the U.S. military, having been involved with letter writing campaigns and other military support programs since Operation Desert Storm. All of Mary Ann's novels and short story collections are dedicated to fallen military heroes who gave their lives defending our freedom. A prolific writer originally hailing from New York, Mary Ann now resides in Nebraska.

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Learn more about the author's background and interests at [maryannbernal.com](http://maryannbernal.com) and [whisperinglegendspress.com](http://whisperinglegendspress.com).

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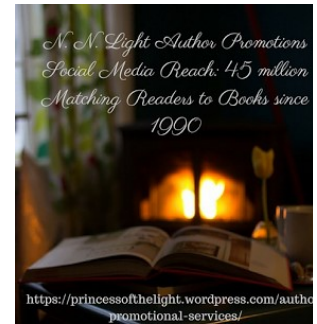
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Posted by [Mary Anne Yarde](#) at 07:00



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[Mary Anne Yarde](#) 19 January 2018 at 07:38

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[Mary Ann Bernal](#) 19 January 2018 at 12:35

Thanks for having me, Mary Anne.

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[Ellys-Daughtrey](#) 19 January 2018 at 11:36

I had no idea there was truth behind that tale. Thank you for the story!

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[Mary Ann Bernal](#) 19 January 2018 at 12:36

Glad you enjoyed the post Ellys. Thanks for commenting.

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**Mary Anne Yarde** 19 January 2018 at 12:42

Fascinating post, Mary Ann.

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**Mary Ann Bernal** 19 January 2018 at 14:45

Thanks, Mary Anne

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Take Care,  
Mary Anne xxx

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