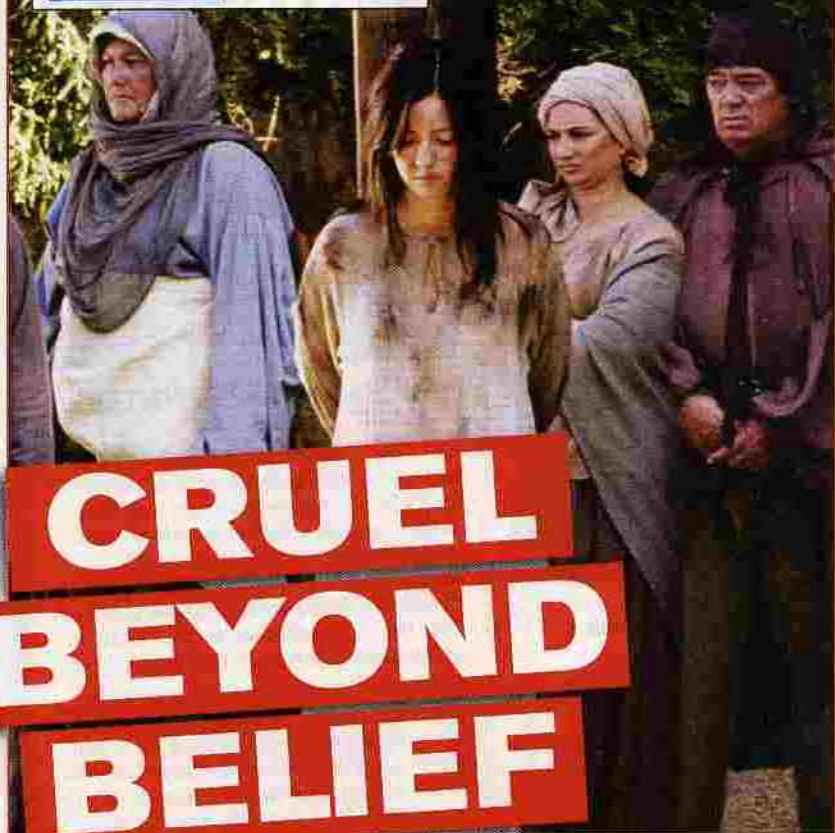


**NEW SERIES**

**THE SECRET FILES  
OF THE INQUISITION**  
UKTV HISTORY • MON-THURS

Trial by fire: Those  
believed to be  
heretics were burned  
at the stake



# CRUEL BEYOND BELIEF

A new docu-drama series reveals the chilling story of the Catholic Church's bloodiest heretic hunters

**T**he Inquisition is one of the most shameful episodes in the history of Christianity. Set up by the Catholic Church in the late 12th century to root out heretics, it persecuted, tortured and burned thousands at the stake for their religious beliefs.

For centuries, information about it was locked away in the Vatican. But in 1998, secret files revealing details of the atrocities were made public.

This four-part docu-drama begins in 1308 in the hilltop village of Montailou in south-west France, where the Church aimed to wipe out a heretical sect called

the Cathars. The whole village was rounded up and interrogated: men, women and children.

One of the accused was the noblewoman Béatrice de Planissoles. Her fascinating story – as recorded by chief interrogator Jacques Fournier (later to become Pope Benedict XII) – is one of sex, intrigue and betrayal.

Béatrice, twice married and widowed, was having an affair with the debauched village priest, Pierre Clergue, who was also a secret Cathar supporter. She claimed in her deposition that she and Clergue regularly had sex in front of the altar.

It was Clergue who eventually betrayed her to the authorities.

When she fled – with her new lover, also a priest – she was captured and became a witness against Clergue, now also charged with heresy after a scorned lover informed on him. Béatrice went to prison; Clergue suffered a mysterious death.

This was just the beginning of a chilling story of religious suppression that was to last 600 years, and which had as its credo that all non-Catholics had to choose: convert, or die.

Features: Richard Fallon, Sue Mallins. Photos: BBC, five, Getty Images, National Geographic, Rex, UKTV

