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Sharpe, James.

Witchcraft in Early

Modern England.

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DOCUMENT 1 THE 1563 WITCHCRAFT STATUTE

Statute 5 Eliz. I, cap. 16, 'An Act against Conjuracions, Inchantments and Witchcrafts' (English modernised). This is the text of this Act insofar as it concerns malefic witchcraft: there is a further section dealing with using magic to find treasure, etc.

Where at this present, there is no ordinary nor codign punishment provided against the practisers of the wicked offences of conjurations and invocations of evil spirits, and of sorceries, enchantments, charms and witchcrafts, the which offences by force of a statute made in the xxxiiij year of the reign of the late King Henry the eighth were made to be felony, and so continued until the said statute was repealed by the Act and Statute of Repeal made in the first year of the reign of king Edward the vith; since the repeal whereof many fantastical and devilish persons have devised and practised invocations, and conjurations of evil and wicked spirits, and have used and practised witchcrafts, enchantments, charms and sorceries, to the destruction of the persons and goods of their neighbours and other subjects of this realm, and for other lewd intents and purposes contrary to the laws of Almighty God, to the peril of their own souls, and the great infamy and disquietness of this realm: for reformation whereof it be enacted by the Queen's Majesty with the assent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that if any person or persons after the first day of June next coming, use, practise or exercise any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits, to or for any intent or purpose; or else if any person or persons after the said first day of June shall use, practise or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed, that then as well every such offender or offenders in invocations or conjurations as is aforesaid, their counsellors & aiders, as also every such offender or offenders in witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery whereby the death of any person does ensue, their aiders and counsellors, being of either of the said offences lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons, and shall lose the privilege of benefit of clergy: saving the wife of such

person her title or dower, and also the heir or successor of such person his or their titles of inheritance, succession and other rights, as though no such attainer of the ancestor or predecessor had been had or made.

And further be it enacted that by authority aforesaid, that if any person or persons, after the said first day of June next coming, shall use, practise or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be wasted, consumed or lamed in his or her body or member, or whereby any goods or cattles of such person shall be destroyed, wasted or impaired, then every such offender or offenders their counsellors and aiders, being thereof lawfully convicted, shall for his or their first offence or offences, suffer imprisonment by the space of one whole year, without bail or mainprise, and once in every quarter of the said year, shall in some market town, upon the market day or at such time as any fair shall be kept there, stand openly upon the pillory by the space of six hours, and there shall openly confess his or her error and offence; and for the second offence, being as is aforesaid lawfully convicted or attainted, shall suffer death as a felon, and shall lose the privilege of clergy and sanctuary: saving to the wife [*as above*].

Statute 5 Eliz. I, cap. 16, 'An Act against Conjuracions, Inchantments and Witchcrafts' (English modernised).

DOCUMENT 2 WILLIAM PERKINS ON THE DEMONIC PACT

William Perkins (1558–1602) was the most celebrated English theologian of his day. His emphasis on the central importance of the demonic pact was widely shared among Protestant demonological writers of the period.

The ground of all the practices of witchcraft, is a league or covenant made betwene the witch and the devill: wherein they doe mutually bind themselves each to other. If any shall think it strange, that man or woman should enter league with satan, their utter enemy; they are to know it for a most evident and certen truth, that may not be called into question. . . . The ende why the devill seeketh to make a league with men, may be this; it is a point of his policie, not to be readie at every man's command to doe for him what he would, except he be sure of his

reward; and no other meanes will serve his turne for taking assurance hereof, but this covenant. And why so? That hereby he may testifie both his hatred of God, and his malice against man. For since the time that he was come down from heaven, he hath hated God & his kingdom, and greatly maligned the happy estate of our first parents in paradise. For he thought to have brought upon them by their fall, eternal and final confusion; but perceiving the covenant of grace, then manifested, and seeing man by it to be in a better and surer state than before, he much more maligned his estate, and beares the ranker hatred unto God for that his mercie bestowed upon him.

Now that he might show forth this hatred and malice, he takes upon him to imitate God, and to counterfeit his dealings with his Church. As God therefore hath made a covenant with his people, so satan joynes in league with the world, labouring to bind some men unto him, that so if it were possible he might draw them from the covenant of god and disgrace the same. Again, as God hath his word and sacraments, the seales of his covenant unto his beleevers; so the devill hath his words and certaine outward signes to ratifie the same to his instruments.

William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft. So farre forth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and manifested by true Experience* (Cambridge, 1608), pp. 41, 45–7.

DOCUMENT 3 WILLIAM PERKINS ON CUNNING FOLK

This is an unusually cogent statement of the view widely held among Protestant theologians that 'good' witches drew their powers from the devil as certainly as did the wicked ones, and should suffer accordingly. Perkins's comments on the popularity of cunning folk were also widely echoed by the writers of the period.

The healing and harmlesse witch must die by this law, though he kill not, onely for covenant made with Satan. For this must alwaies be remembered, as a conclusion, that by witches we understand not those onely which kill and torment; but all diviners, charmers, iuglers, all wizzards, commonly called wise men and wise women; yea, whosoever doe any thing (knowing what they doe) which cannot be effected by nature or

art; and in the same number we reckon all good witches, which doe no hurt but good, which doe not spoile and destroy, but save and deliver. All these come under this sentence of *Moses*, because they deny God, and are confederates with Satan. By the lawes of England, the thiefe is executed for stealing, and me thinke it iust and profitable; but it were a thousand times better for the land, if all witches, but specially the blessing witch might suffer death. For the thiefe by his stealing, and the hurtful inchanter by charming, bring hinderance and hurt to the bodies and goods of men; but these are the right hand of the devill, by which he taketh and destroyeth the soules of men. Men doe commonly hate and spit at the damifying sorcerer, as unworthie to live among them; whereas the other is so deare unto them, that they hold themselves and their country blessed that have him among them, they flie unto him in necessitie, they depend upon him as their god, and by this meanes, thousands are carried away to their finall confusion. Death therefore is the iust and deserved portion of the good witch.

Perkins, *ibid.*, pp. 255–7.

DOCUMENT 4 REGINALD SCOT ON DIVINE POWER

Reginald Scot's tract of 1584 was unrelentingly sceptical about the powers of witches, but a major theme informing the scepticism was a theological position which argued that the misfortunes popularly attributed to witches are in fact the result of God's power. Here he refutes those who overestimate the power of the devil and of witches.

... these make the divell a whole god, to create things of nothing, to knowe men's cogitations, and to doo that which God never did; as to transubstantiate men into beasts, &c. Which thing if divels could doo, yet followeth it not, that witches have such power. But if all the divels in hell were dead, and all the witches in England burnt or hanged; I warrant you we should not faile to have raine, haile and tempests, as now we have; according to the appointment and will of God, and according to the constitution of the elements, and the course of the planets, wherein God hath set a perfect and perpetuall order.

I am also well assured, that if all the old women in the world were witches; and all the priests [i.e., Roman Catholic priests], conjurers; we should not have a drop of raine, nor a blast of wind the more or lesse for them. For the Lord hath bound the waters in the clouds, and hath set bounds about the waters, untill the daie and night come to an end; yea it is God that raiseth the winds and stilleth them: and he saileth to the raine and snowe; Be upon the earth, and it falleth. The wind of the Lord, and not the wind of witches, shall destroye the treasures of their pleasant vessels, and drie up the fountaines; saileth *Oseias*. Let us also learne and confesse with the Prophet *David*, that we ourselves are the causes of our afflictions; and not exclaime upon witches, when we should call upon God for mercie.

Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), book 1, ch. 1.

DOCUMENT 5 WITCHES AND ENTERTAINMENT AT COURT, 1609

Ben Jonson (?1573–1637) was one of the leading playwrights and poets of his day, and also turned his hand to writing masques, entertainments for the court of James VI and I and his queen, Anne of Denmark. The antimasque to his 'Masque of Queens' of 1609 consisted of a presentation of a group of witches to represent 'the opposites to good fame', good fame being the theme of the masque proper. Jonson left detailed instructions on the staging of this antimasque, and referenced his sources, demonstrating his knowledge of both current demonological works and classical allusions to witchcraft. The first extract describes the initial scene witnessed by the audience, the second describes the 'dame', or chief of the witches.

... the part of the scene which first presented it selfe, was a very ugly Hell: which flaming beneath, smoked unto the top of the rooffe. And in respect all evils are, morally, said to come from Hell; as also from the observation of Torrentius upon Horace his Canidia, 'quae tot instructa venenis, ex Orci faucibus profecta videri possit' [one can see as many companies of witches as there are exits from hell]: These witches, with a kind of hollow and infernall musique, came forth from thence. First one, then two, and three, and more, till their number increased to eleven; all

differently attyrd: some with rats on their head; some on their shoulders; others with ointment pots at their girdles; all with spindles, timbrels, rattles, or other veneficall instruments, making a confused noyse, with strange gestures. The device of their attire was Master Jones [i.e., Inigo Jones] his, with the invention, of the whole scene, and machine. Onely, I prescrib'd them their properties of vipers, snakes, bones, herbs, rootes, and other ensignes of their magic, out of the authoritie of ancient and late writers . . .

The *Dame enter'd to them, naked arm'd, bare-footed, her frock tuck'd, her hayre knotted, and folded with vipers; in her hand a torch made of a dead man's arm, lighted; girded with a snake. To whom they all [i.e., the other witches] did reverence, and shee spake, uttering, by way of question, the end wherefore they came: which if it had beene done either before, or otherwise, had not beene so naturall.

*This Dame I make to beare the person of Ate, or mischiefe (for so I interpret it) out of Homer's description of her, *Iliad*, I, wher he makes her swift to hurt mankind, strong, and sound of her feet, and *Iliad*, T [sic] walking upright on men's heads, in both places using one, and the same phrase to signifie her power . . . I present her bare footed, and her frock tuck'd, to make her seeme more expedite, by Horace his authoritie, *Sat.* 8. *Lib.* 1. . . . But for her hayre, I rather respecte another place of his, *Epopd. Lib. Ode.* 5. . . . And that of Lucan, *Lib.* 6 speaking of Erithco's attire. . . . For her torch, see Remig. [i.e., Remigius, or Nicholas Remy, a French demonologist], *Lib.* 2 *cap.* 3.

Ben Jonson, *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson* (1616), pp. 945–6, 948.

DOCUMENT 6 REGINALD SCOT ON THE DYNAMICS OF WITCHCRAFT ACCUSATIONS, 1584

Here Scot provides us with a classic description of the 'charity refused' model of witchcraft accusations.

One sort of such as are said to bee witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eyed, pale, fowle and full of wrinkles; poore,

sullen, superstitious, and papist; or such as knowe no religion: in whose drowsie minds the diuell hath gotten a fine seat; so as, what mischeefe, mischance, calamitie, or slaughter is brought to passe, they are easily persuaded the same is doone by themselves; imprinting in their minds an earnest and constant imagination hereof. They are leane and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces, to the horror of all that see them. They are doting, scolds, mad, diuelish: and not much differing from them that are thought to be possessed with spirits; so firme and stedfast in their opinions, as whosoever shall onelie have respect to the constancie of their words uttered, would easily believe they were true indeed.

These miserable wretches are odious unto all their neighbors, and so feared, as few dare offend them, or denie them anie thing they aske; whereby they take upon them; yea, and sometimes thinke, that they can doo such things as are beyond the abilitie of humane nature. These go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yea, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live: neither obtaining for their service and paines, nor by their art, nor yet at the diuels hands (with whom they are said to make a perfect and visible bargain) either beautie, monie, promotion, welth, worship, pleasure, honor, knowledge, learning, or anie other benefit whatsoever.

It falleth out many times, that neither their necessities, nor their expectation is answered or served, in those place where they beg or borrowe; but rather their lewdnesse is by their neighbours reprooved. And further, in tract of time the witch waxeth odious and tedious to her neighbors; and they againe are despised and despited of hir: so as sometimes she cursseth one, and sometimes another; and that from the maister of the house, his wife, children, cattell, &c. to the little pig that lieth in the stie. Thus in processe of time they have all displeased her, and she hath wished evill lucke unto them all: perhaps with curses and imprecations made in forme. Doubtlesse (at length) some of hir neighbors die, or fall sicke; or some of their children are visited with diseases that vex them strangely: as apoplexies, epilepsies, convulsions, hot fevers, wormes, &c. Which by ignorant parents are supposed to be the vengeance of witches. Yea, and their opinions and conceits are confirmed and maintained by unskilfull physicians: according to the common saieing, *Inscitiae pallium*

maleficium & incantio, Witchcraft and enchantment is the cloke of ignorance: whereas indeed evill humors & not strange words, witches, or spirits are the causes of such diseases. Also some of their cattell perish, either by disease or mischance. Then they, upon whom such adversities fall, weighing the fame that goeth upon this woman (hir words, displeasure, and curses meeting so justlie with their misfortune) doo not onelie conceive, but also are resolved, that all their mishaps are brought to passe by hir onelie means.

Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, book 1, ch. 3.

DOCUMENT 7 SOME EARLY DEPOSITIONS, ESSEX 1563

These were taken by the Archdeaconry courts, although Elizabeth Lowyes was tried shortly afterwards at the assizes. There she became the first person known to have been convicted under the 1563 statute. The evidence given here makes an interesting comparison to Scot's statements in the preceding extract.

Evidence of Philippa Geale (Gale), aged thirty-two, of Great Waltham: 'That Elizabeth Lewys, wife of John Lowys, and this depolnen[t] fell at varia[t]ions for takynge in of worke, in that the said Lewys wif went to John Barnard's wif and said that this depolnen[t] wolld spyn no more of her worke. Thereupon at the next meatyng they fell out. And this depolnen[t] tollde her that she lied and had tollde a wrong tale. And, amonge other talke, this deponent saiethe that she said 'Yf it be as folke saye, thow art a wytche'. To whome the said Lewys wif aunswered, 'Yf I be a wyche the dyvell thee twytche'. And ymmediatly upon that this depolnen[t] fell on a grete quyvering and quakering. And this was don about Satirday aboutes five yeres past. And soo after that [shel] went home, continuynge soo till wednesdaie, at w[h]ich daie she fell downe ded, and was so sick fourteen daies yt no bodie thought shee wolld have lyved. And then her neighbors sent for the preistes, to whom she uttered all. And then he sent for the said Lewys wif, threatenynge her if this depolnen[t] died she shuld be brent [i.e., burnt], and after her comynge this depolnen[t] mended.

And otherwise she knows nothing.

Agnes Devenyshe, aged forty-seven, of Great Waltham, where she had lived for eight years:

She hath herde a comon brute [i.e., rumour] that Lewys wife ys a witche. Item, that about M[ar]ch last, gooyng to Comes house, she wente to the said Lowys wiffes hous, and then they talked about a sore arme of hers. And then she [i.e., Lowys] counselled her to goo to a woman under Munckwoode. And goynge thith[er], the folkes tollde her husbände and her that she was a wytche.

It[em]. The saide Lewys wif did then and there aske her how Johnson drink did worke. And she this deponent aunswerid that yt was as yt did. Then the said Lewys wife said, 'Lett hym com and speke w[i]th me'.

It[em]. That this depolnen[t] goynge for her monnye, viz. vis vilid whiche she colde not spare, and aft[er] that she had two piges and one of them sodenlie died, and the other ev[er] pyned till she was fayne to sell yt. And she judgeth that yt is the doynge of the said Lowys wif. And then she this depolnen[t] fell sicke, w[i]th her husband and child w[i]thall, in pain and grief.

Item. That on Maye Even, being at Canell[es] hous, John Canell his chillde being sicke, laye w[i]th the neck clene awrye, the face undler] the lift [i.e., left] shollder, and the right arme drawn w[i]th the hande clene backwarde and upwarde, the shullder pynt [i.e., point] before the brest pight, the bodie lyng from yt an oth[er] waie, not right but wrythynge, and the right legge clene backwarde behinde the bodie, contrarie to all nature; as they suppose the verye doynge of the said Lowys wif. And otherwise she knows nothing to depose.

Essex Record Office, at end of Archdeaconry of Essex Act Book, ERO, D/AEA/2.

DOCUMENT 8 ASSIZE INDICTMENTS FOR WITCHCRAFT, 1574

This is a fairly typical sample of indictments from the Elizabethan period (abstracted from the Latin originals) from the Summer Assizes in Essex held at Brentwood, 19 July 1574. Another woman, Cecily Glasenberye of Barking, was sentenced to death after being convicted on five counts of witchcraft at this assize. Sad to relate, further documentation reveals that Alice Hynckson died in prison of the plague in May 1578, about ten weeks before completing her sentence.

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Elizabeth Taylor, wife of John Taylor of Thaxted, labourer, on 10 April 1573 at Thaxted bewitched Alice Holmes, daughter of William Holmes of London, basket-maker, who languished until 14 April following, when she died at Thaxted.

Pleaded not guilty: judged [i.e. found guilty and sentenced to death under the 1563 statute]

The same, on 10 October 1573 at Thaxted bewitched Agnes Townesend, daughter of William Townesend of Thaxted, carpenter, who languished until 20 May following, when she died at Thaxted.

Pleaded not guilty: judged

Alice Hynckson of Thaxted, widow, on 20 January 1572 at Thaxted bewitched three cows valued at £4, and seven ewes valued at 20 shillings, the goods and chattels of James Jarvys of Thaxted, husbandman, which died within four days.

Pleaded not guilty: guilty: sentenced to a year's imprisonment and four sessions on the pillory

Agnes Dix, wife of John Dix of Walter Belchamp, labourer, on 1 May 1574 at Walter Belchamp bewitched Richard Hayward, who languished for fourteen days subsequently.

Pleaded not guilty: not guilty

The same, on 20 January 1574 at Walter Belchamp bewitched Elizabeth Potter, wife of John Potter of Walter Belchamp, who languished until 30 January following, when she died at Walter Belchamp.

Pleaded not guilty: not guilty

Public Record Office, London, Clerks of Assize Records, Home Circuit Indictments, PRO ASSI 35/16/4/14-15; 35/16/4/16: 35/16/4/22-23.

DOCUMENT 9 WHY SO MANY WITCHES ARE WOMEN, 1616

Alexander Roberts was an obscure clergyman whose tract of 1616 consisted of a brief exposition of demonological theory, together with an account of the trial of a witch at King's Lynn appended. His explanations of why women were attracted to witchcraft are totally conventional for the period.

First, they are by nature credulous, wanting experience, and therefore more easily deceived.

Secondly, they harbour in their breast a curious and inquisitive desire to know such things as be not fitting and convenient, and so are oftentimes intangled with the bare show and visard of goodnesse . . .

Thirdly, their complexion [i.e. psychological condition] is softer, and from hence more easily receive the impressions offered by the divell; as when they be instructed and governed by good angels, they prove exceeding religious, and extraordinary devout: so consenting to the suggestions of evill spirits, becoming notoriously wicked, so that there is no mischiefe above that of a woman, *Eccles.* 25.13.&c.

Fourthly, in them is a greater facility to fall, and therefore the divell at the first tooke advantage, and set upon Eve in Adam's absence, *Genesis* 3.3.

Fifthly, this sex, when it conceiveth wrath or hatred against any, is unplaceable, possessed with unsatiable desire of revenge, and transported with their power herein answereth not their will, and are meditating with themselves how to effect their mischievous proiects and designs, the divell taketh the occasion, who knoweth in what manner to content exulcerated mindes, windeth himselfe into their hearts, offereth to teach them the meanes by which they may bring to pass that rancor which was nourished in their breasts, and offereth his helpe and furtherance herein.

Sixthly, they are of a slippery tongue, and full of words: and therefore if they know any such wicked practices, are not able to hold them, but communicate the same with their husbands, children, consorts, and inward acquaintance; who not considerably weighing what the issue and end thereof may be, entertaine the same, and so the poyson is dispersed.

Alexander Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft: wherein sundry Propositions are laid downe, plainly discovering the Wickednesse of that damnable Art* (1616), pp. 42-3.

DOCUMENT 10 WITCHES IN WEST YORKSHIRE, c. 1620

The Yorkshire gentleman Edward Fairfax began his account of his daughters' bewitchment with a description of the women he thought responsible. The list is typical, describing women of a generally bad character with an existing

reputation for witchcraft. Note how familiars were by this date a core aspect of witchcraft beliefs, and also how Elizabeth Fletcher's reputation for witchcraft evidently worked to her advantage.

The women questioned for this offence are in number six, of whom five fall in my knowledge; therefore I can give you some character of them; and the spirits also I will describe, as the children demonstrated their shapes. The first is called Margaret Waite, a widow that some years ago came to dwell in these parts, with a husband; who brought with them an evil report for witchcraft and theft; the man died by the hand of the executioner for stealing, and his relict hath increased the report she brought with her for witcherie. Her familiar spirit is a deformed thing with many feet, black of colour, rough with hair, the bigness of a cat, the name of it unknown. The next is her daughter, a young woman, agreeing with her mother in name and conditions, and is thought, she added impudency and lewd behaviour; for she is young and not deformed; and their house is holden for a receptacle for some of the worst sort – her spirit, a white cat spotted with black, and named Inges.

The third is Jennit Dibble, a very old widow, reputed a witch for many years; and constant report confirmeth that her mother, two aunts, two sisters, her husband and some of her children, have long been esteemed witches, for that it seemeth hereditary to her family; – her spirit is in the shape of a great black cat called Gibbe, which hath attended her now above 40 years.

They are made up a mass by Margaret Thorpe, daughter of Jennit Dibble, lately a widow, for which she beareth some blame. This woman, if you read the sequel, will perhaps seem unto you, not without great reason, to be an obedient child and docile scholar of so skilful a parent. Her familiar is in the shape of a bird, yellow of colour, about the bigness of a crow – the name of it is Tewhit.

The fifth is Elizabeth Fletcher, wife of Thomas Fletcher, daughter to one Grace Foster, dead long since: a woman notoriously famed for a witch, who had so powerful hand over the wealthiest neighbours about her, that none of them refused to do anything she required; yea, unbesought they provided her with fire, and meat from their own tables; and did what else they thought would please her.

The sixth is Elizabeth Dickenson, wife of William Dickenson, of whom I cannot say much of certain knowledge; neither is her spirit known to us.

Demonologia: a Discourse on Witchcraft as it was acted in the Family of Mr. Edward Fairfax, of Fuyston, in the County of York, in the Year 1621, ed. William Cradocke (Harrogate, 1882), pp. 32–4.

DOCUMENT 11 A CHURCH COURT DEFAMATION CASE, 1617

One reaction to accusations of witchcraft was to sue the accusers for defamation. A number of such cases survive in church court records, this one coming from the Leeds area. Note the public altercation between Thomas Brooke and John Beamond, the way in which witchcraft was gossiped about, Brooke's longstanding suspicions that Beamond was harming his cattle, and Ann Snowden's refusal to believe that Isabel Beamond was a witch. Other documentation for this case suggests that Beamond had been examined by local justices and committed to prison at York on suspicion of witchcraft a few days previously, although we have no evidence on the outcome of those proceedings or of this defamation suit. The statements reproduced here were taken on 28 November 1617.

Evidence of George Eastburne of Headingly in the parish of Leeds [Latin heading says Eastburne is aged about 50, has known Isabel Beamond well for about 30 years, and Thomas Brooke for about 34 years]:

Upon Sunday next after May Day last past he the articula[te] i.e., aforesaid] Thomas Brooke being in the towne gate or street of Burley situate within the par[is]he of Leedes articula[te] did goe unto the dore of the house of John Beamond, husband of the articula[te] Isabell Beamond, and willed him the said John to come forth of the house into the said streete & threatened to fight w[i]th him, whereupon he the said John Beamond spooke unto the said Thomas Brooke through a windowe of his said house and told him that he had three sonnes the worst of w[i]ch would answere him. And thereupon the said Thomas Brooke told the said John Beamond that both he & his wife were witches meaninge she the articula[te] Isabel Beamond), & further said that the

said Isabell Beamond had bewitched his goodes & had been a wiche for fortene yeres last of his knowledge: then & there being p[re]sent and hearinge the same wordes he this ex[al]minat[al]te, Henrie Moore, William Stevenson and divers others . . .

Evidence of Ann Snowden of Bramley in the parish of Leeds [Latin heading says Snowden is aged 21, has known both Isabel Beamond and Thomas Brookes for about seven years]:

That in May now last past as she certeynely remembreth, she this ex[al]minat[al]te being then a servant to one Edward Haigh in Burley w[ithin] the p[ar]ishe of Leedes ar[ticula]te was goeing into the towne fieldes of Burley to fetch her master's kine at w[ith]ch tyme & place the ar[ticula]te Thomas Brooke did o[ver]take this ex[al]minat[al]te in the said feildes & after some other speches he tould this ex[al]minat[al]te that his kyne would give no milke, 'For I thinke', quoth he, 'that Isabell Beamond ar[ticula]te hath bewitched them (meaning the ar[ticula]te Isabell Beamond)', whereupon the ex[al]minat[al]te tould him that she thought the said Isabell was an honest woman. 'Ney', quoth he, 'she is a wiche [meaning the ar[ticula]te Isabell Beamond] & hath done me harme in my goods these xiiiij yeres last past': then & there being p[re]sent this ex[al]minat[al]te & none other.

Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, York, Cause Papers, C.P.H2177.

DOCUMENT 12 COMMUNITY REACTIONS TO WITCHES, c. 1720

These are two extracts from Quarter Sessions records showing how community reactions to supposed witches could vary. The second extract (which is slightly damaged in the original) suggests a considerable cleavage between the attitude of the justices of the peace and that of the witch's community. The relatively late date of both these extracts is of some interest.

West Riding Com Ebor. To the Hon[or]able the Justices of Peace at Barnsley Assembled.

Wee the inhabitants of Knottingley within the said Riding do hereby certify y[ou]r worships, that William Sefton y[ou]r compl[ain]ant is a man of a quiet disposition frequenting the church & bringing his children up

in the feare of God giveing them as good education as any person of his ability within us doth. But being dayly abused & threatened by one w[illia]m Howitt & Isabell his wife, by terming him a wizzard, I was forced to gett a war[an]t against them from Esq. Harman who comitted them & sent them to ye house of correction, to which place S[ir] Rowland Winn had some yeares since sent them upon y[ou]r complainant's account had he not out of compassion to them put up the same. But being not able any longer to abide their reproaches was forced to doe what he hath & humbly desires that the s[ai]d Howitt may be dealt with as y[ou]r worships may see fitt, for that y[ou]r compl[ain]ant may live at quietness he being no such person as the s[ai]d Howitt terms him to be, to the best of our knowledge, is the request of y[ou]r worshipp's humble serv[an]ts. (Followed by 17 signatures)

West Yorkshire Record Office, Wakefield,
Quarter Session Rolls, Q51/62/10/ File 7: 1723.

To the overseer of the poor for the town of Hainsworth [Hainworth]. Whereas Ann Jackson of y[ou]r town hath been falsly & maliciously defam'd for a witch & that scandall hath been so industriously promoted by wicked people that all her neighbours refuse and avoid to have any dealing or com[pl]er with the s[ai]d Ann and she being thereby deprived of necessary sustenance & her former allowance of twelve pence being insufficient thereby for her maintenance, these are therefore to require & order you the overseer to allow & pay the s[ai]d Ann Jackson the sum of two shillings & six pence weekly & every week untill you shall have cause to the contrary. Hereof faile not at y[ou]r perill. Given under my hand . . . the 19th day of May in the year of our Lord 1719.

Joshua Bootham overseer of the poor of Hainsworth having this day appeared before us to appeal ag[ainst] the above written ord[er] we think fitt to confirm it . . .

John Fountayne
Rob. Monckton

West Yorkshire Record Office, Wakefield,
Quarter Sessions Rolls, Q51/60/4/File 8: 1719.

DOCUMENT 13 THE GODLY REJECT COUNTER MAGIC, 1683

Here a worried parent consults two nonconformist ministers about how to treat her supposedly bewitched son. Note the description of the symptoms of bewitchment, the evident acceptance by the doctor of the efficacy of counter magic, and the recipe for the 'witch's cake': as the document notes, the idea was that burning the cake, by sympathetic magic, would inflict unbearable pain in the urinary tract of the bewitcher, who would then reveal herself when she came to investigate the cause of her torments. Oliver Heywood (1630–1702) was a prominent West Yorkshire nonconformist minister, and his papers contain several references to witchcraft and related matters.

Came to my house – Judith Higson, and because I was not at home she writ down her business and left it for me, which was to desire my advice in a weighty case, she had also gone to Mr Dawson's, but found him not at home, the case was this. She hath a sone by her former husband Abraham Swift (called also Abraham) who hath lyen long under a strange and sad hand of God in his body; he lyes in bed, hath swelling in his throat, hand, cannot stirre, looks as one affrighted, about 12 years of age – they had used many meanes for his cure, but all inefficient, that day, May 7, came to their house (not sent for by them but brought by a friend) one Dr Thornton, who s[ai]th it is not a naturall distemper, that he is troubled with, but hath some hurt by an evil tongue, he s[ai]th he will not prescribe any medicine for him, until his water [i.e., urine] have been tryed by fire – i.e., they must take hi water and make a cake or loaf of it, with wheat meal, and put some of his hair into it and horse shoe stumps, and then put it in the fire, and till she or he or some doe this he will prescribe nothing for him – not that he bids her say any words yet she feared it may be some kind of charm, and as she piously expressed herself (for I hope she is a good woman), 'I being afraid to offend God by such a tryall as he prescribes, I come purposely to you and Mr Dawson to get your judgement' – Mr D. came to me the morning after to consult about it, we have concluded it not to be any way of God, having no foundation either in nature or divine revelation in scripture, I went to Halifax that day to a funeral, called of her, told her our thoughts, and then perceived their imagination, that upon their using these means, the

witch that had hurt them would come and discover all – I utterly disliked it, so did her husband and she – I told them the right way was to goe to God by fasting and prayer, they consent, we appointed yesterday, w[hi]ch was Wednesday May 16 1683.

The Rev. Oliver Heywood B.A. 1630–1702; his Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdote and Event Books, ed. J. Horsfall Turner, 4 vols (Brighouse, 1882–85), vol. 4, pp. 53–4.

DOCUMENT 14 A CUNNING MAN, 1652

There was probably no such thing as a typical cunning man, but one suspects that this example was less typical than most. Note the gendered nature of his business, and the way his reputation seems to have spread rapidly locally.

West Rideing of the County of Yorke. The informacon of Lancelot Milner of Nesfield in the said county husbandman, taken upon oath the eleventh of March 1651[2], before Charles Fairfax of Menston, Esquire, one of the Justices of Peace within the sayd Rydeing.

Sayth that on Weddensday was sevenight att night a man whose name he knoweth not but p[re]tending [i.e., claiming] himselfe to be dumbe and deafe, did come to this informer's home and stayed there a weeke in which tyme divers from severall plarlties of the country came to enquire, the wenches what husbandes they should have; when they should come; whether they should bee widdowes; and divers such like questions; some men to enquire of stollen horses, or mayres, all which questions hee answered by signes in chalke, and poyntinge with his hand which way they were gone; and divers such p[er]sons soe directed, have tould this informer that the sayd dumbe man did directe them very truly. And of those p[er]sons soe resortinge to him, of some of them hee tooke a penny, of others twopence, of others a can of ale and of some nothing; hee further sayth that a souldier (very familiar with him) came the last weeke to this informer's house and sayd the sayd dumbe man was borne about London.

[Information of Edward, son of Lancelot Milner, taken as above]
Sayth that within the weeke before this his informacon, a man dwelling in or neare Rippon came to the dumbe man to enquire of a stolne mayre, and before any discourse with the man, he the sayd dumbe p[er]son tooke

a stolle betwixt his legges and spurned it, and poynted towards him that came to enquire of him; then tooke upp a chipp and flunge it from him, makeinge signes that it was to noe purpose to looke after her; of some he tooke a penny, of others nothing but ale; and of divers nothing at all.

[Information of Isabel Bearing of Menston, 13 March 1652]
 Sayth that shee goeing on Saterdag last with others to the house of Lancelot Milner where the dumbe man was, diverse resorted thither and amongst the rest two from Tadcaster about a horse stollen and some from Morton towneshipp & others from other p[ar]tes of the county to whome he made signes by chalke upon a table and diverse gave him twopence apiece of their owne voluntary will, but shee sayth that the sayd dumbe man to her knowledge demanded nothinge of any either by signes or otherwise.

Public Record Office, London, Clerks of Assize Records,
 Northern Circuit Depositions, ASSI 45/4/2/70.

DOCUMENT 15 MEETING THE DEVIL AND GOING TO THE SABBAT, LANCASHIRE 1634

Part of a deposition taken by local justices from one of the women sucked into the Lancashire witch-scare of 1633–64. It contains what was to become the standard story of meeting the devil and making the pact with him, including sexual intercourse, as well as, for England, an early and rare account of the sabbat. But note how, at this point, the devil of the learned demonologist is still being conflated with the familiar spirit of popular imagination.

The Examinacion and Voluntary Confession of Margaret Johnson, widdow, taken at Padcam [Padiham] ye 9th day of March 1633 [i.e., 1634] before Richard Shuttleworth and J[oh]n Starkey, Esq, 2 of his Ma[ies]ties justices of the peace within the county of Lancaster

Who saith that betweene 7 or 8 yeares since shee beeing in her house at Marsden in great passion & anger & distracted & withall oppressed w[ith] some want there appeared unto her a spirit or devill in the similitude or proportion of a man apparelled in a suite of blacke tied about w[ith] silke pointes [i.e., laces], whose offered her yf shee would give him her soule,

hee would supply all her wants and bring her whatsoever she wanted or needed and at her appointm[en]t would helpe her to kill & revenge her either of man or beaste or what she desired, and after a sollicitacon or two shee contracted and coadioned w[ith] the said devill or spiritt for her soule. And the said devill had her call him by the name of Mamillion, & when shee called hee would bee ready to doe her will. And she saith that in all her talke and conference shee called the said Mamillion her God. And shee further saith that the said spiritt or devill did by her consent defile her body by com[m]itting wicked uncleanness together. And she further saith that shee was not at the greate meetinge of the witches at Harestones in the Forest of Pendle on All S[ain]ts Day last past, but saith that shee was at a second meetinge the Sunday after All S[ain]ts day at the place aforesaid where there was at that time betweene 30 and 40 witches who did all ride to the said meetinge. And th'end of the said meetinge was to consult for the killing and hurting of man & beasts, and that there was one devill or spiritt that was more greate & grand devill then the rest. . . . And further saith that the devill can raise foule wether and stormes, and soe hee did at their meetinge. And shee further saith that when the devill came to suck her pappe, hee came to her in the liknes of a catt, sometimes of one collour & sometimes of another. And since this trouble befell her her spiritt hath left her and shee never sawe him since.

British Library, Additional MSS 36674, f. 196.

DOCUMENT 16 GOING TO THE SABBAT, 1673

This is an extract from the first of a series of remarkable depositions given by a woman called Ann Armstrong to the Northumberland justices in the spring of 1673. Armstrong gave several descriptions of visits to the sabbat, and named numerous people in the area as being witches who had attended these meetings. As far as is known, no trials followed these allegations. In the earlier part of this, her first, deposition, Armstrong had described meeting 'an old man with ragged clothe[s]', clearly the devil, after which she fell into trances and fits.

Northumberland. The informacon of Ann Armstrong of Birks-nooke in the county aforesaid taken upon oath the 5th day of February 1672 [4].