

ESSEX WITCHES

The Bible says in Exodus Chapter 22 Verse 18.

“Thou shall not suffer a witch to live.”

Henry VIII - Witchcraft Act 1542.

The Bill ayest conjuraracons & wichecraftes and sorcery and enchantmants.

Where dyvers and sundrie persones unlawfully have devised and practised Invocacons and conjuracons of Sprites, ptending by such meanes to understande and get Knowlege for their owne lucre in what place treasure of golde and Silver shulde or mought be founde or had in the earthe or other secrete places, and also have used and occupied wichecraftes inchauntement and sorceries to the distruccon of their neighbours persones and goodes, And for execucon of their saide falce devyses and practises have made or caused to be made dyvers Images and pictures of men women childrene Angelles or develles beastes or fowles, and also have made Crownes Septures Swordes rynges glasses and other things, and other things, and gyving faithe & credit to suche fantasticall practises have dygged up and pulled downe an infinite nombre of Crosses within this Realme, and taken upon them to declare and tell where thinges lost or stollen shulde be become; whiche thinges cannot be used and exercised but to the great offence of Godes lawe, hurt and damage of the Kinges Subjectes, and losse of the sowles of suche Offenders, to the greate dishonor of God, Infamy and disquyetnes of the Realme:

FOR REFORMACON wherof be it enacted by the Kyng oure Sovereigne Lorde with thassent of the Lordes spuall and temporall and the Comons in this present Parliament assembled and by auctoritie of the same, that yf any persone or persones. after the first daye of Maye next comyng, use devise practise or exercise, or cause to be used devysed practised or exercised, any Invocacons or conjuracons of Sprites wichecraftes enchauntementes or sorceries, to the intent to get or fynde money or treasure, or to waste consume or destroy any persone in his bodie membres or goodes, or to provoke any persone to unlawfull love, or for any other unlawfull intende or purpose, or by occacon or color of suche thinges or any of them. or for dispite of Cryste, or for lucre of money, dygge up or pull downe any Crosse or Crosses, or by suche Invocacons or conjuracons of Sprites wichecraftes enchauntementes or sorcerie or any of them take upon them to tell or declare where goodes stollen or lost shall become, That then all and every suche Offence and Offences, from the saide first day of May next comyng shall be demyde accepted and adjudged Felonye; And that all and every persone and persones offendyng as is above saide their Counsellors Abettors and Procurors and every of them from the saide first day of Maye shall be demyde accepted and adjudged a Felon and Felones; And the offender and offenders contrarie to this Acte. being therof lawfullie convicte before suche as shall have power and auctoritie to here and determyn felonyes, shall have and suffre such paynes of deathe losse and forfaytures of their lands tentes goodes and Catalles as in cases of felonie by the course of the Comon lawes of this Realme, And also shall lose p'vilege of Clergie and Sayntuarie.

Henry VIII.

Edward VI - Witchcraft Act 1547.

An Acte for the Repeale of certain Statutes, etc.

Sect 3. And be it further ordeyned and enacted by the auctoritie aforesaide that all offences made felonye by any Acte or Actes of parliament Statute or Statutes made sithens the xxiii date of Apryll in the first yere of the Reigne of the saide late King Henry the eighth. not beinge felonye before and also all and everye the braunches and articles mentioned or in any wise declared in any of the same Statute concerninge the making of any Offence or Offences to be felonye not being felonye before, and all paynes and forfeitures concerninge the same or any of them, shall from hensfurthe be repealed and utterlye voyde and none effecte.

Elizabeth I - Witchcraft Act 1563.

An Act agaynst Conjuracons Inchantments and Wichecraftes.

Where at this present, there ys no ordinarye ne condigne Punishment provided agaynst the Practisers of the wicked Offences of Conjuracons and Invocacons of evill Spirites, and of Sorceries Enchauntementes Charmes and Wichecraftes, the wch Offences by force of a Statute made in the xxxiii yere of the Reigne of the late King Henry the Eyghthe were made to bee Felonye, and so continued until the sayd Statute was repealed by The act and Statute of Repeale made in the first yere of the Reigne of the late King Edward the vjth; sythens the Repeale wherof many fantasticall and devili she persons have devised and practised Invocacons and Conjuracons of evill and wicked Spirites, and have used and practised Wytchecraftes Enchantementes Charms and Sorceries, to the Destruccon of the Psons and Goodes of their Neighbours and other Subjectes of this Realme, and for other lewde Intentens and Purposes contrarie to the Lawes of Almighty God, to the Peril of theyr owne Soules, and to the great Infamy and Disquietnes of this Realme:

For REFORMACON wherof bee it enacted by the Quenes Matie with thassent of the Lordes Spuall and Temporall and the Comons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the auctoritee of the same, That yf any person or

persons after the first daye of June next coming, use practise or exercise any Invocacons or Conjuracons of evill and wicked Spirites, to or for any Intent or Purpose; or else if any person or persons after the said first daye of June shall use practise or exercise any Witchecrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed, that then as well every suche offendour or offendours in Invocacons and Conjuracons as ys aforesayd, their Concellors & Aidours, as also every suche offendour or offendours in Witchecrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie whereby the Deathe of any person dothe ensue, their Aidours and Concellors, being of either of the said Offences lafully convicted and attainted, shall suffer paynes of Deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall lose the Priviledge and Benefit of Sanctuarie & Clergie: Saving to the Wief of such persone her Title of Dower, and also to the Heyre and Successour of suche person his or theyr Tytles of Inheritaunce Succession and other Rightes, as thoughe nu suche Attayndour of the Auncestour or Predecessour had been had or made.

And further bee yt enacted by the auctoritee aforesayd, That if any person or persons, after the saide first daye of June next comyng, shall use practise or exercyse any Wytchecrafte Enchaument Charme or Sorcerie, whereby any person shall happen to be wasted consumed or lamed in his or her Bodye or Member, or whereby any Goodes or Cattles of any person shall be destroyed wasted or impayred, then every suche offendour or Offendours their Councelloures and Aydoures, being therof lafully convicted, shall for his or their first Offence or Offences, suffer Imprisonment by the Space of one whole Yere, without Bayle or Mayneprise, and once in every Quarter of the said Yere, shall in some Market towne, upon the Market Daye or at such tyme as any Fayer shall be kepte there, stande openly upon the Pillorie by the Space of Syxe Houres, and there shall openly confesse his or her Erroure and Offence; and for the Seconde offence, being as ys aforesayd lafully convicted or attaynted shall suffer deathe as a Felon, and shall lose the Privilege of Clergie and Sanctuary: Saving to the Wief [as above].

Provided alwaies, That yf the Offendour, in any of the Cases aforesayd for whiche the paynes of Deathe shall ensue, shall happen to be a Peere of this Realme, then his Triall thereyn to be had by hys Peeres, as yt ys used in cases of Felonye or Treason and not otherwyse.

And further to the intent that all maner of practise use or exercise of Witchecrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerye shoulde bee from hensforthe utterly avoyded abolished and taken away; Bee it enacted by the auctoritee of this present Parliament. That yf any person or persons shall from and after the sayd first daye of June next coming, take upon him or them, by Witchecrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie, to tell or declare in what Place any Treasure of Golde or Sylver shoulde or might be founde or had in the Earthe or other secret Places, or where Goodes or Thinges lost or stollen should be founde or become, or shall use or practise anye Sorcerye Enchantment Charme or Witchcraft, to the intent to provoke any person to unlaful love, or to hurte or destroye any person in his or her Body, Member or Goodes; that then every suche person or psons so offending, and being therof lafully convicted, shall for the said offence suffer Imprysonement by the space of One whole yere without Bayle or Mayneprise, and once in every Quarter of the said Yere, shall in some Market towne, upon the Marcket Daye or at such tyme as any Fayer shall be kepte there, stande openly upon the Pillorie by the Space of Syxe Houres, and there shall openly confesse his or her Erroure and Offence; And yf any person or psons, beyng once convicted of the same Offences as ys aforesayd, doo eftesones perpetrate and comitt the lyke Offence, that then every suche Offendour beyng thereof the second tyme convicted as ys aforesaid, shall forfaitte unto the Quenes Majestie her heires and successoures, all his Goodes and Cattelles and suffer Imprysonement during Lyef.

Elizabeth I – Witchcraft Act 1580.

An Acte against sedicious Wordes and Rumours uttered againste the queenes moste excellent Majestie.

[Clause 5] And for that divers persons wickedlye disposed. and forgetting their Duetie and Allegiaunce, have of late not onely wished her Majesties Deathe, but also by dyvers meanes practised and sought to knowe howe longe her Highenes should lyve, and who should raigne after her Decease, and what Chaunges and Alteracones shoulde thereby happen; To the extent that suche Mischeifes and Inconveniences as maye thereby growe in the Common Wealthe to the greate Disturbance of the same, maye be cut of and prevented; Be yt also enacted by the auctoritie aforesaid. That yf any person or psons, of what Estate Condiscon or Degree soever he or they bee, at any tyme, after the ende of the said fortie dayes, and during the life of our sayde Sovereigne Ladye the Queenes Matie that nowe ys, eyther within her Highenesses Dominions or without, shall by setting or erecting of any Figure or Figures, or by casting of Nativities, or by calculacon, or by any Prophecieng Witchcraft Cunjuracons or other lyke unlawfull Meanes whatsoever.

Seeke to knowe and shall set forth by expresse Wordes Deedes or Writings, howe longe her Matie shall lyve or contynue, or who shall raigne as King or Queene of this Realme of England after her Highenesse Decease, or else shall advisedlye and with a malicious intent againste her Highenes, utter any manner of directe Prophecies to any

suche Intent or Purpose, or shall maliciously by any Wordes Writing or Printing wishe will or desire the Deathe or Deprivacon of our Sovereigne Ladye the Queenes Matie (that nowe ys,) or any Thing directlye to the same Effecte, That then everye offence shall be Felonye, and everye Offendour and Offendours therein, and also all his or their Aydours Procurers and Abettors in or to the said Offences, shall be judged as Felons, and shall suffer paynes of Deathe and [Forfeyte] as in Case of Felonye ys used, without any Benefite of Cleargie or Sanctuarye.

The general pardon of 23 Eliz., c. 16, excepted inter alia “all offences of Invocations Conjuracions Witchcrafts Sorceries Inchauntments and Charmes, and all offences of procuring abetting comforting of the same, and all persons now attained or convicted of any of the said offences.”

James I – Witchcraft Act 1604.

An Acte against conjuration Witchcrafte and dealinge with evill and wicked Spirits.

BE it enacted by the King our Sovraigne Lorde the Lordes Spirituall and Temporall and the Comons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authoritie of the same, That the Statute made in the fifte yeere of the Raigne of our late Sov'aigne Ladie of the most famous and happy memorie Queene Elizabeth, intituled An Acte against Conjuracions Inchantments and witchcraftes, be from the Feaste of St. Michael the Archangell next cominge, for and concerninge all Offences to be comitted after the same Feaste, utterlie repealed. AND for the better restrayning of saide Offenses, and more severe punishinge the same, be it further enacted by the authoritie aforesaide, That if any person or persons after the saide Feaste of Saint Michael the Archangell next comeing, shall use practise or exercise any Invocation or Conjuracion of any evill and spirit, or shall consult covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewarde any evill and wicked Spirit to or for any intent or purpose ; or take any dead man woman or child out of his her or their grave or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone or any other part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of Witchcrafte, Sorcerie, Charme or Inchantment ; or shall use practise or exercise any Witchcrafte Sorcerie, Charme or Incantment wherebie any person shall be killed destroyed wasted consumed pined or lamed in his or her bodie, or any parte therof ; then that everie such Offendor or Offendours their Ayders Abettors and Counsellors, being of the saide Offences dulye and lawfullie convicted and attainted, shall suffer paines of deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall loose the priviledge and benefit of Cleargie and Sanctuarie.

AND FURTHER, to the intent that all manner of practise use or exercise of declaring by Witchcrafte, Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie should be from henceforth utterlie avoyded abolished and taken away, Be it enacted by the authorite of this present Parliament, that if any person or psons shall from and after the saide Feaste of Saint Michael the Archangell next cominge , take upon him or them by Witchcrafte Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie to tell or declare in what place any treasure of Golde or silver should or had in the earth or other secret places, or where Goodes or Thinges loste or stollen should be founde or become ; or to the intent to Provoke any person to unlawfull love, or wherebie and Cattell or Goods of any person shall be destroyed wasted or impaired, or to hurte or destroy any Person in his bodie, although the same be not effected and done : that then all and everie such person or psons so offendinge, and beinge therof lawfullie convicted , shall for the said Offence suffer Imprisonment by the space of one whole yeere, without baile or maineprise, and once in everie quarter of the saide yeere, shall in some Markett Towne, upon the Markett Day, or at such tyme as any Faire shall be kept there, stande openlie upon the Pillorie by the space of sixe houres, and there shall openlie confesse his or her error and offence ; And if any person or psons beinge once convicted of the same offences as is aforesaide, doe eftsones perpetrate and comit the like offence, that then everie such Offender, beinge of the saide offences the second tyme lawfullie and dulye convicted and attainted as is aforesaide, shall suffer paines of deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall loose the benefitt and privilege of Clergie and Sanctuarie : Saving to the wife of such person as shall offend in anything contrarie to this Acte ; her title of dower ; and also to the heire and successor of everie such person his or their titles of Inheritance Succession and other Rights, as though no such Attaindor or the Ancestor or Predecessor had been made ; Provided alwaies that if the offender in any cases aforesaide shall happen to be a Peere of this Realme , then his Triall therein is to be had by his Peeres, as it is used in cases of Felonie or Treason and not otherwise.

NOTES According to the Journal of the House of Lords this Bill was read for the first time on 2nd March 1604 and committed on 29th March. However, having been considered and found to be imperfect, a new Bill was brought in on 2nd April. On 7th May amendments were read and the Bill appointed to be engrossed. On 11th May it was read in the House of Commons for the first time. A month later it was passed and was returned to the Lords.

George II – Witchcraft Act 1763.

Transcript of the Witchcraft Act of 1736 .

"An Act to repeal the Statute made in the First Year of the Reign of King James the First, intituled, An Act against Conjurat[i]on, Witchcraft, and dealing with evil and wicked Spirits, except so much thereof as repeals an Act of the Fifth Year of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, Against Conjurat[i]ons, Inchantments, and Witchcrafts, and to repeal an Act passed in the Parliament of Scotland in the Ninth Parliament of Queen Mary, intituled, Anentis Witchcrafts, and for punishing such Persons as pretend to exercise or use any kind of Witchcraft, Sorcery, Inchantment, or Conjurat[i]on. Be it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That the Statute made in the First Year of the Reign of King James the First, intituled, An Act against Conjurat[i]on, Witchcraft, and dealing with evil and wicked Spirits, shall, from the Twenty-fourth Day of June next, be repealed and utterly void, and of none effect (except so much thereof as repeals the Statute made in the Fifth Year of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth) intituled, An Act against Conjurat[i]ons, Inchantments, and Witchcrafts.

And be it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That from and after the said Twenty-fourth Day of June, the Act passed in the Parliament of Scotland, in the Ninth Parliament of Queen Mary, intituled, Anentis Witchcrafts, shall be, and is hereby repealed. And be it further enacted, That from and after the said Twenty-fourth Day of June, no Prosecution, Suit, or Proceeding, shall be commenced or carried on against any Person or Persons for Witchcraft, Sorcery, Inchantment, or Conjurat[i]on, or for charging another with any such Offence, in any Court whatsoever in Great Britain.

And for the more effectual preventing and punishing of any Pretences to such Arts or Powers as are before mentioned, whereby ignorant Persons are frequently deluded and defrauded; be it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That if any Person shall, from and after the said Twenty-fourth Day of June, pretend to exercise or use any kind of Witchcraft, Sorcery, Inchantment, or Conjurat[i]on, or undertake to tell Fortunes, or pretend, from his or her Skill or Knowledge in any occult or crafty Science, to discover where or in what manner any Goods or Chattels, supposed to have been stolen or lost, may be found, every Person, so offending, being thereof lawfully convicted on Indictment or Information in that part of Great Britain called England, or on Indictment or Libel in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, shall, for every such Offence, suffer Imprisonment by the Space of one whole Year without Bail or Mainprize, and once in every Quarter of the said Year, in some Market Town of the proper County, upon the Market Day, there stand openly on the Pillory by the Space of One Hour, and also shall (if the Court by which such Judgement shall be given shall think fit) be obliged to give Sureties for his or her good Behaviour, in such Sum, and for such Time, as the said Court shall judge proper according to the Circumstances of the Offence, and in such case shall be further imprisoned until such Sureties be given."

A Witch-Hunting Magistrate? Brian Darcy and the St Osyth Witchcraft Cases of 1582.

Brian Darcy - Part One.

In just a few short weeks, between 19 February and 26 March 1582, the small coastal town of St Osyth, Essex, became the centre of an outbreak of witch-hunting that saw fifteen suspected witches investigated, two of whom, Ursley Kempe and Elizabeth Bennet, were hanged. Almost immediately, some of the pre-trial materials were published in the pamphlet *A True and Just Recorde* (1582). These materials have been used to argue that Brian Darcy, the investigating magistrate, hunted witches out of godly zeal, perhaps as part of the earl of Leicester's campaign against seditious Catholics in the county. Yet, as this article shows, he was neither a 'contentious person' nor a witch-hunter. There were genuine reasons why people felt compelled to accuse their neighbours of witchcraft that were rooted in a short-term mortality crisis in and around St. Osyth, and fragile personal relationships which made Darcy receptive to their anxieties. Darcy was certainly credulous and played an important role in the examination of the alleged witches who came to his attention, but he did not hunt them out. He was a willing magistrate who reacted to a situation that arose because there existed authentic suspects, accusers with genuine fears and grievances, and local problems which made accusations of witchcraft seem plausible. The St. Osyth witchcraft episode was not the product of one man's actions. In late March 1582, juries impanelled at the Essex assize court sessions considered bills of formal accusation against eleven suspected witches of St Osyth and its environs, which had been drawn up on the basis of investigations undertaken by the local magistrate Brian Darcy in the weeks before the sessions began. These were not the first witchcraft cases to be dealt with by Essex jurors at either the assize or quarter sessions—there had been a steady stream of them, starting even before the passing of the Witchcraft Act of 1563—but this was, by some distance, the largest group of alleged witches they or jurors elsewhere in England had come across. It is no wonder that the printer Thomas Dawson jumped at the chance to license the publication of some of Darcy's pre-trial materials almost before the jurors had time to pronounce their verdicts.

It is a wonder, however, that the cases have not attracted more attention from historians. Dawson's pamphlet, *A True and Just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at St. Osyth in the Countie of Essex* (1582), provides a lengthy account of this singular witchcraft episode, rich in detail about interrogation processes, the accusations of those who believed themselves bewitched, and the confessions wrung

from those accused of the crime. Yet the St. Osyth cases have been marginalised in English witchcraft historiography. In part, this is because they appear less spectacular than the Scottish North Berwick cases of a decade later, the Lancashire witchcraft trials of 1612, those conducted by Matthew Hopkins in the 1640s, and the Salem episode of 1692. They are also less well known than other later cases, such as that of Elizabeth Sawyer, the witch of Edmonton, which benefited from more skilful representation in print or on the stage. As a consequence, the cases have largely been ignored, except where they provide additional data, while Darcy has been squeezed into political histories of witchcraft prosecution as an example of an early puritan witch-hunter.

The St Osyth cases do, however, deserve more detailed scrutiny. They occurred in a world in flux. Elizabeth being almost a quarter of a century into her reign, and approaching 50 years of age, her failure to marry was the cause of concern among her loyal subjects and hope among her enemies. In 1570, she had been excommunicated, freeing radical Catholics from their obligations to the monarchy and allowing them to plot against her; they were opposed by radical Protestants led nationally by powerful men such as the earl of Leicester, and in Essex by the second Baron Rich. Religious strife therefore escalated throughout the 1570s in counties like Essex, home to many recusant Catholics and evangelical Protestants.⁶ In the middle stood most ordinary Elizabethans, many of whom had lived through the complex and confusing religious changes of the sixteenth century. And there was conflict abroad—and dearth at home. A fuller investigation of Darcy's role in the St Osyth witchcraft trials reveals him to be an ambiguous figure in an Elizabethan world of evolving religious identities, rather than a forerunner of later magistrates who were certain of their confessional allegiances and religious purpose: to oppose Catholicism and root out superstition. There is a very real sense that, as a recently appointed but poorly trained magistrate, he found himself out of his depth when confronted with witchcraft accusations. In this respect, he is likely to be representative of many other Elizabethan gentlemen, about whose religious beliefs and actions we often know very little. Giving the witchcraft accusations in St Osyth due attention also leads us to the probable real reason they began: a short-lived, localised, inexplicable mortality crisis. The St Osyth trials were therefore part of the mainstream experience of witchcraft and personal or communal crisis in England, and do not represent some misguided attempt on Darcy's behalf to introduce a Continental-style witch persecution involving torture and an emphasis on the demonic, rather than on the witches' misdemeanours and felonies. What the failure to convict most of the St Osyth suspects does show, however, is that accusations, investigations and prosecutions were still testing the limits of the Witchcraft Act of 1563.

While much has been written on Elizabethan witchcraft, only a small proportion of it investigates individual witchcraft episodes, and even less examines the roles of magistrates, who were charged by the Marian statutes of bail and committal to examine suspected felons and their accusers before bailing the suspects or committing them to gaol to await trial. Thus, Brian Darcy appears frequently in the historiography, but only because he oversaw the investigations that make up *A True and Just Recorde*, and was subsequently attacked in print by Reginald Scot. Few other Elizabethan magistrates are mentioned in Alan Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1970) or the various other surveys and textbooks about witchcraft. Three justices involved in the investigation of Alice Samuel get a single mention each in Philip Almond's *The Witches of Warboys* (2008). We are told, for example, that John Dorington, who arrived in Warboys from London as a friend of Robert Throckmorton, father of the witches' victims, would 'play a part in the trial of the Samuels.' We are told later that Dorington sat on the magistrates' bench, but not what his part was. This omission of justices is important. By 1582, magistrates, in the course of investigating felonies, were compiling evidence and shaping it for trial in ways that they had not done before the Marian statutes were passed; they were also doing so in something of a vacuum. William Lambarde had only just published *Eirenarcha* (1581), his manual for justices of the peace; it was to be some years before Michael Dalton and Richard Barnard wrote their influential legal guides.

It is only with *A True and Just Recorde*, therefore, that we get some sense of how Elizabethan magistrates pursued their investigations of suspected witches—or, indeed, any other felony—and even then we are presented with the work of a newly appointed man who may not have read Lambarde or sought guidance from other, more experienced justices. If Darcy did struggle to make sense of his role, he would not have been alone. As Mark Stoye has shown, in Elizabethan Exeter, once cases had gone to trial, the magistrates initially proved unsure how to proceed against witches. They deferred sentencing and reduced penalties, for example, rather than applying the full force of the law—a year in gaol or death by hanging, depending on the severity of the crime—that the Witchcraft Act allowed.

In February 1582, Brian Darcy was confronted with accusations of witchcraft against Ursley Kempe of St. Osyth in the hundred of Tendring, Essex. She was not the first person from the hundred to be accused of the crime. Agnes Taster of Weeley was twice presented for witchcraft at the court of the archdeaconry of Colchester (in 1579 and 1580), while Joan Dowtie and Alice Mylles, both of Brightlingsea, found themselves before the assize courts in 1580 and 1581, respectively. Yet Kempe's case sparked a minor witch-hunt in and around the small port town of

St. Osyth. Within the space of a few weeks, thirteen other women and one man found themselves being investigated by Darcy on account of allegations made against them. If nothing else, the depositions published by Thomas Dawson show that Darcy took his role as justice of the peace seriously. The suspects had been accused of a felony, and he investigated them and their accusers actively and promptly, as the Marian statutes demanded. He asked pertinent questions and appeared to have had all the testamentary evidence recorded, however fantastical, implausible, inconsistent or confusing it might seem.

Following Darcy's investigations, eleven of the women were tried at the Hilary assizes in late March, while Anne Swallow was brought before the Trinity assizes later in the year. Of the St. Osyth suspects brought to trial in March, only Ursley Kempe and Elizabeth Bennet were executed. Annys Glascocke was reprieved, but died in gaol, while Ales Newman was released under a general pardon in 1588. Cisley Celles and Ales Manfielde were arrested on charges of witchcraft and a related arson attack. They were both acquitted of arson, but Celles was found guilty of murder by witchcraft and remanded; Manfielde seems not to have been tried for witchcraft. Celles was also arrested at the same time, with her husband Henry and son Robert, on two further counts of arson; they were tried and acquitted of the crime in August 1582, but Cisley and Henry died in gaol the following year. Ales Hunt, Margaret Grevell and Annis Herd were acquitted, while Joan Pechey and Elizabeth Ewstace were discharged by proclamation. These actions are testament to the jurors' ability to sift and judge the evidence presented to them. They also show that Elizabethans were not all credulous 'witchmongers,' to borrow Reginald Scot's term. Four other women from St Osyth, Margaret Barnes, Joan Dale, Ales Bolton and Elizabeth Lumney, were tried in 1584. Thereafter, there was a return to a more typical Elizabethan pattern of intermittent witchcraft prosecution in the hundred.

A True and Just Recorde was published shortly after Darcy certified his examinations before the assize court judges on 29 March 1582; it was licensed to Thomas Dawson on 6 April. As the title suggests, the pamphlet included some, but by no means all, of the materials collected by Darcy in the course of his investigations between 19 February, when he took evidence from Grace Thurlowe and Annis Letherdall, and 26 March, when he took information from Henry Durrant. The information, examinations and confessions purport to be verbatim, which may be the case given the speed with which they reached Dawson's printing press. As Marion Gibson has observed, however, the omissions and chronological disorder of the depositions suggest that the pre-trial materials were manipulated in an attempt, not entirely successful, to 'make coherent and solid that which is essentially multiform, confused and ungraspable.' Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, the pamphlet has become the main source for evaluations of Darcy's character and assessments of his possible motives in allowing the witchcraft trials to escalate in St. Osyth.

At this point, we should consider who the author of this pamphlet was. Darcy was certainly the origin of the testimonial material that makes up the bulk of it. On the basis of the claim on the frontispiece that the record was 'Written orderly, as the cases were tried by evidence, By W.W.,' together with the use of the first person throughout the text, Macfarlane claims that Darcy was the author of the whole. This seems unlikely. Normal practice would have been to employ a scribe to record the evidence while the magistrate conducted proceedings. The use of the first person was (and remains) common to many legal documents, such as wills. When Darcy handed the evidence over to the assize courts, he certified it; it was entirely proper for the record to state that each testimony was 'taken by me Brian Darcy, esquire.' Gibson, following Barbara Rosen, has suggested that William Lowth might be the author of the preface. He had, after all, dedicated his translation of Barthélemy Batt's *De economia christiana* (1558) to Brian and his half-brother Thomas Darcy, and Thomas Dawson had published it, with Gregory Seton, as *The Christian Mans Closet* in 1581. But why not simply use one's own initials? While someone might want to hide their involvement with a piece of hack work such as *A True and Just Recorde*, as has been suggested by Rosen, W.L. would have sufficed for this in Lowth's case; he was hardly well known, seemingly had no further literary ambitions beyond his translation of Batt's advice book, and had not done anything that might get him into trouble.

There is, however, an alternative possible author of the preface, who can perhaps even be identified as the scribe who followed Darcy around writing down what was said during the investigations; the prefacer wrote of his own involvement, 'I dilygently observing and considering [the witches'] trecheries to be notable: undertooke briefly to knit up in a few leaves of paper, their manifold abuses; and obtaining the meanes to have them published in print.'

This was William Webbe, who possessed the right initials and did harbour modest literary ambitions. In 1586, Webbe dedicated his *Discourse of English Poetrie* to Edward Sulyard, describing him as 'my verie good Master'. As Elizabeth Heale suggests, this indicates that he may have been tutor to Sulyard's two boys. He had also presented a manuscript translation of the *Georgics* to Sulyard. Sulyard was Thomas Darcy's brother-in-law and sat alongside Brian Darcy as a magistrate. If he had been in the Sulyard household early in 1582, Webbe would have been in a

good position to marshal the investigatory materials and write the preface to the pamphlet. It might also have been wise for him to disguise his identity if he hoped to publish more poetical work. More importantly, Edward Sulyard was a Catholic. Lowth's dedication of a work by Batt, a Lutheran convert, to the Darcy brothers has been used to reinforce an image of Brian Darcy the godly witch-hunter. If Webbe is an equally plausible candidate for the authorship of *A True and Just Recorde*, then that image does not look so sharp; it starts to disintegrate further when we look into Darcy's life and the course of the St Osyth witch investigations.

Brian Darcy - Part Two.

Who was Brian Darcy? In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), Reginald Scot dismissed *A True and Just Recorde* as a 'foolish pamphlet' which demonstrated that Elizabeth I's 'excellent magistrates' not only agreed with foreign cruelty towards witches, but 'surmounteth it farre' in wanting harsher torture, greater rigour and more severe punishments than mere hanging. Scot had earlier listed Darcy among a number of authorities, ranging from Ovid and the eleventh-century Greek theologian Psellus to the *Malleus maleficarum* (c.1486) and Richard Galis, author of *A Brief Treatise Conteyning the most Strange and Horrible Crueltye of Elizabeth Stile* (1579). They all provided examples of the 'miraculous actions imputed to witches by witchmongers, papists, and poets.' Later, Scot offered Darcy's interrogation of Ursley Kempe as an example of persuasion to confession by flattery. To Reginald Scot, then, Brian Darcy was simply the most recent example of a witchmonger, one of the numerous 'faithlesse people' he excoriated in his *Discoverie*. Nothing else was said about Brian Darcy's pamphlet or his actions by his contemporaries. It has therefore been left to historians to work out who he might have been.

Peter Elmer has suggested that the St Osyth witch-hunt was a by-product of the campaign against Catholic sorcery and recusancy in England driven by the puritan earl of Leicester and carried into Essex by the evangelical Robert Rich, second Baron Rich, before his death in 1581. Elmer has not strayed far from a well-rehearsed caricature of Darcy. While James Sharpe saw him as a meticulous magistrate who represented the concerns and practices of other English justices confronted with the crime of witchcraft, Macfarlane depicted him as a precursor of the later witch-hunter Matthew Hopkins, another puritan who discovered witches in Essex, and beyond. Following Barbara Rosen, Gibson recognised Darcy as a devout, if self-serving and disappointed, witch-hunter, who sought to promote his Continental views on witchcraft (as a heresy deserving of death by fire) in print. The basis for these interpretations of Darcy's character and motives is limited. It comprises the scope of the witchcraft investigations he conducted, the preamble to his will, the malpractice evident in the pamphlet, its dedication to Thomas, Baron Darcy of Chiche, the brief translation from Bodin's *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580) in its preface, and an allusion to Bodin's views on witchcraft in the interrogation of the suspect Elizabeth Bennet. The resulting representation of the man leads to an over-emphasis on the relationship between puritanism and witch-hunting, and a misunderstanding of what happened in St Osyth in 1582.

Darcy may have presented himself as godly, but investigation into both the local context of the witchcraft accusations and Darcy's personal networks shows that he was not a witch-hunter in the mould of Matthew Hopkins; nor did he take advantage of Leicester's campaign against Catholics to purge his district of ungodliness. While the number of witchcraft accusations in St Osyth may have been unusually high, Darcy did not orchestrate a witch-hunt. Rather, the accusers came to Darcy, and he investigated their claims in the normal course of his duties, as required by the Marian statutes and the Witchcraft Act of 1563. That he proved as credulous as the accusers reflects the belief in witchcraft across the religious spectrum throughout early modern Europe. What evidence does exist about Darcy's religious beliefs suggests that he was not a 'contentious person.'

There also seem to have been genuine reasons why certain individuals felt compelled to accuse their neighbours of witchcraft that were rooted in a short-term mortality crisis in and around St Osyth; this crisis may have heightened Darcy's receptivity to their anxieties. Darcy played an important role in the examination of the alleged witches who came to his attention, as did all magistrates who responded to witchcraft accusations, but his actions were not decisive in the St Osyth episode. To paraphrase the important point made by Robin Briggs, there were many reasons why the St Osyth witchcraft trials, and those elsewhere in Essex and England more broadly, occurred: the existence of authentic suspects; accusers with genuine fears and grievances; a willing magistrate; and local problems which made accusations of witchcraft seems plausible.

Brian Darcy – Part Three

As the explanation of the outbreak of witchcraft accusations in St. Osyth rests primarily on the materials collated in '*A True and Just Recorde*,' investigation should begin with that book. Thomas Dawson printed the pamphlet; its prefacer and compiler is presented to the reader as W.W.; and the dedicatee was Thomas, Baron Darcy of Chiche. The catalogue of the godly works printed in Dawson's workshop is large and wide-ranging. Between 1577, when he became a partner of Thomas Gardiner, and 1582, the year in which '*A True and Just Recorde*' came off his press, for example, Dawson printed sixteen editions of works by Calvin, including five of *Sermons of M. Iohn*

Caluin, upon the Ten Commandements of the Lawe (1579–81). These editions stood alongside works by other reformers and nonconformists, homegrown as well as foreign. We should not, however, read too much into Dawson's roster of religious works. Reginald Scot certainly did not equate witchmongers (including Darcy) with reformers such as Calvin; he relied heavily on the French theologian in, for example, his discussion of the story of Job. In practical terms, once a licence was granted, the small number of printers and booksellers operating in London had to work in co-operation with each other to meet demand. A large workshop like Dawson's, which boasted three presses, could handle volume, and it is not surprising, therefore, that most of the religious works he printed were issued with, or on behalf of, fellow printers. That Dawson was the man to go to for speed and volume is shown by the differences in the quality of the two parts of *The Monument of Matrones* (1582), compiled by Thomas Bentley. The two sections assigned to Dawson were considerably less fine and elaborate in execution than the five printed by Henry Denham; at over 1,500 pages per copy, however, quality was no doubt sacrificed for completion of the print run. Those religious books that Dawson did print or sell on his own account tended to be from stock (and therefore reprints), by less well-known authors, shorter in length, or licensed for a shorter print run; they kept the press ticking over when the workshop was between large-scale, co-operative ventures. It should also be noted that, unless he held quite radical views, a large-scale printer like Dawson would stick to licensed, saleable material that was less controversial than—for example—*The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* (1579), which saw the author, John Stubbs, his printer, Hugh Singleton, and his sponsor, the MP William Page, condemned to lose their right hands.

A True and Just Recorde was printed on Dawson's own account. It is a long text but was clearly meant not to interfere with the schedule of works to be printed in collaboration with others. There was probably little preparatory work to do. Dawson had been granted access to apparently verbatim material relating to trials which had only just concluded in Chelmsford. It is unlikely that either Darcy or his prefacer could have made many alterations to the substance of the examinations and information in the week between the certification of the documentation before the judges and the granting of the printing licence to Dawson. This is especially the case when one considers that the verdicts and punishments were added to the volume by inserting the word 'condemned' under the titles of the confessions and adding a pull-out table, seemingly at the last minute. What Darcy may have done, though, is select material for publication in advance of the trials. No doubt Darcy or his editor approached Dawson because they already had a connection with him. As we have seen, Dawson printed *The Christian Mans Closet*, which Lowth had dedicated to Darcy and his half-brother.

Dawson probably saw the financial potential of a timely, newsworthy publication of Darcy's investigations. If the reports were true, the coven uncovered in the port was by some way the largest known in England. Earlier pamphlet reports of witchcraft cases had been sporadic. Of the five surviving pamphlets that were printed after the Act of 1563 came into force and prior to 1582, two appeared in 1566. One related the story of three witches of Hatfield Peverel, who, like the St. Osyth witches, were tried at Chelmsford; the other, the case of John Walsh, presented in print as a Catholic, who was investigated by the bishop of Exeter's commissary in August. The three others were printed in 1579: *A Detection of Damnable Driftes* brought the reader up to date with the case of Elizabeth Francis, one of the Hatfield Peverel witch-suspects; the other two told the story of four notorious witches of Berkshire. These small knots of witches were the nearest the English had come to the witch-sects and sabbaths of Continental demonology. (see Documents and Pamphlets page 30).

The fact that the pamphlets only relate three of the most infamous cases before 1582 also suggests that English witchcraft episodes were unworthy of national notice unless they were distinct from the mundane accusations and confessions typical of cases in the 1560s and 1570s. It was, then, the drama of the deposition narratives and potential executions that seems to have attracted Dawson.

But there was a further element of attraction. Just as the French jurist Jean Bodin was beginning to attract notice among Elizabethan scholars of history and politics, he appeared in England: in 1579, and again in 1581–2 in the entourage of the Duke of Alençon. It was this ducal visit that led John Stubbs to criticise a French marriage in the *Gaping Gulf*, to Elizabeth's displeasure and his pain. The preface to '*A True and Just Recorde*' begins with a direct translation from Bodin's *Démonomanie*, urging the rigorous and cruel punishment of witches.

The source of the translation is confirmed with a later reference to 'the magistrates of forren landes,' and a marginal note on Bodin's confutation of Johannes Weyer's assertion that convicted witches were innocent and their judges no better than hangmen. In the translated passage, the Continental method of executing convicted witches by fire is praised as more proportionate to their crime than hanging them. The passage therefore served to amplify Darcy's cryptic reference to Bodin in his words to the suspect Elizabeth Bennet:

"a man of great cunning and knowledge come over lately unto our Queenes Majestie, which hath advertised her what a companie and number of Witches be within Englande: whereupon I and other of her Justices have received

Commission for the apprehending of as many as are within these limits, and they which doe confesse the truth of their doings, they shall have much favour: but the other they shall bee burnt and hanged."

It also, however, brought further topicality to the publication, and served to balance both the general unwieldiness of the text and the lack of accounts of executions that makes the pamphlet seem incomplete.

Darcy's words to Bennet are vague. Elmer suggests that the author of *A True and Just Recorde* 'had confused, possibly deliberately, the date of the original commission in order to legitimate Darcy's actions as witch-finder.' Elmer is referring to a commission promoted by the earl of Leicester in 1580 to investigate and arrest English Catholics suspected of sorcery. Even if Darcy was inspired or encouraged to act by Leicester, this obfuscation seems unlikely. We have seen already that there was no time in which to edit the pre-trial materials to tell an effective story of witchcraft activity in the pamphlet, much less shape them for higher political purposes. As a relatively new justice, Darcy might also just as easily have been referring to the regular commissions issued to magistrates without which they could not act against suspected criminals. As Queen Elizabeth and her magistrates knew well, English justices were already bound by the Marian statutes of bail and committal and the witchcraft statute of 1563 to investigate any accusations of witchcraft they came across in the execution of their commissions. A more plausible context for Darcy's words might therefore be gossip percolating through all circles connected to the court. No one knows if Bodin did discuss witchcraft with either Elizabeth or Leicester during his second stay in England, as Darcy suggested, but the recent publication of *Démonomanie* and the various threads of witchcraft activity in the country at the time certainly make it seem likely. Leicester and Rich's activities against Catholic sorcerers in Essex would have given currency to any such gossip. Darcy need not have read Bodin or have been involved with Leicester to hear it—and use it. The more dramatic elements of Bodin's views, such as his advocacy of burning witches, might also have been the subject of rumour rather than the fruit of reading. It was the prefacer, not the magistrate, who sought out Bodin's work and translated the relevant section. Darcy may simply have been astute enough to know that he only needed to conjure the spectres of deep knowledge (about matters of court) and high authority (the queen) to stand formidably alongside the law to get Bennet to confess.

It has become a commonplace of analyses of Darcy's investigatory methods that he adapted them to the Continental theories of witchcraft he found in Bodin. This is confirmed, in such accounts, by Scot's single reference to Darcy's practice—that he persuaded Kempe to confession by flattery; it seems that Scot, a careful reader, may not have read beyond the first few pages of the pamphlet to reach the more telling persuasion used in Bennet's case. The way in which successive historians have made Bodin stand here for a wide range of European theories about, and actions against, witchcraft is a matter for further investigation elsewhere. Darcy's methods, however, do not seem to have been 'Continental.' Like all English justices, including those in Exeter discussed by Stoye, he was hampered by the law's failure to recognise the difficulties of investigating an accusation of witchcraft. At the very least, an attempt to use 'witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery' for seeking treasure, provoking unlawful love, or harming persons or property, had to be proven; that would condemn a suspect to a year's imprisonment and a quarterly appearance in the pillory. Unless a suspect was caught red-handed, gathering proof was a difficult job. Proving that harm then followed was even harder. The first accusations against Ursley Kempe were raised in the course of Darcy's ordinary duties as magistrate—the appropriate authority to whom felonies should be reported. But neither of the accusations was ordinary. Grace Thurlowe's position in Thomas, Lord Darcy's household demanded that her claim against Kempe be looked into. In Annis Letherdall's case, it was reported that her daughter 'appeared to be in most piteous sort consumed, and the privie and hinder partes thereof, to be in a most strange and wonderfull case, as it seemed to verie honest women of good judgement, and not likely to live and continue any long time;' she had been like this since 'before Michaelmass last;' that is, since before 29 September 1581. Such an unnatural condition warranted further investigation. In neither case did the accuser make a direct accusation against Kempe. Thurlowe reported that Kempe said she would be even with her because Thurlowe refused to pay Kempe for the cure of her lameness; thereafter, either Thurlowe was painfully lame or her son Davy, whom Kempe seems to have healed previously, was tormented. Letherdall, on the other hand, based her claim on a diagnosis of witchcraft made by an unnamed 'cunning body.'

It was this cunning person who said that Kempe had bewitched Letherdall's child. When she was brought before Darcy the day after he had taken the information from Thurlowe and Letherdall, Kempe initially told only of three times when she had healed women lamed by bewitchment.

At that point something happened. The record states that 'The saide Brian Darcey then promising to the saide Ursley, that if she would deale plainly and confesse the trueth, that shee should have favour and so by giving her faire speeches shee confessed as followeth.' At these flattering fair speeches, Ursley burst out weeping and produced the first part of her lengthy confession—to Darcy, in private. After supper, Darcy then recited Kempe's confession to the unnamed men attending the investigations. It may be that in private Darcy referred to Bodin and the queen as he did when he took Bennet to one side two days later. A promise of unspecified favour from one

who had absolutely no right to offer it was as despicable to some Elizabethans, including Reginald Scot, as it seems now; only the jurors at the assize court sessions could decide Kempe's fate. Nevertheless, Kempe, realising that she already had a 'naughtie name,' could have taken Darcy's promise as a cue to confess in return for some presumed but unnamed lesser punishment. Her tears mirror those shed by suspects about to confess under torture in places like Eichstätt. They speak of fear and remorse for what a suspect was about to do to herself and her neighbours, if she named any of them. It is also clear from the pamphlet that both suspects and witnesses were led by Darcy's questioning. In private, Kempe having named her four spirits, Darcy asked which of them she had sent to punish Grace Thurlowe. She said that she had sent Titty to do this, and Pigin to hurt her child. She then confessed that it was the spirit Tiffyn who rocked Thurlowe's child out of its cradle, breaking its neck. Aside from the spirits, all of this detail comes directly from Thurlowe's information, which must therefore have formed a template for Darcy's questions. In the case of Letherdall's child, Kempe attempted to deflect the blame onto Ales Newman; Kempe 'caused' Newman to send a spirit to plague the infant. Nonetheless, Letherdall's information clearly also formed the basis of Darcy's questions. In turn, Kempe's answers were used to direct Thomas Rabbet, her 8-year-old son, to confirm both the names of her spirits and her relationship with Newman; according to Rabbet, his mother gave Newman a spirit with which she killed one Johnson and plagued his wife (rather than Letherdall's child). Rabbet was examined on 25 February, five days after Kempe's first confession, by which time Johnson's death had become another object of the investigation.

While promises of favour, private conferences, leading questions, and the use of child witnesses to secure and confirm confessions may seem to have been inspired by Bodin, it is difficult to see how else magistrates would collect evidence of witchcraft. Even though he was a competent jurist, Bodin struggled with the issue of evidence in *Démonomanie*, allowing suspicion and rumour to stand as solid proof; but there are hints that dubious methods were used in England before Bodin came to write on the subject. In 1566, 12-year-old Agnes Brown confirmed the substance of Agnes Waterhouse's confession that her daughter Joan had called upon the familiar Sathan to scare the girl, and that he did so in the form of a black dog. Agnes Brown may have embellished the story, adding an ape-like face and horns, but it is possible that she, like Thomas Rabbet, was asked questions during the magistrate's investigations that led her to confirm the story, and that she simply repeated that version of it during the assizes. In the case of the Berkshire witches, Robert Galis was clearly not above abusing them: he took them to church one night to hear a preacher, after which two of them died; and he forcibly bound Elizabeth Stile and dragged her through town, on a market day, to the magistrate Sir Henry Neville's house. Stile escaped arrest that time. Later, however, as she was being removed to Reading gaol, there to await the next assizes, the gaoler, Thomas Rowe, urged her 'to turn hir self to God, from whome she had notoriously fallen, and mildely to beare the punishmente belongyng to hir deedes passed, and there withall urged in sign of hir repentaunce, to confesse hir former follies and facts.' Taking this as her cue, and perhaps a source of strength to face what was to come, Stile asked to talk with Rowe. She confessed to witchcraft then in front of him and three others.⁶⁸ The intervention of the gaoler here bears some resemblance to that of a Bamberg gaoler who, in 1628, urged Johannes Junius to confess because otherwise his interrogators would have him tortured until he did so. One gaoler may have sought the salvation of the witch, the other to help him avoid further torture, but the pressure to confess is comparable, pragmatically and emotionally.

The St Osyth witchcraft episode was one of the largest in Europe at the time. This fact went unremarked by contemporaries and has certainly escaped scholarly attention since, but it underscores why the episode was newsworthy, as well as the possibility that Darcy may have struggled to deal with the accusations that came before him. Darcy oversaw an event on a scale that few had ever witnessed or heard about. It is doubtful that, in 1582, Bodin, Darcy or many of their readers could have envisaged witch persecutions on the scale of those that were to begin in Europe within the following decade and beset large parts of it, notably the Holy Roman Empire, until they reached their peak in the 1620s.

It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that Darcy felt he had no choice but to adopt practices he had read about in English cases or discussed with other magistrates or acquaintances, and that Bodin, even if simply through gossip about his views, convinced men like Darcy that they had to act at the edges of permissible judicial procedure to secure solid evidence. It is equally possible that Bodin advocated the acceptance of exceptional proofs on the basis of practices he had observed in France and heard about in England. One does not need to turn Darcy into a follower of Bodin, or *Démonomanie* into a manual, to account for the magistrate's actions.

Whatever role Brian Darcy had in fomenting witch-hunting and publishing the testimonies he had collected, he had good reason to suggest or approve their dedication to Thomas, Baron Darcy of Chiche. Much confusion arises from the proximity in a small part of Essex of two branches of the Darcy family, whose estates and duties as landowners and justices overlapped considerably. Brian Darcy was a member of the lesser gentry branch of the family, which owned and rented properties across north-east Essex; the senior baronial branch of the Darcys was

located in much the same area with its principal seat at the priory in St Osyth. Alan Macfarlane mistook Brian Darcy for Lord Darcy's son. Gibson, on the other hand, has suggested that Thomas, Lord Darcy 'was a cousin of the same generation as Brian's grandchildren.' That may be accurate, but Brian's grandchildren were not yet born when Thomas succeeded his father. It is also not clear that Thomas and Brian felt any close kinship. They belonged to entirely different generations, in distant branches of the family. Moreover, on the death of John, Lord Darcy, in March 1581, Brian became Thomas's client. One of the significant properties held by Brian was the manor of St Clere's in St Osyth. It was here, rather than at another of his residences, that Brian Darcy seems to have settled, and it was here, rather than at St Osyth Priory, that the local witch-suspects were investigated. The lesser Darcys had held St. Clere's of the Lords Darcy since 1555; in this regard, Brian, his father Thomas, and, incidentally, his elder half-brother Thomas, were as many tenants of the Lords Darcy as the other minor gentlemen who held property belonging to these landowners. By marriage to Darcy women, these other men were sometimes as closely related to the barons as Brian Darcy was. In this context, Gibson's emphasis on the relationship between the mature Brian and the fatherless young Lord Darcy is misleading; it promotes kinship above a more realistic early modern context of patronage.

Sampling the extant dedications to texts published throughout 1581 and 1582 shows that they tended to be gifts from clients rather than from friends or family on roughly equal terms with the dedicatee. Their purpose was to establish or reinforce existing ties of patronage, rather than to advise patrons and readers about the matter at hand, or lend credibility to the content (except implicitly by association). The death of John, Lord Darcy, marked the end of a period of stability for his tenants and clients across his estates in Essex which had lasted since his own father had died in June 1558. This local stability may have mitigated to some extent the broader national instability caused by the accession of Elizabeth in November 1558, because John Darcy, a moderate Catholic, would have been able to protect the traditions of his tenants and the parishes whose benefices were in his gift at a time when the terms of a religious settlement were unclear. Brian Darcy had held the manor of St Clere's since it passed to him on his father's death in October 1558. For Brian, as for all of John's tenants, therefore, his death after more than two decades of local dominance marked the beginning of a period of personal uncertainty, compounded by the religious conflict which had re-emerged in Essex in the 1570s and was still gathering pace. John's son Thomas, then aged 16, was too young to have established his credentials as a patron and manager among his father's long-standing clients or his own place in county administration or courtly politics. Although he was yet to gain the notoriety into which his marriage to Mary Kitson would lead him, Thomas may also already have been regarded as peevish, jealous, weak, perverse and tardy by members of the Essex nobility and gentry. If so, this would have heightened their anxieties about the continuation and strength of their ties to the Lords Darcy. Not unnaturally, therefore, these clients would have sought various means by which they could secure Thomas's ongoing patronage and the publication of 'A True and Just Recorde' should be interpreted in this context.

When the witchcraft investigations in St. Osyth began in February 1582, they did so right at the centre of Thomas, Lord Darcy and Brian Darcy's little commonwealth. Such rare events were disquieting in small communities like St. Osyth, especially when winter was drawing to a close and there was little to do at sea, in the port or on the farmsteads. Thomas is likely, therefore, to have taken an interest in them whether or not he believed Ursley Kempe's desperate claim, made later in the investigatory process, that Ales Newman had sent her familiar to kill his father. If he was resident in St Osyth during the investigations, he may well have been inclined to take the short walk to St. Clere's Hall to observe Brian's conduct of the investigations; he might also have ridden out to the villages to which the accusations soon spread, perhaps in Brian's company. He would almost certainly have known many of the townsfolk caught up in the affair, including the accuser Grace Thurlowe, who had worked in his household. If Thomas did not share the experience of investigation directly, he may have done so vicariously, receiving reports from his neighbours and servants as well as Brian Darcy himself.

One of his servants, Robert Spenser, who seems to have died as the investigations progressed, certainly knew some of the participants. He bequeathed a ewe and other items to the butcher Henry Durrant (an accuser of Ales Hunt). Spenser pastured the ewe on land belonging to Newman of Great Clacton; this Newman may have been a relative of the suspect Ales Newman. He also bequeathed to his sister Margaret a bullock which he kept in a field belonging to Richard Rosse (the main accuser of the suspects Henry and Cislely Celles). No doubt, a degree of local knowledge helped Thomas Darcy follow the cases at the assizes later in March 1582, if he attended them as a magistrate. Whatever the extent of his connection with the process of investigation, when the pamphlet came to be published he would already have known and understood the examples of justice on which Brian Darcy drew. Thomas did not need the advice offered by the pamphlet, nor, as a 16-year-old boy, was he sufficiently established or connected to give such 'memorable matters' the authority of minor noble patronage, as suggested by Gibson. The pamphlet stood, therefore, as a reminder to Thomas of Brian's usefulness as a client, neighbour and magistrate, at a time when the latter's status was in question. In addition to re-affirming a long-standing patron-client relationship between the two branches of the family, Brian Darcy may also have wanted to use 'A True and

Just Recorde' to establish allies in the increasingly uncertain religious climate blighting the county. While Leicester and Rich were pursuing seditious Catholics, Leicester's political and religious opponent, Bishop John Aylmer, whose London diocese extended across much of Essex, was battling both puritans and Roman Catholics, particularly those active in the Jesuit mission and the Campion affair. Further afield, the furore caused by Stubbs's Gaping Gulf highlighted fears about the impact of a French marriage on a fragile religious settlement; Mary Queen of Scots remained a constant concern, soon to become more acute thanks to the Throckmorton and Babington Plots of 1583 and 1586, and there were apprehensions about French and Spanish activity in the Low Countries which ultimately threatened Tudor sovereignty in England.

The assumption that Brian Darcy was a godly man and something of a puritan places him clearly in one camp in these religious conflicts. Thus, Peter Elmer can situate the origins of a political history of early modern English witchcraft, in which magistrates feature prominently, firmly in the late sixteenth-century world of Brian Darcy and Reginald Scot. Elmer argues that puritanism lies at the heart of witch-hunting efforts in England, shaping both the patterns of prosecution and the responses of critics and sceptics; political partisanship, he observes, settled legal, scientific and medical judgements about witchcraft. As a consequence, puritan magistrates and their political allies came to dominate the prosecution of witches. Elmer need only speculate, therefore, that 'The trials may also have been a by-product of [Rich's] original investigation, as well as an attempt by Leicester to shift the focus away from treasure-hunting and treasonous sorcerers and conjurors, who ... may have been the cause of some embarrassment to Leicester and his circle.' The problem with Elmer's speculation lies in the dedication of 'A True and Just Recorde' to Thomas, Baron Darcy, a known Catholic.

The Tudor church was theologically and spiritually complex. The speed of change and the ambiguities that arose in inconsistent, compromised and often contentious attempts to reform the country led to the broad church of the Elizabethan Settlement. Many families, like the well-studied Throckmortons, experienced religious range and division among their members. In only the most clear-cut of cases during Elizabeth's reign, usually those for which a body of material exists that deals directly with religious conviction, can one state definitively that an individual subscribed to a particular confessional stance. A case in point would be Reginald Scot. Elmer argues, convincingly, that Scot was averse to religious extremism and that this position led him to attack in print puritan witch-hunters in Kent, the demonology of Bodin, and the actions of Brian Darcy. Where there is no substantial evidence, however, historians should exercise the caution recommended by a succession of scholars writing about both English Catholics and English puritans. As Debora Shuger has noted of Catholicism, 'the reticence meant to conceal an outlawed faith from Elizabeth's pursuivants will also shield it from the historian's gaze.'

This observation would apply equally to puritans or, indeed, to anyone who willingly conformed to mainstream religious views without making a public assertion of faith. There is certainly enough evidence to assert that Brian Darcy may have been a puritan, but it does not seem to be sufficient to support Elmer's argument that his witch-hunting was driven by his religious attitudes.

The preamble to Darcy's will confirms that he could command the rhetoric of godly devotion. Sick in body and feeling that he was near the end of his life, he humbly commended his 'soule into the hands of allmightie God stedfastly assuring my selfe that by the death of Christ his sonne my sinnes are forgiven me and that thereby I shall amonge others his electe inheritt the kingdome of heven.' As observed of early modern Lancastrian wills, the word 'elect' can be key to determining the puritan beliefs of the will-maker. In 1587, when Darcy dictated his will on his deathbed, the rhetoric of election was firmly established among those whom one might call puritans, partly aided by the activities of preachers like George Gifford and Arthur Dent.

Both were active in Essex from the 1570s and had been clients of Robert Rich until his death in 1581; they got into trouble with Aylmer for their beliefs and activities. One might add that Thomas Dawson printed a second edition of Gifford's *Four Sermons on election* for Toby Cooke in 1582, the year in which he also printed *A True and Just Recorde*. It would be tempting to align this evidence to support Elmer's suggestion that Darcy's activities reflected the wider puritan campaigning against Catholic superstition and sedition in the county. But not all those who considered themselves one of the 'elect' were puritan. J. Sears McGee, following the example set by Patrick Collinson, has shown that rhetoric and preaching might be indicators of puritanism, but may also lead to the misidentification of its followers. He was writing of Thomas Adams (1583–1652), whose body of work, considerably larger than Darcy's, has not helped in pinning him down to puritanism, mainstream Calvinism, Anglicanism, or somewhere in between.

A True and Just Recorde avoids overt association with any confession. If Darcy did sympathise with Leicester's campaign, he had only to use earlier pamphlets as models on which he could base his expression of it. It is likely that he would have been interested in the Hatfield Peverel cases reported in *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex* (1566). Hatfield Peverel was in Witham, the same half-hundred as two of his properties, Tiptree Priory and Bentons; his tenants may well have been among the jurors

deciding on them. Henry Fortescue investigated these cases alongside Thomas Cole, the archdeacon of Essex. As Marion Gibson has noted, Cole's presence at the trial is unusual, but it has not been examined further. Cole was a radical Protestant, a former exile whose mission was to eradicate Catholicism from his jurisdiction, which did not include the secular assizes. As a body of research has shown, an early alignment of Catholicism and witchcraft as twin threats to Elizabeth's reign led directly to the Witchcraft Act of 1563. By 1566, Cole seems to have been investigating the extent of the relationship between these threats. At the three sittings of the archdeaconry court in 1566–7, twelve cases of witchcraft and magic were examined; it dealt with only two other cases during Cole's tenure in office (1560–71), one in 1564 and another in 1570. Cole came to the Hatfield Peverel cases at a late stage. He is recorded as interviewing the suspects, alongside Fortescue, at the Chelmsford assizes on 26 July 1566. This was the day on which that year's Trinity assizes for the county first sat in the town. The suspects had, in fact, been 'taken' in time for the Midsummer sessions on 22 June, so they could have been tried then. At some point over the course of June and July, the witches had been investigated and brought to confession by a magistrate, probably Fortescue himself. They were then tried by the circuit judges on 27 July, the day after Cole interviewed them. The encounter between Cole and the witches presented in the pamphlet is therefore extra-judicial and an extension of Cole's investigation into the link between witchcraft and Catholicism. This makes sense of the substance of the exchanges. The only criminal activity that mattered under the Witchcraft Act, and, therefore, in a secular court, was the attempt to commit a felony. Yet Cole's concern was the suspects' sins, religious beliefs, and knowledge. In answer to the questions put by Fortescue and Cole, Agnes Waterhouse claimed that her familiar cat Sathan willed her to say her paternoster in Latin. The Catholic beliefs hinted at here were explored further in the 'ende and last confession,' recorded on the final page of the pamphlet after Waterhouse had been convicted. Here, Waterhouse confessed that she said 'the Lordes prayer, the Ave Maria, and the belefe' in Latin because 'sathan wolde at no tyme suffer her to say it in englishe.' The slippage in this last sentence between her familiar cat Sathan and Satan the devil might well have been deliberate on the part of the person reporting the matter. Even though many older men and women, like Waterhouse, were probably confused about the status of Latin prayers and unsure how long they might be proscribed, the pamphlet's anti-Catholic tone would have been unmistakable. If Darcy had wanted to rid his district of Catholicism in the guise of witchcraft, he had only to ask similar questions about Catholic practice and superstition. He did not, however, take the opportunity to do so. It is hard to locate anything Catholic in character in the depositions collected in *A True and Just Recorde*; it is mainly a catalogue of misfortune, healing practices, bad neighbourliness, and the names of familiars.

One might consider here what the dedication of *The Christian Mans Closet* to Brian and Thomas Darcy tells us about Darcy's religion. Its original title, *Oeconomia christiana*, borrows directly from Justus Menius' influential work of the same name, published in 1529. This would place it in a Lutheran tradition of theology concerning the holy household. Yet, we know little about its author, Barthélemy Batt. He was born in Aalst in the Spanish Netherlands, but emigrated to Rostock at some point, seemingly because he had embraced Lutheranism and was persecuted by the Inquisition. When he came to publish his *Oeconomia christiana* in 1558, however, he looked to a printer in his homeland rather than a Lutheran one in Germany. His Antwerp printer, Gerard Speelmans, took on a range of work but seems to have avoided anything controversial; Franciscus Sonnius, whose early work he did publish, was yet to make his mark as an opponent of Calvin. It may be that Batt saw himself as an heir to the Catholic humanist tradition of household and educational advice that had found its international voices in the Spanish Netherlands in Erasmus and Juan Luis Vives.

In all probability, William Lowth knew as little about Batt and his religion as we seem to now. Having acquired a copy of the Latin original, however, which had been out of print for about two decades, and finding nothing controversial in it, he decided to translate it, perhaps without thinking much about its provenance. The dedication therefore tells us little about Darcy's own religious views.

Brian Darcy – Part Four.

Darcy's family ties are more helpful in gaining a fuller understanding of his religion. Thomas, his half-brother and co-dedicattee of *The Christian Mans Closet*, married Margaret Sulyard, who had been brought up as a Catholic. Margaret was the cousin of Sir Thomas Cornwallis, also a known Catholic. The Cornwallises were bound by marriage to many other Catholic families in the region in the later sixteenth century, including the other branch of the Darcy family. Sir Thomas Cornwallis's daughter Elizabeth married Sir Thomas Kitson, who was, like his father-in-law, implicated in Catholic rebellion as well as straightforward recusancy. In 1583, the Kitsons became the parents-in-law of Thomas, Baron Darcy, Brian's patron. In 1574, Elizabeth's sister Alice married Richard Southwell, brother of the Jesuit Robert Southwell; the Southwells' grandmother was Mary Darcy, John, Baron Darcy's sister. Other marriages which served to reinforce existing ties between such Catholic families in Essex included John Darcy's to Frances Rich, daughter of Richard, first Baron Rich, and his daughter Elizabeth's to John, Baron Lumley.

Like their baronial cousins, and as indicated by Thomas's marriage to Margaret, the lesser Darcys did not seek to ally themselves to Protestant Essex families of the same rank such as the Mildmays, whose properties around Danbury and duties at county and government levels brought them into close contact with Brian Darcy and his kin in the late sixteenth century. Indeed, St Osyth—Darcy's choice of parish over those in which his properties Tiptree Priory and Bentons were located, which were within the orbit of evangelical patrons—remained a Catholic outpost in the county until the Stour Valley riots of 1642. Thomas and Margaret's son, also named Thomas, married a Catholic in 1582 and took up residence at Tolleshunt Darcy Hall; she was Camilla Guicciardini, daughter of Vincenzo Guicciardini, denounced by the bishop of Rochester in 1577 as an obdurate recusant. Thomas Darcy's brother-in-law, Edward Sulyard, also maintained a Catholic household in Essex and, as we have noted, sat alongside Brian Darcy as a magistrate. Like his Darcy in-laws at St Osyth, Edward Sulyard was strong enough as a lord of the manor and magistrate not to be dragged into the escalating search for recusants in Essex in the late 1570s and early 1580s. William Webbe may have been resident in Sulyard's household by 1582. If he was also the prefacer of *A True and Just Recorde*, Brian Darcy did not blench at the association with a known Catholic household. He certainly did not blench at dedicating the pamphlet to his Catholic patron. The Darcy–Sulyard marriage therefore placed Brian's half-brother Thomas in a strong relationship with other prominent Catholic families, and the joining of the two men in the dedication of Lowth's Christian Mans Closet indicates that Darcy was a tolerant Protestant, rather than a rabidly anti-Catholic one.

The rest of Brian Darcy's career as a magistrate should also give pause for thought with regard to the claim that he was motivated by zeal or puritan politics to prosecute witches. Marion Gibson argues that Darcy's zealotry for the prosecution of witches was given direction by his appointment to the magistracy in 1581. It seems, however, that Darcy was not interested in local justice before his appointment, although there were regular trials of witch-suspects in Essex, including, as we have seen, in the hundred of Tendring and the half-hundred of Witham. Darcy had occasionally used the quarter sessions to protect his property, but he may have sought to minimise his attendance because the jury for Witham was constantly complaining about his failure to repair Machin's Mill Bridge. The continuing disputes about the bridge brought Darcy into direct confrontation with the magistrates: in the summer of 1576, for example, a jury had to be impanelled specifically to try Darcy for his failure to respond to the justices' demands to maintain it. He was back before them again, represented by his lawyer, for the same offence in 1578. That he duly attended sessions after his appointment was only to be expected if he were to make the best use of this new status in local politics and avoid amercement for non-attendance; his attendance does not necessarily reflect any particular interest in the mechanics of justice. Similarly, after the St. Osyth witchcraft trials began to tail off, Darcy did not use his position and any lingering fears of his neighbours to engineer a further round of witch-hunting. If he had been frustrated by the acquittals of most of the St Osyth witch-suspects late in March 1582, he would have had the opportunity to resurrect the investigations through the outstanding accusations which were to be dealt with over the next five years. Nor did he engage in investigations or prosecutions of witch-suspects in the hundreds in which his other properties were located. Fortunately for the residents of St Osyth and the other towns and villages of Tendring Hundred, Darcy's hunger for witchcraft prosecution seems to have been sated quickly. His lack of interest in justice prior to 1581, and his rapid withdrawal from witchcraft prosecution in the spring of 1582 after just a few weeks, both suggest that Darcy was not a zealous witch-hunter.

If Leicester's allies in Essex thought that Darcy's hunt was an extension of their own activities, they must have been disappointed at his lack of tenacity after the first depositions had been certified.

Brian Darcy – Part Five.

Darcy was, of course, willing to investigate the accusations against Ursley Kempe and the other suspects identified by his neighbours in this isolated, rather bleak part of the county. But why did they begin making their accusations, and why did they not stop at one or two? The answers seem to lie in an apparent spike in death rates at precisely this moment. Unfortunately, the burial registers for St. Osyth and neighbouring Brightlingsea only begin in 1666 and 1697, respectively. They do, however, survive for the late sixteenth century for an arc of parishes around St Osyth: Thorrington, Great Bentley, Weeley, Little Clacton, and Great Clacton. Further afield from the epicentre of the trials, data is available for Beaumont-cum-Moze, Great Holland, Great Oakley, Harwich, Little Oakley, and Tendring. Some of these parishes were too thinly populated for us to be able to state anything definitively about patterns of mortality from the data. In Little Clacton and Thorrington, however, we see a sudden rise in burials in the years leading up to the witchcraft trials. In Thorrington, the next village north from Brightlingsea, the annual number of burials had ranged from two to six between 1573 and 1579; in 1580, there were eighteen, and in 1581, ten. In Little Clacton, the nearest village east of St Osyth, the years 1573 to 1579 never saw more than seven burials; there were seventeen in 1580 and twenty in 1581. Of the parishes further afield, only two seem to have experienced a similar pattern. The nearest, Tendring, saw a peak in 1580, when there were eleven burials; in 1581, however, there were none. Great Oakley, at the further end of the hundred,

also experienced a single-year peak with twenty-nine burials in 1580, but it, too, returned to normality in 1581. On the other hand, Great Clacton, the nearest coastal parish to St. Osyth, experienced a decline in burials in 1580 and very few annually after that.

It is possible to hypothesise a correlation between the sudden increases in burials in the villages nearest St. Osyth and the witchcraft accusations made there. This correlation would lie in the increased anxiety and fear caused by attending two or three times the usual number of burials of neighbours, and hearing news of many others, and the instinct to review unusual events of the past while in this anxious state. There had always been peaks and troughs in death rates and probably also anxieties about these, but early in 1582 these anxieties could find expression in the witchcraft accusations against Ursley Kempe, which others then followed with further accusations against other neighbours. Thus, on 1 March 1582, not yet two weeks into the investigatory process, Richard Rosse of Little Clacton, the parish that experienced the sharpest rise in death rates, made accusations against Henry and Cisley Celles. His information consisted of four parts. Six years previously, Henry Celles had been ploughing Rosse's ground but had not done many turns before two of the horses 'fell downe in most strange wise, and dyed.' He followed this with a tale about how his wife fell out with Cisley Celles over the cost of some bushels of barley. While Rosse stated that the price was a bargain, Celles had refused to buy any and went away 'using many hard speeches.' This had happened before the plough-horses had died. Then, finally, Rosse made an accusation of witchcraft. His wife and Cisley Celles had fallen out again, this time over the Celles' failure to keep their cattle off Rosse's land. Much of Rosse's livestock was then 'in a most strange taking.' This condition he ascribed to 'some witchcraft, or sorcery' by either Henry or Cisley Celles. Only now did he move the story into the present, telling of his suspicion that seven or so months ago, the Celles had deliberately burned down one of his barns full of corn. This was an accusation of arson rather than of witchcraft. Six years of fractious relations with a neighbour on whom one had to rely for labour, an apparent arson attack in July 1581 in which valuable corn was lost, the frequent trips to the parish church of St James to watch too many people be buried, and news of the increasing number of witches found across the hundred provide the context for Rosse's testimony. It probably did not help the accused that their son Henry, aged 9, gave credit to the accusations of bad neighbourliness by recalling that Henry called Cisley a 'whore'.

Rosse may have put pressure on his neighbours to testify against Henry and Cisley Celles, but his accusations seem as authentic as those made by Grace Thurlowe and Annis Letherdall at the beginning of the investigations.

Genuine, often inexplicable harm had happened that could be interpreted, in the right circumstances, as the result of witchcraft by malicious people. While Darcy did follow up on the few denunciations of other suspects by those already accused, he did not routinely ask who their confederates were. Such a question was the hallmark of the witch-hunter. If such a question prompted Ursley Kempe to name Elizabeth Bennet and Ales Newman—which seems doubtful as Bennet, at least, had been examined before Kempe named her—it does not seem to have been asked of other suspects who came before Darcy. He was no witch-hunter, but a credulous magistrate faced with plausible accusations rooted in local fears, rather than a county-level expression of national politics.

Brian Darcy – Part Six.

We have come a long way from the zealous, godly witch-hunting of which Darcy has been accused. It seems that he was, probably, something of a 'godly' Protestant, but not one who forsook his Catholic kin and neighbours. Indeed, he chose to live in the shadow of the Catholic barons Darcy. He was not the only Protestant to do so. John Marckant, vicar of Great Clacton from 1569 until his death in the mid-1580s, contributed to Thomas Sternhold and John Hopkins's metrical psalter of 1562; the singing of metrical psalms was popular among the Elizabethan godly. Darcy had no strong connection with either the allies or the aims of Leicester and Rich, and did not ask the suspects who came before him about their religious beliefs; one cannot plausibly argue that the St. Osyth episode was an extension of their campaign against Catholics. He did not actively hunt out witches, although he was certainly credulous and abused both his position and the investigatory process to produce confessions. When confronted with accusations of witchcraft, he acted upon them diligently, but did not seek to revive witch-hunting, if indeed that is the best description for what had gone on, after Ursley Kempe and Elizabeth Bennet had been executed. He was also acting against a background of fear caused by an inexplicable rise in death rates that affected some parishes but not others within his authority. This context probably heightened local tensions concerning bad neighbourliness. Given the precariousness of his own position following John, Baron Darcy's death, Brian Darcy was probably receptive to his neighbours' anxieties. Against this background, A True and Just Recorde seems to have been simply an appeal to a new patron, who happened to be a Catholic, that a canny prefacer and printer saw as newsworthy and profitable because nothing like this coven had been uncovered in England, or much of Europe, before. In summary, Darcy was certainly culpable in the executions of Ursley Kempe and Elizabeth Bennet, but there were many reasons other than religion and politics why the St Osyth witchcraft episode expanded so quickly and so dramatically.

And here we arrive back at the importance of witchcraft episodes like that of St. Osyth. In the search for the causes of witchcraft prosecution as a phenomenon in England, there has been a tendency to tidy up the history of witchcraft and present a uniform, teleological version of events from the Elizabethan era into the seventeenth century. But the circumstances in which accusations were made and witch-suspects investigated and prosecuted are far too messy and incompletely understood to suggest that one can see the firm outlines of a political approach to witch-hunting on the part of puritans. Careful examination of individual episodes reveals many reasons why they might begin, deepening our understanding of how Elizabethans grappled with the new concept of witchcraft at judicial as well as social and communal levels. In the process, we reveal more about the contexts in which witchcraft could appear and become dangerous. We see Elizabethan magistrates struggling with evidence and the application of law in ways that may help us understand how they approached other accusations of felony, and how they negotiated complex personal and political relationships that could be equally dangerous; we find printers making choices about which stories their readers wanted to discover; and we find ordinary people groping around for explanations of the inexplicable in a very uncertain world.

Here be Witches – Essex and Witchcraft

“How do you know she is a witch?” “Well, she looks like one” – Monty Python and the Holy Grail.

If you imagine a witch, what do you see? An old bent woman with a wart on her nose? a pointy black hat who is accompanied by a black cat? the stereotypical image that comes to mind when the word Witch is mentioned. The bent part is slightly accurate as the word itself derives from the Celtic word Wicca to twist or to bend. Today the word is usually used to describe a female who has received supernatural powers most of the time from the Devil.

Why female? Of course, there have been male witches, some referred to as wizards or warlocks. However, throughout the centuries, the word witch has commonly been linked with the female sex. Every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furrowed brow, a hairy lip, a single tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a rugged coat on her back, a skullcap on her head, a spindle in her hand, and a Dog or Cat by her side; is not only suspected, but pronounced for a witch.

James VI of Scotland said in his book on Demonology “But before yee goe further, permit mee I pray you to interrupt you one worde, which yee have put mee in memorie of, by speaking of Women. What can be the cause that there are twentie women given to that craft, where ther is one man? The reason is easie, for as that sex is frailer then man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these gross snares of the Devil, as was over well proved to be true, by the Serpents deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex sensine.”

So women were perceived to be the weaker sex therefore, more likely to succumb to the devil. A number of the women persecuted as witches were sometimes those who lived outside the acceptable norms of society – the old widows who spoke their mind, the single mothers, the ones that had disabilities or deformities on their bodies. 90% of the accusations made were towards women. If a woman did not know her place did she deserve the harsh persecution and punishment that was delivered when accused of being a witch? No!

Following the Lancaster Witch Trials (1612–1634), William Harvey, physician to King Charles I of England, had been ordered to examine the four women accused, and from this there came a requirement to have material proof of being a witch. Witches then became heretics to Christianity, which became the greatest of their crimes and sins. Within continental and Roman Law witchcraft was *crimen exceptum*: a crime so foul that all normal legal procedures were superseded. Because the Devil was not going to “confess”, it was necessary to gain a confession from the human involved.

More witches have been hung in the county of Essex than any other in all of England. In the assizes from 1560-1680, 545 people were accused of witchcraft. There are 424 villages in Essex of which 227 have a connection with the persecution of witches. One hundred of these so-called witches were sentenced at Chelmsford, which was accrued the highest death toll of witches anywhere in England itself.

Matthew Hopkins - his early life:

There is reason to believe that this was the noted Matthew Hopkins, Witch-Finder General to the associated counties, who had frequently been mentioned by various writers. Sir Walter Scott says: “He was perhaps a native of Manningtree in Essex, at any rate he resided there in the year 1644, when an epidemic cry of witchcraft arose in that town”... It is not known that any writer has made any mention of Hopkins after 1647. The inference therefore is, that the particulars in that register refer to him.”

Fate and demise

The fate of Hopkins remains a mystery and in the realms of speculation, for many accounts of his demise abound. One account by "William Andrews" (a 19th century writer on Essex folklore), wrote in his book "Bygone Essex" (1892), that Hopkins was passing through Suffolk and was himself accused of being a witch. Hopkins he alleges was charged with having stolen a book containing a list of all the witches in England, he supposedly obtained the book by means of sorcery. Hopkins pleaded innocent but an angry mob had formed, and he was forced to undergo his own ordeal of Swimming. In some accounts he drowned, while others say he floated and was condemned and hanged. However no records of his trial exist, if ever there was one?

A more likely cause of his death was given by Stearne his faithful assistant, who relates in his own book "A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch-craft" - (London 1648), that he passed away "peacefully, after a long sickness of a Consumption". Records show that he died in the nearby village of Mistley, where according to the "Church Registers" he was buried on the 12th of August in 1647. Today according to local legend, Hopkins' ghost is said to haunt Mistley Pond. An apparition wearing 17th-century attire is reportedly seen roaming the vicinity, particularly on Friday nights near to the Witches Sabbats.



The work of Hopkins and John Stearne was not necessarily to prove any of the accused had committed acts of maleficium, but to prove that they had made a covenant with the Devil. Prior to this point, any malicious acts on the part of witches were treated identically to those of other criminals, until it was seen that, according to the then-current beliefs about the structure of witchcraft, they owed their powers to a deliberate act of their choosing.

Many of those in the years 1644-47 would have been the handiwork of the self-titled Witchfinder General, Mathew Hopkins. Born in Wenham, Suffolk around 1619. Mathew Hopkins was an unremarkable lawyer until 1644. He said that he overheard a discussion of witches at his local pub, the Thorn Inn in Manningtree who were trying to kill him. He decided to leave his law practice and took it upon himself to rid the countryside of witches. With his right-hand man John Sterne, they would travel to villages and hunt down the witches, for a fee of course!

Aside from his knowledge of the law and reading about witches from James I's book Demonology Hopkins had no other expertise in what he was doing.

This did not stop him giving himself the title of Witchfinder General and claiming that he had been appointed by Parliament. This was not true, but people believed him none the less especially when he said he possessed the 'Devils List' – which supposedly had all the names of the witches in England. In addition to John Sterne, Hopkins was also aided by 'good' Phillips, Edward Parslet, and Frances Mills. Hopkins was no fool. He knew what was needed to get people to seek his aid. He used the mood of uncertainty and fear to his advantage. Times were tough and due to the outbreak of the Civil War, the mood of the county of Essex was one of distrust. He also knew how to bend the law to get confessions, by using techniques, which were not deemed as 'torture,' – sleep deprivation, and solitude confinement.

Most of the time the accused would be taken to somewhere private and dark like a dungeon. Colchester Castle was such a location. There the prisoner would be thrown into the isolated cell, stripped naked, and beaten. They would also be starved and prevented from sleep. After this, Hopkins would move onto pricking. Hopkins had a special jabbing needle to do this, a three in one spike, which retracted when pushed against the skin so the woman would feel no pain, therefore, condemning her. If no so-called witches marks were found the prisoners would then be forced to sit crossed legged on a table or stall bound and left alone for 24 hours. After this, they would then be forced to walk naked, barefoot up and down until their feet blistered and bled – enough for anyone to confess to anything just to get it to stop or even driven mad.

Elizabeth Clarke (1565 – 1645)

The first to fall victim to Hopkins was a one-legged woman named Elizabeth Clark. John Rivet, a local tailor, had accused her of placing a spell on his wife causing her to get ill. Clarke was placed under the 'care' of Hopkins and his inhuman methods until she could take no more and told him what he wanted to hear along with naming another five people. This 'witch-hunt' soon grew to implicate thirty-eight persons, of which seventeen were hung, six reprieved in prison (with four of them dying while incarcerated) and two acquitted. Elizabeth Clarke, also known as Bedinfield, was accused of cursing the wife of Manningtree tailor, John Rivet during the winter of 1643. A lynch mob brought her to Sir Harbottle Grimston, her landowner, who decided that she should be tried. Matthew Hopkins, assisted by John Stearne and Mary Philipps, took up the role of investigator and prosecutor, known as "Watcher". Although torture was illegal in England, suspected witches were subject to scrutiny by their Watchers. In Clarke's case, Hopkins and colleagues including John Stearne watched her for several days and nights without allowing her to sleep. After this treatment, Hopkins claimed to have witnessed Clarke summoning familiars, imps in animal form.[6] During this ordeal, Clarke implicated other women from Manningtree, Anne West and her daughter Rebecca, Anne Leech, Helen Clarke, and Elizabeth Gooding as well as women from other villages. Clarke stated that she had been brought into witchcraft by Anne West, who took pity on her due to her poverty and only having one leg. The women discovered by Hopkins were tried at Chelmsford assizes on 17 July 1645. Elizabeth then confessed due to the persuading, forcing and imprisonment, this led to thirty-five women who were accused and put to prison.

During the testimonies of the watchers, they described many of the imps that he saw with Clarke, including:

Jarmana - a white dog with sandy spots, fat with short legs[2]. **Vinegar Tom** - a greyhound with long legs,[2] who turned into a 4-year-old boy with no head[7]. **A black imp**[2]. **Newes** - A pole cat with a large head[2][8]. **Hoult** - a white imp, smaller than a cat [8]. **White imps that went to bed with Clarke in the shape of a "proper gentleman" with a laced band.**[2]. **Three brown imps from her mother**[9]. **Sacke and Sugar** - a demonic black rabbit[4][8]. Other familiars referred to by name but not description: Elemauzer, Pyewacket, Peck-in-the-crown & Grizel Greedigut.

Hopkins would be invited to use Colchester Castle as a base to interrogate the Witches that were accused in Manningtree. At times, the women would be held there for up to six months while awaiting trial and four of the thirty-three women held died due to the horrible conditions there. Moreover, as they had never been found guilty they never received a pardon, which those who were found guilty by Hopkins did.

In 2018, John Worland, a filmmaker, successfully raised funds to have a plaque placed in the rose gardens opposite the entrance to the Castle to remember the victims of the witch-hunts. *"We are, strangely, living in times where there are parallels with the plight of women back then," says John. "Through social media, we see hysteria and misrepresentation, where nobody relies on facts or evidence, and this can trigger hate crimes. This is what happened to many women four hundred years ago and the significance of this shouldn't be swept under the carpet."*

Chelmsford in Essex would be the location for many persecutions of witches. The location of the site of the execution today is believed to be Primrose Hill. Not all those sentenced there would be from the town.

Chelmsford would be the location for the first full trial and execution of a witch in England in 1566 where Agnes Waterhouse would be executed as a witch. She and two other women – Elizabeth Frances and Joan Waterhouse (daughter of Agnes) who all lived in Hatfield Peverel in Essex. All that linked them was a white spotted cat called Satan, which was believed to be their familiar.

Agnes Waterhouse (1502 – 29 July 1566).



She was also charged with using sorcery to kill livestock, cause illness, as well as bring about the death of her husband. Her eighteen-year-old daughter Joan Waterhouse was also accused (but found not guilty) of the same crime. Joan Waterhouse's testimony ultimately helped to convict the two other women. Agnes was hanged, and was the first woman executed for witchcraft in England.

Information from the trial of Agnes Waterhouse is recorded in a pamphlet from 1566 titled, "The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex before the Quenes Majesties Judges the XXVI daye of July anno 1566." John Phillips wrote the pamphlet, and though incomplete, outlines the testimonies of the three women accused of being witches. During the first examination Reverend Thomas Cole and Sir John Fortescue were present. Sir Gilbert Gerard, the queen's attorney, and John Southcote, justice of the queen's bench, were present for the second examination. The presence of all these men suggests that the case was considered to be of unusual significance.

On 29 July 1566 - two days after the trial finished - Agnes Waterhouse was executed. At this time she repented and asked for forgiveness from God. She also confessed to her attempt to send the cat to hurt and damage the goods of her neighbour, the tailor named Wardol. However, this was regarded as having been unsuccessful because the Wardol was so strong in faith. When questioned about her church habits, Agnes Waterhouse said that she prayed often, but always in Latin because the cat forbid her from praying in English.

Elizabeth Francis (1529 – 1579)

Elizabeth Francis, Fraunces, Frauncis or Frances, was tried three times for witchcraft at the Chelmsford Assizes. Declared guilty on each occasion, her first two sentences, in 1566 and 1573, were for her to be imprisoned for a year during which she was to be placed in a pillory four times. In 1579, together with three other women, she was charged with bewitchment and murder by witchcraft. She was executed by hanging, probably within days of her third trial. Each of Elizabeth's trials is noteworthy for different reasons. Her first was not only the first prosecution under the new Witchcraft Act 1563 – which stipulated capital punishment for those found guilty of causing death by magical means – but the accused were also immortalised in the oldest surviving chapbook on the topic of witches, "The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde". Following her third trial thirteen years later, at which she pleaded her innocence, Elizabeth was featured in another pamphlet, "A Detection of Damnable Driftes".

Despite the Act mandating that a guilty verdict handed down for a second offence of witchcraft was punishable by death, at her second trial Elizabeth received the more lenient sentence of a year in gaol, owing to errors in the drafting of her formal accusation. Possessing a poor reputation and of low character, Elizabeth's impoverished circumstances meant she often resorted to begging or had to rely on poor relief. She had a brief sexual relationship with Andrew Byles, whom she considered to be wealthy, but he refused to marry her. Worried that she might be having his child, Elizabeth took herbal remedies that would induce an abortion if she had conceived. Shortly afterwards, the assets of Byles dwindled, and he soon died.

Later, Elizabeth was married to Christopher Francis, a yeoman. The couple had one child, a daughter, who was born around three months after the pair were married but the baby died when about six months old. Married life was a constant round of heated arguments with her husband, who had a surly disposition.

First trial

Details of Elizabeth's first trial, held at Chelmsforde Assizes, are documented in the chapbook "The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde". She was charged under the Witchcraft Act 1563 of bewitching a child, which mandated the death penalty for witches who killed by using magic. It also prescribed that the method of execution should be hanging instead of burning, and that for non-fatal incidents the guilty receive a sentence of incarceration for a year during which they would also spend time in the stocks; however, if the lesser offence were repeated, a death penalty would be applied. The first major English trial prosecuted under the new Act, proceedings were conducted by an array of prestigious judges, setting a precedent for later trials.

Confession and verdict

Elizabeth readily confessed to a variety of wrongdoings. She explained that when she was a child her grandmother, then deceased, instructed her to renounce God and gave her a cat called Satan. The white-spotted feline spoke to her in a strange hollow voice, promising to fulfil her needs. Normally fed bread and milk, the creature's diet was supplemented with Elizabeth's blood. Satan provided her with livestock – eighteen black and white sheep – that Elizabeth kept in a field for a while, but she did not know what happened to them; the animals just eventually disappeared.

Satan was, according to the testimony Elizabeth gave to her inquisitors, responsible for enticing Byles into the relationship with her, his loss of wealth, his death and the cat supplied the recipe of herbs needed to terminate any possible pregnancy. At her request, the creature also killed Elizabeth's baby daughter then, by transforming itself into a toad, caused her husband to become incurably lame. The final thing she told the justices was that she offered to give Satan to a poor elderly neighbour, Agnes Waterhouse, – who it was later discovered was her older sister – as recompense for one of the cakes she had seen her baking. Insisting that the story she was growing tired of looking after the cat – Elizabeth had owned it for fifteen or sixteen years by then – was not true, when the sixty-four-year-old agreed to the transaction, she gave her the cat passing on the same instructions for its care as she had received from her grandmother.

Declared guilty of the original charge against her – that of bewitching John, the baby son of another resident of Hatfield Peveril, William Auger, until the child was paralysed – Elizabeth was sentenced to imprisonment for one year plus sessions in the stocks.

Second trial

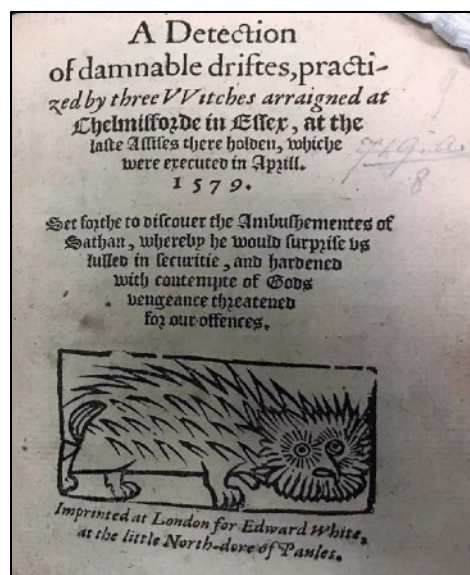
In 1572, Elizabeth again came to the attention of the authorities when she was accused of using witchcraft to make a woman ill. Her victim, a miller's wife named Mary Cocke, was severely incapacitated for ten days following

the incident on 25th March and feared she was not going to survive. Elizabeth was arrested with her case scheduled to be heard at Chelmsford Assizes in August. The court was very busy during that session – several other witchcraft cases were being heard: one against a woman with four serious charges against her; a married couple facing a string of bewitchment accusations; and another adult female who allegedly induced serious illness in livestock and a woman. The documentation for Elizabeth's case was not correctly presented necessitating the indictment be rewritten. This delayed her trial until 2nd March 1573.

The revised paperwork was presented at court on 2nd March 1573; however, a key component from the original formal accusation, that of it being Elizabeth's second offence, was omitted. The legislation in the 1563 Witchcraft Act stipulated the death penalty for subsequent misdemeanours, yet despite the case being heard by one of the judges from her first trial, her punishment was once more that she be jailed for a year with periods in the stocks. The leniency of her sentence is especially noteworthy as the judges had no qualms prescribing the death penalty for three others declared guilty of witchcraft at the same time.

Third trial

By 18 March 1574, Elizabeth had served her sentence and returned to Hatfield Peverel. Four years later, in 1578, she is documented as a spinster and, unlike in earlier records, no reference is made to a spouse or partner. Villagers remained convinced that any unfortunate incident or sickness could be attributed to witchcraft or magic; paupers like Elizabeth, who mainly supported themselves by begging from neighbours, instilled a sense of terror by angrily cursing or bitterly responding if their pleas for sustenance were refused.



Published in 1579 and featuring two illustrations, the octavo pamphlet's full title is "A Detection of Damnable driftes practised by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsford in Essex, at the late Assizes there holden, whiche were executed in April, 1579". Despite the title, it records details of four women: Elizabeth Francis; Ellen or Elleine Smithe; Alice Nokes; and Margery Stanton or Staunton. All were convicted then hanged except Stanton, who was released.

By Edward White, it was printed by John Kingston, whom White had employed to produce a similar publication earlier that year. The principle character, Elizabeth Francis, was also central to the 1566 chapbook, entitled "The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde". As both pamphlets concentrate principally on Elizabeth, despite being almost thirteen years apart and the work of different printers, they may stem from the same source.

Academic Timothy Scott McGinnis speculates the informant may have played a role in the trials, but concedes verification is impossible. The illustration from the pamphlet "A Detection of Damnable Driftes" of the

shaggy dog apparition seen by Elizabeth.

On one such occasion during Lent in 1578, Elizabeth approached Alice Poole begging for some old yeast; when Alice refused, Elizabeth headed off to try another villager, loudly cursing against and expressing a desire for Alice to suffer. There was a loud noise followed immediately by an apparition in the form of a white shaggy dog appearing beside Elizabeth. She conversed with the creature, rewarding it with a tiny morsel of bread after it promised to cause pain to Alice's head. Elizabeth never saw the dog again, but she later discovered from another villager that Alice was suffering with severe head pains that started not long after the incident.

An accusation was made against Elizabeth on 26th June 1578 alleging she had bewitched Alice, although at that time her victim was only ill; she subsequently died from the affliction on 1st November. Elizabeth was apprehended but the first hearing of her case did not take place until the Quarter Sessions at Chelmsford on 8th January 1579 where it was endorsed to be tried at the Chelmsford Assizes on 2nd April.

During the trial of Agnes Waterhouse, Elizabeth Francis was examined first. She confessed to possessing the familiar, a white spotted cat named Sathan (or Satan). Elizabeth Francis received the cat from her grandmother, Mother Eve of Hatfield Peverell, who taught her witchcraft when she was twelve years old. Elizabeth Francis kept the cat for fifteen or sixteen years, before eventually giving it to Agnes Waterhouse. According to Elizabeth Francis, the cat spoke to her in a strange hollow voice and would do anything for her in exchange for a drop of blood. She confessed to stealing sheep, and killing several people including a wealthy man, Andrew Byles, who would not marry her after she became pregnant with his child. Francis also said the cat instructed her on what herbs to drink to terminate the pregnancy. Later, after Francis married, she was unhappy and willed the cat to kill her six-month-old daughter and make her husband lame. The confessions that Elizabeth Francis made expanded

the scope of her crimes considerably. Elizabeth Francis was the first to be accused, and is the one who accused Agnes Waterhouse. She was given a lighter sentence, but was hanged after a second conviction thirteen years later. A later pamphlet from a 1579 trial shows that Elizabeth Francis and Agnes Waterhouse were sisters.

Elizabeth Francis gave the cat, Satan, to Agnes Waterhouse in exchange for a cake. She reportedly taught her how to perform witchcraft as she was instructed before by her grandmother, Mother Eve, telling her that "she must call him Satan and give him of her blood and milk as before." Agnes Waterhouse confessed to first having the cat kill one of her own pigs in order to "see what he could do", before, after arguments with her neighbours, having their cows and geese killed. She kept the cat in a pot lined with wool, but wanted to repurpose the wool, so she supposedly turned the familiar into a toad. Other sources recount that the cat had turned himself into a toad. Agnes denied that she had ever succeeded in killing anyone by witchcraft, but was found guilty.

Frances was accused of having bewitched a baby because it had become frail and weak. She would confess to the crime along with also confessing to murder, aborting, and having illicit sex. She said she had been taught to be a witch by her grandmother who introduced her to Satan the cat. Satan promised her that she would be rich if she followed his will. Francis was found guilty of bewitchment and was sentenced to a year in prison. It turned out that Francis would meet Agnes one day and offer Sathan in exchange for a cake. She said that he was something that would improve her life massively to which Agnes agreed. Agnes was accused of bewitching William Fynee who went on to die in November 1565. Like Francis, Agnes too would confess, to not only to this crime but also one destroying her neighbours cattle and geese. She also said that she had sent her daughter Joan to the home of Agnes Brown a 12-year-old girl for cake and cheese. Agnes Browne refused and found a few days later that her right leg and arm became 'decrepit.' Joan went home and called out for Sathan whom she had heard her mum call for. When he turned up she asked him to make the young girl afraid, in turn, Sathan said that he wanted Joan's mind and soul.

Joan Waterhouse (born 1548)

Joan was tried for bewitching brown but was found not guilty. Her mother, however, was sentenced to death by hanging and was executed on July 29th. Frances Waterhouse in 1579 was accused again of being a witch and this time was not so lucky and was hung. Joan Waterhouse, daughter to the mother Waterhouse, being of the age of 18 years, and examined, confessed as followeth:

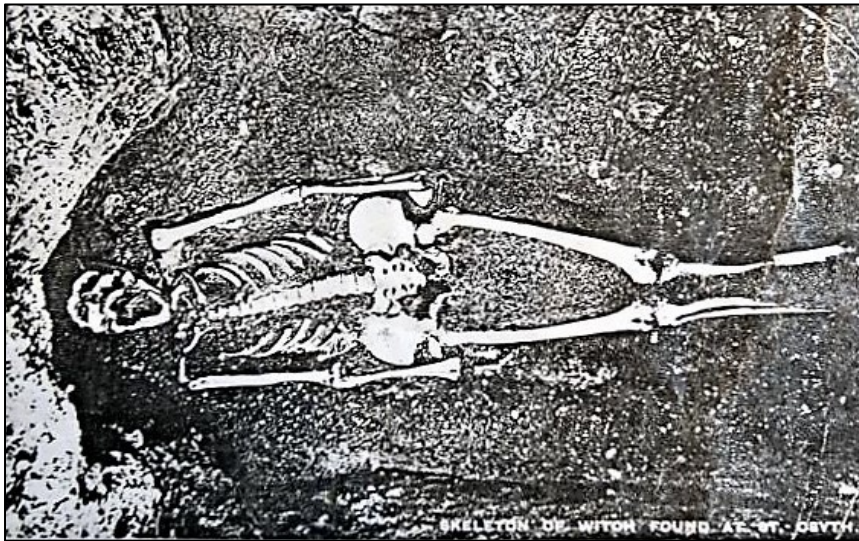
First, that her mother this last winter would have learned her this art, but she learned it not, neither yet the name of the thing. She sayeth she never saw it but once in her mother's hand, and that was in the likeness of a toad, and at that time coming in at a sudden when her mother called it out to work something withal, she heard her to call it Satan, for she was not at any time truly taught it, nor did ever exercise it before this time as followeth:

Item: She confessed that when her mother was gone to Breakstead, in her absence lacking bread, she went to a girl, a neighbour's child, and desired her to give her a piece of bread and cheese, which when she denied and gave her not, or at least not so much as would satisfy her, she going home did as she had seen her mother do, calling Satan, which came to her (as she said) she thought out of her mother's shaw from under the bed, in the likeness of a great dog, demanding what she would have, wherewith all she being afeared, said she would have him to make such a girl afeared naming this girl, then he asked her what she would give him, and she said a red cock, then he said no, but thou shalt give me thy body and soul, whereby she being sore feared, and desirous to be rid of him, said she would: And herewith he went to this girl in the likeness of an evil favoured dog with horns on his head, and made her very much afeared, and doth yet haunt her, now cannot these witches (as they say) call him in again because they did not let him out. And more (sayeth she) she never did, but this her doing was the revealing of all the rest. After being hung the bodies of the supposed witches could not be buried in consecrated holy ground. Most were placed in unmarked graves and some even at crossroads. Sometimes their remains were humiliated even more by the placing of stakes in each hand to prevent the witch ever rising. This was the case with Ursula Kemp in St Osyth 1582. In total, thirteen were accused of being witches, 10 on the charge of bewitching people to death. Of these ten, six were found guilty but only two sentences carried out – Elizabeth Bennet who confessed to murder and Ursula Kemp.

Ursula Kemp (1525-1582 St. Osyth)

Kemp was a woman of poor means who managed to survive by doing midwifery and removing bad spells from people. What brought her into the witch-hunt was a falling out with Grace Thrulowe where Kempe had threatened her with lameness. Just idle threat but unfortunately for Kempe Thurlow was soon overcome with severe arthritis in her legs and decided that it was a curse from Kempe. What made her case even more damaging was her 8-year-old son who was encouraged to tell damning stories against his mother. Kempe would confess but only with the promise of leniency is she cooperated and named others. This she did but the promise of leniency was false. The final charge was bewitching three people to death between 1580 and 1582. Through the testimony of Thomas and Ursula it became apparent that Kemp had four familiars, Tytтей (a male white lamb), Jacke (a male

black cat), Pygine (a female black toad) and Tyffin (female grey cat) to which she fed cake and beer and her own blood. The trial confirmed that Tyttey (the lamb) had been sent to kill Joan Thurlow and Jacke (the cat) to kill her sister-in-law. The other two familiars were used to make people ill. Obviously, confessions such as these did nothing to dissipate the fear and hysteria associated with the witch hunts.



But Kempe's story does not end there. In 1921, the remains of two skeletons were unearthed in the garden of Mr Brooker in St Osyth. One of the skeletons was badly damaged but the other was still in a reasonable condition. It was then deduced that it must be the body of Ursula, and the other ... Mr Brooker used this discovery to make some money and allowed people to view the skeleton for a small fee. Then in 1932, the house burnt down in an unexplained fire and the body of Ursula was reburied. It was disturbed again in the 1960s during some redevelopment but this time the body of Ursula was sold to the Witchcraft Museum in

Boscastle. Finally in 2007 filmmaker John Worland and others managed to get Ursula back to St Osyth and reburied in un-consecrated land with both representatives of the Christian and Pagan religions. May she now rest in peace.

An infant girl, aged a years and a half, from St. Osyth in the county of Essex and the daughter of Annis Letherdall and Richard Letherdall. Elizabeth is allegedly bewitched by Ursula Kempe who muttered at Elizabeth, and she developed a "great swelling in the bottome of the belly, and other privie partes." Her mother took her to see Mother Ratcliffe for medical or un-witching treatment, on to way to and from Ratcliffe's home, Elizabeth cried "to the mother, wo, wo, and poynted with the finger to the wyndowe wardes."

Although Ratcliffe claimed she could likely do little, she attempted to minister to the child. Soon after, presumably because the child did not get better, Letherdall visited a cunning woman who diagnosed the girl as having been bewitched by Kempe. Kempe scoffed at Letherdall claiming that she "would lay her life that she the said Annis had not been with any [cunning folk]," so certain was she, that Kempe "requested a woman being in the house a spinning with the said Ursley, to beare witnessse what shee had said." Elizabeth's conditioned worsened, becoming a "most piteous case to beholde." Kemp, believing that she would be afforded some lenience if she confessed, answered the specific questions Brian Darcey demanded of her, confessing to sending her familiar "Pigen [to torment] Letherdalls Childe" and begging "forgivenesse of the sayde Letherdalls wife." Ursula Kempe and Alice Newman are indicted and found guilty of this crime, but remanded.

Lawrence Kempe

A man from St. Osyth in Essex and brother to Ursley Kempe. Lawrence Kempe testifies that "his late wife was taken in her backe, and in the privie partes of her bodye, in a very extreme and most strange sort, and so continued about three quarters of a year. This origin of this bewitchment occurred circa 1580 when Ursley and Mrs. Kempe has a physical altercation when Ursley "took up her clothes and did heat her upon the hippes, and otherwise in words did misuse her greatly." Mrs. Kempe allegedly told her husband "several times that Ursley Kempe his sister, had forspoke her, and that shee was the onely cause of that her sickness." Mrs. Kempe's body grew cold before she died, and she lay in a kind of half-life, "like a dead creature," until Ursley came one day, unannounced and again "lifted up the clothes and took her by the arme, the which shee had not so soone done, but presently after she gasped, and never after drew her breath and so dyed."

Elizabeth Bennet

Elizabeth Bennet, who was found guilty of murdering four people through witchcraft and confessed to having two familiars. Elizabeth Bennet is a woman from St. Osyth in the county of Essex and the wife of a dairy farmer. According to Ursely Kempe, Elizabeth Bennet has a hungry ferret familiar laying over a pot in her house, and according to Kempe's own familiar, Tyffyn, she had two familiars: one was a "blacke Dogge, and the other redde like a Lyon, and that their names were Suckin and Lyerd." Kempe later accused Bennet of sending her spirit "Suckin to plague one Willingall (to death), William Willes' wife (who lingered for years) and sending her "spirite

Lyerd to plague Fortunes wife and his chylde" and Bonners' wife "to plague her" in the knee. Bonnet confirmed that his wife and Bennet had been Elizabeth Bennet "were lovers and familiar friends, and did accompanie much together."

However, there appeared to be a falling out between the women and Mrs. Bonnet experienced a lameness in her knee, and later after speaking with and kissing Bennet found "her upper Lippe swelled & was very bigge, and her eyes much sunked into her head, and shee hath lien sithence in a very strange case." Bennet's own confession came from behind a veil of tears. She had been neighbours with William Byet and his wife, and live peacefully so for a year. However, they eventually began to argue. "Byet calling her oftentimes olde trot and olde witche, and did banne and curse this examinat and her Cattell, to the which this examinat saith, that shee called him knave saying, winde it up Byet, for it will light upon your selfe." Following this altercation, Bennet admits that two of Byet's cattle died, and a third dropped to the ground where he began to beat it to death. Beating animals was common practice in Byet's home; his wife beat Bennet's swine "several times with greate Gybets, and did at another time thrust a pitchforke through the side of one of this examinats swine." Bennet explains her malefic compact as happening only two years prior (1580) and taking place as she went through the many long steps needed to make bread. Suckin grabbed her by the coat as she was coming from the mill and would not release her for over two hours until she "prayed devoutly to Almightye God to deliver her from it: at which time the spirite did depart from her." He returning closer to her home, he held her fast again, until she again prayed and as released. Within hours, Suckin appeared again, once by the well where she was presumably collecting water and once as she was shifting her "meale" and was again exorcised. The next day as Bennet kneaded her bread, Suckin returned with the spirit Lyerd; they grew bold, and scolded her for being "so snappish" but were again exorcised. They returned again as she made the fire and were again made to depart. They returned again as she stoked the fire and, growing increasingly bold, grabbed her leg, but were exorcised. Lyerd and Suckin came one final time as Bennet was stroking the fire in her oven. They seized her by the hips and said, "seeing thou wilt not be ruled, thou shalt have a cause, & would have thrust this examinat into ye burning Oven." Bennet struggled and used the fire fork as a wedge to keep her out of the oven, or to beat off the spirits, but she would suffer burns up and down her arms. They would come to her two more times while she was in a barn, once while milking, and again she would exorcise them. It was not until the falling Elizabeth Bennett fell out with William Byet, however, that the spirits would act against others.

Bennet claims that "shee caused Lyard in ye likeness of a Lion to goe & to plague the saide Byets beastes unto death, but that "the spirit called, Suckin," reported to her that he had, of his own accord, "plagued y^e said Byets wife to the death." She did however send "Suckin, to goe and plague the sayde Willyam Byette where that woulde: The which the sayd spyrite did," because Byet had "abused her, in calling her olde trot, old whore, and other lewde speeches." Bennett supposes that Suckin and Lyerd, which she fed with milk and housed in an earthen pot lined with wool were sent by Joan Turner after Bennet "had denyed the sayde Mother Turner of mylke." Bennet is held, indicted, and tried for the malefic murder of Mrs. Byet and "acknowledges" the felony. She is condemned to be hanged in 1582.

Alice Hunt

Ales Hunt from St. Osyth in the county of Essex, mother or stepmother of Febey Hunt, sister of Margery Sammon, and the daughter of Widow Barnes. According to her daughter, Hunt keeps two familiars, Jack and Robbin, next to her bed in an earthen pot with woll. She feeds them "with milke out of a blacke trening dish," and sent them at least once to Hayward of Frowicke. Urlsey Kempe picks up this narrative and suggests that "shee asked Tyffin her white spirite, what Hunts wives spirite had done: And then it told this examine, that it had killed Heywarde of Frowicke six beastes which were lately dressed of the gargette. And sayeth, that her sayde spirite told her, that Hunt's wives spirite had a droppe of her blood for a reward: but shee sayeth, that shee asked not her spirite upon what place of her body it was." Kempe appears again in Hunt's narrative, claiming that Hunt and her mother, the Widow Barnes, had bewitched Elizabeth Durrant after her father, Henry, a local butcher, denied them pork. At first, Hunt denies all charges against her. Brian Darcy claims that Hunt, falling on her knees and with tears streaming down her face, confessed to having had Jack and Robbin only six days before she was examined. The two spirits allegedly told her that "the sayde Ursley Kempe woulde bewray her this Examine, and willed her therefore to shift for her selfe. And so they went from her, and sithence this Examine saith shee saw them not." She also informed against her sister, claiming she too kept familiars. Hunt is indicted on the charges of bewitching six of William Hayward's cows to death and bewitching Elizabeth Durrant to death. She pleads not guilty and is found not guilty on both charges.

Febey Hunt (daughter of Ales Hunt)

A eight-year-old girl from St. Osyth in the county of Essex, daughter to Ales Hunt, niece to Margery Sammon, and granddaughter to Widow Barnes. Despite the fact that her mother allegedly "charged her not to tell anything," Febey Hunt testifies that Ales Hunt had two familiars, described as "two little things like horses, the one white, the other blacke, the which shee kept in a little low earthen pot with woll, colour white and black" placed by her bedside. Febey claims her mother "feed them with milke out of a blacke trening dishe." She also claims her mother sent her familiars to "Hayward of Frowicke, but to what end shee cannot tell, and shee being asked howe she knew the same, saieth, that shee hard her mother bid them to go."

Alice Newman

Ales Newman is from St. Osyth in the county of Essex who is accused of bewitching at least four people: Thorlow's wife (on the knee), John Stratton's wife (on the back -- to her death), Letherdalls' child, Johnson (the tax / alms collector) and his wife (unto the death), Butler (who languished still in pain), the "late Lorde Darcey, (whereof he dyed)", and her "own, her husband, William Newman. (Ales) Newman confessed nothing herself and was accused of being obstinate. She is condemned but remanded. She is found guilty and remanded to prison. As of August 2nd 1582, she is still imprisoned, along with Cecily Sellis, Ellen Southern, and Agnes/Annis Glascock at Colchester Goal.

Margery Sammon (Barnes)

Margery Sammon is from St. Osyth in the county of Essex, sister to Alice Hunt, and daughter of Mother Barnes. She allegedly keeps two familiars which appear in the form of toads by the names of Tom and Robbyn. She also informs against Joan Pechey.

Joan Pechey

Joan Pechey is a woman who lived in St. Osyth, in the county of Essex for at least eleven years and who claims to be somewhere above sixty years old before and the mother of Phillip Barrenger. Widow Barnes allegedly describe her, via her daughter Margerie Sammons, as "skilfull and cunning in witcherie," and a woman who could both do "as much as the said mother Barnes," or "any other in this towne of St. Osees."

She allegedly bewitched Johnson, the Collector and distributor of alms after her gave her "bread was to hard baked for her," she being an old woman, presumably should have received a softer loaf and the harder bread should have been given to "a gyrle or another, and not to her." She denies any involvement in witchcraft and denies Mother Barnes had any either. She also denies the accusations of incest between herself and her twenty-three-year-old son, Phillip Barrenger, who confessed that "manye times and of late hee hath layne in naked bed with his owne mother, being willed and commaunded so to doe of her." Although Margarey Sammon allegedly sent her familiars (formerly her mother's two familiars) Tom and Robbyn skipping and leaping off to Pechey's home, and Ales Hunt claimed that she had heard Pechey scolding her spirits, saying "yea are you so sawsie? are yee so bolde? you were not best to bee so bolde with mee: For if you will not bee ruled, you shall have Symonds sause, yea saide the saide Ioan, I perceive if I doe give you an inch, you will take an ells," Pechey likewise denied these charges. She claimed she indeed had pets, a kitten and a dog, but no "Puppettes, Spyrites or Maumettes." Although she was "committed to prison for suspicion of felony and upon inquisition," she was released by proclamation.

Agnes Glascock

A woman presumably from Little Clacton who appears to have be named as a witch during the March 1582 Assize at Chelmsford as the woman who initiated Cecily Sellis into witchcraft. Sellis confirmed that she knew Mother Tredsall, but denied ever claiming that Tredsall was a witch or that she had made her one. This short reference is the only reference to Mother Tredsall in the pamphlet; she does not appear in the records of the Assize.

A woman from St. Osyth in the county of Essex, the wife of John Glascocke and the sister of Edward Wood. Accusations against Glascocke appear to come from a few sources; one of her former tenants or roommates, according to Michael the shoemaker, reported that Glascocke was "a naughtie woman, and a dealer in witchcrafte," and another person named Sparrow also living with Glascocke complained of "a strange noise or rumbling since Christmas." However, most of the accusations against her come courtesy of Ursley Kempe. Kempe notes that the same shoemaker said Glascocke "had bewitched his Chylde, whereof it dyed," an accusation confirmed by Kempe's familiar Tyffin. Tyffin also evidently claimed that Glascock had killed Charity Page, described as "the Base childe that Page and his wife have in keeping." And Kempe herself accused Glacocke of bewitching Fortune's child. Glascocke represents herself as a victim of paranormal events and witchcraft, as opposed to a perpetrator of them. She suggests that when she was twenty years old, that she had been "haunted



by" (bewitched or forspoken by) Mrs. Arnold, who "was accompted a witch' and who she suspected of causing "certain ledde~ weights and great stones were cast into the house, and divers strange noyses of rumblings hearde" as a way to scare Glascocke's husband.

Glascocke suggests that she was also "consumed by the space of two or three yeares," by "strange aches in her bones, and otherwise." She sought the help of man named Herring (named to be a Cawker [or a person who waterproofs a ship]) who gave her a poultice, in the form of a "lynnen bagge of the breadth of a groate, full of small thinges like seedes, and willed her to put the same where her payne was most, the which shee proved by sewing it uppon her garmente, neare the place where her greefe was." She is searched by Annis Letherdall and Margaret Sympson did "affyrme uppon their credites, that upon the left side of the thighe of this Examinee, there be some spots, and upon the left shoulder likewise one or two Which spottes bee like the sucked spots, that Ursley Kempe hath uppon her bodie." Glascocke is actually charged with bewitching Charity Page, Abraham Hedg, and Martha Stevens. She is condemned but remanded. She is found guilty and remanded to prison. As of August 2, 1582, she is still imprisoned, along with Ales Newman, Ellen Southern, and Cecily Sellis at Colchester Goal.

Cicely Celles.

A woman from Little Clacton, the wife of Henry Sellis, and the mother of Henry Sellis Jr., John Sellis, and at least one daughter. Sellis is accused of conspiring with Ales Newman (to commit arson against Richard) and Mary Barker (to bewitch Mary Death) and a number of other crimes by her neighbors and by her own sons. Her sons, John and Henry both alleged that she had familiars which she pampered, feeding them with milk and tucking them into sleep on a bed of wool, nestled into the roots of a crab apple tree. They also suggest that she allowed or did not prevent at least one of these familiars from attacking her own son John; he was plagued, they attested, by the black male familiar named Hercules, and had an imperfect toe as proof of the assault. Relations became strained inside her family as a result, but they also became strained outside of her family and between her family and her neighbor Richard Rosse's family. Following the death of two of his plow horses, which died while her husband worked them, Rosse began to suspect the Sellis family of witchcraft. This suspicion was supported by two verbal altercations.

One where Sellis used "hard words" against Richard, when their negotiation over the cost of malt when sour, and one where, in a "great anger," Cecily have his wife "lewd speeches," after Mrs. Rosse beat Sellis' cattle out of her pasture.

Although Rosse could not confirm the Sellis' involvement in the burning of his barn, he did hear the "youngest sonne of the saide Henrie and Cisley, should say heere is a goodly deal of corn, and a man unknowne shoulde answere there was the diuell store." Cecily and Henry Sellis are tried and found guilty of this arson. Ales Mansfield, however, did confirm that Cecily Sellis was involved in that arson. She suggested that her own imps implored that they should be allowed to "goe unto little Clapton to Celles, saying, they woulde burn Barnes, and also kill Cattell." They were allegedly "fedde at Celles house by her all ye time they were away," and fed with Mansfield's beer and blood when they returned. It was property damage for which Sellis was in the most trouble, however. Sellis was implicated in the causing the Joan and Robert Smith's child to die, John Death to die, and Mary Death to sicken. The death of the Smith child is the most tenuous accusation, Joan herself seems to be relating the narrative reluctantly, suggesting that she would not accuse the Sellis' over overs-peaking her child, but would pray God forgive them if they had. In the case of the Death family, Cecily Sellis plays a starring role. The death of four-year-old John Death (circa 1580) is recorded as happening following and disagreement between Mrs. Death and Cecily Sellis over who would act as wet nurse to George Battell's infant. His death is recorded as one aspect in a series of tragedies: John was well and then he was dead. However, the narrative weight given to the swine which had been well before the leap and skipped to death, and the weight given to the fat calf who had been well and then was dead, suggests that John's death was one of a series of debilitating attacks against the Death family; its importance is illustrated legally, as opposed to textually; it is for this death that Cecily is found guilty and remanded. The narrative which follows Mary Death's illness, however, is both long and complicated; it helps that she is old enough to tell some of the tale herself and that it drags on long enough to create some narrative tension. Mary becomes, for all intents and purposes, a hysterical demoniac; suffering in an incurable "most pitious" condition. Only after Thomas Death visits a cunning man who presumably forces Cecily Sellis and Mary Barker to appear before her (as corporeal beings, or as apparitions) is she cured. For her own part, Sellis denies all charges against her, including the allegation that she accused Mother Tredsall of making her a witch. She is searched as one, however, and "upon her body many spots very suspitious [were seen], and the said Margaret [Simpson] saith, that they bee much like the sucked spots, that shee hath seene upon the body of Ursley Kempe and severall other[s]." She is found guilty of her crimes and remanded. She is found guilty and remanded to prison. As of August 2, 1582, she is still imprisoned, along with Ales Newman, Ellen Southern, and Agnes / Annis Glascock, at Colchester Goal.

Joan Turner

St. Osyth Witches : A witch hunt that swept through a remote coastal area of Essex, England, in 1582 brought indictments against fourteen women. Despite lurid and flimsy testimony of the kind that quickly led to convictions and executions elsewhere, all but two of the women went free. Joan Turner was charged with bewitchment by over-looking, and did spend a year in prison.

Elizabeth Ewastace

Elizabeth Ewastace is a fifty-four-year-old woman from Thorpe (now Thorpe-le-Soken) in the county of St. Osyth and mother of Margaret Ewastace. Elizabeth Ewastace is accused of bewitching Robert Sannuet so that "his mouth was drawn awrye, well neere uppe to the upper parte of his cheeke," after he "used threatening speeches" on her daughter Margaret, who was working as his servant at the time (circa 1567). This was not the only crime she was accused of committing against Sannuet, however. She also went after his family and his livelihood. She allegedly bewitched his wife, so that she developed a "most strange sicknes, and was delivered of childe, which within short time after dyed," a crime which found its origins in the bewitchment of his brother, Thomas Crosse, Felice Oakely's late husband. Crosse originally blamed his illness on Margaret Ewastace, and after Sannuet swore he'd be avenged on her, if it were true, Elizabeth allegedly bewitched Sannuet's wife and his livestock. Crosse, who before (circa 1579) was "verye sickly, and at tymes was without any remembrance" soon "pyned," and who "coude neyther see, heare, nor speake, and his face all to bee scratched" and "woulde alwayes crye out upon the sayde Elizabeth even unto his dying day." She was accused of having "iii. Impes or spirits, of coulour white, grey and black," which she denied, and she also denied being in any co-conspiracy with Ales Newman.

Anis Herd

Annis Herd is a woman from Little Oakely in the county of Essex and mother to Annis Dowsing and at least one son, Annis Heard is, according to Andrew West, "ill thought of for witchcraft" and described by Mrs. Harrison as a "light woman, and a common harlot." Head is a mother or at least one child; Bennet Lane references "the girl of the said Annis Herds," speaking to her mother. Having been accused of being a witch, Annis Heard allegedly spoke to John Wade and "prayed him to be a meanes to help her, that she might answeere the same when the dayes were longer." Wade suggested that he could not help her, and but suggested that she see that "Register dwelt at Colchester, saying, it must be hee that therein may pleasure thee.

Wade recounted that since the investigation into Heard began "he hath had not so fewe as twentie sheepe and lambes that have died, and e lame and like to die: & hee saith, that hee hath lost of his beasts & other cattell, which have dyed in a strange sort." Wade was not the only one to speak against Herd, nor was he the only one to suffer. Five more households would speak out against Herd. Two of Thomas Cartwrite's cows died after he annoyed Heard by moving her makeshift road repair; Bennet Lane (William Lane's wife) lost the ability to spin after demanding a dish back and lost the ability to make cream after demanding two pence back from Herd; Andrew West, having rescinded on a deal to give her a pig, found one of his went mad; having accused her of having an "unhappie tongue," his wife could not brew; Edmond Osborne and his wife also lost the ability to brew, after calling in a loan "iii. d. the which shee owed her for a pecke of Aples."

Richard Harrison's loss, however, was the most heart wrenching. While he was in London, his wife accused Herd of stealing duckling from their nest underneath a cherry tree. Mrs. Harrison did not only lose her ducklings, however. Having gone to Herd to "rate" and "chide" her, Mrs. Harrison soon grew ill, convinced Herd had bewitched her. Within two months, she implored to her husband "I pray you as ever there was love betweene us, (as I hope there hath been for I have v. pretie children by you I thanke God) seeke some remedie for me against yonder wicked beast (meaning the saide Annis Herd). And if you will not I will complaine to my father, and I thinke he will see some remedie for me, for (said she) if I have no remedie, she will utterly consume me." Herd was not charged for Harrison's bewitchment, nor does she even acknowledge it in her confession, although she acknowledges the other charges against her. Despite all the hoolpa, the myriad of witnesses who testify against her (or about strange occurrences which appear to gesture towards her), and her inclusion amongst the "witches" in the March 29, 1582 Assize record, Herd is only indicted on one charge, that of having "bewitched a cow, ten sheep and ten lambs worth four, belonging to John Wade, to his great damage." She pleads not guilty, is found not guilty. Therefore acquitted.

Margaret Grevell and Alice Mansfield

Margaret Grevell is a fifty-five-year-old woman from Thorpe in the county of Essex who, according to Alice Mansfield, shares four feline familiars with her for seven years: Robin, Jack, William, Puppet (alias Mamet). Again according to Mansfield, Grevell "caused her impes to destroy several brewinges of beere," belonging to Reade and Carter (Carter likewise testified against Grevell on this charge) a number of "batches of bread." Nicholas Stickland

accuses her of preventing his wife's butter from churning and causing the untimely demise of a calf. Although Grevell is accused (again by Mansfield) of the murder of Elizabeth Ewstace's husband, she is indicted for the malefic murder of Robert Cheston. She is searched as a witch, but the witch-searchers "say that they cannot judge her to have any sucked spots upon her body." She is found not guilty of causing Cheston's death, and acquitted.

Anne Swallow

Sister of Alice Hunt from St. Osyth and one of those charged. She was imprisoned but later released.

St. Osyth Prison.



The area of Basildon Borough.



A clean sheet.

Anne Buvers of Nevendon had an illegitimate child by William Trotter of Billericay and in December 1529 she was ordered at the archdeacons court "to stand in Chealimysforde market upon Fridaye nexte comings with a sheete and whyet rodde in her hand and confess he her failte"

The area we now think of as Basildon Borough was not immune from the witch craze that swept across Europe.

During 1574 Dunton resident Anne Brewer was accused of witchcraft. Unfortunately, there are no details of what the accusation was made for or what the outcome was.

In 1575 John Howe of Nevendon was ordered at the Archdeacons Court "to confess in the sheet and likewise to stand in the market at Billericay," he also was to keep the woman Agnes Whode and the child".

At the Trinity Session of the Assizes in 1582, Agnes Bryant, who sometimes lived in Great Burstead and sometimes in Billericay, was accused of witchcraft. Her formal accusation was that she bewitched 'twenty brewinges of beere' belonging to Gabriel Bee, by reason of which the beer 'wolde not work and sporge.' She pleaded not guilty, but was found guilty. Her punishment is not recorded. At the same Assizes in 1582, Agnes Bryant was accused of two other witchcraft offences. On 20th March 1482 at Great Burstead, she was said to have bewitched a gelding belonging to John



Atkynson, which died on the 29th of the same month. This time she was found not guilty, but she was found guilty of the more serious charge of bewitching Daniel Fynche at Great Burstead on 23rd April 1582, whereof he died on the following 5th May and so Agnes must have suffered the penalty of hanging.

In 1587 Margaret Paine had to stand in a 'white sheet' in Pitsea Church to do penance for immorality, she also had to stand in Billericay Market.

In 1589 Thomas Corde of Langdon Hills was also accused. Joan Bell of Fobbing was accused in 1592. The formal accusation being that she 'was not receiving communion' and thereby of being a witch. There was also a witch at South Hanningfield in 1583 and Stock had two reputed witches. Elizabeth Boxworth of Stock was suspected of witchcraft and in 1577 Agnes Sawen of the same village, "did bewitch and enchant Christopher Veele, son of Roger Veele of Stock, who became lame in both feet, his feet being curved and one foot was wasted within. Agnes Sawen was imprisoned in the Jail at Colchester Castle, which was then for from a comfortable lodging!

Margaret Prentize of Little Burstead was accused in 1605. In 1610 John Skaife was also accused of Witchcraft. If the clock could be turned back nearly 400 years to May the first 1612, the little church of St Marys, Dunton on the western boundary of Basildon would be seen filled with parishioners, who had assembled to hear Thomas Allum publicly confess that he had wilfully slandered Richard Steward and Ann Mason, whom he had accused of acting immorally in a cornfield at harvest time. He craved pardon at the hands of Almighty God and prayed forgiveness of Richard and Ann and of the grace of God to amend his ways and concluded "I will that this public act of mine to stand record and witness against me."

The proceedings were duly recorded by the rector, William Kettle, on the last page of the first parish register. The rector and three witnesses signed the confession, and three other witnesses made their marks.

Amongst them being William Mason, Ann's husband. Public confession in the 16th and 17th centuries was considered good for the soul, and there were several records of people having the shameful experience of standing in a white sheet in the markets of Billericay and Chelmsford.

This could be John Skates (John Skaife in 1610 above), who was a weaver in Billericay and went before the assizes in 1616. During April 1616 accusations of Witchcraft were made by Richard Tarling against John Skates, a weaver in Billericay. His case was heard before the Assizes, but it is not known what the outcome was. It is thought that Skates died in prison.

Mary Hurst, a spinster of Nevendon, was accused of bewitching William Hodge on 24 May 1653. She was found guilty, 'convicted of felony by witchcraft' and remanded in gaol until 'she shall be delivered by due course of law'. The last person executed for witchcraft in England was Mary Hurst in 1716, when she was hanged along with her daughter. Scotland executed its last witch twenty years later. Law was passed in 1735 making it illegal for anyone in Great Britain to accuse another of witchcraft.

The strange case of Sarah Moore from Leigh on Sea.

In 1735 the Witchcraft Act which James VI had passed in 1604 was repealed as most people believed witchcraft to not be possible. But not all would be convinced. There are still stories in our history of supposed witches, even in Essex such as Sarah Moore from Leigh on Sea who lived in the 19th Century. Sarah was a local woman who is said to have lived in a cottage of Victoria Wharf. In appearance, she is said to have been weather-beaten, had a hooked nose and a harelip who made her living sitting by the estuary down in Old Leigh, telling fortunes and selling sailors 'a good wind' for a penny. The latter was a common practice along various coasts. The 'witch' would take a length of string or ribbon and 'tie' the wind into it. The sailor would buy it. Then when out at sea, if they desired wind, they would untie the string. A single knot would loosen a breeze, two would summon a strong wind, and three would unleash a storm.

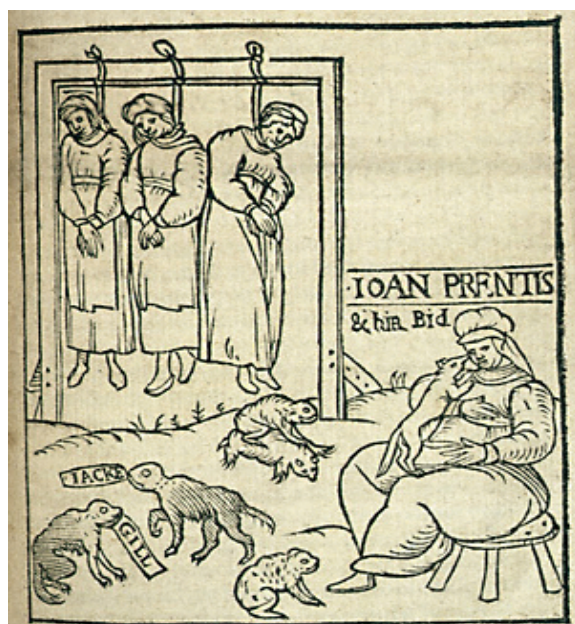
The legend goes that Sarah would confront expectant women in Leigh telling them the sex of their child and that it would have a hare lip. One day a foreign Captain forbade his men from giving her any money, which infuriated Sarah. As the legend goes, when Moore heard about this she flew into a rage and, in revenge, summoned up The Great Storm of the Estuary. When he got further out to sea the wind got stronger, and he got into difficulties. The skipper took action and with an axe cut down his rigging or mast. With the third strike, the storm seemed to cease. When the beleaguered crew got the wounded ship back to Belle Wharf, they saw, there on the floor the dead body of Sarah Moore, three axe wounds across her corpse. A woman named Sarah Moore did exist and there were rumours of her being a Witch, but they were just that.

Today there are many legends and stories around witches in Essex. Tales of ghosts coming back from the grave to avenge their wrongs or just to visit us. Canewdon has such folklore behind it that every Halloween it is said the police have to rope the Church off to stop people going there and seeing if the story is the story. There are many

version, but all involve walking or running around the church tower. If you walk around it at midnight, you will be forced to dance with witched, if you run around it backwards three times you will see a ghost at the top of the tower if you run three times anti-clockwise a portal will send you back in time. On Halloween if you walk around it seven times you will see a witch, thirteen times, you will become invisible, and anti-clockwise on Halloween if you run around it the devil will appear. A very supernatural site it seems.

It is also said that there will always be six witches in Canewdown, three of silk and three of cotton and that whenever a stone falls from the church tower a witch has died but another will always take her place. Hopkins never visited Canewdon; did he feel it was not worth the visit? Was it too far to travel or was he afraid of the coven that is said to always live there? Who knows? Even Hopkins does not escape the accusatory finger of being a witch. William Andrews, a 19th-century writer stated in *Bygone Essex* that in 1647, Hopkins was accused of being in league with the devil himself, and the Devils book he had obtained by sorcery. He was then swum in Mistley Pond by an angry mob where he either drowned or floated and hung. A suitable fate for such a man it seems. But no rerecord of this exists, what does exist is a record in Mistley Church in 1647 of his burial and a statement by Stearne that "he died peacefully at Manningtree, after a long sickness of a consumption, as many of his generations had done before him, without any trouble of conscience for what he had done, as was falsely reported of him."

Although the Witch-hunts in England began to die down after Hopkins' death across the pond in America, they were beginning to boil over. In 1692, Essex County the infamous Salem Witch trials had just begun. Head over to the following link to my sister site across the pond to find out the interesting truth about witches in America:



Essex witches (act. 1566–1589) - woodcut, 1589

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Essex witches (*act.* 1566–1589), are known from four surviving pamphlets published between 1566 and 1589 describing the lives, and in some cases deaths, of one man and thirty women who were accused of witchcraft in Essex and prosecuted under the *Witchcraft Act* of 1563. In this period witchcraft was punishable by hanging if a witch was convicted of killing a person, or if he or she committed a second witchcraft offence of any kind. Witches were not burnt in England, and lesser witchcraft offences were punished by imprisonment and the pillory. Because survivals of early modern Essex trial records are among the most numerous in England, and because of the higher-than-average number of contemporary pamphlets published on Essex cases, the county's witchcraft prosecutions have received more attention than those of most other areas and statistical analysis as well as individual biography is possible.

Documents and Pamphlets.

The Examination and Confession of Certain Witches at Chelmsford in the County of Essex,
before the Queen Majesty's Judges,
the 26th day of July Anno 1566
(London, 1566).

A summary of the early witchcraft trials 1566 – 1579.

Over the period covered by the pamphlets some 430 people were prosecuted for witchcraft offences in the home counties, which formed the home circuit for judicial purposes, with a peak between 1580 and 1589. Essex, one of these five counties, accounted for nearly 60 per cent of home circuit prosecutions for witchcraft and between 1570 and 1609 fifty-three Essex witches were hanged as against a total of sixty-four executions across all the home counties. This was a high proportion, even allowing for the fact that only about a quarter of the total indicted were actually found guilty and hanged. Accusations were most common in eastern and central Essex, although local episodes of witch accusation could occur anywhere. Many Essex people clearly believed strongly in witchcraft as a threat to them, as a source of healing or divining magic, or as a power which they themselves had come to possess. Women were particularly likely to be accused, often of inheriting their powers or sharing them with other female family members or friends (nearly 90 per cent of all indicted Essex witches were women), and many confessed the accusations to be true. Some may have been convinced that they could and did curse their neighbours, others said they practised only healing magic, while a third group denied all involvement. Some

people seem likely—from the pattern of their narratives—to have invented confessions and denials out of mixed motives including, sometimes, a belief that producing any kind of coherent narrative would lead to clemency.

Their accusers were equally likely to create an unnaturally neat fiction about the witches out of a combination of incoherent events and unverifiable beliefs about their lives. It is therefore hard to decide, or to find a reliable methodology for assessing, which elements of their stories represent factual and verifiable life events, and which are retrospective rationalizations based on fantasy or fiction confabulated under pressure. Both these types of experience represent, however, a biographical reality for the pamphleteers who immortalized these Essex people. All the villagers are shown in the pamphlets as ordinary people who have been tempted into the felony of maleficent witchcraft for a variety of reasons. In 1566 Elizabeth Frauncis (c. 1529–1579), from Hatfield Peverel

Her story was printed in *The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex (1566)*. It suggests that Elizabeth Frauncis, as described earlier, felt guilty about sexual events in her younger life, and that, when interrogated on suspicion of witchcraft, she confessed those matters which were on her conscience, rather than the expected punishable acts of harmful magic against neighbours. Equally, the fact that one of her questioners was a churchman may mean that the focus on sin rather than crime in Frauncis's story was his rather than exclusively hers. Assize records suggest that she was not formally charged with any of the matters she confessed—the trial at Chelmsford concentrated on the bewitchment of a child, to which Frauncis pleaded guilty. She was sentenced in July to a year's imprisonment, with four pillory appearances, as the penalty for a first, non-fatal offence.

In August 1572 Frauncis was tried again as a witch, for what is rightly described in the assize records as her second offence. However, the formal accusation had to be redrafted: when tried in March 1573 for the same offence and found guilty she escaped death (the penalty for a second offence) and was imprisoned and pilloried again (the penalty for a first offence). In April 1579, however, her luck ran out and she was tried, convicted, and hanged for killing a neighbour, Alice Poole, by witchcraft.

She pleaded not guilty, but had confessed to the offence in a pre-trial examination which appears in the second Essex pamphlet *A detection of damnable driftes practized by three [actually four] witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex (1579)*. Frauncis said that she killed Poole, with the help of a dog spirit, because Poole refused to give her yeast—a far more petty motivation than the grand lusts of her first confession thirteen years before.

Agnes Waterhouse (1501/2–1566), Frauncis's neighbour and probably her sister, confessed far more conventional witchcraft offences in 1566 than she did. In July 1566 Waterhouse pleaded guilty in court to killing William Fynee (no mention was made of the more sensational murder of her husband, or the confessed property offences) and she was hanged at Chelmsford on 29 July. She said at her death that she had been a witch for fifteen years, and added that she had always prayed in Latin. The pamphlet emphasized the illegality and ungodliness of this activity, suggesting again the influence of churchmen on some of the confessions of witches, and the thin lines between residual Catholicism, deliberate recusancy, and the practice of secret magical rites with a perceived Satanic tint.

The third witch to be tried at Chelmsford in July 1566 was Joan Waterhouse (b. 1547/8), Agnes daughter. She began her pre-trial examination by denying any knowledge of witchcraft, although she said that her mother had attempted to teach her 'this art'. However, shortly afterwards she began to confess that she had tried out the familiar spirit, Satan, in her mother's absence, and used him to punish a neighbour's child, Agnes Browne, for uncharitable acts towards her. Browne is shown in *The Examination and Confession* as giving sensational evidence against both Joan and Agnes Waterhouse, and it seems likely that her stories played a large part in bringing both women to trial, along with Frauncis. She said that she had been 'haunted' by a black dog with an ape's face which had asked for butter, played in the milkhouse, and finally attempted to kill her with a knife which he said belonged to Agnes Waterhouse. Browne was counselled by a clergyman during her alleged experiences, rather as if she were a possession victim, and she had the backing of the pamphlet which treated her as a star witness. However, Joan Waterhouse was acquitted and Browne's credibility in court must therefore be in doubt. Other felonies and witchcraft cases at the 1566 summer assizes went unreported.

Witchcraft was usually thought to have occurred where disputes arose between victim and suspect, followed by misfortune. The second Essex pamphlet illustrates this well. It contains accusations against four women, Elizabeth Frauncis and three others. The first was Elleine Smith (d. 1579), of Maldon, tried and hanged at Chelmsford in April 1579 for killing a child. She had quarrelled with a number of people, including her stepfather, John Chaundeler, when he asked her for money which her mother had given her. Smith's mother, Alice Chaundeler, had been executed for murder by witchcraft in 1574 and her daughter was probably assumed to have inherited her witchcraft as well as her money, especially since John Chaundeler died strangely after their quarrel.

Smith was also believed to have hit the child who died and sent a dog spirit to attack her, and to have attacked with a toad spirit a neighbour who refused charity to her son. Her son, as was often the case, also accused his mother of keeping familiar spirits. Margery Staunton of Wimbish, described in the same pamphlet, was refused charity by nine households and was seen to resent this—after which misfortune overtook the households. She escaped punishment because her indictment was wrongly drafted. Finally, Alice Nokes of Lambourne allegedly injured a man who stole gloves from her daughter, and attacked a horse because the ploughman would not speak to her. She was hanged for murder by witchcraft, an accusation not mentioned in the pamphlet.

Late witchcraft trials 1579 – 1589.

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And so to Salem ...

The Salem witch trials occurred in colonial Massachusetts between 1692 and 1693. More than 200 people were accused of practicing witchcraft, the Devil's magic, and twenty were executed. Eventually, the colony admitted the trials were a mistake and compensated the families of those convicted. Since then, the story of the trials has become synonymous with paranoia and injustice, and it continues to beguile the popular imagination more than 300 years later.

Following the trials and executions, many involved, like judge Samuel Sewall, publicly confessed error and guilt. On January 14, 1697, the General Court ordered a day of fasting and soul-searching for the tragedy of Salem. In 1702, the court declared the trials unlawful. And in 1711, the colony passed a bill restoring the rights and good names of those accused and granted £600 restitution to their heirs. However, it was not until 1957, more than 250 years later, that Massachusetts formally apologized for the events of 1692.



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