

The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England*

Abstract

Historians agree that most early modern witches were women. A question rarely asked, though, is how any men came to be accused at all, given the strong association of women and witchcraft in popular folklore and learned demonology. This article examines the prosecution for witchcraft of a Kentish farmer in 1617, and argues that an integrated qualitative context of conflict and belief is essential for understanding this and other accusations. The aim is not, however, to offer yet another overarching explanation for the rise of witchcraft prosecutions, but rather to demonstrate how witchcraft can open windows on early modern mentalities.

Seeing as both [sexes] are subject to the State of damnation, so both are liable to Satans snares.

(Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of Witch-Craft* (1617), pp. 180–1)

In 1617, the same year as the Reverend Thomas Cooper's treatise appeared in the London bookshops, a day's ride away at New Romney in the marshlands of south-eastern Kent Susan Barber and Margaret Holton also had witchcraft on their minds.¹ The two women, the wives of a carpenter and a farmer respectively, and both in their mid-thirties, claimed to have suffered disturbing experiences and misfortunes in recent years. It was Barber's contention, for example, that diabolical spirits had tried to abduct her newborn baby, while Holton complained that her young son had perished in inexplicable circumstances and that periodically she found her laundry spattered with blood. Additionally, both women swore that on numerous occasions in the night they had been terrified by strange noises. The specific configuration of circumstances in this case was, of course, unique; yet in their

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¹ Thomas Cooper was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, receiving his B.A. in 1590, M.A. in 1593 and B.D. in 1600. He held livings in Cheshire and Coventry, and spent his later years preaching in London. Apart from witchcraft, he also published on the threat of Catholicism, deliverance from Gunpowder Treason, and the heinousness of murder (*Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. 'Cooper, Thomas'). *The Mystery of Witch-Craft* was registered 17 June 1616, but the date of printing was 1617 (*A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640 A.D.*, ed. E. Arber (5 vols., 1875–94), iii. 272b).

thinking and responses Barber and Holton had much in common with many other early modern people who believed themselves the victims of witchcraft. In the first place, they were convinced they knew who was responsible for their misfortunes: a reputed witch living locally with whom both women had experienced difficult relations. Secondly, they came forward as witnesses in the legal prosecution of their supposed tormenter.²

Recent research has extended the scope of female involvement in English witchcraft prosecutions beyond the role of the persecuted scapegoat.³ We now know that many ordinary women like Barber and Holton were eager participants in pre-trial procedure, sometimes acting in conjunction with men, but at other times seizing the initiative to further disputes within more exclusively female spheres.⁴ Nor did this female autonomy belong exclusively to witnesses. Many women *accused* of witchcraft, instead of passively accepting charges against them, vigorously defended their reputations informally and at law;⁵ conversely, others confessed in the belief that they could indeed harness supernatural forces to further their own ambitions.⁶ Overall, these findings challenge certain assumptions about the so-called European 'witch-craze'. Most prominently, explanations where misogyny provided the *primum mobile* of accusations no longer seem adequate,⁷ despite

² Centre for Kentish Studies (hereafter C.K.S.), New Romney borough and liberty records, borough quarter sessions, NR/JQp 1/30 fos. 5–7, examinations of Susan Barber and Margaret Holton, 30 Apr. 1617. Although, archivally, this file is unfoliated, reference is made to the original foliation of the depositions. For the classic exposition of interpersonal relations between witches and accusers, see K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in 16th- and 17th-Century England* (1971), chs. xvi–xvii. For some anthropological parallels which influenced Thomas, see M. Douglas, 'Introduction: thirty years after *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic*', in *Witchcraft Confessions and Accusations*, ed. M. Douglas (1970), pp. xiii–xxvi.

³ For a concise summary, see J. Barry, 'Introduction: Keith Thomas and the problem of witchcraft', in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. J. Barry, M. Hester and G. Roberts (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 36–41.

⁴ J. Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550–1750* (1996), ch. vii (see also the same author's 'Witchcraft and women in 17th-century England: some Northern evidence', *Continuity and Change*, vi (1991), 179–99, and 'Women, witchcraft and the legal process', in *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England*, ed. J. Kermode and G. Walter (1994), pp. 106–24); C. Holmes, 'Women: witnesses and witches', *Past and Present*, cxi (Aug. 1993), 45–78; D. Harley, 'Historians as demonologists: the myth of the midwife-witch', *Jour. Soc. Hist. of Medicine*, iii (1990), 1–26. For European parallels, see: L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (1994), pp. 199–225; R. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: the Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (1996), pp. 265–71.

⁵ See M. Gaskill, 'Attitudes to crime in early modern England, with special reference to witchcraft, coining and murder' (unpublished University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1994), pp. 50–1 (to be published by Cambridge University Press as *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*); P. Rushton, 'Women, witchcraft and slander in early modern England: cases from the church courts of Durham, 1560–1675', *Northern Hist.*, xviii (1982), 116–32.

⁶ M. Gaskill, 'Witchcraft and power in early modern England: the case of Margaret Moore', in *Women, Crime and the Courts*, pp. 125–45; J. A. Sharpe, *Witchcraft in 17th-Century Yorkshire: Accusations and Counter Measures* (Borthwick Papers, lxxxi, York, 1992), p. 8. For a European example, see: Roper, pp. 1–3, 19–20, 215, 226–48.

⁷ For good discussions of misogyny and gender in relation to European witchcraft, see G. R. Quaife, *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage: the Witch in Early Modern Europe* (1987), chs. v–vi; S. Clark, *Thinking with Demons: the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 112–18, 123–8.

the fact that demonological theory, consistent with mainstream thinking in all areas of society and culture, presupposed the spiritual, mental and moral inferiority of women.⁸ Even the idea of a seventeenth-century 'gender crisis' needs careful handling here.⁹ Prosecution for witchcraft was more than just a strategy by which insecure men subjugated innocent female victims, if only because, in terms of legal redress for injury and loss, more women were actually beneficiaries of witchcraft legislation than were its victims. More importantly, a gender-persecution model underplays the assertiveness and independent thinking displayed by early modern women, both witnesses and witches.¹⁰

These suggestions are consistent with a more nuanced picture of women in early modern society, and a wider range of female roles than was once appreciated.¹¹ Although legally and culturally male privilege dominated

For a recent 'revolutionary feminist' approach which argues that witchcraft prosecutions were an expression of 'eroticised inequality' and 'part of the ongoing dynamic of male domination over women', see M. Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: a Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (1992), pp. 107, 202. See also *eadem*, 'Patriarchal reconstruction and witch hunting', in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 288–306; M. Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1979).

⁸ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 112–15; S. Clark, 'The "gendering" of witchcraft in French demonology: misogyny or polarity?', *French Hist.*, v (1991), 426–37, esp. p. 428. For evidence of this presumption in England, see R. Bernard, *A Guide to Grand Jury Men* (1627), pp. 91–3; M. Casaubon, *A Treatise Concerning Enthusiasme* (1655), p. 119. It was argued that the Devil had first used a woman to betray men at Eden, and had exploited her weakness ever since (see R. Boulton, *The Possibility and Reality of Magic, Sorcery, and Witchcraft Demonstrated* (1722), p. 172).

⁹ For discussion of witchcraft in this context, see D. Underdown, 'The taming of the scold: the enforcement of patriarchal authority in early modern England', in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. A. Fletcher and J. Stevenson (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 116–36, esp. pp. 117, 120–1; S. D. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 182; *eadem*, 'The gendering of popular culture in early modern England', in *Popular Culture in England, c.1500–1850*, ed. T. Harris (Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 57–8, 62–3, esp. p. 63; M. Ingram, "'Scolding women cucked or washed": a crisis in gender relations in early modern England?', in *Women, Crime and the Courts*, pp. 49–50, 53. For European parallels, see Roper, ch. ii; H. C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany, 1562–1684: the Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford, Ca., 1972), pp. 184–6, although it is significant that in the 1620s, at the height of the craze in this region of Germany, more men than women were accused (*ibid.*, p. 179).

¹⁰ Although Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas argue that accusations between women suggest less antagonism between the sexes than might be supposed, more recent historians remind us that many female witnesses 'acted at the behest of their menfolk, as part of a family strategy of accusation', and that 'a patriarchal social structure divides women'. Women thus experienced 'limited subordination' (A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: a Regional and Comparative Study* (1970), p. 55; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 679. The quotations come from A. A. Barstow, *Witchcraze: a New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco, Ca., 1994), p. 10; C. Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion: the Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford, 1984), p. 84; and Amussen, 'Gendering of popular culture', pp. 51, 55 respectively). Women did not, however, need men in order to be hostile towards other women.

¹¹ The following is a small sample of a vast literature: K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660–1900* (Cambridge, 1985), chs. ii, vi; *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, ed. L. Charles and L. Duffin (1985); B. Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in 18th-Century England* (Oxford, 1989), esp. chs. iii–ix; Amussen, *Ordered Society*, ch. iii; P. Higgins, 'The reactions of women, with specific reference to women petitioners', in *Politics, Religion and the English Civil War*, ed. B. Manning (1973), pp. 177–222. On more exceptional, but nonetheless revealing female roles, see A. Laurence, 'Women's work and the English civil war', *History Today*, xlii (1992),

society, in practice patriarchal ideals were tempered by pragmatism, and thus many women emerge from a close examination of evidence as important actors in their own right. Yet it is undeniable that women adopted, or were forced to adopt, male roles and identities to a greater extent than men adopted theirs—an imbalance which is especially striking with regard to witchcraft prosecutions. Even though many women appeared as witnesses, only about twenty per cent of persons accused of *maleficium* were male, and in certain jurisdictions the proportion was even smaller.¹² In other words, however much the actions of women such as Barber and Holton may adjust our understanding of the dynamics of witchcraft accusations, the standard image of the accused remains, to use Carol Karlsen's phrase, 'the Devil in the shape of a woman'.¹³

Even so, surely it matters that even a minority of men were prosecuted, and therefore that witchcraft 'while sex-related, was not sex-specific'.¹⁴ After all, male witches were still individuals who found themselves caught up in the processes of suspicion, accusation and trial—processes underpinned by cultural norms which, it is easy to think, presupposed that maleficent witches were by nature female. If this male minority still seems insignificant, perhaps we should attempt to see witchcraft in a wider perspective, and ask whether *any* type of accusation matters that much anyway. Although one sometimes receives the impression that English villagers were preoccupied with witches,¹⁵ between the passing of the first statute in 1542 and the repeal of the last in 1736 there were fewer than 1,000 executions; a figure around half that is probably closer to the mark. Even if we shift all known and probable

June, pp. 20–5; P. Mack, 'The prophet and her audience: gender and knowledge in the world turned upside down', in *Reviving the English Revolution: Reflections and Elaborations on the work of Christopher Hill*, ed. G. Eley and W. Hunt (1988), pp. 139–52; P. Crawford, 'Women's published writings, 1600–1700', in *Women in English Society, 1500–1800*, ed. M. Prior (1985), pp. 211–82.

¹² Sharpe, 'Witchcraft and women', p. 179; *idem*, 'Women, witchcraft and the legal process', pp. 106–7; M. Gaskill, 'Witchcraft in early modern Kent: stereotypes and the background to accusations', in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 263–4; Macfarlane, p. 160. On the Home Circuit the proportion of male suspects was a mere 10%, and the proportion convicted less than 7% (C. H. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials: the Indictments for Witchcraft from the Records of 1373 Assizes held for the Home Circuit, A.D. 1559–1736* (1929), pp. 102–8, 117–265).

¹³ C. F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York, 1987).

¹⁴ Lerner, p. 87. For historians who have adopted this phrase, see B. P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (1987), pp. 124–5; Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 259–65, esp. p. 262. Despite this, Marianne Hester still maintains that in the early modern period 'witch hunting became sex-specific . . . serving as one means of maintaining and reconstructing male dominance and male power *vis-à-vis* women' (*Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, p. 305).

¹⁵ Alan Macfarlane's assertion that witchcraft accusations were 'a normal part of village life, widespread and regular' and 'of considerable everyday importance' is difficult to substantiate beyond Essex; and even there the assertion that 'villagers were constantly engaged in contending with, or discussing, witches' is dubious (Macfarlane, pp. 30, 57, 113). Nor should the control of witchcraft be seen as 'a central concern of Elizabethan and Jacobean village life' (Hester, p. 160). For a historian who plays down the importance of witchcraft, see M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 97; *idem*, 'From reformation to toleration: popular religious cultures in England, in *Popular Culture*, pp. 106–7.

executions to the key period of prosecution, say 1570–1680, this still only amounts to about between four and nine every year in a country of between three-and-a-half and five million people. Put another way, at a generous estimate perhaps one in every 500,000 English adults was hanged for witchcraft in the early modern period.¹⁶ Indeed, as some historians have pointed out, one of the hardest things to explain about witchcraft prosecutions is why they did not happen more often.¹⁷ Even if allowance is made for unsuccessful prosecutions (and a vast number of unrecorded suspicions and allegations) the term ‘witch-craze’ remains a misnomer for England. Seen in context, then, the relative insignificance of male witches is comparable to the relative insignificance of witchcraft as a whole. Because a witchcraft trial was such an extraordinary event it is easy to see how *anyone* prosecuted, regardless of sex or social status, by the very fact of their prosecution had more in common with all other accused witches than with the overwhelming majority of people who never attracted so much as a hint of suspicion.

It is possible, though, to emphasize the significance of male witches without needing to undermine the significance of witchcraft as a whole. Indeed, witchcraft remains a profitable area of study, less in itself than as a window through which popular mentalities may be surveyed and analysed. Too often, the full importance of witchcraft has been obscured by a compulsion to explain the rise and decline of prosecutions, producing overarching theories unable to bear the strain of the evidence in all its diversity.¹⁸ Instead, we might explore what witchcraft tells us about the popular experience of cohesion and conflict in local communities, and the ways in which ideas and beliefs were mediated, received and put into practice. Witchcraft can be treated less as a discrete phenomenon, and more as an opportunity to explore ‘the darker streets of the village, pausing to glance in at the windows and alehouses of the poor’, and perhaps even to hazard guesses about how they were thinking.¹⁹ Cultural historians need to

¹⁶ Ewen, p. 112. On numbers of trials and executions, see also Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 535–7. Population estimates are taken from K. Wrightson, *English Society, 1580–1680* (1982), p. 122. For a recent reworking of the data which shows that nearly two-thirds of all executions at the Home Circuit assizes occurred in the period 1570–1609, and that only 22% of those indicted there were executed, see Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, ch. ii, esp. pp. 111–13.

¹⁷ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, p. 125; *idem*, *Witchcraft in 17th-Century Yorkshire*, pp. 22–3 (here Sharpe cites R. Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tension in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1986), p. 22). The idea, therefore, that when confronted by ‘women who behaved in a way that was suspicious and irrational, men in authority, until at least the late seventeenth century, jumped easily to the conclusion that witchcraft was involved’ seems somewhat overstated (A. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven, Conn., 1995), p. 24). Neighbours were generally reluctant to accuse, most cases came to nothing and courts were typically circumspect in their judgments (see Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 8–9, 95, 401).

¹⁸ Bernard Rosenthal has written that behind the much-mythologized Salem trials lie ‘a series of diverse stories, singular situations that do not lend themselves easily to overarching theories’ (B. Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 7). See also R. Briggs, ‘“Many reasons why”: witchcraft and the problem of multiple explanation’, in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 49–63.

¹⁹ K. Wrightson and D. Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling, 1525–1700* (revd. edn.,

scrutinize and dissect small events and experiences to see what they tell us about larger issues.²⁰ For this purpose, documentary evidence relating to male witches is as valid as that relating to their more numerous female counterparts; indeed, its very atypicality even promises to expand our understanding of the meanings which ordinary people attached to witchcraft in the early modern period.

Hence the point of this article is neither the rehabilitation of men, nor the historical reanimation of women, but the social and cultural meaning of a single witchcraft prosecution.²¹ The New Romney case from 1617 has been chosen because the accused was a man—a comfortably-off, middle-aged farmer by the name of William Godfrey—whose sole example demonstrates how the Devil could sometimes assume the shape of a man, and that the place of gender in witchcraft accusations requires careful contextualization and an awareness of its subtleties, complexities and contingencies.²² Although Susan Barber and Margaret Holton had almost certainly never heard of the Oxford-educated preacher Thomas Cooper or his scholarly treatise, at least part of their unconscious attitude to witchcraft was consistent with that of the clerical and judicial élite: namely that witches could be men as well as women. The fact that even a single man was prosecuted for witchcraft has implications for what witchcraft actually meant in terms of experience. Perhaps we should ask ourselves, then, not only why one comes across so few

Oxford, 1995), p. 111. Here, the phrase refers to the historical value of studying crime and disorder in general. On interaction between élite and non-élite during witchcraft trials, see C. Holmes, 'Popular culture? witches, magistrates and divines in early modern England', in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the 19th Century*, ed. S. L. Kaplan (Berlin, 1984), pp. 85–111; C. Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. R. Rosenthal (1990); *idem*, 'Deciphering the sabbath', in *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries*, ed. B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (Oxford, 1990), pp. 121–37; R. Muchembled, 'Satanic myths and cultural reality', in *ibid.*, pp. 139–60.

²⁰ C. Geertz, 'Thick description: toward an interpretative theory of culture', in *idem*, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973), p. 23; *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe*, ed. E. Muir and G. Ruggiero, trans. E. Branch (Baltimore, Md., 1991), p. viii; *History from Crime: Selections from Quaderni Storici*, ed. E. Muir and G. Ruggiero (Baltimore, Md., 1994), pp. 7–8, 226.

²¹ More scholars of European rather than English witchcraft have used case-studies in this way, for example, D. W. Sabeen, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 1984), ch. iii; G. Fiume, 'The old vinegar lady, or the judicial modernization of the crime of witchcraft', in *History from Crime*, pp. 65–87; G. K. Waite, 'Talking animals, preserved corpses and Venusberg: the 16th-century magical word view and popular conceptions of the spiritualist David Joris, c.1501–56', *Social Hist.*, xx (1995), 137–56. For a recent exception which illuminates the dynamics of community life in Elizabethan England, see A. R. De Windt, 'Witchcraft and conflicting visions of the ideal village community', *Jour. British Studies*, xxxiv (1995), 427–63. See also Gaskill, 'Witchcraft and power'.

²² Susanna Burghartz has asserted that although 'gender must be seen as a central analytical category for the study of witchcraft', this must produce 'a history that deals with men and women in equal degree' ('The equation of women and witches: a case study of witchcraft trials in Lucerne and Lausanne in the 15th and 16th centuries', in *The German Underworld: Deviants and Outcasts in German History*, ed. R. Evans (1988), p. 71). For example, to return to an earlier point, the presence of female witnesses in witchcraft trials indicates not that gender-ideology was unimportant, simply that a new set of questions needs to be asked about it (D. Purkiss, 'Women's stories of witchcraft in early modern England: the house, the body, the child', *Gender and History*, vii (1995), 409).

male witches in the archives, but why there are any at all. This article explores Godfrey's case in pursuit of this question, and through this seeks insights into the broader mental and behavioural environment of early modern English society.

In the seventeenth century, life in Romney Marsh was both dreary and demanding. Although well-populated before the Black Death, by the sixteenth century it had become one of the most sparsely inhabited regions in the country.²³ The reclaimed land, however, was highly fertile, leading many townsmen from the fifteenth century onwards to acquire land and hire labourers to cultivate it. Much was turned over to pasture, and by the end of the early modern period there were more sheep per acre there than anywhere else in England. The main problem of the marsh was its climate. In the fifteen-seventies William Lambarde described the area as 'Evill in Winter, grievous in Sommer, and never good', an opinion shared by the eighteenth-century historian Edward Hasted who called it a 'sickly and contagious country', and lamented the 'sickly countenances and short lives' of the inhabitants. The land was rife with 'marsh ague'—a form of malaria—and mortality was high. Unsurprisingly, by the eighteenth century a strong tradition of absenteeism among landlords had been established, and resident gentry families were thin on the ground.²⁴

The town of New Romney, therefore, offered something of a haven positioned between this bleak landscape and the sea. As a Cinque Port, it enjoyed independent legal and administrative status in return for an obligation to defend the coast, and was thus governed by a mayor and jurats (aldermen) with rights of gaol delivery.²⁵ Professor Peter Clark

²³ S. Pearson, *The Medieval Houses of Kent: an Historical Analysis* (1994), p. 144. In 1676, the Compton Census recorded an average of 44 acres of land per inhabitant compared to just 7 further north in the Weald (A. Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization: the Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester, 1986), p. 61).

²⁴ C. W. Chalklin, *17th-Century Kent: a Social and Economic History* (1965), pp. 73–5; J. Thirsk, 'The farming regions of England', in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, ix: 1500–1640, ed. J. Thirsk (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 59–61; Everitt, pp. 60–4; W. Lambarde, *A Perambulation of Kent* (1826), pp. 180–1; Hasted, quoted in Everitt, p. 62. On wool production in Romney Marsh, see B. M. Short, 'The south-east: Kent, Surrey and Sussex', in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, v: 1640–1750 I: *Regional Farming Systems*, ed. J. Thirsk (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 281, 284–5. For a work which captures some of the peculiarities of traditional marshland life, see *Annals of a Fishing Village*, ed. J. A. Owen (Edinburgh, 1891).

²⁵ New Romney had been a fully incorporated chartered borough since 1563. For a descriptive summary of the territory and liberty, see W. A. Scott Robertson, 'The Cinque Port liberty of Romney', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xiii (1880), 261–80; 'The customal of the town and port of Romney', in J. Lyon, *The History of the Town and Port of Dover* (2 vols., Dover, 1813–14), ii, 312–43; C.K.S., NR/LC 1–2. On the Cinque Ports in general, see K. M. E. Murray, *The Constitutional History of the Cinque Ports* (Manchester, 1935). In theory, all magistrates had rights of gaol delivery, but after 1590 these were rarely exercised outside special jurisdictional enclaves. On the whole, though, Kent magistrates were generally slow to respond to changed legal practice (J. S. Cockburn, *A History of English Assizes, 1558–1714* (1972), p. 2; *idem*, introduction to *Calendar of Assize Records: Home Circuit Indictments, Elizabeth and James I* (1985), pp. 23–4).

describes New Romney as a second-rank urban community with lively economic relations with the hinterland; and in Lambarde's opinion it was 'good, sure and commodious' as a port, enclosed as it was by shingle bank on both sides of its approach. By the seventeenth century it had a population of around 1,000, including a number of 'respectable' families, and a map from 1614 shows approximately 200 buildings arranged in rows parallel to the coast with strips of land in between.²⁶ The site of the Brodhull (a liberty court dealing with economic matters), New Romney also hosted an annual cattle fair, and was an important fishing centre too. The principal church, of St. Nicholas, had the grandest Romanesque tower in Kent, and was used as a beacon to guide shipping into the harbour.²⁷ From the later sixteenth century, then, New Romney enjoyed a modest grandeur; socially and politically, however, it was becoming increasingly unstable.²⁸

The source of this instability was twofold: economic pressures and challenges to mayoral authority.²⁹ Relations with the bailiffs of Yarmouth, over whom the Brodhull had partial administrative control during the fishing season, were always stormy, as indeed they were with neighbouring Lydd concerning shipping and jurisdiction over the parish of Broomhill.³⁰ The local economy fared badly after the fall of Calais in 1558, and deteriorating town finances, inflation, debt, contracting trade and fishing and the administration of poor relief also led to local conflict.³¹ Relations with the centre were often fraught as well. Tudor centralization meant that the

²⁶ M. Teichman-Derville, 'The New Romney and Cinque Port records', *Arch. Cant.*, xlii (1930), 3. The records which survive for the town are generally of a very high quality (see also Hist. MSS. Comm., 4th Rept., pp. 439-42; 'Mr Edward Salisbury's report on the records of New Romney', *Arch. Cant.*, xvii (1887), 12-33).

²⁷ P. Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent, 1500-1640* (Hassocks, 1977), p. 9; Lambarde, pp. 178-9; W. A. Scott Robertson, 'Churches in Romney Marsh', *Arch. Cant.*, xiii (1880), 408-87. On the jurisdiction of the Brodhull, see M. Burrows, *Cinque Ports* (2nd edn., 1888), pp. 178-85.

²⁸ In 1678 Samuel Jeake wrote that New Romney was 'neither plentiful in Buildings nor populous in People (though generally those that are, love to be as stately as most in Kent) but surely was sometimes more populous' (S. Jeake, *Charters of the Cinque Ports* (1728), p. 109). Culturally, the town must have been reasonably lively: a large amount of public money was spent in 1609 and 1612 for Shakespeare's King's Players to perform there (M. Teichman-Derville, *The Annals of the Town and Port of New Romney* (n.p., 1930), p. 22).

²⁹ This account of strife at New Romney relies heavily on the following: *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1581-90*, pp. 167-8; *Acts of the Privy Council 1580-1*, p. 339; *A.P.C. 1586-7*, p. 308; *A.P.C. 1587-8*, pp. 421-2; *A.P.C. 1588*, pp. 22-3; *A.P.C. 1588-9*, p. 101; *A.P.C. 1589-90*, p. 435; *A.P.C. 1590*, pp. 5, 9, 64, 232, 207-9; Clark, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 11-12, 28-9, 28-9, 98, 104, 112, 139, 153-4, 169, 236, 251-4, 306, 327, 394, 437n; Burrows, pp. 175-6, 184, 190. On the conflicts of the 1590s, see also P.R.O., SP 12/169/20, 39-40.

³⁰ For an example of clashes with Yarmouth and Lydd, see C.K.S., NR/CPc 29 (1568); NR/CP 29-34 (1605); NR/CPc 98/1-2 (1606). On the Broomhill dispute in particular, see C.K.S., NR/CP 1b 77-90, 100 (c.1608-9); P.R.O., SP 14/67/252 (c.1611). The silting up of the coastline meant that both Broomhill and Lydd were growing as acres of salt-marsh emerged from the sea; this led to conflict, not least with the Crown, over who was entitled to its produce (J. Thirsk, 'Farming techniques', in *Agrarian History*, iv, 184).

³¹ In 1591 a petition to Burghley protesting about poor government referred to 'the poore decayed towne of newe Romeneys' (British Library, Lansdowne MS. 67 fo. 209v).

Cinque Ports were the only major independent jurisdictions left in Kent by the fifteen-sixties, and even their privileges were under threat. A generation later, due to increasingly bitter accusations of financial misconduct, bribery and corruption, the privy council was intervening directly to preserve order during New Romney's elections. Taxation was a source of particular rancour, as it was between New Romney and its neighbour Old Romney, and indeed within New Romney itself. From the fifteen-nineties, challenges to municipal authority came from both local landowners and respectable townsmen who felt themselves politically marginalized. Controversy also raged between the town and church authorities over, amongst other things, the collection of tithes, and in doctrinal matters godly interests were hemmed in by religious conservatism on one side and Protestant fragmentation on the other. After 1600 it became increasingly difficult to maintain regular church services, and separatist congregations proliferated.³²

Peter Clark identifies 1617 as the point at which New Romney's already waning fortunes took a turn for the worse.³³ In this year James I's restoration of the Merchant Adventurers' charter disrupted trade between the Cinque Ports and the Low Countries and contributed to an economic slump. Industrial and commercial contraction, combined with adverse weather and stagnating wool prices, hit small farmers hard and the swelling ranks of the poor harder still. In addition, the kiddlemen ('kiddles' being a Kentish word for nets) and others employed in the herring trade were increasingly impoverished by the silting up of the harbour and the lack of navigable rivers on which to fall back.³⁴ From around this time, moreover, religious divisions deepened, municipal authority withered and the military and naval demands of the Crown grew more intolerable, culminating in the refusal of ship money in 1634.³⁵ If there was, after all, a 'general crisis' in seventeenth-

³² For a Chancery dispute with Old Romney over land and liberties, see C.K.S., NR/CP1 9/1 (c. 1595). For a title dispute of 1609–10, see C.K.S., NR/AZ 29, 32. In 1559 the minister was convicted of theft and speaking against the queen, and in 1561 was ejected as a 'sower of evil doctrine' (C.K.S., NR/JB 7, court book 1559–68 fo. 7v). In a dispute at Faversham, another Kentish Cinque Port, in 1635, a woman who criticized the mayor and her neighbours was alleged to have called one of them 'puritent Roge'; she was later convicted of witchcraft by the same mayor (see Gaskill, 'Witchcraft in early modern Kent', pp. 266–9). For a witchcraft accusation caused by factional disputes in another Cinque Port, see A. Gregory, 'Witchcraft, politics and "good neighbourhood" in early 17th-century Rye', *Past and Present*, cxxxiii (Nov. 1991), 31–66.

³³ In this year the most serious attack on mayoral control occurred at Faversham, and over similar issues to those at New Romney, i.e. the frustration of political exclusion (P. Clark, 'The migrant in Kentish towns, 1580–1640', in *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700*, ed. P. Clark and P. Slack (1972), p. 151). For examples of attacks on the mayor and jurats of New Romney at about this time, see *Cal. S.P. Dom. 1611–18*, p. 612; *Cal. S.P. Dom. 1619–23*, p. 305. In 1615 the town was ravaged by smallpox (C.K.S., NR/AZ 37).

³⁴ R. F. and F. W. Jessup, *The Cinque Ports* (1952), pp. 28–30; Burrows, p. 210. The recession of the sea had been apparent for at least a century (see *John Leland's Itinerary: Travels in Tudor England*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith (5 vols., 1964), iv. 66–7). The New Romney poor law accounts for 1617 indicate the scale of poverty in the town (C.K.S., NR/ZPa 5/13).

³⁵ Clark, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 340–1, 316–17, 322–8. By the 1620s, the Cinque Ports possessed only one overseas trading ship, and Crown demands on New Romney to provide seamen were the smallest of any of the ports. In 1637, in response to the demand for ship money, New

century Europe, a better example could scarcely be found.³⁶ Daily life in New Romney was overshadowed by disharmony and discontent, and people at all social levels must have felt their town had lost its way. Hence, although no direct causal links can be established, it does at least seem appropriate that 1617 was the year in which the troublesome farmer William Godfrey was formally accused of witchcraft by his angry and anxious neighbours.

We know comparatively little about William Godfrey, as we do about the majority of ordinary people in early modern England.³⁷ In 1617 he was about forty-seven years old and lived in a two-storey house in the eastern part of the town. He was married with a son and daughter, aged fifteen and eighteen respectively, and had kept at least one servant for about two years. He was a husbandman by occupation, but also rented out a house and close near his own; and in the previous decade he had lived there himself. To the rear of the house, he grew fruit and vegetables, and kept ducks and possibly pigs. He owned a barn with a barnyard, and with the help of his family reared sheep on several acres out in the marsh,³⁸ which he himself would routinely visit on horseback, accompanied by his dogs, probably spaniels.³⁹ Without doubt, he enjoyed a standard of living higher than most men of his rank, and by the sixteen-thirties was even styling himself yeoman.⁴⁰ He was among the hundred or so townsmen sufficiently wealthy to pay the poor rate in

Romney protested that there was no longer a single fishing boat left (Hist. MSS. Comm., *Rye and Hereford Corporations*, p. 190; Jessup, pp. 29–30).

³⁶ This refers to T. K. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1975). However contentious the thesis might now seem, Rabb's central argument that Europe was transformed by centralization and bureaucratization, the need for taxation, resistance from local élites, the growth of social problems (especially poverty) and religious strife between radicals and conservatives, holds true for Kent—especially New Romney. See also *Crisis in Europe, 1560–1660: Essays from Past and Present*, ed. T. Aston (1965).

³⁷ This brief biography had been assembled from a number of documents including the depositions already cited and the following C.K.S., NR/JQP 1/27 (1614), examinations of Judith and William Godfrey, 12 Dec. 1614 (although elsewhere his age is given as approximately 47 in 1617, here it is 37).

³⁸ In 1616 Godfrey took up a lease on the land in an area known as the Helmes for 15s per annum (C.K.S., NR/AC 1, assembly book 1577–1622 fos. 245v–246v). The town beacon was situated here (see 'Petition from the bailiff and jurats of Romney March to the Lieutenant of Dover Castle (1596)', in M. Teichman-Derville, *The Level and the Liberty of Romney Marsh* (1936), pp. 125–6).

³⁹ Not everyone in New Romney was allowed to keep dogs, as they had become a chronic nuisance by the later 16th century and required a licence (Teichman-Derville, *Annals*, pp. 22–3). Godfrey's familiars were alleged to be 3 black spaniels (see below).

⁴⁰ In 1600, a typical Kent husbandman had a house of between 3 and 7 rooms, was unlikely to house servants full-time, and had an estate worth between £15 and £50 (Chalklin, pp. 242–4). On the yeoman's standard of living, see M. Campbell, *The English Yeoman under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts* (New Haven, Conn., 1942), caps. 5–6. As a landlord, Godfrey must have been worth more than the average, and his former house was of the sort with 2 storeys and a small hall. In his will of 1636, he bequeathed £100 per annum to his son, and his house to his wife, Margery. Her will records that personally she was worth £80 in 1645 (C.K.S., PRC 32/51/26–7; 22/19/74). Maps from the 1650s show that near to where Godfrey's house would have been located, at least 100 acres was in the possession of a Mr. Godfrey, although how much belonged to William Godfrey's successors, and how much to the Lydd gentry family of the same name, is unclear (C.K.S., S/Rm P1/6 (1653); S/Rm P2/2 (c.1654). Godfrey does not appear to have been related to this family (see below).

1617;⁴¹ he had served as a petty juror;⁴² he was one of only a handful of men in the militia who could afford to equip themselves with a firearm;⁴³ and, although unable to write his own name, he clearly cared about the education of the succeeding generation.⁴⁴ Of his character we know less, except that he appears to have been assertive and argumentative, and had a sense of humour.⁴⁵ Finally, for some reason he acquired a reputation for witchcraft which, on the last day of April 1617, spilled over into formal accusation and prosecution.

On numerous days in the administrative calendar the mayor at this time, John Beadle, and his jurats sat in sessions as the Corporation of New Romney. This particular Wednesday, however, they met as justices of the peace to hear evidence against a suspected felon. Detailed depositions were to be taken, the textual insertions in the finished documents suggesting care to get the testimony right. It seems likely that William Clarke—a fifty year-old kiddleman, sometime churchwarden and one of Godfrey's near neighbours—initiated the prosecution, and it was he who first appeared before the bench. He told of how two or three weeks previously, he had been tending sheep with his son when they had noticed Godfrey's ducks straying through the fence between their land. Clarke told his son to chase them back, at which the boy 'layd a little sticke he had then in his hand upon their necks'. Observing this, Godfrey's daughter, Judith, allegedly called out 'that they should repent it and that they would be quit with them for it'. Within days, Clarke's lambs went lame, his wife was unable to get butter from the churn, and he began to wonder about a bullock he had recently lost. He discussed the matter with Goodwife Standen—possibly a cunning woman—and was

⁴¹ C.K.S., NR/ZPa 4/17, churchwardens' and overseers' assessment (1617); NR/JQp 1/21 (unfoliated). Taxation records are scarce for New Romney before the later 17th century and Godfrey is not listed in either a rental of 1606 or an inquisition into taxable property for 1610 (C.K.S., Derville MSS, U157; NR/RTa 1/13).

⁴² C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/21, jury list, 8 Aug. 1608. In neighbouring Sussex at this time a typical petty juror was a minor yeoman or tradesman for whom jury service was 'part of the agenda of obligation for middling landowners' (C. B. Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in 17th-Century England* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 138–41, quotation at p. 141).

⁴³ C.K.S., NR/CPm 1/15–16, muster of the general band for Old and New Romney (1602, 1605); P.R.O., SP 14/78/19, 14/107/30, muster rolls (1614, 1619). Godfrey was a caliverer, whereas most of his neighbours were pikemen and billmen. The caliver superseded the musket in the later 16th century, but was obsolete by the time of the 1619 muster in which Godfrey is referred to as a musketeer. A caliver still cost between 12s and 30s—the sort of money a menial servant might earn in a year (L. Boynton, *The Elizabethan Militia, 1558–1638* (1967), pp. xv, 69, 171, 238; Campbell, p. 398).

⁴⁴ Godfrey bequeathed payments for his nephew's education (C.K.S., PRC 32/51/27). He always signed documents using the same arrow-like mark.

⁴⁵ Godfrey laughs at the accusations made against him, sometimes sarcastically, and may have used this to his own advantage in court. I am grateful to Lyndal Roper for this suggestion. The humour in Godfrey's story is an interesting extension of the idea that laughter offers a key to social ambiguities, tensions and anxieties (K. Thomas, 'The place of laughter in Tudor and Stuart England', *Times Literary Supplement* (21 Jan. 1977), 77–81). At no point does Godfrey seem afraid of his accusers, and evidently felt that mockery was an appropriate response to his neighbours' fear and distress.

asked by her 'if he did mistrust noe body about the towne'. He explained his suspicions, and Standen informed him that a woman from Hope, a small parish near New Romney, had said that her father had been visited by Godfrey who had repeated the avowal of revenge. The malicious intentions of the Godfrey family thus crystallized in Clarke's mind, and he signed the document in which they were officially recorded.⁴⁶

Suspicions against William Godfrey stretched back a number of years. For John and Susan Barber it all began in about 1609 when they had rented Godfrey's property on a year's lease. When this expired, Godfrey had hoped that Barber would not only renew his tenancy, but might even consider buying. The Barbers, however, could hardly wait to get out, believing the house to be bewitched or haunted. In his testimony, John Barber described various ghostly sounds including knocking, dripping and spitting upon the ceiling. One day, while he was taking up the ceiling-boards to see what was causing the disturbances, Godfrey had let himself in at the back door. In a sudden outburst, Barber challenged him, saying 'he thought he had lefte the divell behind him in his house', to which, Susan Barber related, a puzzled Godfrey 'laughed and grinned and told him ther was nothing ther that he knew of'. Godfrey joked that even if Barber found a bag of money in his searches he would not lay claim to it, and departed wishing them 'noe worser luck in the house then he had'. To the Barbers' relief, over the next few days the noises stopped, but things were about to take a more sinister turn.⁴⁷

At the time of this confrontation, the twenty-six year-old Susan Barber was heavily pregnant—a time of intense anxiety for any woman in the seventeenth century, but in that house she must have felt especially vulnerable.⁴⁸ Soon after the child was born, the women who had attended the labour departed, all except Barber's mother who handed her baby to her. When she became drowsy the mother left her to sleep and, from the stressful and strenuous events of the evening, all fell quiet. But within a quarter of an

⁴⁶ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 fo. 1, examination of William Clarke, 30 Apr. 1617. (In all quotations from manuscript sources, standard abbreviations have been extended and capitalization and punctuation modernized.) For evidence of Clarke having been a churchwarden in c.1614, see C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/29 (1616), examination of William Clarke. Obviously, he was no ordinary fisherman; apart from his office, he paid 4s a year to the poor rate in 1617, and 5s rent in 1609 for a kiddle-ground upon which he would have spread his nets (C.K.S., NR/ZPa 4/17, churchwardens' and overseers' assessment, 1617; NR/FR 16, chamberlain's town rental roll, 1609). A man of the same name was even listed as a jurat in 1617 (and other years) (C.K.S., NR/ACo 1, election book of mayor and jurats, 1596–1734, fo. 33).

⁴⁷ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 fos. 1–6, examinations of John and Susan Barber, 30 Apr. 1617, quotations at fos. 2, 5, 6. For a case where a witch was accused of 'divers strange noises of rumbles' in her house, see *Witchcraft in England, 1558–1618*, ed. B. Rosen (Amherst, Mass., 1991), p. 125. Another example from 1622 provides a striking parallel to the New Romney case (Cambridge University Library, EDR E7/4/1). A later case is reported in the *Athenian Mercury*, iv, no. 20 (1691), p. 5. For bewitched windmills, see Ewen, p. 159 (Essex, 1587); Camb. Univ. Libr., EDR E12 1647/12v (Cambs., 1647). It was not unknown for tenants to make bogus complaints that their houses were haunted in order to depress the value of the rent (Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 712).

⁴⁸ See L. Pollock, 'Embarking on a rough passage: the experience of pregnancy in early modern society', in *Women as Mothers in Pre-Industrial England: Essays in Memory of Dorothy McClasen*, ed. V. Fildes (1989), pp. 39–67.

hour a shriek broke the silence, and all was panic, John Barber, sitting in another room at the time, described how his hysterical wife had

called to her mother and said that Goodfreys rugges [i.e. diabolical familiars] had caried away her childe, and her mother coming into the rome unto her with the candle light, she sawe the childe lying along the bolster of the bedd she lay in, above the head of this examinants wiffe and his wiffe had hold of the feet of the child by the blanketts or else his wiffe had thoughte the childe would have been taken away from her.

Susan Barber herself explained to the magistrates that ‘as sone as her mother was gone from her, her said child was pulled out of the bedd from her and then she this examinant gott hold of the feet of the child with the blanketts’. She confirmed that Godfrey’s familiars had come for her baby, and that in the ensuing struggle it had been pulled up above her head. Nor was this the end of the matter. She claimed that the familiars returned on other occasions and ‘did seeme to her to be like three rugged blacke spaniell dogges’. One night, Barber deposed, an apparition of Godfrey himself reinforced the intrusion. As she rocked her baby by the fire-light (she had no candle), ‘the said Godfrey came behind her and gave her a great punch upon the backe, and then she looking about for him she could see noe body and she saith that her backe was in payne about one houre after’. Whenever she was alone after dark, she added, she was always afraid.⁴⁹

The Barbers vacated the property that autumn, despite Godfrey’s apparent warning that, as John Barber deposed, ‘he had better stay ther, then dwell in another, for he said this examinant should repent it’. A series of disasters followed which Barber believed were linked to this possibly casual remark. Shortly before Christmas, he split his thumb with an axe, and in the spring cut off a finger-tip which a surgeon had to cauterize to staunch the bleeding. Livestock also suffered. His sow had a litter of piglets in which Godfrey, by now a deeply sinister and suspicious figure, expressed a keen interest. Barber tried to explain that the piglets were not old enough to sell, but that ‘when they were worth eating he should have one of them if he would’. Apparently, Godfrey left dissatisfied and within days the sow’s milk dried up, the piglets’ growth was impaired, and several horses also died. In this climate of brooding fear and escalating conflict, small events became loaded with great meaning for John Barber. He deposed that whilst entertaining Thomas Riggden at his house, Riggden had sent his wife to buy meat from the butcher whom she found drinking with Godfrey. The next morning Riggden’s cow broke its leg—a misfortune Barber apparently interpreted as a consequence of this minor interruption.⁵⁰

Others complained about Godfrey’s house. Margaret and William Holton lived there between 1613 and 1615, and had similar experiences to the

⁴⁹ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/20 fos. 1–6, examinations of John and Susan Barber, 30 Apr. 1617, quotations at fos. 3, 4, 5.

⁵⁰ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 fos. 3–4, examination of John Barber, 30 Apr. 1617, quotations at fos. 3, 4.

previous tenants. A month after moving in, Godfrey asked Margaret Holton if she had been gossiping about the ghostly noises, to which she protested 'she was soe troubled that she could not tell what to thinke of it, nor what it should be'. As the Barbers had found, all fell quiet in the house until a child—a son, James—was born. First of all, Margaret Holton was startled not only to find that her laundry had been sprinkled with 'perfect redd blood', but that at the precise moment of discovery, Godfrey had entered the house, once again through the back door. 'Good lord, landlord', Holton exclaimed looking at her spoiled washing, 'what a mischance have I!' Godfrey laughed, said 'it was but some catt', and left his tenant pondering this strange event (which was to be happen again) and the fact that she knew of no cats in the neighbourhood. The next misfortune was infinitely more distressing. In April 1614, when James Holton was just over a year old, he suddenly sickened to the extent that 'noe body could tell whether the childe was alyve or noe'. Margaret clearly suspected Godfrey, and in a deliberate act of sympathetic magic, threw a soiled nappy (or 'clot') onto the fire, pretending to Mary Ladds, a widow in her fifties who was helping her to nurse the child, that it was not worth washing. What happened next was taken to be deeply significant:

before the clott was burned into ashes the said Godfrey came into their house by the back doore and came to where the child laye and asked this examinant how the child did, and then she annswered, 'As pleased God'. Then said the said Godfrey, 'Noe doubt but the grace of go[d permitting?] the child wilbe well', and this examinant said she hoped soe, and then Godfrey within a little tyme went awaye.

Within the hour, the child was dead. It would seem that by this stage, like so many other people accused of witchcraft in early modern England, Godfrey had attracted sufficient suspicion in the community that both his maledictions and benedictions might be interpreted as incriminating.⁵¹

Before they adjourned, the magistrates heard the evidence of one more witness, William Evans, another kiddleman, before binding Godfrey over to the next sessions.⁵² Reconvening on Friday 2 May, the mayor reflected on an additional piece of evidence provided by John Barber two days earlier. In the spring of 1613 he had been working in the marsh, when a yeoman named Thomas Bennett from Newchurch, about five miles away, had told him that Nicholas Archer from Saltwood believed he had become ill and lost a horse as a result of dealing with Godfrey. 'Be warye of him', Bennett warned Barber gravely, 'for he thought in his conscience that he the said Godfrey was a witch', and advised that 'he should have no doinge with the said Godfrey for

⁵¹ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 fos. 6–7, examination of Margaret Barber, 30 Apr. 1617; NR/JQp 1/27, presentment of William Godfrey for bewitching James Holton. On sympathetic magic intended to reverse *maleficium* or draw a witch back to the scene of the crime, see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 217–18, 648–9, 656–7.

⁵² C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 fos. 8, examination of William Evans, 30 Apr. 1617; NR/JQ 1, quarter sessions book 1616–74, fo. 10. Sureties were offered for Godfrey's appearance by Walter Bishop, baker, and Thomas Puckle, yeoman.

if he had not, then the said Godfrey could have noe power over him'. Bennett added that he himself had already spread rumours about Godfrey (which he called 'setting a prick in his tail') and that if he did it again 'it should sticke closer to him the said Godfrey then the other, and yett he said the other stucke pretty close to him'. In the eyes of the magistrates, this seemed to open up a wider set of suspicions, and they wrote to the barons of Romney Marsh, a separate liberty, to ask for Bennett to be examined and bound to appear at the next general sessions at New Romney, due to be held on Monday 5 May.⁵³

On Friday and Saturday, evidence was taken from three other witnesses. Widow Ladds—Margaret Holton's companion when she burned the nappy—came forward to allege that every time she fell out with Godfrey she seemed to lose something. For example, eight years ago their pig had died just days after Godfrey complained that it had been eating his pumpkins, saying 'it was noe matter if the sow did eat noe more'. Her son, John, a stonemason, also testified, and together they even helped draw Godfrey's son, William Godfrey junior, into the web of suspicion. Already, the previous Wednesday, William Evans had deposed that when the boy was aged about twelve he had been playing at his house, and

feeling of some pyes that were in a litle cubbeard in his house, the said Godfrey the sone asked what they were and this examinant's wiffe told him they were pyes, and then the said Godfrey the sone said that they should never spend them whilst they were good, and the next daye or next day after the pyes were naught, and not fitt to be eaten.

The same day, the boy passed a similar judgement upon a sack of flour, and within a week Evans had been forced to give it to the pigs. Mary Ladds and her son also alleged that they had heard from Godfrey's servant, John Farnum, that the boy had a mysterious habit of getting out of bed (they shared a room) and wandering off into the night. Again, the commonplace had taken on a sinister import in a climate of fear. As Farnum himself explained, Godfrey's son did indeed get up in the night but only 'to make water or to ease himself and came to bedd presently againe'; sometimes, they even went out into the yard together. William junior denied even this, and although he admitted predicting the decay of the Evans's food, stressed that this was a playful remark rather than a maleficent threat.⁵⁴

The magistrates may have been waiting for word about Thomas Bennett before they examined Godfrey himself, but on Sunday they were forced to

⁵³ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 fos. 3–4, examination of John Barber, 30 Apr. 1617, quotation at fo. 4; Letter from the mayor and jurats of New Romney to the lords, bailiff and jurats of Romney Marsh, 2 May 1617 (loose folio).

⁵⁴ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 fo. 8, examination of William Evans, 30 Apr. 1617; *ibid.* fo. 9, examinations of John Ladds and Mary Ladds, 2–3 May 1617; *Ibid.* fo. 10, examinations of John Farnum and William Godfrey junior, 3 May 1617. To make William Godfrey junior's words seem a casual prediction rather than an intentional curse, the word 'would' was substituted for 'should' in the line 'he said that they should not spend it the flour whilst it was good'.

summon him as the sessions was scheduled for the following morning.⁵⁵ Godfrey first denied that John Barber had ever accused him of leaving the Devil in his house, but did recall a complaint about a noise which at the time he had put down to a leaking roof. To all other charges, Godfrey declared that he was 'a cleare man and never in his liffe heard or knew of any such thing as the said parties have accused him for'.⁵⁶ The stage was set for the trial, but in the event Godfrey was simply bound over again.⁵⁷ Possibly, the magistrates decided to postpone proceedings until Bennett could testify. The barons of Romney Marsh had written on Sunday to say that they had examined him but he knew only what Archer had told him, and although willing to testify could not attend the next sessions as he was appearing in court at Dymchurch. As we shall see, there is good reason to doubt his word.⁵⁸

Despite the delayed trial, Godfrey and Clarke were to be back in front of the magistrates before the next sessions. On 18 July 1617 they fell out while working in the fields, and Godfrey reported that Clarke had struck him. Clarke explained that he had tied his mare to his neighbour's fence, and that Godfrey had warned him to take it away or he would bewitch her. Asked why, Godfrey had ignored Clarke and walked off. Godfrey's version, however, suggests that this was a sarcastic joke which the anxious Clarke misinterpreted. Godfrey testified that he had simply quipped that 'he marveyld he would tye his mare to his poles, for feare he this examinant would bewitch her', and that later on the hysterical Clarke had demanded: 'Must thou needs bewitch my mare?', before pulling Godfrey from his horse, and beating him with a cudgel in a vain attempt to extract a confession. In the courtroom, Godfrey once again protested his innocence, and the case was forwarded to be heard alongside the witchcraft charges. Clarke was charged with assault, and bound over to keep the peace against Godfrey.⁵⁹

The next sessions was not held until Monday 23 February 1618.⁶⁰ William Godfrey was charged with using *maleficium* to destroy the goods of William Clarke and cause the death of James Holton according to the act of 1604, which prescribed a capital sentence without benefit of clergy if he were convicted.⁶¹ The second charge was endorsed by William Clarke, William Evans, John and Susan Barber, Margaret Holton and John Ladds, all of whom presumably also gave evidence *viva voce* to the grand jury. There is no

⁵⁵ It was customary for magistrates to examine the accused last, so that he or she could answer the allegations that had been made by the witnesses.

⁵⁶ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30, fo. 11, examination of William Godfrey, 4 May 1617.

⁵⁷ C.K.S., NR/JQ 1, quarter sessions book 1616-74, fo. 111r-v.

⁵⁸ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 (loose folio), letter from Thomas Dodd to the mayor and jurats of New Romney, undated (4 May 1617). This excuse certainly cannot be verified since the relevant records for Dymchurch have not survived.

⁵⁹ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 (loose folio), examinations of William Clarke and William Godfrey, 18 July 1617; NR/JQ 1, quarter sessions book 1616-74, fo. 12.

⁶⁰ C.K.S., NR/JQ 1, quarter sessions book 1616-74, fo. 141r-v.

⁶¹ 1 Jas. I, c. 12 (1604), 'An Acte against Coniuration Witchcrafte and dealinge with evill and wicked Spirits'. The text of the act is given in Ewen, pp. 19-21.

evidence that Thomas Bennett ever testified. Evidently, the jurors were not impressed, even by 5,000 words of written testimony, and the bill was thrown out.⁶² There now remained the small matter of William Clarke's assault charge. One can only imagine the hollowness of Clarke's defence now that his victim had been cleared; and it was probably as a consequence of this that the jury convicted Clarke of assault and fined him 3s 4d. And so the prosecution of William Godfrey ended in defeat for the accusers—in Clarke's case, even censure—almost ten months after it had been initiated.⁶³

The case of William Godfrey is in many respects exceptional. He was a middling householder, prosperous farmer and landlord, active in civic life as a militiaman, juror and ratepayer. Yet in the eyes of some he was also a witch; even the authorities took the charges against him seriously, and spent a considerable amount of time and effort gathering evidence for his trial. He thus stands outside the stereotype most familiar to historians of early modern England: the elderly, marginal widow dependent on charity, or the equally socially-ambivalent younger single woman who fails to meet the conventional expectations of her neighbours, often her female peers. Yet if we view the evidence another way, Godfrey's story can also be read as a classic tale of fear and *maleficium*. A man falls out with a neighbour who, according to both gossip and a long-standing reputation, uses witchcraft; he then suffers losses to his livestock and his wife's butter fails; finally, a cunning woman confirms his suspicions and he informs a magistrate. His neighbour, also at odds with the suspect, is injured, his livestock sicken, and his wife imagines that demons threaten her child. Another woman claims she summoned the witch responsible for her dying child's sickness by burning its ordure, and then interprets the suspect's good wishes as evidence of guilt. In each case, harsh words are exchanged, personal space is invaded, and inexplicable harm sustained. To anyone who has studied early modern witchcraft, these complaints will be immediately familiar; one might even say they are typical. How, then, can we connect the ordinary and extraordinary features of such a case?

The question necessarily involves the way historians classify aspects of the past. We should remember that 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' are relative terms, the line between them movable, and that only rigid definitions and theories limit our ability to see patterns in the diversity of the past, not the diversity of the past itself.⁶⁴ In Godfrey's case, we can either explain away the

⁶² C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/27, presentments of William Godfrey for witchcraft. These documents are undated and are misfiled under 1614; James Holton died in this year. William Clarke, William Evans and John Barber had been bound by recognizance on 2 May to give evidence against Godfrey (NR/JQ 1, quarter sessions book 1616–74, fo. 10v).

⁶³ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30, list of fines, 23 Feb. 1618. It is possible that Godfrey took the case further, as a court book entry from March 1618 refers to a suit between Godfrey as plaintiff and Clarke as defendant (C.K.S., NR/JB 12 fo. 28).

⁶⁴ As Michael Mann has observed, 'societies are much messier than our theories of them' (M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1986–93), i. 4). For similar comments, see: J. A. Sharpe, 'Witches and persecuting societies', *Jour. Hist. Sociology*, iii (1990), 85; P. Collinson, *The*

social identity of the accused as an exception to a rule or, more fruitfully, we can redefine the rule to accommodate that identity within a broader interpretative scheme. For the latter, we need to emphasize common ground between examples, and to identify what—at the most basic level—moved people to prosecute their neighbours for witchcraft. A more latitudinarian approach is certainly consistent with recent scholarship suggesting that England's apparently peculiar pattern of accusations should be seen as one of a number of variations on a basic European theme, and that even within the English context contrasting regional patterns and diverse case studies point to a greater range of causes, circumstances and contexts than has previously been acknowledged.⁶⁵

But before exploring this idea further, we should consider the other option, that is, treating Godfrey as an exception to the rule. How could any man be prosecuted as a maleficent witch given the strong association between women and witches? The answer, it seems, is quite easily. First, contemporary definitions of the witch were varied and vague, especially over the question of gender.⁶⁶ There was certainly no theological objection to the male witch and surprisingly little interest in why more women were witches than men; indeed, godly ministers actively discouraged the notion that witches were exclusively female in order to exploit witchcraft—popular magic and *maleficium*—as a universal symbol of sin. One Elizabethan preacher expressed less concern about 'poore doating old women (which are commonly called witches)', than the 'wicked man or woman that worketh with the devill',⁶⁷ and, likewise, in the year of the Jacobean statute,

Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the 16th and 17th Centuries (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 83.

⁶⁵ *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, pp. 1–2 and *passim*. For other European variants, see M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, 'The European witchcraft debate and the Dutch variant', *Social Hist.*, xv (1990), 181–94; R. Briggs, 'Women as victims? witches, judges and the community', *French Hist.*, v (1991), 438–50. For diversity amongst English witchcraft cases, see J. T. Swain, 'The Lancashire witch trials of 1612 and 1634 and the economics of witchcraft', *Northern Hist.*, xxx (1994), 64–85; Sharpe, *Witchcraft in 17th-Century Yorkshire*, p. 18; De Windt, p. 429; S. D. Amussen, 'Punishment, discipline and power: the social meanings of violence in early modern England', *Jour. British Studies*, xxxiv (1995), 30–1. Brian Levack has recommended a varied, multi-causal approach which he terms 'the cumulative concept of witchcraft' (Levack, p. x, chs. ii–iii, *passim*).

⁶⁶ Although over 90% of Macfarlane's Essex witches were women, he concedes that 'there does not seem to have been any obvious objection to the idea of male witches' (Macfarlane, p. 160). For a recent comment on this possibility, see D. Underdown, *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in 17th-Century England* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 34–5. The divine William Perkins called the central problem of defining the witch 'a matter of great difficultie, because there be many differences and diversities of opinions touching this point' (W. Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1608), p. 2). See also J. Gaule, *Select Cases of Conscience, Touching Witches and Witchcraft* (1646), p. 24. On varied and changing definitions of witchcraft, see E. Peters, *The Magician, The Witch and the Law* (Hassocks, 1978), esp. ch. vi.

⁶⁷ H. Holland, *A Treatise Against Witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1590), sigs. B3, E1. For a similar definition, see G. Gifford, *A Discourse of the subtill Practises of Devilles by Witches and Sorcerers* (1587), sig. B2. On the broader context of English clerical views, see S. Clark, 'Protestant demonology: sin, superstition and society (c.1520–c.1630)', in *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, pp. 45–81.

a canon of Windsor advised that the two sexes were equally likely to practice witchcraft.⁶⁸ At the time Godfrey was prosecuted, this idea was circulating widely in print. In a pamphlet of 1616, the vicar of King's Lynn warned that not all witches were female 'but men also on whose behalfe no exception can be laid'; and both Thomas Cooper—with whose treatise we began—and the Cambridge divine William Perkins broadly agreed, the latter explaining that Moses's use of the feminine gender was misleading and that, in truth, the Hebrew patriarch 'exempteth not the male'.⁶⁹ Even opponents in the witchcraft debate of the sixteen-forties voiced the respective opinions that although most witches were female, 'let not the male bee boasting, or secure of their Sexes Exemption or lesse disposition'; and that 'one may fall into this sinne as well as into any other . . . and therefore whether men or women'.⁷⁰

Nor did the law impose restrictions upon who a witch might be.⁷¹ Although the statutes of 1563 and 1604 distinguished between different types of witchcraft, no guidance was offered relating to the sex, age or social status of likely suspects. The earlier statute referred only to 'Practisers of the wicked Offences of Conjurac[i]ons . . . Charmes and Witchecraftes', and to 'fantasticall and devilshe p[er]sons', and its Jacobean successor was similarly non-specific.⁷² Few legal commentators were more precise, possibly due to their own varied experience of witchcraft in the courts, but also because of the law's open-endedness. The magistrate's guide, Dalton's *Country Justice* (1618), did little more than summarize the 1604 statute, and the usually oracular Sir Edward Coke was circumspect in defining the witch—a *person* that hath conference with the Devill—and even gave exclusively masculine definitions to 'conjurer', 'enchanter' and 'sorcerer'.⁷³ Nor is there any evidence

⁶⁸ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 620n.

⁶⁹ A. Roberts, *A Treatise of Witchcraft . . . With a true Narration of the Witchcrafts which Mary Smith, wife of Henry Smith Glover, did practice* (1616), pp. 4–5; T. Cooper, *The Mystery of Witch-Craft* (1617), pp. 180–1; Perkins, p. 168. For similar comments, see Bernard, p. 87; *The Most True and Wonderfull Narration of two women bewitched in Yorkshire* (1658), p. 3.

⁷⁰ Gaule, pp. 52–3, quotation at p. 53; J. Stearne, *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, (1648), pp. 10–12, quotation at p. 12. On this point in the same era, see also T. Ady, *A Candle in the Dark* (1655), pp. 12–13; J. Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677), ch. ii, p. 80. As Nathanael Homes pointed out, a 'witch' was simply anyone who made an explicit or implicit covenant with the Devil (N. Homes, *Daemonologie and Theologie* (1650), esp. ch. iv).

⁷¹ By the late 1640s, Hobbes was concerned about the vagueness of the law in this regard, and called for precise formal definitions, 'purged from ambiguity' (T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), p. 22).

⁷² 5 Eliz., c. 16 (1563), 'An Act agaynst Coniurac[i]ons Inchantments and Witchecraftes', 1 Jas. I, c. 12 (1604), 'An Acte agaynst Coniuration Witchcraft and dealing with evill and wicked Spirits'. An act of 1542 (33 Hen. VIII, c. 8)—which referred simply to 'dyves and sundrie persons'—was repealed in 1547 (1 Edw. VI, c. 12). A proclamation of 1559 announcing the injunctions for religion used general terms to forbid witchcraft (*Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin (3 vols., New Haven, Conn., 1964–9), ii. 26). The 1563 statute may have been a response to the practices of male magicians in London, and the first person to be charged under the 1604 act may well have been a man (*A.P.C. 1558–70*), pp. 6, 22; *Hist. Comm., Salisbury MSS.*, xvii. 36). For cases from the 1550s, see *A.P.C. 1550–2*, pp. 279, 300; *A.P.C. 1552–4*, pp. 13, 131; *A.P.C. 1554–6*, p. 143.

⁷³ M. Dalton, *The Country Justice* (1618), pp. 250–1; Sir Edward Coke, *Third Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England* (1644), p. 44 (my emphasis). See also W. Sheppard, *An Epitome of all the Common*

that juries were advised to observe particular distinctions.⁷⁴ In practice, the law against witchcraft, like the law in general, was more likely to favour the defence of male suspects, especially men of respectable social and economic status, but it remains significant that it did at least allow for the *possibility* of male witchcraft.

As Dr. Christina Lerner and Dr. Stuart Clark have argued, witches were predominantly female for secondary reasons: they were witches first and women second. Witches and women were never equated; women were strongly *associated* with witchcraft in the same way they were associated with the negative poles of many binary oppositions central to early modern thought. 'For this reason', writes Dr. Clark, 'it was literally unthinkable that witches should be typically male'; but, equally, nor should they be exclusively female.⁷⁵ Moreover, the contrast between theory and practice was less pronounced than one might expect. After all, even though eighty per cent of witches were female, this still meant that on average one man was prosecuted for every four women; at certain times and places the ratio might be as high as one or even two for every three, as was the case during the Ely trials of 1646–7.⁷⁶ Clearly, then, although the folkloric stereotype of the female witch helped to shape the gender composition of the accused, it did not directly determine it; nor does it satisfactorily explain why accusations were made in the first place. In reality, to a surprising number of people a male witch appears to have been no more implausible than a female burglar or murderer (both predominantly male criminal categories) because specific circumstances, relationships and, above all, the fear of *maleficium* took precedence over an unqualified appreciation of the sex of the suspect in the mind of the accuser.

Consequently, the charges against men and women were frequently similar.⁷⁷ John Godfrey (no relation) was prosecuted for various *maleficia* against animals and people at the Middlesex sessions in 1597 and 1609. An

and Statute Laws of this Nation now in Force (1656), p. 1110. William West, a barrister, did consider maleficent witches to be women, but then he also believed them capable of raising storms, moving corn fields and flying on 'a staffe or forke, or some other instrument': such feats were generally absent from English trials (W. West, *Symbolaeographie* (1594), cited in Ewen, pp. 23–4).

⁷⁴ See, for example, *A Volume of Court Leet Records of the Manor of Manchester in the 16th Century*, ed. J. Harland (Chetham Soc., lxiii, 1864), p. 30; Sir Peter Leicester, *Charges to the Grand Jury at Quarter Sessions, 1660–77*, ed. E. M. Halcrow (Chetham Soc., 3rd ser., v, 1953), pp. 16, 73–4.

⁷⁵ Lerner, p. 87; Clark, "Gendering" of witchcraft", pp. 427–8, 431–7, quotation at p. 437. For a recent elegant restatement of this idea, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 109–12. As Dr. Clark writes, 'It remains, then, a *question mal posée* to ask why women were the main objects of witch prosecution when its main objects were witches who, for culturally specific reasons, were expected to be female' (p. 111).

⁷⁶ Overall, of recorded suspects tried at Ely in these years, 6 were male and 11 female (Camb. Univ. Libr., EDR E44/3; E12 1647/1–2, 4–5, 7–12, 14–22), 5 out of 12 witches at a single trial were men (EDR E12 1647/23, calendar of prisoners in Ely gaol, Sept. 1647).

⁷⁷ Although the majority of male witches were probably cunning men, this did not constitute 'a fundamental difference in the motive behind men's and women's attempted manipulation of the supernatural', as has been argued for early modern Italy (R. Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550–1650* (Oxford, 1989), p. 226).

Essex glover of the same name was indicted for causing death with witchcraft in 1616; and the following year another man was convicted of attempting to destroy a family at Islington using *maleficium* and poisoning.⁷⁸ Even the circumstances of accusations might be similar to those made against women. In a striking parallel to William Godfrey's case, also from 1617, David Fairman indicted John Rolfe and another man and his wife for bewitching his livestock following a quarrel over boundaries and trespassing pigs at Dallington in Sussex. He told magistrates that they had used witchcraft in their 'intent to impoverish him and to make him weary of his dwelling', adding that after his wife refused to sell Rolfe a cow, 'he went away disco[n]tented', mouthing threats in the classic manner.⁷⁹ Evidently, it was possible for accusers to uphold one image of a witch—the female stereotype—and yet not be bound by it in practice.⁸⁰

Hence we return to the more fundamental question of how *any* witch, irrespective of gender, came to be prosecuted, and the broader explanatory model proposed above. In all prosecutions, three basic intersecting factors can be identified: the existence of conflict, the prevalence of witch-beliefs, and a legal framework which allowed the former to be legitimately expressed and resolved in terms of the latter. As for the law, suffice it to say that a statute existed to make witchcraft a felony, that technically magistrates were obliged to act when felonies were reported and that many anxious and angry people availed themselves of this facility throughout the period.⁸¹ This leaves conflict and belief, both of which were as complex and varied in individual cases as human beings themselves. The remainder of this article will attempt to demonstrate the part played by these factors in William Godfrey's prosecution and, conversely, what this might suggest about the nature of popular mentalities in early modern England.

To understand the social meaning of witchcraft, it is necessary for us to explore the 'qualitative contexts' in which individual accusations took place.⁸²

⁷⁸ *Middlesex County Records*, ed. J. C. Jeaffreson (4 vols., 1886–92), i. 237; Ewen, p. 208; *County of Middlesex: Calendar to the Sessions Records*, ed. W. Le Hardy (4 vols., 1935–41), iv. 303.

⁷⁹ East Sussex Record Office, QR/E18 fos. 26–31, 59–61, quotations at fo. 60; Herrup, pp. 32–33n. 10 years later Fairman presented one of the accused for trespass (QR/E 28). John Rolfe had himself accused a neighbour, Robert Stockton, of *maleficium* in 1602 (*Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (1975), no. 2057; *Calendar of Assize Records: Sussex Indictments, James I*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (1975), no. 73). For other examples of male maleficent witches, see Gaskill, 'Witchcraft in early modern Kent', pp. 272–8; *idem*, 'Attitudes to crime', ch. ii.

⁸⁰ On this point, see B. Scribner, 'Is a history of popular culture possible?', *Hist. of European Ideas*, x (1989), 183–4; Gaskill, 'Witchcraft in early modern Kent', pp. 261–2; Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 22–3. Popular attitudes could be influenced by the tangible reality of judicial judgement. In Salem, for example, the idea of male witches became less extraordinary after the execution of John Proctor (Rosenthal, pp. 109, 115).

⁸¹ For comment on the law and legal procedure in witchcraft cases, see C. R. Unsworth, 'Witchcraft beliefs and criminal procedure in early modern England', in *Legal Record and Historical Reality: Proceedings of the 8th British Legal History Conference, Cardiff 1987*, ed. T. G. Watkin (1989), pp. 71–98; Holmes, 'Popular culture?', pp. 87–92; Sharpe, 'Women, witchcraft and the legal process'.

⁸² A 'qualitative context of crime and prosecution' may be defined as 'the complex and

We are thus fortunate that William Godfrey's case is exceptional, not just for the reasons given above, but for the amount of detail the records have to offer. For the majority of English witchcraft cases, we have at best a few depositions or perhaps a pamphlet account, but more often only basic court records survive (mainly terse indictments) which tell us little about what witchcraft actually meant to people. This case, though, reveals a richer background of alliances and animosities which usually either cannot be reconstructed or remain undisturbed in the archives. Yet even here we have surely only scratched the surface. Other scraps of information are tantalizing in this regard, and suggest a social, economic, legal and mental environment where a witchcraft prosecution was just one way by which daily conflicts between competing neighbours might be played out. A great deal of conflict in Romney Marsh originated in disputes over ownership of the land and livestock central to the regional economy. It is revealing, therefore, that lawsuits against Godfrey concerning sheep both preceded and succeeded the witchcraft prosecution of 1617.⁸³

In June 1613 Godfrey was presented for killing a lamb belonging to Thomas Godfrey, a gentleman from nearby Lydd (apparently no relation), whose land was adjacent to his own.⁸⁴ Although the grand jury rejected the charge, in September of the following year, James Cushman, a thatcher, deposed to mayor Peter Lancaster that he had seen William Godfrey take a lamb from Thomas Godfrey's field, cut its throat, then carry it home on his horse. The previous winter, he added, he had spied Godfrey and his wife in their barnyard hastily marking sheep with tar. All this Godfrey denied, and presumably he was bailed.⁸⁵ In December 1614 the story took yet another twist. Godfrey's daughter, Judith, later implicated in bewitching William Clarke's property, admitted that a sow had killed a newborn lamb as she

contingent web of choices, priorities and responses which were crucial in determining the outcome of criminal justice, long before anyone stepped inside a courtroom' (Gaskill, 'Attitudes to crime', p. 3, *passim*).

⁸³ For a striking description of the village community where social relations were full of ambiguities, for example over ownership of property, see Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 138–42. See also Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, ch. vi.

⁸⁴ This was the father of the future M.P. for New Romney and activist of the 1640s (also called Thomas), and grandfather of Sir Edmundberry Godfrey, murdered during the Popish Plot of 1678. Thomas Godfrey senior died in 1623 (*D.N.B.* s.v. 'Godfrey, Sir Edmund Berry'). On Thomas Godfrey junior, see Clark, *English Provincial Society*, pp. 312, 338. For an occasion in 1608 where the Godfrey family went to law over sheep distrained from their land, see C.K.S., NR/CP 1b 77–9. They were also central to the Broomhill dispute (see above). Parish registers for New Romney do not survive before 1662, and although the vicars of New Romney were also the rectors of Hope, and consequently a few entries for New Romney appear on the Hope register, 1589–1607, none relates to the Godfrey family (C.K.S., P191 1/1; Teichman-Derville, *Annals*, p. 31). For the genealogy of the Godfreys of Lydd, see 'The visitation of the county of Kent, taken in the year 1619 by John Philipott', *Arch. Cant.*, vi (1866), 260; 'The domestic chronicle of Thomas Godfrey, esq.', in *The Topographer and Genealogist*, ed. J. G. Nichols (3 vols., 1846–58), ii. 450–67; C.K.S., PRC 32/42/285–88, will of Peter Godfrey, proved 11 Aug. 1613; PRC 32/46/150v–107, will of another Peter Godfrey, Thomas junior's brother, proved 15 Dec. 1624; P237 1/1, Lydd parish register, 1540–1799.

⁸⁵ C.K.S., NR/JQP 1/27 (1614), examination of James Cushman and William Godfrey, Sept. 1618.

tended her father's flock and, fearing her parents' wrath, she had swapped it for one belonging to another farmer. Her father had become suspicious when his ewe rejected the changeling and she confessed.⁸⁶ Neither the outcome of these charges nor the connections between them are clear. Judith Godfrey was presented for theft,⁸⁷ but came to no serious judicial harm as her father's will indicates that she later married, and we know that Godfrey himself was at liberty in 1617.⁸⁸ The basic point, however, is self evident: the Godfrey family were embroiled in local disputes and suspected as thieves long before the taint of witchcraft entered the official record.

This discovery is reinforced by accusations made in 1618 which tied in with James Cushman's testimony four years earlier. In November, less than nine months after his acquittal for witchcraft, Godfrey was back before the magistrates, and this time the plaintiff was none other than Thomas Bennett, the reluctant witness who had boasted about 'setting a prick in [Godfrey's] tail'. Bennett deposed that after his servants told him of a sheep bearing his mark in a field at Ivychurch, he had questioned the occupier, John Sebery, who told him that his flock actually belonged to William Godfrey, and that he was only looking after it for a year. Bennett confronted Godfrey who protested that he had bought the sheep legitimately, after which Godfrey, by his own admission, reclaimed the animal before Bennett could get to it. Sebery deposed that Godfrey had in fact substituted the contested sheep for another, saying 'there were xii poynts in lawe and possession is eleaven of them'.⁸⁹ The law, however, disagreed and he was charged with felony.⁹⁰

Such disputes seem to have been a normal part of marshland life, especially in this era of social instability and uncertainty prior to the Civil Wars. Even a cursory glance through surviving court-books confirms that Godfrey was by no means the only inhabitant of New Romney caught up in a succession of lawsuits strung out over months or even years. The network of friendships and feuds behind Godfrey's case, moreover, was undoubtedly more extensive and intricate than it is possible to show here. For example, there was evidently no love lost between Thomas Bennett and sometime mayor Peter Lancaster. At some point in 1617 Lancaster had imprisoned Bennett at New Romney for a debt of sixty pounds owed to him, perhaps suggesting that he had been trying to lure Bennett into custody by calling

⁸⁶ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/27 (1614), examination of Judith Godfrey, Dec. 1618. It is not known how this confession came to the attention of the authorities, but it is possible that Godfrey put his daughter forward as a cover, safe in the knowledge that the law would be more favourable towards her at a felony trial.

⁸⁷ C.K.S., NR/JQp1/27 (1614), presentment of Judith Godfrey. This presentment added that the crime was committed in time of divine service, presumably for added obloquy. The relevant court and sessions books, which would tell us more, do not survive for the 17th century before 1616.

⁸⁸ See C.K.S., PRC 3/5/26-7.

⁸⁹ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/31 (1618), examinations of Thomas Bennett, 6 Nov. 1618; William Godfrey, 7 Nov. 1618; and John Sebery, 18 Nov. 1618.

⁹⁰ C.K.S., NR/JQ 1, quarter sessions book, 1616-74, fos. 22v-23. On 1 March 1619 Godfrey was still bound by recognizance (fos. 26v, 27v, 28v).

him to give evidence, or that Bennett was uncooperative to Lancaster's request because he had already been imprisoned.⁹¹ The exact connections between Bennett, Godfrey and the magistracy regarding witchcraft, sheep-theft, debt and other matters are not known, but enough of a context of conflict is visible to cast the witchcraft prosecution in a different light. In particular, it is clear that accusations were not tied to a single dynamic of social tension but that, as Wolfgang Behringer has written recently, 'every form of conflict lends itself in principle to a transference onto the level of witchcraft'.⁹²

Whereas historians have tended to present witchcraft accusations as the culmination of a chain-reaction, the lawsuits in Jacobean New Romney would be better likened to a web in which Godfrey's prosecution as a witch formed but a single thread. All manner of disputes proliferated endlessly without proper resolution, especially when opponents of approximately equal social status were jockeying for position.⁹³ Furthermore, a web of co-operation was woven through the warp of conflict. Godfrey was, after all, an integrated social figure who trained with his enemies in the militia, whose children played in their houses and, most important of all, who worked and traded with them. Barely a month before the first witnesses were examined about Godfrey's witchcraft, Nicholas Archer of Saltwood, whose warning to Thomas Bennett had first alerted John Barber about the possible danger Godfrey presented, was prosecuted for throwing hay out of a barn and blocking the public highway. The owner of the barn? William Godfrey of New Romney.⁹⁴ If Archer did this against Godfrey's will, then it embellishes the picture of local conflict; if, on the other hand, he was employed by Godfrey as a labourer, as seems more likely given that this was not a private prosecution for theft or damage to property, it simply illustrates yet another type of relationship which could exist between witch and accuser. According to Barber, Archer was spreading rumours about Godfrey as far back as 1613 when he first believed he had been bewitched, suggesting the possibility of co-existence—albeit tense co-existence—with suspected witches on a day-to-day

⁹¹ C.K.S., NR/JW 167, process of witherman court, complaint of Thomas Bennett, 28 Jan. 1618. One could extend these networks of conflict outwards from the 1617 witchcraft case; for example, in about 1618 William Hebblethwaite, jurat, petitioned the Lord Warden for protection from 'his enemies mighty, his dangers many'; it was Hebblethwaite whose land Godfrey bought in 1616 after other members of the magistracy distrained it for non-payment of rent (P.R.O., SP 14/104/193; C.K.S., NR/AC 1, assembly book 1577–1622, fos. 245v–246v).

⁹² W. Behringer, 'Witchcraft studies in Austria, Germany and Switzerland', in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, p. 91. On the same point see also Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 142–54.

⁹³ William Godfrey and William Clarke, for example, were men of similar age and wealth, assessed at the same poor rate in 1615 (C.K.S., NR/ZPa 4/15, churchwardens' and overseers' assessment, 1615). According to their depositions, in 1617 Godfrey was about 47 years old and Clarke about 50. 'Witchcraft was primarily the idiom of conflict between closely matched rivals, rather than between those at opposite ends of the spectrum of wealth and power' (Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, p. 304).

⁹⁴ C.K.S., NR/JQp 1/30 (1617), presentment of Nicholas Archer, 25 March 1617.

basis.⁹⁵ Evidently, here, conflict was generated by social and economic integration; and, as in other witchcraft accusations, discord between individuals was liable to escalate into feuds between whole households, the household being the most integrative social and economic institution.⁹⁶

To the individual accuser, what mattered more than the objective social profile of the suspect determined by sex, status, physical appearance or even supposed maleficent power, was the highly subjective and often unstable social relationship between the two parties. In general, specific accusations were made only when this relationship deteriorated, and even then would enter the public sphere first as gossip, and in most instances probably went no further. Quite how informal accusations developed into formal prosecutions defies simple generalization. Since, in contrast to continental inquisitorial procedure, English accusatory justice dictated that ordinary prosecutors risked counter-prosecution for slander if they lost, it is easy to see why many people were reluctant to repeat in a courtroom the things they said in the fields and alehouses, and why most of the time rumour-spreading and folk-magic were preferred as counter-measures. For a formal prosecution to go ahead probably depended on a confluence of factors such as the mobilization of local feeling, the particular unacceptability of a misfortune, a legal climate of successful prosecution and the actions of a zealous witch-finder, minister or magistrate. But, in the final assessment, as Sir Keith Thomas has observed, 'we can only speculate as to why one case was taken up in the courts while another remained a matter of village gossip'.⁹⁷

It is always possible that a particular witchcraft prosecution was blatantly malicious, forming part of a wider strategy in a feud. Contemporaries certainly believed that the courts should exercise caution. In 1627 the Somerset minister Richard Bernard warned that 'witnesses may feigne their accusations, yet and confirme them by oath to bee truth', and that others were 'so transported with rage and uncharitable desire of revenge' that they may exaggerate about suspects in order to 'rid them out of the way'. Twenty years later, the witch-finder John Stearne used almost identical words.⁹⁸ The problem is that, except in the case of fraudulent diabolical possession, malice is usually impossible to prove historically. Counter-suits,

⁹⁵ To style oneself a witch, or to confirm the fears of others, could command 'an elaborate if cautious deference', and thus might provide an exploitable source of authority (Holmes, 'Women: witnesses and witches', p. 52). See also M. E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 25. For witches whose local standing was based on fear of their powers, see T. Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (1613), sigs. B1v-B2.

⁹⁶ In the Flemish village of Bouvignies, witchcraft accusations in 1679 were set against a broad background of conflict over land and livestock, and were directed towards at least one villager positioned at the centre of the struggle (R. Muchembled, *Les derniers bûchers: un village de Flandre et ses sorcières sous Louis XIV* (Paris, 1981). Competition between households, as much as the association of witchcraft with women, helps to explain why many men accused of witchcraft were accused alongside their wives (see Gaskill, 'Attitudes to crime', pp. 61-6).

⁹⁷ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 534.

⁹⁸ Bernard, pp. 194-6; Stearne, p. 34. Sceptics stressed the role of malice even more emphatically. Reginald Scot, for example, argued that 'manie maintaine and crie out for the execution of witches,

however, do expose the conspiracies which could field witchcraft prosecutions but which in most cases have left no record. In 1608 Nicholas Stockdale, a Norfolk yeoman, alleged in Star Chamber that eight years earlier he had been indicted at the assizes for killing sheep by witchcraft, but it had been proved that they died from overgrazing. In 1602, after a constable and others deposed that Stockdale was responsible for *maleficia* dating back to 1595, he was tried as 'a notorious murderer witche and fellow', but again acquitted. One of the defendants denied subornation, or—anticipating Bernard—telling the conspirators 'that they should do a good deed to hange the said complainant out of the way'. Instead, like so many other witnesses in witchcraft trials, he pleaded simply that Stockdale was a 'badd fellow' and that Goodwife Skippon had 'never prospered since the tyme that her husband and the now complainant fell owt'.⁹⁹ Although Star Chamber evidence cannot be taken at face value, the case still illustrates how malicious charges might be constructed, the plausibility of a legal defence of conspiracy and, above all, that the plaintiff could be a man of middling status accused of typical *maleficia* after falling out with neighbours. We cannot say how many others shared Nicholas Stockdale's experience; for all we know, William Godfrey may have had a similar story.¹⁰⁰

A full analysis of interpersonal relations in the fertile but insalubrious expanses of early Stuart Romney Marsh lies beyond the scope of this article. Instead, an insight has been given into a social context which is considerably richer than that revealed by the depositions of 1617—a context which extends our understanding of what witch-beliefs could mean to ordinary people. William Godfrey's case bridges not only the theory and experience of witchcraft, but also links the experience of witchcraft more generally with the way people in Jacobean society might have perceived, contemplated and responded to confrontation and competition. Consequently, there is less to say about belief *per se*, since it has been implicit in the discussion throughout. Popular beliefs and attitudes cannot be properly understood in the abstract, but need to be considered in terms of practical influences, actions and relationships, situated in the concreteness of daily life. This is a point expressed succinctly by Gordon Schochet: 'At best, we can infer a portion of the belief system of the ordinary member of Stuart society from our knowledge of his regular experiences and the doctrines he was taught'.¹⁰¹ This

that particularlie beleeve never a whit of that which is imputed unto them' (R. Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), p. 15).

⁹⁹ P.R.O., STAC 8/276/25 esp. mm. 1–2v, 14. The case is summarized in C. L. Ewen, *Witchcraft in the Star Chamber* (n.p., 1938), pp. 20–1.

¹⁰⁰ The Jacobean Star Chamber records do not contain any plaintiffs or defendants by the name of William Godfrey, and of numerous men by the name of William Clarke none is involved in Kent cases (*List and Index to the Proceedings in Star Chamber for the Reign of James I (1603–25), in the Public Record Office, London: Class STAC 8*, ed. T. G. Barnes (3 vols., Chicago, Ill., 1975)).

¹⁰¹ G. Schochet, 'Patriarchalism, politics and mass attitudes in Stuart England', *Historical Jour.*, xii (1969), 414. Historians have seen this practical approach as a way of getting to grips with the ethereal

has been a brief study of witchcraft as an idea but, crucially, as an idea in action.¹⁰²

This practical approach is central to the history of mentalities and projects a kaleidoscopic rather than a fixed image, constantly requiring us to adjust our focus.¹⁰³ It is a well-established idea, for example, that the birthing-chamber was meant to be exclusively reserved for women,¹⁰⁴ and that participants might lay themselves open to accusations of witchcraft if they crossed boundaries into ambiguous areas of authority.¹⁰⁵ Yet this does not explain why Godfrey's apparition there was so disturbing to Susan Barber. In this context, he can be seen simply as someone she believed bore her family diabolical malice; the fact that he was a *man* invading a female space cannot be dismissed as irrelevant, but it may have been secondary in importance. This incident also shows that when conflict and belief are viewed together, it is not just the functional value of the witchcraft accusation to the accuser which is laid bare, but also the accuser's vulnerability to the witch. In short, we have a graphic illustration of witchcraft as power: the legal power to accuse, and the perceived magical power to bewitch. Although driven by hatred and anger, the accuser's primary emotion was undoubtedly fear: relentless anxiety about death, suffering, intrusion and dispossession.¹⁰⁶ Again, we can see how this fear could be directed towards anyone a distraught person believed bore feelings of hostility towards his or her household.¹⁰⁷ Just as self-confessed female

concept of popular culture (see, for example, E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (1991), p. 7; Amussen, 'The gendering of popular culture', pp. 48–9).

¹⁰² This approach is particularly important because learned ideas about witches were rarely consciously employed at the popular level (see Sharpe, 'Witchcraft and women', p. 183; Holmes, 'Women: witnesses and witches', pp. 64, 76–7). As Max Gluckman has written: 'Magic and witchcraft are lived, far more than they are reasoned about' ('The logic of African science and witchcraft', in *Witchcraft and Sorcery: Selected Readings*, ed. M. Gluckman (2nd edn., 1982), p. 444).

¹⁰³ As Michel Vovelle has written, the history of mentalities is a natural extension of more solid social history, forcing us to confront 'the real in all its complexity and in its totality' (*Ideologies and Mentalities*, trans. E. O'Flaherty (Cambridge, 1990), p. 12. See also J. Le Goff, 'Mentalities: a history of ambiguities', in *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology*, ed. J. Le Goff and P. Nora (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 174–6; M. A. Gismondi, "'The gift of theory": a critique of the *histoire des mentalités*', *Social Hist.*, x (1985), 212.

¹⁰⁴ See A. Wilson, 'The ceremony of childbirth and its interpretation', in Fildes, pp. 68–107. In practice, husbands were often expected to be at hand to offer support (Pollock, pp. 52–3; U. Rublack, 'Pregnancy, childbirth and the female body in early modern Germany', *Past and Present*, cl (Feb. 1996), 84–110, esp. p. 85). Indeed, in Susan Barber's case not only did the women leave soon after she had given birth, but her husband John was nearby throughout to help her through her ordeal.

¹⁰⁵ For a good summary of these dangers, see Purkiss, pp. 417–22.

¹⁰⁶ The centrality of fear and insecurity in witchcraft accusations has been re-emphasized recently in W. Behringer, 'Weather, hunger and fear: origins of the European witch hunts in climate, society and mentality', *German Hist.*, xiii (1995), 1–27. As well as Godfrey's unwelcome presence in the birthing-chamber, witnesses' stress on his use of the back door suggests sinister invasion of their homes. One may see a connection here with possession, which was experienced as an invasion of the body by a malevolent force (see J. A. Sharpe, 'Disruption in the well-ordered household: age, authority and possessed young people', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Griffiths, A. Fox and S. Hindle (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 194–5).

¹⁰⁷ For a case from the 1630s where a woman in childbirth believed herself oppressed by a witch

witches were 'not always mere consumers of male discourse', the actions of many female accusers reflected more than simply the internalization of male standards of conduct, if only because their demonic adversaries were sometimes men.¹⁰⁸

The contrast between theory and reality is heightened if one turns to a religious context. Sir Keith Thomas has described popular religion as an incoherent conglomeration of scraps of thought and custom, in contrast to the formal worship which supplanted it.¹⁰⁹ He has been criticized on the grounds that plebeian beliefs were actually more systematic; for dividing magic and religion too sharply, suggesting the popularity of the former and unpopularity of the latter; and because orthodox devotion was actually no less diverse or syncretic.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the similarities between popular witch-beliefs and those enshrined in official doctrine were more important than the differences. Even though ministers urged people to trust in Providence, they were cautious about denying the temporal agency of the Devil;¹¹¹ and biblical injunctions against witches remained a powerful argument for their existence until the early eighteenth century, when doubts about translations of the word 'witch' from Hebrew first became widespread in England.¹¹² Moreover, no one would ever have been formally executed for witchcraft had parliament not seen fit to legislate against it in the first place. Yet, in a sense, Thomas was right to emphasize the chaotic nature of popular beliefs, if only because, in terms of their practical application, a multiplicity of unique circumstances dictated infinite variety. To most people, beliefs were not precepts carved in stone, but states of mind subject to change as their lives changed; in other words, they did not have a single mentality, but were flexible in their thinking—even capricious and contradictory—and this is surely how we must try to understand them.¹¹³

with whom her husband had come into conflict, see Camb. Univ. Libr., EDR E11 1639, prosecution of Anne Greene of Littleport (Cambs.).

¹⁰⁸ Quotation from Roper, p. 19. For the view that witchcraft accusations between women reflect self-interested female subscription to, and investment in, male cultural values, see Wiesner, p. 229.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, *passim*.

¹¹⁰ For the first criticism, see H. Geertz, 'An anthropology of religion and magic, I', *Jour. of Interdisciplinary Hist.*, vi (1975), 71–89; for the second, P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English Society, 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 192–3; and for recent examples of the third R. Hutton, 'The English Reformation and the evidence of folklore', *Past and Present*, cxlviii (Aug. 1995), 89–116; M. Ingram, 'From Reformation to toleration: popular religious cultures in England, 1540–1690', in *Popular Culture in England*, pp. 95–123.

¹¹¹ See, for example, 'Arthur Hildersham's commonplace book of the sayings of Richard Greenham, 1581–2', John Rylands University Library, Manchester, English MS. 524 fo. 47; T. Bromhall, *A Treatise of Specters* (1658), p. 122.

¹¹² For typical contributions to this debate, see *The Impossibility of Witchcraft, Plainly proving, From Scripture and Reason, That there never was a Witch; and that it is both Irrational and Impious to believe there ever was* (1712), pp. 3–6, 14; *A Discourse on Witchcraft. Occasion'd by a Bill now depending in Parliament, to repeal the Statue . . . against Conjuraton, Witchcraft, and dealing with evil and wicked Spirits* (1736), p. 8.

¹¹³ Jim Sharpe has described witchcraft as 'a complex set of beliefs and practices which, by their very nature, were fluid, ambivalent and sometimes ill defined' (*Instruments of Darkness*, p. 167).

Above all, we need to see the lives of early modern people from their own perspective. Gender, in particular, as Mr. Robin Briggs has asserted, was ‘a bundle of shared assumptions’ to contemporaries, and we must avoid projecting our conceptions backwards into their minds.¹¹⁴ Godfrey’s case may well have been atypical, but to the people of New Romney in 1617—not least Godfrey himself—it was as valid and real an experience of the European ‘witch-craze’ as any other prosecution in the early modern period. In some ways, then, his case reinforces the earlier observation that, a disproportionate number of female suspects notwithstanding, witches were accused primarily because they were believed to be witches rather than because they were women. If Godfrey’s male status was important to his accusers then they may not have been consciously aware of it and, even if they were, any such considerations were undoubtedly eclipsed by the panic they felt at the thought that he could threaten their lives and property with maleficent power. Godfrey was a witch because his neighbours perceived him as such and, when seen from their emotional stance rather than our own sociological or psychological perspective, that is really all that matters.¹¹⁵

Thus we arrive at the principal conclusion that we cannot define attitudes, meanings or beliefs about witchcraft; we can only point to a range of possibilities fleshed out in real settings based on narratives which are essentially unique in construction.¹¹⁶ This may seem rather a bathetic way to end, but then, as Dr. Robert Darnton has written, there is no reason why cultural history ‘should avoid the eccentric or embrace the average, for one cannot calculate the mean of meanings or reduce symbols to their lowest common denominator’.¹¹⁷ We have identified three basic causal elements—conflict, belief and law—and these must suffice as the lowest possible common denominators for all witchcraft prosecutions. If we try to pin down the dynamics of witchcraft more precisely we risk creating an explanatory framework unable to accommodate awkward variations which

¹¹⁴ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, pp. 6–7, 286, 371, 408–9. See also R. Rowland, ‘“Fantastical and devilish persons”: European witch-beliefs in comparative perspective’, in *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, pp. 163–4; Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 6–7, 58–9, 301. On the importance of relativism for studying pre-industrial societies in general, see T. G. Ashplant and A. Wilson, ‘Present-centred history and the problem of historical knowledge’, *Historical Jour.*, xxxi (1988), 253–74; Larner, p. 5. For a less sanguine view, see S. Reynolds, ‘Social mentalities and the case of medieval scepticism’, *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 6th ser., i (1991), 21–41. Lyndal Roper has argued against ‘an excessive emphasis on the cultural creation of subjectivity’ (Roper, p. 3, and *passim*).

¹¹⁵ As Robin Briggs has written, the most important popular stereotype was neither male nor female, but ‘a person motivated by ill-will and spite who lacked the proper sense of neighbourhood and community’ (*Witches and Neighbours*, p. 23). For this reason the article has not focused on Godfrey’s masculinity—asserting himself as a householder and landlord, laughing at his accusers, fighting and so on—as some readers may have wished. However, the importance of this dimension is undoubted, as is evidenced by a growing literature. For an introduction to key themes, see Fletcher, pp. 5, 16; Roper, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ As Jonathan Barry has observed, historians of witchcraft are now undertaking the challenge ‘to explore the positive dimension of past evidence as storytelling, by considering the meaning of the story itself’ (Barry, p. 43).

¹¹⁷ R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre: and other Episodes in French Cultural History* (1984), p. 14.

emerge from the archives. There is a constant need for historians to question their conceptual tools and the interpretations which those tools shape, and to remember that although anthropological, sociological and psychological models provide stimulating interpretative structures by which historical evidence may be organized, they do not determine human behaviour, past or present. Our dead subjects, people like William Godfrey and his neighbours at New Romney, are notoriously recalcitrant in that regard.

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