

John Waller  
(Report of a mismanaged witchcraft  
trial in Faversham)  
in Raphael Holinshed and others  
The third volume of chronicles  
London  
1587

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THE

Third volume of Chronicles, beginning at duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror; and descending by degrees of yeeres to all the kings and queenes of England in their orderlie successions:

First compiled by Raphaell Holinshed, and by him extended to the year 1577.

Now newlie recognised, augmented, and continued (with occurrences and accidents of fresh memorie) to the year 1586.

...

1268

THE CHRONICLES OF

England, from the yeare of our Lord 1576, where Raphaell Holinshed left; supplied and continued to this present year 1586: by Iohn Stow, and others.

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The note of Iohn Waller concerning the arraignment of a witch.

At a great session holden in a towne of Kent called Feuersham, being a towne incorporat, and a lim or member of Douer; vpon the nineteenth daie of Aprill, in the yeare one thousand fiue hundred fourescore and six, before Thomas Barming, then maior of the same towne, and others; Ione Cason late the wife of one Freeman, was accused, attached, indicted, and arraigned for witchcraft; but condemned & adiudged to die, and executed for inuocation of wicked spirits, according to a statute made *In 5. Elisa. ca. 2:* for that she, the statute aforesaid not at all regarding, vpon the first of Aprill, in the seven and twentieth yeare of queene Elisabeth, and at diuerse daies and times since, the art of witchcraft and inchantment had vsed, and vpon wicked spirits had inuocated and called, contrarie to the peace of our souereigne ladie the queene; and namelie, that she the second of Februarie in the eight and twentieth yeare of queene Elisabeth, had bewitched Iane Cooke of the age of three yeares, who by hir inchantment languished and died. Herevpon seuen women and one man gaue euidence against hir, who though they were all verie poore people, yet were they the rather admitted to accuse hir,

for that they were hir neere neighbors, and hir offense verie odious.

The evidence of Sara Cooke against lone Cason.

The first and principall deposition was made by Sara Cooke, mother to the bewitched child in these words following (that is to saie) that after hir said child had beene sicke, languishing by the space of thirtene daies, a trauellor came into hir house, to the end to drinke a pot of ale (for she kept an alehouse) who seeing the lamentable case and pitious grieffe of the child, called hir vnto him, saieng; Hostesse, I take it that your child is bewitched. Wherevnto she answered, that she for hir part knew of no such matter. Well (said the ghest) if you thinke it to be so, doo no more but take a tile from ouer the lodging of the partie suspected, and laie it in a hot fier: and if she haue bewitched the child, the tile will sparkle and flie round about the cradle where the child lieth. Now she, conceiuing that trauellors haue good experience in such matters, did steale (as she deposed) a tile from the house of the said lone Cason (though not from ouer hir lodging) and laied it in the fier besides the cradle, which soone after sparkled about the house, euen according to hir said ghests information. And within short space, the saide lone (being the suspected partie) came into this deponents house, to see how the child did, which (soone after hir comming) looked full in hir face, and had not lifted vp hir eie, nor looked abroad all the night precedent; but within foure houres after died: so as by the circumstance of that euidence, she thought it might plainelie appeare to the iurie, that the said lone had bewitched hir child to death. Neuerthelesse, the prisoner did absolutelie denie anie thing doone, or proposed by hir to haue beene doone in this behalfe.

A pretie point of witchcraft.

A. Reim.

Howbeit, to pursue this matter to prooffe, and hir to death, the other seuen persons were all deposed; by whome it was affirmed constantlie, and approved manifestlie, that to the house of one Freeman (whose wife the said lone Cason then was) not latelie but diuerse years since resorted a little thing like a rat (but more reddish) hauing a brode taile, which some of them had seene, and some had heard of. Insomuch as one heard it crie in the wall like a cricket, another like a rat, another like a tode, another that it ran vnder a tub, and spake these words (that is to saie) Go to, go to, go to. And it was further de-

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posed by one goodwife Offild (the substantiallest person of them all) that hir cat could not kill it.

Hir accusers hir professed enimies.

All these depositions were made and taken, to proue lone Cason a witch; and consequentlie, that she had through hir inchantments, and by the helpe of this vermin or spirit, killed the said lone Cooke. But she (with great attestations) pleaded not giltie, alleging diuerse matters and instances of the malicious dealings of hir aduersaries against hir, reciting also certeine controuersies betwixt hir and them, wherein they had doone hir open wrong. But although she satisfied the bench and all the iurie touching hir innocencie for the killing of hir child, denieng also that she had anie skill in the art of witchcraft; she then and there confessed, that a little ver-

min, being of colour reddish, of stature lesse than a rat, and furnished with a brode taile, did diuerse yeares since (but not latelie) haunt hir house, and manie other houses in the towne; & further, that she (as she imagined) heard it crie sometimes; Go to, go to, go to; sometimes, Sicke sicke; sometimes, Come, come. Whereby she gathered, that it charged hir to see hir maister Masons will performed; which she had not executed according to the confidence he had in hir; to the trouble of hir conscience, and vexation of hir mind. And yet she honestlie confessed, that he had the vse of her bodie verie dishonestlie, whilst she was wife to hir husband Freeman.

The iurie meant well.

Vpon these foresaid depositions, and vpon this hir owne confession, the iurie was charged, went together; and being loth to condemne hir of witchcraft (which they knew to be fellonie) they acquitted hir thereof, and found hir giltie vpon the said statute, for inuocation of wicked spirits; thinking thereby to haue procured hir punishment by pillorie, or imprisonment, and to haue saued hir from the galowes. So as when the verdict was giuen vp by the iurie to the maior and his brethren, sitting on their iudgement seat, together with their learned counsell; the said maior vttered this speech following: (that is to saie) lone Cason, for so much as it hath pleased God to shew such fauor this daie vnto you, as to put it into the hearts of the iurie, to acquite you of the fellonie, wherevpon you were arreigned; it behooueth you to render most humble thanks to God and the queene, and hereafter to beware that you giue no such occasions of offense againe. And you shall doo well, hense forwards to serue God better, and to resort to sermons oftener: whereby you maie learne your obedience to God, and your dutie to your neighbors.

The first sentence of the maior of Feuersham.

A gentleman (being a lawier, & of counsell with the towne, sitting vpon the bench with the maior, to assist, or rather to direct him in the course of law and iustice) hearing this mild iudgement to proceed out of the maiors mouth, stept vnto him, and told him, that (vnder correction) he thought him to erre in the principall point of his sentence (that is to saie) that instead of life he should haue pronounced death; because inuocation of wicked spirits was made fellonie by the statute wherevpon she was arreigned. Then (quoth the maior) goodwife Cason, you must be conueied from hense to the Whitehouse from whence you came, and from thense to the place of execution, where you must be hanged vntill you be dead; and so God haue mercie vpon you.

The maiors second sentence.

Then was she carried back to their prison, which they call the White house. And because there was no matter of inuocation giuen in euidence against hir, nor proued in or by anie accusation, whereby the iurie might haue anie colour to condemne hir therefore: hir execution was staid by the space of three daies after iudgement was giuen. In the meane

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lone Casons confession.

time, she was persuaded by sundrie preachers and learned men to confesse it. But no persuasion could

lone Cason  
taketh hir  
death that she  
died gittlesse.

preuaile, to make hir acknowledge anie other criminal offense, but hir lewd life & adulterous conversation with one Mason, whose house she kept whilest he was in health, and whose person she tended whilest he was sicke; with whome she was conversant at the houre of his death, mainteining his concupiscence all the daies of his life; & in the end abused the trust reposed in hir, touching the disposition of certeine bequests, which he made hir onelie priuie vnto. For he died of the plague, for feare of which infection none other durst repaire vnto him; so as she vsed that matter according to hir wicked conscience. In which respect, she said in hir confession vpon the gallowes (taking hir death that she died gittlesse herein) that the iudgement of God was in such measure laid vpon hir, and therewithall made so godlie and penitent an end, that manie now lamented hir death, which were (before) hir vtter enimies. Yea some wished hir aliue after she was hanged, that cried out for the hangman when she was aliue: but she should haue beene more beholding vnto them that had kept hir from the gallowes, than to such as would haue cut the rope when she was strangled. Neuerthelesse, they extended to hir as much fauor herein, as their combarons of the ancient towne of Rie shewed to a neighbour of theirs named Foule. Which storie being not altogether impertinent, and certeinlie performed about the yeare of our Lord one thousand fiue hundred fortie & seuen, I thought it not vnfit to be in this place inserted; especially, because both these townes are ruled by one kind of gouernement, for they are of the ports.

The storie of  
Foule of Rie,  
hanged for  
robbing his  
wife.

There haunted to the house of this Foule, in respect of the good will he bare to his wife, a little honest man, whose name I will not discouer, who committed vnto hir custodie a bag of monie, amounting to the summe of ten pounds stearling. Fous wife locked it vp in her cupboord. Howbeit, she handled not the matter so couertlie, but hir couert baron espied it, and (in hir absence) either picked or brake open the locke, and tooke out the monie; wherewith afterwards he plaid the good fellow all the daies of his life. For immediatlie his wife accused him (not of subtile dealing) but of plaine theft, regarding more hir friends losse, than hir husbands life. Herevpon, the maior of Rie (at the next sessions) caused him to be indicted and arreigned, and being conuicted of the fact, he was condemned and adiudged to death. For whose better execution, there was presentlie a new paire of gallowes erected, wherewithout further delaie he was hanged vntill he was dead; which gallowes hath beene euer since called by the name of Fous mare. And now he cared not so much for the maior, as the maior did for him. For Foule was skant cold, but manie murmured at the maiors hastie proceedings; which moued them to doubt and whisper, that Fous fault was no felonie.

Fous mare.

Counsell asked  
too late.

But the maior (although it be said that portmen maie tell their tale wise) could not now deuse, how (Foule being dead) he might reuerse this foule sentence. Neuerthelesse, he sent vp with all speed to one maister Ramseie of Greies Inne, who

was of counsell with the towne, to learne what the law was in that case: who hauing fullie weied and conceiued thereof, told the partie directlie, that the matter was without the compasse of felonie. Whie sir (quoth the messenger) goodman Foule is alreadie hanged. Goodman Foule (said he againe) whie came ye then to me for counsell? But what was he for a man (said maister Ramsie?) A bad fellow (said the messenger.) Well (quoth he) go thou they waies home,

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& then there is but one knaue out of the waie. Such conclusions are manie times made in the ports, who sometimes vse the priuilege of their liberties, not as they ought, but as they list, seldome times applie their authoritie to so good purposes as they might: for commonlie they vse more circumspection in their expenses, than in their sentences.

<The third and last volume of this new edition of Holinshed's 'Chronicles' had been completed by January 1587 (that date is given at the end of the booklet containing the index). But then, mysteriously, some portions of the book were removed, 74 leaves in all, and eight new leaves were printed to bridge the gaps. Only a few copies of the book survive entire; most copies have been (as the expression is) castrated. This report of a witchcraft trial at Faversham is one of the contributions which disappeared when the book was cut: I transcribe it, not from an entire copy, but from a copy which has been mended with an eighteenth-century replica of the missing leaves. (The replica is generally very good, but the compositor lacked the calligraphic capitals, *A, D, R*, needed in the running titles.) The author, John Waller, is not anyone I know about. – C.F. November 2012, revised January 2013.>