Law and the Crime of Practicing Popular Medicine in Early Modern Society

The Cunning Folk and Magical Healing

Yf she be yonge and can have no children, wryte this psalme 33.
Exultate iusti in domino and these caracters, and perfume them with mastick and laye them to her right arm and she shall conceave.1

The cunning folk were the practitioners of traditional medicine in the popular neighborhood. The local community perceived their activities ambivalently. They were popular because their activities were often free of charge but they were also feared because through their magical powers they were potentially dangerous. On the whole, they offered remedial treatment to people in exchange for a meal or for some other small token of appreciation. Their healing practices and details of their expertise have been well recorded in a wide variety of primary manuscript sources which I have consulted for this study to provide an account of popular medicine in northwest England which may, or may not have parallels with other regions of England. Although cunning folk had practiced popular medicine in the community for many centuries, by the seventeenth century Puritan Justices of the Peace in local Quarter Sessions courts had demonized their healing activities, and, by the early seventeenth century, they became susceptible to and were more often accused of sorcery and of pronouncing 'inchauntements' [enchantments] and witchcraft. It was, however, a complex situation. Members of the community also, by the seventeenth century, made similar accusations of sorcery and enchantments and these cases were also brought before the Church courts. Research into the ecclesiastical court records of Northwest England suggests that legal accusations initiated by the community were spontaneous demonstrations of fear that increased during periods of social dislocation, principally when large numbers of children died at any one time in a particular community. There is evidence to suggest that the cunning folk were caught up in these community outpourings of anguish and were often held responsible by members of the community for causing the misfortune. The primary documents consulted for this investigation provide an important historical source. They offer an insight into a little understood social account of the widespread affairs and popular form of treatment that contributes a unique perspective of popular medicine and the connection with the supernatural world, while offering an insight into the lives and mentalities of villagers and townspeople of early modern England.2

Before examining selected detailed legal cases involving enchantments it will be constructive to briefly summarise the broader use of popular medicine in the seventeenth century. One notable feature of the practice of traditional medicine is that the responsibility for the wellbeing of the community was not placed specifically with doctors of medicine, or with surgeons, but traversed a broad spectrum of formal and informal curative methods. In this regard, historians acknowledge the duties of apothecaries, herbalists and midwives. However, the widespread use of 'domestic' medicine by women and the role of the cunning folk in practicing medicine both have been given little attention.3 The focus of this investigation, therefore,

1 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms.e. Mus, 173, Ms e. Mus., 243, folio 13, 'Conception for to Cause.'
2 For evidence relating to the activities of the cunning folk in Northwest England, see Cheshire Record Office (hereafter referred to as CRO) manuscripts referring to cases of popular medicine below. See also Lancashire Record Office (hereafter referred to as LRO for details of cases of sorcery involving cunning folk in Lancashire Quarter Sessions courts. The Oxford Record Office contains manuscripts pertaining to cunning folk and they appear here to provide some comparative details of the social circumstances of cunning.
3 See, for example, Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England (London, 1971). This study analyses the subject of popular healing thoroughly and extensively but it does not examine any particular region in detail. See also, Alan Macfarlane, Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England; A Regional and Comparative Study (London, 1970). Macfarlane's study is a comprehensive and far-reaching study of the cunning folk, but it is confined to the Essex region. See also Mary Chamberlain, Old Wives Tales: Their History, Remedies and Spells (London, 1981). Chamberlains' study recognises that church legislation operated to outlaw women as healers. Her study, however, identifies a gap between official ideology and actual practice. Women continued to nurse patients back to health and were consulted in spite of the church's long history of stopping women...
is to understand the use of 'cunning' [knowledge] that was engaged by a wide variety of so-called 'informal' practitioners of traditional medicine in early-modern England.

Firstly, it is important to know precisely who the cunning folk were and what they did. Popular medicine to restore health was undertaken by individuals who were known collectively as the 'cunning folk.' The cunning folk were sometimes referred to as 'Wise women', 'Wise men' or 'Blessers.' The ability to heal encompassed a broad range of undertakings. The medical procedures the cunning folk practiced often involved pronouncing charms or blessings and knowledge of their undertakings compliments what is more widely known about elite practitioners of medicine. They often practiced healing for little payment, and their abilities were highly sought after, not only by the greater part of the population, but also by those of the higher orders. Surgeons, who, contrary to the cunning folk, usually charged their patients high fees, undertook the more formal and 'licensed' practice of 'chirurgery' and 'physick', as it was termed in the seventeenth century. The lower orders of society, who generally could not pay the expensive charges of the surgeon or doctor, preferred not to consult with them, and chose instead to consult the cunning person.

The cunning folk played a prominent role in community welfare. It was a feature of popular belief that cunning folk possessed great powers of speech and that they used this power of speech to advantage to cure their patients by pronouncing charms and blessings. In uttering such proclamations, their antagonists, namely religious delegates disapproved of female participation in the healing arts. The practice of cunning had existed from at least the fourth century AD to the eleventh century. Mary Chamberlain's study, entitled Old Wives' Tales, investigates the legislation applied by the church in England from the fourth century against cunning women. She argues that 'Old Wives' were the traditional healers of the tribes of Northern Europe, Teutonic, Celtic and Roman society. The Teutonic writings and Tacitus, it is argued, mention only women as healers. In the Synod of Ancrya in 314 the 'curing of sickness by occult means' was outlawed, and the Synod of Laodicea in 375 resolved to outlaw magical healing in 506, 511, 533 and 603. The church fathers believed magic was involved in healing and they condemned it. Sorcery and healing were deemed to be 'women's magic' and the association came to be enshrined in canon and civil law. Chamberlain refers to the words of St. Eligius who said: 'let he who is sick trust only in the mercy of God' [and] 'the apostles and prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up.' This belief, she argues, underpinned religious and secular attitudes to healing. However, Cnut's secular law forbade chanting of runes and the performance of 'wiccecraeft.' Chamberlain explores how under old pagan beliefs women were believed to have been in control of demons and found that in 829 the Synod of Paris from healing. See also, James Obelkevich, Religion and Rural Society in South Lindsey, 1825-1875 (Oxford, 1976). Obelkevich emphasises the role of the wise man. He claims that women who could cure animals were the exception rather than the norm. Whilst the cunning folk of the Northwest were not public figures, they were well known by ordinary people in the community. For some European comparisons, see also David Gentilcore, ‘Was there a “Popular Medicine” in early modern Europe, Folklore, Vol. 115, No. 2 (Aug., 2004), pp. 151-166. Gentilcore proposes that based on Italian evidence it is impossible to draw absolute distinctions between schooled medical professionals, ecclesiastical healers, and illiterate "wise-women," there were important differences in the guiding mentality behind each approach. Willem de Blécourt, Witch Doctors, Soothsayers and Priests. On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition, Social History, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1994), pp. 285-303. Blecourt’s article stresses the need for further research into the activities of the cunning folk. Timothy D. Walker, Doctors, Folk Medicine and the Inquisition: The Repression of Magical Healing in Portugal during the Enlightenment. (The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World, number 23) Boston, 2005. Walker's portrait of folk medicine draws on a broad range of materials to offer a nuanced picture of the environment and work of practitioners. See also Edward Bever, Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe, New York, 2008. For an innovative perspective see Roy Porter (ed), Patients and practitioners: lay perceptions of medicine in pre-industrial society, Cambridge, New York, 1985. The authors attempt to reconstruct illness in pre-industrial society from the point of view of the sufferers themselves by examining the meanings that were attached to sickness; popular medical beliefs and practices; the diffusion of popular medical knowledge; and the relations between patients and their doctors (both professional and 'fringe') seen from the patients' point of view. For a comprehensive account of popular belief and the comparison between early modern beliefs and tribal shamanism, acknowledging the folkloric component to popular belief, see Emma Wilby, Cunning-Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic, (Brighton, 2005). For an alternative and less widely accepted view to Wilby’s analysis, see Owen Davies, Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History, (London, 2003).


5 Chamberlain, Ibid., p.35.
recommended that sorcery should be severely punished. Aelfric in England outlawed natural remedies, he ordered: 'it is not allowed to any Christian man to fetch his health from any stone, nor from any tree, unless it be the holy sign of the rood.' Bede commented during the great plague on the subject of how seventh-century east Saxon's Christians reverted to paganism. Similarly, King Alfred ordered that 'women who are want to receive enchanter's workers of phantasms, and witches, suffer them not to live.' Chamberlain, in claiming that cunning women were sometimes referred to as 'old wives', identifies a gap between official ideology and actual practice, arguing that the ideology of the 'spiritual deficiency' of women translated into a belief in their 'intellectual deficiency' in the seventeenth century. It was such thinking that emphasised female illogicality and irrationality. The underlying theme is that women were guilty of an 'original sin.' Chamberlain argues that 'women's bodies' were seen to be the cause of their fundamental weakness. Even though the church argued that healing women were a liability, and were 'sinful' and 'stupid,' the official ideology failed in its objective of ridding society of healers and midwives.

In early-modern England farming women and the wives of husbandmen who were famous for their curative skills and their willingness to help sick people practiced medicinal art. These skills were often taken for granted. Ordinary folk were reliant upon the expertise of 'wise-women' that did not always accept payment: 'some were paid, some acted out of kindness.' The wise women of the village were often superior in knowledge and skill to the so-called educated 'men who professed medicine and who let blood.' Experience and common sense contrary to science was the key to success over the learned male counterpart of the cunning women. Clark quotes from Adam Martindale's diary, who, in 1632, noted his opinion on the skills of doctors in comparison with those of wise women as follows:

Some skilfull man, or so esteemed, being consulted and differing much in their opinions....God sent in his mercie a poore woman who by a salve made of Celandine Mosse of an ashe roote, shred and boyled in May-butter, tooke it clear away in a short time.

In 1647, Sir Ralph Verney, convinced of the low level of efficiency among men who professed medicine and surgery, sought the services of the wise woman to cure his child:

Give the child no phisick but such as midwives and old women with the doctors approbation doe proscribe....They, by experience know better than any phisitian how to treat such infants.

According to Clark, Hobbes 'took little physick' but preferred 'an experienced old woman' above the 'most learned and inexperienced physician.' The West Country eye doctor Dr. Turbeville not only found Court doctors 'wholly ignorant' but accused them of being 'spies upon his practice.' He also venerated the accomplishments of the wise women: 'he knew several midwives and old women whose advice he would rather follow than theirs.' His sister, Mary, after his death in 1696, practiced 'with good reputation and success.'

The long tradition of the female practice of medicine was under threat from the introduction of government policy in 1617 to control the practice of medicine and, in particular, the possibility therefore of witchcraft. Women who attempted to practice became suspect who:

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6 Chamberlain, Ibid., p.36.
7 Chamberlain, Ibid.,
8 Chamberlain, Ibid.,
9 Chamberlain, Ibid.,
10 Chamberlain, Ibid., p. 32
11 Chamberlain, Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 258.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 259.
boldly and accustomably took upon them great Cures and Things of great difficulty in the which they partly used sorcery and witchcraft and partly applied such medicine unto the Diseased.\textsuperscript{19}

The cunning women became liable for fines:

Divers women [who are] Unskilled in the art of chirurgery, who do often times take cures on them to the great danger of the patient [who] shall have or take, any money benefit or other reward would be fined ten shillings.\textsuperscript{20}

In 1617, apothecaries also sought to exclude women from their ranks on the grounds that they must be examined and approved after an apprenticeship. The Faculties of Medicine and Surgery excluded women completely, but some apothecaries admitted women by marriage or apprenticeship.\textsuperscript{21} The combined consequence of the regulatory measures operated effectively to exclude women from the world of the healing professions and eventually this avenue, like midwifery, was eventually closed to them.

According to Beier, magical healers, like other unlicensed practitioners, were condemned for their lack of learning. They were attacked by anti-quack writers of the time who turned their attention from astrologers and attacked the 'unlearned' magic of the 'cunning folk, wise folk, white witches and itinerant practitioners.'\textsuperscript{22} She argues that 'this target was perfectly safe, for in their attack the anti-quack writers could rely on the combined support of organised medicine, the state and the church.'\textsuperscript{23} In his opinion, such attacks of the cunning folk as witches 'did much to discourage the open practice of traditional medicine.'\textsuperscript{24}

Alan Macfarlane, in his comparative study of Essex, also contends that a consultation with the cunning person was likely to lead to that person being prosecuted for witchcraft. He argues that an accurate understanding of the activities of the cunning folk is a prerequisite to the correct comprehension of the social pressures behind accusations such as witchcraft. Further, the visitation articles of the church courts, he believes, 'were primarily directed at the cunning folk.'\textsuperscript{25} According to Macfarlane, it was common practice to consult cunning folk in matters of bewitchment. His study shows that information on about 61 cunning folk was found in archival records connected with Essex, and indeed that the county was covered by a network of magical practitioners.\textsuperscript{26} Macfarlane refers to George Gifford's \textit{A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcrafts}, [1593] whose analysis provides some quantitative support for his perspective. Gifford wrote disapprovingly about the broader section of society that attended consultations with the cunning folk. He wrote: 'there be thousands in the land deceived, the woman at R. H. by report hath some weekes fourtie come unto her, and many of them not the meaner sort.'\textsuperscript{27} It is clear from the example provided by Gifford that the cunning folk provided a service beyond the poorer members of society.

Cunning folk served the sick people of the Essex community in many ways. They performed a function beyond the realms of medicine. Firstly, they provided the means for counter-action to victims of bewitchment and cursing. Secondly, they acted as 'information centres.' Macfarlane describes the cunning folk aptly as 'entrepreneurs in the business of allocating blame and distributing antidotes.'\textsuperscript{28} Activity such as this unquestionably locates them at the very heart of the social anxiety which was common during this period. Thirdly, they were consulted in order to locate lost money and other goods. Fourthly, but most importantly, they provided a healing function by diagnosing illness and disease and prescribed 'charmes of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 260.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 261.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Lucinda McCray Beier, \textit{Sufferers and Healers: the Experience of Illness in Seventeenth-Century England} (London, 1987), Beier, p. 46.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p. 25.
\item \textsuperscript{26} A. Macfarlane, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 120.
\item \textsuperscript{27} A. Macfarlane, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 120.
\item \textsuperscript{28} A. Macfarlane, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 120.
\end{itemize}
words, herbs, bags of seeds or holy writings.\textsuperscript{29} Whatever the service, the activities of the cunning folk were suppressed. James Sharp, in \textit{Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750}, draws attention to 'the frequency with which Roman Catholic practices were directly attacked or popular superstitions abutting witchcraft were equated with them.'\textsuperscript{30}

It is significant that the verbal crime of cursing was the close relation of sorcery. During the middle ages the church had the power to pronounce curses. Priests used curses to control the behaviour of parishioners.\textsuperscript{31} Maledictions were pronounced against robbery, violence and against those who sinned against the church. Churchwardens and constables were alerted to members of the community who would swear, bann or curse. During the visitations, church officers inquired whether any members of the community had offended. Church Wardens reported curser, swearers, scolders and chiders and the reports they provided were the first step on the road to presentment before the church courts where offenders were excommunicated.

Because the church court had dominion over public morality it was often involved with sexual matters. Scolding, cursing, witchcraft, illwishing and defamation often appear associated with crimes of a sexual nature like adultery and cuckoldry. This is how the church court became known as the 'bawdy' court. It employed churchwardens to guard the sexual and religious morality of the community. Whilst the church courts were usually involved with moral offences against the community, they also had control over incidents that disrupted the peace, such as verbal violence. Individuals were cited to appear on the report of the churchwardens who kept a close ear on local affairs. They listened carefully to rumour and gossip that was circulating in the community.

In 1624 an Act of Parliament was passed which tightened the laws against swearing and cursing, making individuals more susceptible to these charges, and later a similar ordinance was issued against offenders under the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{32} Nevertheless, the law was defied. Puritan ministers, aware of the power of the imprecation, cursed those who did not sit through sermons, and during the Civil War, Royalist clergy, as did the Ranters and Quakers, invoked the wrath of God upon the Anglican church.\textsuperscript{33}

The Church used the power of cursing to its advantage, but the efficacy of the curse was derived, not from theological sources, but from common belief. As Thomas argues, cursing was powerful not because it had ritual connections with the church, but because people believed it could work.\textsuperscript{34} It was owing to such beliefs that the curser was endowed with power. A powerful weapon against adversaries, the reputation for being a successful curser, could and often did result in a formal charge of witchcraft. Unlike other forms of power, such as high-ranking social status or financial power, the power of cursing could be wielded by any member of society. According to Thomas, it was most destructive when the least successful member of the community uttered the curse. The impotent resorted to the power of the imagination because it was as 'effective a means of destruction as it was of healing.'\textsuperscript{35} It is clear from the records that the reputation for successful cursing could easily lead to a formal charge of witchcraft. As Thomas explains, people in the early-modern period perceived the link clearly: 'Cursers are murderers, for if it please God to suffer their curse to take effect, the party cursed is murdered by the Devil.'\textsuperscript{36}

\textit{Religion and the Decline of Magic} confirms that cursing cases were sparse and unconnected to any particular region, although the evidence also suggests cursing was more common in the North than in the South of the British Isles. The evidence from the Northwest suggests that cursing and witchcraft had a clearly defined social and economic function. Witchcraft, cursing, and scolding in early-modern Cheshire and Lancashire concealed uncertainty and anxiety. In addition, the female influence in areas of verbal crime is obvious. Investigation of the records reveals the methods by which women dominated the 'symbolic' domain of cursing, swearing and scolding, and records reveal also their close involvement with

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\textsuperscript{29} A. Macfarlane, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 125. \\
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 600. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 609. \\
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 610.
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herbal medicine. Furthermore, the documents from the same region prove how women committed the kinds of crimes that were usually associated with men. Spoken affronts, sexual slander and defamation, were the most common criminal charges levelled against females. In the Northwest, the social background of women involved in verbal crimes of cursing, scolding, chiding and witchcraft remains unexplained but certainly sorcery and speaking charms were among the offences.

During the mid seventeenth century the Anglican Church was outright hostile to popular practices of medicine which were prohibited. In part, this arose from the fact that the authority of the church varied from place to place. The church was, however, responsible for appointing women to positions of midwifery. Widows were selected and made accountable to the priest to 'assist women who are stricken with illness.' Chamberlain sees such restraints as deliberate attempts to control the main practitioners of healing, but since the practice continued, it is difficult to see how the church enjoyed much success in eliminating magical healing.

Old Wives, Midwives and Magical Healing

The Teutonic methods of curing, such as 'wort cunning' [herbal cures] were traditionally allowed through the invocation of the help of the saints. Christianised spells came into common usage because saints replaced the pagan emphasis on nature. For example, Saint Swithin controlled rain, and Saint Barbara protected from storms. Chamberlain argues that within this context, wise-women were able to maintain a claim to the legitimacy of their role, but their position was still precarious. Physicians such as John of Ardenne summed up the official opinion regarding women healers in the fourteenth century. He maligned female practitioners of medicine and their remedies, describing them as 'ladies bountiful' because they did not charge a fee. In contrast, he charged forty pounds cash, a new suit of clothes and a pension of 100 shillings to perform an operation for fistula. A physician of St. Bartholomew’s wrote of: worthless and presumptuous women [who] usurp this profession to themselves and abuse it, who, possessing neither ability nor professional knowledge, make the greatest possible mistakes (thanks to their stupidity) and very often kill their patient.

Female participation through cunning was influential but undervalued in the world of medicine. Nevertheless, the healing arts of the cunning folk informed the learning of university-trained doctors. Paracelsus claimed he learned all he knew from 'the sorceress.' One Oxford professor went 40 miles to get the prescription to cure jaundice with plaintain juice. Bleedings, cuppings, prayer and astrology were also methods derived from wise-women. In 1421, a church edict was issued which prohibited women from practicing medicine or surgery. The Bishop of Paris who claimed that they were fortune-tellers prevented old wives in Paris from practicing medicine. One seventeenth-century clergyman as 'described wise-women and wise men as the 'Ministers of Satan.' John Cotta, in Short Discoveries of the unobserved Dangers of Several sorts of ignorant and inconsiderate practisers of Physicke in England (1612) wrote the following description of women healers:

Therefore are men warned of advising with women counsellers...seeing their authority in learned knowledge cannot be authentical...we may justly here taxe their dangerous whisperings about the sicke.

39 Chamberlain, op. cit. p.36.
40 Chamberlain, op. cit. p.39.
41 Chamberlain, op. cit. p.45.
42 Chamberlain, op. cit., p.45.
43 Chamberlain, op. cit., p.41.
William Perkins in *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* [1608] wrote how women were 'inclined to use spells, charms and anti-magical remedies for their cure' and Defoe, wrote of 'every practicing old woman for medicines and remedies.' Old country women who gave 'burnt purple' for curing smallpox managed whooping cough, or 'chincofe'. William Clowes in 1579 wrote of old healing women at Bankside and Newington, 'unto whom the people do resort as unto an oracle' and made reference to 'the cunning woman in Seacole lane.'

At this point, it is important to draw attention to the links that had previously existed between the arts of the cunning folk and the practice of midwifery. It was these connections that caused the Church ongoing concern. In England, for example, certain midwives' activities were controlled in 1512 by the Bishop's Court, which had sought to gain jurisdiction over the domain of childbirth. In 1584, 'the midwife's oath' meant that midwives had to obtain a license in order to practice. Midwives gave 'groaning malt' and 'virgin nuts' to labouring mothers, and were sometimes banned from practicing for employing certain doubtful methods, such as 'casting water', which were said to verge on the magical. Carlo Ginzburg, in *Ecstasies* refers to a long European association of the midwife with the 'old wife'. Supernatural associations, such as those in Italy relating to the 'Benandanti' or those 'born with the caul', were picked up from old wives.

Doctors claimed that midwives were incompetent and described them as 'tattling dames'; they also spoke derogatorily of their skills and learning as 'kitchen physic.' Despite the attempts of the church, and of some doctors, physicians and apothecaries to control the healing power of women, the official ideology was unsuccessful in achieving its aim, because of popular belief in the efficacy of the healing powers invested in the cunning folk. For example, in 1613, Dr Suckling, of Norwich, wanted the wise woman Mary Woods to brew him medicine which he was to take himself. Moreover, it can be argued that because there was a shortage of physicians, especially in rural England, the cunning folk were indispensable.

The popular mind perceived the difference between 'black' and 'white' magic and 'wise woman' and 'witch' very clearly. Nevertheless, Gamini Salgado argues that the Protestant and Catholic churches, out of a sense of competition, that is, condemned the cunning folk because 'his or her services were called upon more often than the church.'

L. M. Beier in *Sufferers and Healers: The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth Century England* provides a definition of the meaning of a 'profession' in early-modern England. It is defined as 'a calling or vocation, exclusive of occupations purely commercial, mechanical, agricultural or the like and what gives it its distinctive social stamp is the fact that, through education and a career-oriented training, a particular body of specialised knowledge is acquired and is then applied to the service of others.' In Beier's study it was found that 'only seventeenth-century physicians could have claimed to fulfill the requirements of such a definition, and even the physicians claims were suspect because their numbers were very small.' Beier claims that 'relatively few sufferers ever became their patients. Other medical occupations had no pretensions to such professional status in the seventeenth century. Healers such as surgeons, apothecaries, midwives, empirics and the cunning folk sold their services quite openly. Their training, usually by some form of apprenticeship, was similar to that of others trades and crafts.' Also, according to Beier, 'the truly licensed healers of seventeenth century England were the physicians, surgeons and midwives'.

Midwives sometimes housed women and cared for them during and after pregnancy, and Beier acknowledges that there was a strong 'time-honored' association between midwifery and magic. On occasion, midwives helped as cunning women. However, also in this capacity they also carried the reputation of being 'bawds and abortionists.' Whether licensed or unlicensed, the techniques of healers were strongly connected with traditions of magic.

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44 Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 49.
45 Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 52.
48 Ibid., p. 74.
49 Beier, op. cit. p. 8.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 9.
52 Ibid., p. 29.
Throughout England, the Church and civil authorities forcefully regulated the practice of midwifery in the aftermath of the Reformation. Midwives were compelled to take an 'oath of office.' By the seventeenth century the oath was a prerequisite for a license. Authorities were keen to restrict the midwife's license to those who resisted the use of 'witchcraft, charms, sorcery, invocation, or other prayers.' For example, the Bishop of Chester in 1584 to 1585 specifically forbade midwives to use 'any witchcraft or charms.'

The perspective of the continued devaluation of midwives' skills in early-modern England is sustained by a study of provincial midwives in Lancashire and Cheshire between 1660 and 1760. In the seventeenth century, midwives were women of high status. They were central figures in local women's culture. They were an integral part of a strong network of women and moved as equals with the more affluent of their clientele 'by virtue of their skills and social standing.' By the mid-eighteenth century there was a shift in attitudes and the traditional midwife had forfeited this status. Harley explains: 'the ever-widening gap between genteel and popular cultures made the village midwife, whatever her skills, an unsuitable person to take into a gentry household.' Harley argues that the process of social distancing of gentry families and tenants meant that urban midwives were considered to be below the station of gentry and therefore they were ostracised. Harley does not raise questions relating to the female body and space, or issues of sexuality associated with the process of social distancing but such issues are important in midwifery. Male midwives who represented 'metropolitan modernity and scientific progress' advertised greater skills. They replaced female midwives and began to govern the space of the women such as the 'elaborate lying-in rituals, [which were] governed by the midwife and excluded the husband.' Males began to 'define the meaning of childbirth and increasingly directed the event.' By the end of the eighteenth century, men attended half of all deliveries.

The change to male midwives meant better conditions for paying patients only. Those who could not pay, which would most likely have been the majority, were obliged to resort to the insanitary conditions of lying-in hospitals. Alongside the changes from female midwife to male-midwives and surgeon were transformations in the position in which women preferred to give birth. The favoured squatting position, which gave women greater control over childbirth, was discouraged, and replaced with the lying-down or 'lithotomy' position that gave the obstetric surgeon more power. This, it is argued, took away women's authority and encouraged a more passive role in childbirth. It was introduced in early-modern England, and described as a part of a process of reducing women to the status of infants, a process which inevitably resulted in greater female reliance upon the obstetric skills of the hospital surgeon in modern maternity hospitals.

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54 Ibid., p. 278.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., p. 42.
58 Harley, op. cit. p. 43.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid. Harley claims that 'Changes to the lithotomy position for childbirth further increased the passivity of women and encouraged the infantalisation of parturient women that was to reach its apogee in the twentieth century maternity hospitals.'
Nursing

In most cases, nursing was not solely undertaken out of compassion for the sick, but for payment. In the seventeenth century, care of the infirm was carried out according to whether or not a sick person could pay. Professional nursing was low-paid work. It was then, as it often is today, a low-paid occupation. It was also a low-status occupation. Women of poor families held curative responsibility for the household. The poorer classes were also involved in professional nursing and the rules governing their conduct were strict. For example, nurses at one seventeenth-century hospital were subject to an instruction which read:

See that ye avoid, abhor and detest Scolding and Drunkenness as most pestilent and filthy vices... Ye shall avoid and shun the company and conversation of all men.\(^{63}\)

Alice Clark’s study of working women found that one London hospital, St Bartholomew’s, made certain that nursing women complied with the rules by imposing strict regulatory measures on them. For example, the salary was ten pounds per annum without board, there was no training and rich people bequeathed money that was to be distributed in endowments. The following quotation demonstrates the strict supervision of nurses at St Bartholomew’s in the seventeenth century:

If any of the nurses shalbe negligent in their duties or in giving due attendance to the sick souldiers by daye or night or shall by scoulding, brawlinge or chidinge make any disturbance in the said hospital she shall forfeit 12d for the first offence, a weeks pay for the second, be dismissed for the third.\(^{64}\)

Armies of female workers did the unpleasant and dangerous work involved in nursing. It was found that women treated plague victims because nobody else would. In 1570, London Constables and Churchwardens mapped out the duties of the nurse:

women [are] to be Provyders and Deliverers of necessities to infected \(^{65}\) Houses, attend the infected Persons, bear reed Wandes, so that the sick mai be kept from the whole, as nere as maie be needful attendance weyed.\(^{66}\)

Clark found that women in sixteenth-century Reading, were employed as 'searchers' of dead bodies. They were called upon to diagnose and record the cause of death, to 'certifeye of what disease they died' and to 'ayre and cleanse all the bedding and other things.'\(^{67}\) In gentry households, children and servants received training, but 'professional' nurses received none. Because there was no systematic training at such hospitals, the standard of efficiency was higher in the domestic, rather than in the public sphere.

Clark refers to Frazer's remarks in 'The Golden Bough' where he argues: 'science is the lineal descendant of witchcraft.'\(^{68}\) There is much evidence in early literature and in the diaries of gentlewomen to demonstrate how women dominated medicine as a 'domestic art.'\(^{69}\) Faith in the ability of the female to heal is also expressed in manuscript sources a selection of which will be investigated more closely below.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., p. 249.
\(^{65}\) Ibid.
\(^{66}\) Ibid.
\(^{67}\) Ibid.
\(^{68}\) Ibid., p. 254.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., p. 235. See, for example of domestic medicine the following manuscripts, CRO DDX/361 Stanleys of Alderley (1620-1760), and CRO D4367/1AQ2BES Eliza Cholmondeley's Receipt book, 1677, and CRO DAR/6/60 Lady Jane Stanley's receipt for bilious complaints [and] relief for gallstones (undated).
Love Magic, Bewitchments and Magical Healing

Magical healing was practiced in places beyond the community. For example, love-magic and the potential of spells to cure diseases were debated regularly at Oxford University in 1605, 1620, 1637, 1652 and 1669.\(^70\) Spells, prescriptions and charms were prepared by astrologers mostly for men who wished to have their love returned by the object of their desire.\(^71\) Spells, such as those listed in a compendium entitled 'The preparation of Experiments of Love', were executed by saying 'names over virgin waxe or parchment or any other experiment of love.'\(^72\) Richard Napier's loose notes of his astrological practice of medicine from 1598 to 1629 contain a number of references to medical recipes to deal with supernatural occurrences.\(^73\)

The casebook of William Lilly, who was a practicing astrologer in 1648, contains a large number of remedies sought by members of the community to protect them against witchcraft. He retained these for use in the many cases he encountered where people believed that they had been bewitched. His casebook reveals that he provided counter-spells and prayers 'for one bewitched' and for a 'house bewitched.'\(^74\) Spells and charms were also used to bring about the conception of a child.\(^75\) In an example of magic to bring about conception, he suggested the following action should be taken:

\[ \text{Yf she be yonge and can have no children, wryte this psalme 33. Exultate iusti in domino and these characters, and perfume them with mastick and laye them to her right arm and she shall conceave.} \]

\[ \text{Another to cause conception, wryte these letters in virgin parchement and let the woman beare yt upon her and she shall conceave And yf you will not beleive yt prove yt on a tree.} \]

Bewitchments were common in the popular community and though historical evidence suggests that cunning folk performed a curative function, they also were widely consulted on matters of enchantment. They also dealt with the mental and physical needs of people in pain and were regularly called on to pronounce charms that would help to heal sick children and animals. They also took in clients distressed about health and lost property. Macfarlane argues that, in Essex, it was quite possible that wise women were also consulted to detect pregnancy.\(^78\) The evidence conducted for this study, primarily from the Northwest of England but also from other regions in England, confirms absolutely that wise women were indeed consulted about a range of issues associated with childbirth, as they were about forecasting the gender of an unborn child.\(^79\) In her chapter entitled 'Motherhood', within her broad synthesis of European women's history entitled The Prospect Before Her, Olwen Hufton examines the place of childbirth in early-modern society. She finds that English wise women performed an invaluable function, particularly within the realm of childbirth:

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\(^70\) See, for example, the Register of the University of Oxford, II, (1571-1622). I. A. Clark, (Ed.), Oxford Historical Society (1887).
\(^71\) Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. e. Mus, 173, 'An Experiment for love', 'To make a woman love thee.'
\(^72\) Ibid.
\(^73\) See, for instance, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ashmolean Manuscripts, No. 181, p. 135.
\(^74\) See, for example, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ashmolean Manuscripts, Casebook of William Lilly, Numbers, 184, 178, 185, 420, 210, 427, 547 (contains a whole file on witchcraft), 749, 1488. Remedies against it are contained in 1417 V.16, 1442 V1 27, 1447, 1X, cases of people who thought to themselves to be bewitched are found in 182, 1076, 153, and 1447, 1X, 14, 1488, 11,35, 1730 artt. 35, 82 contains 'a prayer for one bewitched', and 178, 31, prayer for 'a house bewitched'.
\(^76\) Ibid.
\(^77\) Ibid.
\(^78\) Alan Macfarlane, op. cit., p. 121.
\(^79\) See, for example, LRO QSB1/255/38 where cunning woman, Alice Schofield, in 1641, was consulted to diagnose the gender of the unborn child of Jane Broushey by the use of the 'devilish' practice of 'sieve and shears.'
At all levels of society, relatives, friends, and neighbours came to help the mother during her labour before the midwife arrived, or (in the case of most villages) the local wise woman who did the job for little or no payment.  

The community that sought the skills of the cunning folk believed them to have been in possession of great powers of speech. Clients accepted that they called upon supernatural powers which they then channeled into the healing process. The opponents of the cunning folk, particularly the clergy, believed that they possessed a power was diabolic. However, not all people agreed on this interpretation of medicine. Macfarlane again cites Gifford, who gave a first-hand account of such skills:

The spirits which appeare unto them in the Christall, or in the glasse, or water, or any way do speake, and shewe matters unto them [were] holy Angels, or the Soules of excellent men, as of Moses, Samuel, David, and others.  

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**Gender Complications**

In researching the broader circumstances of magical healing it is important to understand the position of women clearly. Women's part in sorcery and witchcraft is often misunderstood as that of victim. Often females appear in witchcraft history identified as a 'victim' of male dominance. This situation is even true of deliberately 'feminist' accounts such as Mariane Hester's *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, which undermines female participation in spite of being a consciously 'feminist' exposé. As a result of a misreading of the issues, and the avoidance of consultation with a broad range of manuscript sources, which ground such activities firmly within the community, highly sensationalised pamphlet information is utilized to discuss women, considered from the perspective of the 'victim' of patriarchal dominance. A closer examination of the female role in the early-modern in an enlightened, sensitive and historical approach might more usefully analyse the complexities associated with gender relations in early-modern England to achieve an appropriate understanding of the issues.

One investigation that attempts to re-establish women's importance in the witchcraft phenomenon is Lyndal Roper's *Oedipus and the Devil*. Roper questions why women were perceived and prosecuted as witches in Early Modern Europe. Roper concentrates on the psychological dimensions of witchcraft in

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81 Alan Macfarlane, op. cit., p. 126.
84 Ibid.
early-modern Germany. She argues that, because women involved in witchcraft were 'fantasy targets' for their enemies, studies of witchcraft belong to psychology as much as to history. Roper, who identifies what she terms the 'sociological characteristics of women as a group', places a psychological emphasis upon women through a study of the 'dilemmas of the psychic identity of womanhood.' Roper argues that the psychic conflict attendant upon oedipal relations and motherhood that provided witchcraft with a psychic drama allowed the 'fantasy of witchcraft to unfold.' In explanation of the phenomenon, Roper argues that the ambivalent effects of sexual regulation can be dated back to the period before the eighteenth century. Roper's argument operates on the premise that where gender is an issue, and where 'psyche and body are at stake', these are necessarily cultural or psychological areas. Since sexualities and gender issues remain mostly unexplored in early-modern history, Oedipus and the Devil is among the first to chart new ground. It explores the ideas of Weber and Elias arguing that the early-modern period saw a 'renewed interest' in magic and the irrational. Whilst this may have been the situation in early-modern Germany, English sources demonstrate that interest in magic and witchcraft was not 'renewed' but was rather a 'continuity' of popular culture. The evidence supports the view that in England it was the systems for the prosecution and the regulation of witchcraft that were renewed or changed. Roper's psychoanalytical approach is based upon the inquisitorial proceedings against witchcraft in continental Europe. The same approach cannot be applied to witchcraft in England, firstly, because there were no inquisitions, secondly, because there were no Sabbaths, and, thirdly, because there were no witch-hunts. The English legal system simply did not hold inquisitions, unlike the continental courts.

Lyndal Roper herself expresses doubts about adapting a 'model of psycho-analytical enquiry to an entire society.' These doubts are well founded, for indeed it is not possible. Whilst relevant English archival sources remain relatively unexplored any broad-based generalisations about women and witchcraft in early-modern England are unfounded until the local and regional variations of female experience are analysed in closer detail. From local studies, and research upon parish and village, a complex and divergent account of local and regional issues is emerging to alter the national picture.

It is clear from English legal records, especially those from the Northwest, that the cunning folk were not specifically selected for punishment according to gender. The situation in England was more complex than that. At certain periods in early-modern England, such as the period between 1630 and 1640 in the Northwest, magical healing was perceived by Puritan Justices of the Peace as sorcery and witchcraft and the rate of prosecution for such crimes associated with sorcery and enchantments intensified. However, the legal elite did not principally initiate the accusations. It was the ordinary members of the

86 Ibid., p.4.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., p. 3. Roper's work emphasises how approaches influenced by Weber have dominated the way subjectivity is conceptualised for the early-modern period. She argues that 'Michel Foucault's emphasis on the power of language and the importance of discourse in the constitution of the individual subject enables exploration of the construction of sexual desire through language.'
89 See also, E. Donoghue, Passions between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801 (London, 1993), explores women as a 'distinct sexual and social group'. Euphemisms such as 'l Wellington' 'lusty elves', 'abominable women' and 'female fiends' are substituted for women who prefer lesbian relationships or 'secret bias' is discovered in 'texts about women' as distinct from studies which look at lesbians in comparison with gay history. I did not find euphemistic references in any of the legal institutions under investigation but I did find evidence in women's Wills and Inventories that women lived together quite openly in early modern Nantwich. See See also, Laura Gowing, Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London, (Oxford; New York 1996).
community that initiated the accusations which complicates the circumstances of magical healing further. Women were clearly susceptible to prosecution for crimes of verbal violence and witchcraft, but their male counterparts also faced prosecutions for witchcraft and magical healing. It is clear from the evidence of courts in the Northwest, therefore, that a so-called 'gendered' approach is not appropriate in every context involving magical healing, and, because the events of such accusations were complex, the circumstances require close scrutiny, and a range of methodological approaches required so that the complexity of the issue and the varying local and regional circumstances might emerge.

Whilst a gender-based analysis may not always be useful for examining the distribution of power within the community, it is, however, a useful approach for the identification and evaluation of the criteria and circumstances that authorised the criminalisation of other certain types of female behaviour. Female power in early-modern England was distributed in subtle and complex ways and the investigation of female goings-on is a task that requires a range of analytical approaches. Recent research on the subject of women in early-modern England challenges the notion of female passivity, and lack of involvement in the community, and does much to recover female experience from the margins of early-modern history. Although females were largely accused of committing crimes of a symbolical nature, such as cursing, scolding and witchcraft, they were also involved in 'real' crimes such as murder and robbery. Evidence from the court records has shown that women committed some crimes that are normally attributed to males - 'real' crimes, such as murder and robbery, as well as 'symbolic' crimes, such as witchcraft, cursing and scolding. However, it is important to stress that while women also participated in symbolic crime, verbal offences such as cursing and scolding remained exclusively female crimes. Further investigation is required into the areas in which women dominated. Similarly, in those areas often referred to as 'female' domains, particularly magic and healing, there was also a male presence.

The period of 1630 to 1640 in Northwest England showed an increase in litigation in the Chester Consistory Court and the Quarter Sessions courts against the cunning folk and the evidence demonstrates that the charges of superstitious practice fell upon a wider range of traditional activities. Those people whose practices could be associated with Catholicism - however innocuous their actual rituals such as 'blessings' or 'casting water' may have been - became subject to harsh regulation. The litigation against the cunning folk was often initiated by ordinary people, who, with no explanation to hand for the disastrous occurrences that overtook them, then accused the cunning people of resorting to the dark side of magic. As with the crimes associated with speech, the 'charms' of the cunning folk were depicted as enchantments or even worse, as 'sorcery.' The accusations, however, were rarely inspired by ideology alone; as with cases of cursing, the accusers repeatedly referred to the deaths of children, sickness, the loss of goods and fear of starvation among the reversals of fortune provoking their allegations against cunning folk. Such evidence expresses very clearly the desperate state of affairs in the communities in which petitioners existed.

Prosecutions for cunning during times of uncertainty and illness existed in regions outside of the Northwest. A regional comparison is beyond the scope of this article but a number of cases demonstrate the danger that existed for embarking on magical healing. For example, the Oxfordshire Diocesan records of an earlier period contain details of the ways in which cunning women were made particularly vulnerable to the accusation of sorcery that intensified during times of acute adversity. Elizabeth Crackelow, a cunning woman and healer of the town of Adderbury in the diocese of Oxford, had a history of casting spells. She was a known Blesser and Charmer. In October 1546 Crackelow was accused of witchcraft and sorcery. The details of this case came to light during a case concerning the will of Henry Tanner, a case which produced

93 Macfarlane, op. cit., pp. 255-309. Macfarlane analyses the gender distribution of those accused of witchcraft in early-modern Essex. He argues that though the proportion of women accused of witchcraft was high overall, men were accused at a lower rate than women. It is difficult, therefore, to establish a gender bias.

detailed evidence about the circumstances in which Henry Tanner died of the plague. Tanner, on his deathbed made a will. He shouted the details through the window to his master, Henry Syviar, and to the curate, Sir Robert, who were standing outside the window of Syviar's house. Witnesses were examined on 9 October and 16 October 1546 to discover the circumstances of Tanner's will. The wise woman, Elizabeth Crackelow was arraigned. An inquiry was empowered to decide whether, in making his will, Elizabeth Crackelow, whose reputation was well known in Adderbury as a cunning woman and sorcerer, influenced Tanner. Many members of the community were called as witnesses. The court wanted to know whether she had cast spells to influence the direction of the will, or whether Robert Harres, who, it was alleged, had an interest in the will, went into Syviar's house before Tanner died. As with so many cases, the outcome of this particular case is not known. However, the court records confirm that cunning woman Elizabeth Crackelow attended Henry Tanner, who was dying of the plague, when others would not think of entering the house. The documents indicate that in doing so she risked losing her home. Precisely why this punishment was a possibility is not clear, but she was aware of the fact that she was jeopardising her future. She herself expressed concern about losing her house in Adderbury, either because she had been in a house where there was plague, or because she was accused of improperly influencing the dying man in creating his last will. Her fears were exceeded, however, by her responsibility for healing. Whether she did lose her house or not is not clear from this manuscript. However, confiscation of the property of women accused of verbal crime was a frequent punishment in later years in Northwest England. Women healers in particular, found their property and goods at risk, even though they were performing an essential service that nobody else could, or would, do. On the matter of property in the Crackelow case, the court is imprecise about whose expectations had been disappointed by the outcome of the will. What is clear, however, is that Crackelow was brought under suspicion for being a wise woman. Interested parties were given the opportunity to censure her for influencing Tanner by supernatural means. This was how she came to be accused of witchcraft.

A similar situation to that of Crackelow occurred in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, in 1618, when a cunning woman called Margaret Link was accused of sorcery. The depositions of a number of witnesses disclose that the cunning woman had 'nothing to answer' [not guilty] when accused of sorcery. It was found that Foulke Hart of Chelgrove, when 'in conference with Margaret Linck', told the cunning woman that he needed help to assist his son who was in love with a maid called Mistress Anne. He asked her to 'use means to bring the young maid to the waterside to carry her away.' Thomasina Linck told the court that 'his purpose was to use sorcery to contrive a marriage.' She also claimed that 'widow Linck was reputed a cunning woman to help men with cattle, no powder, spice or drug, no skill in any such business for all she knoweth [she] does not bewitch.' The deposition of John Link of Aston Rowant, dated 23 January, 1618, said that he overheard 'Goodman Fulke of Chalgrave when he came to the house of Margaret Linck his Mother and told her that his sonne and a mayde were in love together' and said 'yf you can bring her but to the water syde I will give you twenty shillings.' Further, he stated, that 'he did hereby understand that Fulke was purposed to make use of sorcery for the obtauming of the mayde for his sonne and did conceade that his mother had skill to worke by sorcery and inchauntements.' Although the judgement of 'nothing to answer' is ambiguous, the depositions of those who knew Margaret Linck disclose that the cunning woman was innocent of sorcery. Their evidence reveals that Goodman Fulke was the offender, for he sought to procure love-magic with the intention of kidnapping the object of his desire. Nevertheless, the case discloses the fact that speaking enchantments could be dangerous and this finding has much in common with cases of the later period of 1630 to 1640 in the Quarter Sessions of Lancashire.

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Puritanism and Magical Healing

95 Oxford Record Office, MS Oxf. dioc. papers, 1546 ff. 73v, 74, 74v, 75, 75v, 76, 76v, 83v, 84, 84v, 85, 85v, 86v, 87, 87v.
96 Oxford Records Office, Depositions of Thomasina Linck, 1616-20, Oxon, c118-f223, Wydowe Linck.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
The inhabitants of the Northwest had a long tradition of referring to cunning men and women in order to obtain cures for themselves. The Warden of Manchester and an astrologer, John Dee, was famous for magical healing in the 1580s. In 1640, Thomas Broadbent, who was affectionately known as 'Old Daddy', was a servant of the Stanley family. He was also well versed in the art of healing.\(^99\)

Historians of Puritanism in northwest England are constrained by the limited availability of evidence within the legal system, because Government before 1630 did not systematically attack Puritanism.\(^100\) While this may be true of Puritanism in general, there is no lack of information about women in the ecclesiastical and secular records.\(^67\) Charges of witchcraft, cursing and other forms of verbal violence made against women gave females a high profile in the legal institutions of early modern northwest England. Evidence of their challenging attitudes to the authorities and their role in community affairs, throughout the Northwest but especially in Nantwich, Cheshire, is readily available in the sources. Those who brought cases of cursing to court demonstrated in their depositions the outlook of the bereft and superstitious townsfolk. Such hostility might suggest a reason for the increase in the prosecutions of cursing and magical healing in the decade 1630 to 1640 in the Northwest region of England. The eagerness with which the judiciary reacted in this decade to such accusations, arose out of their efforts to rid the Northwest of what they believed were surviving remnants of 'papish ritual'. The legal emphasis of the later period of 1660 to 1670, however, suggests a shift away from charges of magical healing and sorcery, and a concentration instead on cursing as a manifestation of female social protest. Here, women's language, as revealed through accusations of cursing and scolding, and any overt demonstrations of women’s’ sexual propensities, became increasingly subject to regulation. Further research is required in this area to ascertain more clearly the circumstances of change for control of the traditional beliefs of popular culture.

The cunning folk functioned throughout the Northwest. Some, whose healing methods were tried and true, achieved considerable renown within the local community. The inhabitants of distant places knew the proficiency of the more accomplished practitioner and the troubled often travelled considerable distances to consult with them. In some cases, the cunning folk would travel on horseback for three days at a time.\(^101\) Though little is known about the cunning folk, it is possible to ascertain a geographical distribution of their practice from the surviving records of the wide variety of legal actions such as petitions, sworn statements of deponents, and the recognisance bonds which were issued by the local Quarter Sessions courts. The Puritan Justices of the Peace in particular, dealt with cunning people very severely. In some instances, by practicing a healing art, they were open to accusations of sorcery, while in some circumstances, they were even accused of witchcraft. When found guilty, they were imprisoned, and some starved to death. In some of the more serious cases, those charged might be hanged. Usually, they were suspected of a verbal crime, such as the saying of 'charms', 'inchauntements' or 'blessings' and in this respect, speaking charms was closely related to cursing. In the Northwest, some of the cunning folk prescribed charms to cure people and cattle and to free houses of evil influence. They were also requested to voice blessings over a valuable harvest, or to bless the areas where valuable foodstuffs were stored. Evidence from Lancashire exists to demonstrate that they were consulted to say charms to make barns secure.\(^102\) In circumstances such as these, where the offender was said to have invoked the wrath of God,  

\(^99\) See, for example, the recipes for healing of the Stanley's of Alderley, CRO DDX/361. Some of these recipes were probably passed on by 'Old Daddy'.


\(^101\) See, for example, Lancashire Record Office (hereafter referred to as LRO) QSB1/139/85 1630, the case of Lancashire cunning man William Nuttall, (whose mother, was also a cunning woman), who travelled by horseback for three days.

\(^102\) See, for example LRO DDX/471/1, Charms to cure a horse, and LRO DDX/611/4/8, Charms to be spoken over a house and a barn.
the blessings pronounced by the cunning folk were perceived by the Justices as enchantments. As the following evidence will demonstrate, such dangerous language was sufficient for a cunning person to be charged with sorcery.

**Community Ambivalence and Magical Healing**

The following cases of magical healing that were brought before the Puritan Justices of the Quarter Sessions courts identify the ways in which the community could turn against cunning folk. Mostly, people were afraid of enchantments and accused the cunning folk of bewitching them and their children and the cunning folk were singled out as the potential cause of the waves of illness that swept through the community. Members of the community also gave evidence against cunning folk for magical activities and for being in possession of magical objects such as stones and other means of magical prognostication. For example, in 1629, James Browneworth of Penwortham appeared before the Quarter Sessions court at Preston, Amounderness, before Edward Beale and Richard Burgh, Justices of the Peace. The evidence they heard implicated Browneworth in having in his possession a stone with magical and healing qualities that he claimed he had received from 'a spirit'. Husbandman, Christopher Baron of Penwortham, gave a description of it and said that he was aware that Browneworth had used the stone for some years:

Browneworthe comonlie called Browne of Penwortham husbandmen had brought a stone into the Procter his workehouse, or shopp in Penwortham aforesayd about twenty years since, which stone was redd coloured upon th'one side and blacke upon th'other as Procter did them relate unto this examinate and Brownemouth tould him that he had that stone from a spirit but the Procter sayd it was twenty yeares since he sawe stone and had the aforesayd conference with Browneworthe.

Anne Foreshawe, a Blacksmith's wife, of Preston gave similar evidence:

Upon Saturday last past in the nightime in her husbands house in Preston, she heard James Browneworth and William Procter talking of a strange stone at which time Brownworth told this examinate and her servante Margaret Hudson that he in his time had a stone which if it had been raked with a pinn gave blood and the Procter his then companion told Justice the same but the Procter sayd privatlie to this examinate and her servante that he had seene Browneworth [with] a stone but he could not tell whether it would bleede or noe.

Robert Culdfield of Preston, also claimed to have heard Browneworth speak of a magic stone. However, he rationalised its use by saying that he believed the situation had little to do with magic, but was owing to pressure on Browneworth from a several court actions proceeding against Browneworth:

Upon Sunday last past he heard James Brownworth say that in times past he had a stone which had Rakes like blood upon it but neyther heard him say where he had it hence gott it nor of what vertue it was besides he heard him utter manie other sillie frivalous and foolish speeches like a man destracted or troubled in his minde which this examinate thinketh was by reason of some troubles which have beene betweene him and his neighbours both at the generall Assyses and divers Sessions.

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103 LRO QSB1/65/39 1629, Recognisance bond issued to James Browneworth of Penwortham.
104 Ibid., Deposition of Christopher Baron, Husbandman.
105 Ibid., Deposition of Anne Forshawe of Preston, Blacksmith's wife.
106 Ibid., Deposition of Robert Culdfield of Preston, Bellfounder.
To Justice of the Peace Edmund Assheton, the activities of a well-known Lancashire wise man, William Nuttall, in 1629, were nothing short of witchcraft. The evidence tells of Nuttall's blessing ritual or 'casting water' to bring about a cure. The community of 'Little Boulton', which was suffering a wave of disease, turned against him when their children died, and the people denounced him to the court. Here, his healing charms were interpreted as sorcery. According to Jane Chisnall, the trouble arose from an on-going dispute between Richard Nuttall, the cunning man's son, and William Chisnall, Jane Chisnall's brother. She provided the court with the following evidence:

Her brother called the mother of Richard Nuttall a witch whore (as her brother told her) and Richard said unto him thou had best to take heede what thou sayes for my mother will take courses with thee, where upon the day after the sd William fell lame (by reason of the extreme payne he was in) as though they had cast water upon him. William said alsoe he must have Nuttals mother sent for because he knewe she had done him harme, the mother of William made answere she should not be sent for, and she saw her sonne for foure or five dayes continued the same, and some tymes withall despaired of his speech [he could not speak].107

Nuttall's mother was sent for in order to cure William. She initially maintained that she would not come to see him, because her exhausted son had recently ridden for three days to attend another person, and so she said that 'she would pray for him' instead. Apparently she relented, and did visit William Chisnall. Her diagnosis was such that, although 'he was over-wrought with a foule tongue', he would recover in nine days. Upon Mrs Nuttall's departure, he immediately recovered. Shortly after, when Chisnall's mother became ill and died, and Jane Chisnall became lame, and the distressed family claimed bewitchment. They denounced the Nuttalls:

William being instructed of his mother not to give Nuttall's mother any foule wordes said hee knewe not what she had done but he prayed her to doe him some good and she said she would pray for him and said he would mend and soe went her way after which he suddenly mended. Immediately after this examinates [the person being examined under oath] mother fell sore sicke and she her selfe lame, was extremely troubled with some sorcery, and she was taken after the same manner and the mother of this examinate within six weekes after, dyed, and this examinante thinks and is verily persuaded that she, Nuttals mother did bewitch them and that she released her self her brother and sister. Her mother in the time of her sickness told her she was not affrayed of Nuttall's mother but she thought she was a witch.108

The sources record no clear outcome of the fate of the Nuttalls, but to be convicted of witchcraft in Lancashire in the 1630s was to be convicted of a felony, and the punishment was death by hanging.

In the same year, renowned 'Blesser' and 'Cunning woman' Mary Shaw gave an account of her activities when she was examined by George Ireland, Justice of the Peace, at Southworth. Her words provide enlightenment about the role of the cunning person and speak of the 'good will' of the cunning folk, and of her refusal to accept payment. Anne Urmeton, the daughter of William Urmeton of Crofte, a Tailor, swore before the court that Mary Shawe, wife of Henry Shawe of Crofte, a tailor, was a magical healer. She had returned from 'milking Edward Dowson's kyne' in August, 1630, when she encountered Mary Shawe who suggested that Anne 'might give God thanks for her amendment'. Anne was unaware of any healing Mary had done. Mary's testimony revealed the essentials of her healing:

Mary Shawe tould this examinante that shee hadd beene at Nicholas Hadfeilds and that shee hadd done good, and never did any Hurt, and that shee could do some little thinges, but never tooke any money, but what they would give her of good will and did att the same tyme Confesse that shee Came into Hadfeilds howe and that there was a pigge fell downe very sicke. And thereupon she went into a Chamber there and was very sicke and then

107 LROQSB1/139/85 1630, Lancashire wiseman, William Nuttall, charged with witchcraft.
108 Ibid., Deposition of Jane Chisnall.
Nicholas Hadfield caused a possett to bee made for her, but tell she was amended shee could not eate yt, but after shee came out of the Chamber shee said that under god and her the pigg was amended.\textsuperscript{109}

Mary claimed to have cured the pigs and cows of Nicholas Hadfield. Other neighbours, such as John Key and Robert Gaskell, testified to their having made good use of the cunning woman's skill and of her efficiency as a Blesser:

John Key, sonne of Henry Key of Croft, Lynen Webster, saith that Ann Urmeston tould this examinate that Mary Shawe said that under God and herself shee hadd amended a pigg of Nicholas Hadfeilds Robert Gaskell of Crofte aforesaid husbandman, sworne and examined saith that Mary Shawe was with this examinate and other his neighbours, to helpe upp a Cow of Nicholas Hadfeilds, but did not see her blowe in the cowes mouth, nor use any Charme to his knowledge, but further saith that shee ys generallie suspected to be a Blesser.\textsuperscript{110}

Justice George Ireland does not leave any indication of the outcome of the matter. However, the charms of Mary Shawe probably sealed her fate. She, like those accused of cursing, was probably imprisoned.

Cunning man, Thomas Hope of Aspull, in 1638, gave a clear account of the healing activities that he carried out during examinations at Standish by William Leigh, Puritan Justice of the Peace, of Lancaster. Hope's situation highlights the healing practices of the Lancashire cunning folk, and also illustrates the Puritan Justices' hatred of any ritual that smacked of Catholicism. They particularly objected to any ritual associated with 'healing' water, 'holy' water or 'casting water'. Hope claimed that he went to Rome when he was ten years old with John Hale of Frodsham, where he stayed for seven weeks. During his time there he claimed to have washed in water which left marks on his arms. This, he claimed, had left him with remarkable curative capacity, which he professed had assisted him with his task of curing illness in both humans and animals:

\begin{quote}
when he was but ten yeres of age he went with one John Hale of Frodsome to Rome where he continued about seven weekes, and after came into Frodsham and he saith that att his being in Rome he was washed in a Chamber with water by vertue of which water he hath helped horses, beasts and some children, and cured their maladies.\textsuperscript{111}
\end{quote}

Hope's problems came about through the deterioration of a professional relationship with his clients, Margerie and William Mullenix. They insisted that their children had died after a long period of illness, and that Hope was responsible. Hope was not only asked to help cure the children, but was also expected to reveal who it was that had bewitched them. Margerie Mullenix denounced the cunning man, telling the court that Hope claimed to heal 'by the name of Jesus' advising Margerie to be alert for 'some sign' and to watch neighbour Sibyll Hyton:

\begin{quote}
Margerie the wife of William Mullenix of Westthoughton sworne and examined saith that about two years since her son being dead, Thomas Hope of Aspull came unto her and told her that a prayer was sayd for him. And another tyme another of her sonnes dyed about two yeares being sicke she sent unto Thomas Hope for helpe who ansered that if she then had not taken him upp he had dyed, and she demaunding by what meanes he did that and other things, he said by the name of Jesus, And Margerie Mullenix further saith that she demanding of Hope who had done them that hurt had answered he could not tell, But shee should knowe 'itt' by some signe after he went awaye, whereupon one Sibyll Hyton then
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{109} LRO QSB1/78/49, 1630, Examination of Mary Shawe of Crofe, Blesser.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibld., Sworne examination of Robert Gaskell.
\textsuperscript{111} LRO QSB1/202/89, 1638, Examination of Thomas Hope of Aspull, Blacksmith and cunning man.
came into the house to borrowe a cart-rope then Hope said when she was gone that she could let noe other but come come in, and warned this examine she should not lett Sibyll Hyton have Any thinge from her But that she shuld first put salt into itt.\textsuperscript{112}

Hope also threatened Margerie saying that if she exposed him he would not provide a cure. She did not keep her word, however, and subsequently denounced 'Agnes Hurst' as a 'chief' of 'half-a-dozen witches' and claimed that Hope had acquainted her with the names of others but she could not remember them:

And told her that if shee did complayne of them or descrye them he could never cure Any more diseases for he further told her there was halfe a dozen witches thereabout whereof Agnes Hurst was chiefe of the fold And named noe more saveing a man and his wife who had noe children, and were as badd as Agnes Hurst, but who they were by name he declared not.\textsuperscript{113}

In May, 1638, Margerie Mullineux proceeded against Thomas Hope for witchcraft. William Leigh heard evidence from physician, Christopher Leigh of Rumworth, who claimed Margerie was his patient and was 'over-raught' or bewitched and insisted that Hope was responsible:

On Saturday last he comming unto the house of William Mullineux in West Haughton and heareing that Thomas Hope had been there and suspectinge that some practice had been done upon Margrett Mullineux then his patient, sent to Hope to learne what he had practixed and done unto Margrett Mullineux; who told him she was over raught and that he knewe who did itt as well as he himeself that did itt. And promised she should have noe further hurt untill this matter were tryed.\textsuperscript{114}

The above evidence demonstrates that practicing popular medicine was a dangerous business. Hope's problems began when he failed to cure sick children. At this point his healing methods became the focus for the grief-stricken and desperate parents, who, with no other explanation, sought revenge when the cunning man failed to heal their sick children. Thomas Hope was soon desperate himself, for he knew that had he been found guilty by a Quarter Sessions Justice, and that he would certainly be imprisoned. He then exposed others who, he claimed, resorted to 'charms and inchauntements' to achieve their ends. His efforts to direct attention away from himself, and on to Agnes Hurst, paid off, because she subsequently was denounced for bewitchment, as the evidence below will demonstrate.

On 23 July, 1668, at Manchester General Sessions of the peace, Roger Gregory of Westhaughton brought a petition before the court to force 'material witnesses' who had declined to appear, to disclose all they knew in relation to a charge of 'witchcraft, charms and inchauntements' against Agnes Hurst and Margaret Hurst:

That at the last Sessions her houldeon one Agnes Hurst and Margaret Hurst were indicted for witchcraft charms and inchauntements, and your petitioner there obeyed an order from this Court for your witnesses who were Considered to bee materiall to goe before some justices of peace to give informacion against them and for her sheweth that there are some persons whom this Informacion conciders to be very materiall who deny and refuse to goe before any Justice of peace to give any information against them. Your petitioners humbly prayeth that your good worshipes would bee pleased to grant your warrants directed to the Constables of the severall townes where your sessions dwell, to charge and command the persons concerned to be materiall witnesses to repaire before your Justices of peace to give informations against Agnes Hurst and Margaret Hurst to you and they may be bound over

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., Sworne deposition of Margerie Mullineux.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., Sworne examination of Christopher Leigh of Rumworth, Physician.
to your Generall Sessions of Assizes goal delivery and your petitioner as in duty bound will ever pray.  

The Hurst sisters were most likely casualties of a network of suspicion, illustrated by the above case which demonstrates how the Mullineuxs sought to shift the blame for the children's deaths to practitioners of 'charms and inchauntements.' Thomas Hope, through his determination to save his own neck, clearly exposed several members of the community to the suspicion of sorcery. What such incidents reveal are the ways in which accusations came about and the social dynamic which drove such accusations. In this case, as in every other, the theme that is most obvious is the 'dead children' one. This theme was obvious in cases of 'inchauntement' and the circumstances serve to bring attention to the distress felt by members of the community.

As the previous cases have demonstrated, the cunning folk were consulted about a range of issues. In some instances, they found missing persons or stolen objects. One such situation arose on July 21, 1634, when two labourers from Upholland, James Rigby and William Rigby complained to the Justices at the General Sessions of the peace, at Ormskirk, of wrongful imprisonment. They found themselves involved in a charge of witchcraft, having been accused by cunning man James Garnett, who was already imprisoned at Lancaster for witchcraft. Garnett said that the Rigby brothers, had murdered Humfrey Morecroft of Scarisbricke and had his body thrown in a pit. As the court proceedings reveal, Morecroft's murder was 'solved' by Garnett:

Upon Midsomer day last, Homfrey Morecroft of Scarisbricke, haveing bene at Wigan and coming homewards through Holland farre overloaden with drinke (as is generally reported carried himselfe very boysterously, abuseing many honest men both in words and deeds)
And absenting or concealing himselfe secretly, a great stirre and uproare was made in the County, especially, in the Towne of Holland in searching of Pitts, where the friends of Morecroft thought him to be murthered and thrown in (as by report they were informed by one John Garnett, now prisoner as Lancaster for suspition of Witchcraft to whome they sought to knowe what was become of him).

James Garnett, though imprisoned, was nevertheless consulted to find the 'murderer'. The constable and Morecroft's friends acted upon his advice to see if Morecroft had indeed been thrown in a pit and murdered. The brothers, who were employed in the Marlepits, were likely suspects. Having been imprisoned for several days, they expressed concern about losing pay, and loss of status:

The Morecrofts friends, charging your poore petitioners, were committed to safe keeping in the custody of the constable for the space of seven or eight dayes and nights, to their great discredit (being true poore men) and much hindered in the same tyme where they might have bene imployed in workeing in marlepitts.

In this instance, a note at the bottom of the page indicates that the Justice 'considered' the brothers' wishes. Though precisely how they ensured that their good name and reputation was restored is difficult to ascertain.

At Chadderton, in 1634, a cunning man known as Henry Baggillie maintained that he knew a charm for curing both humans and cattle. The charm was inherited from his father, who, according to Baggilie, learned it from a travelling Dutch man, he told the court that:

About twenty years since, this examinants father was taught by A Dutcheman certaine Englishe wordes and priyers to repeate, whereby to blesse or helpe anie sicke person or cattell in there extremetie.
The charm which Henry related to the court, was clearly a simple prayer or wish and had very little to do with sorcery, as the following words demonstrate:

Tell thee thou for Spoken Toothe and Tongue: Hearthe and Heartenaithe: Three things thee boote moste: the father sonne, and holighoste, with the Lordes prayer and thee Beleeve three tymes over.\(^{119}\)

According to the evidence of Henry Bagillie, there was much need of the healing charm, particularly during the years of 1632 and 1633, since many people became ill and his services were called upon regularly:

all which wordes and the manner of speakinge them: hee learned of his father and hath made use of dyiverse times though more frequently for these two yeares last paste, when people have come to him to blesse there friends or cattell. And further he confesseth that alwaies when hee came to the partie ill affected, if the same needed his blessinge, then he pronounced the wordes and praiers in utteringe [sic] the of the wordes and duringe all the tyme of his blessinge, hee for all suche tyme hath alwaies beene suddenlie taken with sickness or lamenesse and that alwaies in the same manner that the man or beaste that hee blessed was troubled withall.\(^{120}\)

The cunning man did not take payment for these healing services, although he took a meal with the family concerned:

that what hee hath blessed hath recovered and he hath only receaved Meale, or Cheese or Comodities of the like nature, but never did take silver or anie other rewarde but such as before hearein is Acknowledged.\(^{121}\)

In spite of it being an obvious healing charm, Edmund Assheton, the Justice who had convicted many cunning folk of witchcraft, found the cunning man guilty. His note at the bottom of the page condemned Henry Bagillie to a dubious future. His activities were interpreted by Ashheton as 'witchcrafte.'\(^{122}\) Bagillie would certainly have hanged.

The Justices, however, were not always ruthless in dealing with people. They would, in certain cases, respond favourably to a request for compassion. Such was the case in 1663 with John Roshorne, labourer, of Little Bolton in Lancashire, who became embroiled in a situation which resulted in an accusation of bewitchment against his landlady's brother. His petition, reproduced below, gives a clear account of his history:

your petioner being a very poore Lame Cripell who formerly followed the occupation of Miller but for the space of foureene years last past hath not beeene able to work at a mill, your petioner hath lived in Litel Boulton for the space of five years last past and upwards att the house of William Stone and coming upon atime in my landlords house my landlady William Stone's wife told mee of a neighbours wife and Thomas Warde wiffe which had gotten a women to spit her some grout to quicken in a barril which a littell before had been left under a spout and when the barrill was emptied she told mee there was two or three water toads in itt. Goeing to one Adame Stones house his daughter Dorothy told mee the same story and throughge the story I had heard of my landlady, she said she thought I was a witch and she having a brother fallinge sicke shortly after Mr Hon Seefeild of Boulton told mee hee heard on 21th July 1663 Adam Stone say that hee suspected mee to be a witch and that he threatened to further a warrant for mee and Mr Seefeild wished him to take heed what hee did and said for hee had known mee this twenty or thirty years and neither knew nor heard nothinge to mee where upon these reports my Landlord William Stone July 7th

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\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Ibid.

\(^{122}\) LRO QSB1/139/81, 1634. Examination of cunning man Henry Bagillie and the note of Edmund Ashheton.
1663 did give mee warning to provide a plea for my selfe on the 15th September and hee
tould mee that if Mr Seefeild would witnesse what he said to mee I might have a warrant
against them.\textsuperscript{123}

John Rosthorne's petition is informative about the pace at which such accusations gathered momentum. In
this incident, Rosthorne was forced to respond with equal rapidity to thwart the legal actions taken by his
disgruntled neighbours who believed sorcery was involved. The petition also demonstrates his indignation
at his treatment at the hands of his neighbours, 'as if I had been some theefe'.\textsuperscript{124} Because people were afraid
to accommodate him he was forced to live on the streets. He applied to the Justices for poor relief, and his
plea was recorded as follows: 'may it please your good worshipes to grant your petitioner relief who is
allmost starved for want of a habitation.'\textsuperscript{125} In this case, poor relief was granted and a note at the bottom of
the page read: 'Done. Provided relief and cleared of charge'.\textsuperscript{126}

Neither the petition of eighty-year-old Ann Baker of Warrington, nor the signatures of 13 people
in support of her petition, moved the Justice William Weast, to show compassion at Warrington in 1658.
Ann Baker, who was most likely a wise woman, was not as fortunate as John Rosthorne. She was
imprisoned for sorcery without having been proved guilty. The petition read as follows:

Your petitioner beinge within the Comon Gayle at Lancaster upon the suspition of sorcerie
or witchcraft and nothing prouved againste her, and remaineth here still for not paying her
feese wich shee can not produce, nor pay haveing no frends to Looke upon her, but hath
sould all her clothes her hatt and aprine and all that shee hath and now lieth sore sicke in
bed, and is not able to stir or to helpe her selfe any way.\textsuperscript{127}

The signatures which appear on the petition demonstrate that some members of the community felt a great
deal of compassion for the elderly woman and her sorry state. Their words reveal their concern:

May it therefore please your good worship to take into your grave Consideration the poore
and Miserable Condition of your afflicted petitioner and release her from prison and shee
as in duetie bound, will ever prey wee whose names are heare subscribed are daylie
witnesses of her miserable condition being a woeman of fourscore years of age or
thereabouts.\textsuperscript{128}

The petitioners may have been inmates or prison wardens at the jail from where Anne Baker made her
plea. The petition was in vain. William Weast's blunt response, recorded at the bottom of the request for
compassion, was the single word 'Nothing.'\textsuperscript{129}

There were a number of such incidents where those accused of magical healing were imprisoned.
In 1657, in a similar situation to Anne Baker, widow Margery Greene, of Ince in Macclesfield, and her
children were starving because she was condemned by the local community and imprisoned on suspicion
of sorcery. Her petition read as follows:

Your poore petitioner fyndeth her selfe sore wronged and disgraced by Thomas Bradshaw
of Ince, Mr Ralphe Browne, Mrs Elizabeth Goodlaw and her sonne Christopher, Elizabeth
Jolly of Ince spinster, Katherine Ford of Wigan widow, and by Jane the wife of Edward
Marsh of Wigan who have all accused slandered and said and reported your petitioner to be
a witch insomuch that your petitioner and her children are lykely to be famished by reason

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} LRO QSP/268/6, 1663. The petition of Labourer John Roshorne of Little Bolton.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Ibid. Note of the Justices of Lancashire Quarter Sessions Court.
\item \textsuperscript{127} LRO QSP165/12 The Petition of Ann Baker of Warrington.
\item \textsuperscript{128} LRO QSP165/12 The names subscribed are T. Barrow, Hariot, John Coulthrot, Bennit, Thomas Parkinson, George
Chorlton, Janice Whitworth, John Renshall, William Sharlock, George Almred, Richard Mather.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., The note of William Weast, Justice, at Warrington.
\end{itemize}
that noe one (through these reports) will give them any releife but push them from their doores.\textsuperscript{130}

A note from Justice Butterworth that also read 'Nothing', at the bottom of the Petition, is a clear indication that no mercy was forthcoming for Margerie Green or her children and she was likely to have starved in prison.\textsuperscript{131} Her children, perhaps, met with a similar fate.

At Lancashire Quarter Sessions in October, 1661, an unnamed female reported a cunning woman to the magistrates, who she claimed had carried out sorcery, though it is more likely that she attempted to cure a colt and failed. The petitioner was afraid of being suspected of witchcraft, and was anxious for the Justices to issue a warrant for the arrest of the cunning woman that she claimed was a witch. Her words testify to the fact that she had, on previous occasions been 'bound', (probably a recognisance bond was issued against her), and this petition was prompted by her desire to try to protect herself from further indictment. Her petition stated the following:

\begin{quote}
Nouble gentle men I desire you to consider of this women what kind of acourse of life shee hath lived in the first of her time shee lived with her husband as man and wife and was not so and after they were married shee went away with another man besides her husband and shee goes in the name of a witch for which a child which the mother of the child was tought to get blud of them to cure the child, and shee did go and the child recovered well and shee was taken one morning killing of a neibours Coult and the other daye the Coult dyed, and they threaten me that they will make me to breake my bones or they will make my bones Clater in my skin and they say that they will hange me at the sessions or they will be hanged themselves and if shee meete me far from any house shee will say nothing to mee but if shee be neare any house shee will cry out for helpe and as for my part I never spoake word to her since I was bound and as for his part hee hath bin arraigned and since stole close of a hedge and I can bringe witness of this all if you plese to grant mee a warrant for them.
\end{quote}

The petitioner was clearly frightened to speak. Her evidence shows that the dispute was about the death of a young horse that she had failed to heal. Threats of violence were made between the women concerned. The fate of the cunning woman is not known.

In 1641, a Recognisance Bond was issued by John Butterworth, Justice of the Peace, for Alice Schofield, a cunning woman of Castleton, to appear before the Justices of Manchester Great Sessions accused of sorcery. She was accused of attempting to find stolen cattle, sheep and a hen at the request of neighbours, James Newbold and John Seildon. She was also required to answer charges of using the 'sieve and shears'. The evidence stated the following:

\begin{quote}
the Courte shall injoyne her commanding the devillish practising of a sieve and a pair of sheeres to know whoe had stoulen the sheepe, the goods and Chattel of James Newbold of Castleton aforesayd, and a hen from John Seildon of Belfield in the parish of Rochdale, and to know whether Jane Broaslly at Cydeon nowe with Child, and Mary the daughter of the aforesayd John Feilden were with Child.\textsuperscript{133}
\end{quote}

The cunning woman of Castleton had been in trouble on other occasions, and John Chadwick, Labourer, of Belfield, brought a number of 'Bills of Indictment’ against her.\textsuperscript{134} If the charge was proved against her at Manchester Quarter Sessions, she would have been imprisoned.
Witchcraft or Magical Healing?

Records of the Quarter Sessions and Church Courts of the Northwest between 1595 and 1667 show that English society and State consistently brought legal opinion to bear on a far wider range of traditional healing activities, particularly 'charms and inchauntements' which came to be perceived as 'sorcery' by legal institutions. However, the townsfolk themselves brought most instances. Some were simply cases of slander or defamation, but some of the more serious incidents led to prolonged legal actions. The women who were accused of sorcery, not surprisingly, moved very quickly to defend their reputations as honest and God-fearing folk. For example, Ellen Osbaldston of Blackburn took action in 1595 against Robert and Ellen Tailor who asserted that she had enjoyed a long reputation as a witch. The court recorded the following words: 'Ellen Osbaldson art or is a witch and so has she beene taken for the past twenty years.'\(^{135}\)

Elene Smyth, of Frodsham, in 1616, was accused of defaming John Lathom with the following words: 'John Lathom is an old lame witch that did stinke.'\(^{136}\) In 1613, Lauren Kershaw of Rossendale moved to defend her name before the court having been accused of 'witching to death' a chicken called 'Ashmouth' and returned the compliment by referring to Edward Bulroke as 'thou Witcherie knave, thou didst witch my cowe to death.'\(^{137}\) In a similar situation, Elizabeth Boude, of the Parish of Rochdale, in 1618, was maligned by Elizabeth Botham with the words 'Elizabeth Boude, is a thieve a whore and a witch' and she moved quickly to defend herself before the Church Court.\(^{138}\) In 1627, Dorothy Green of Skippoole gave information before Richard Burch, to defend herself from a comparison with the Lancaster witches through the words of William Wilkinson who called her 'a witch and Demdyke.'\(^{139}\) He further added 'thou arte a witch and Demdyke, god blesse me from all witches, I am affrayd for my wife, children and goods.'\(^{140}\)

As with other instances which involved verbal crime, the cunning folk did not fare well in early-modern northwest England. Unlike cursing, that was exclusively an aspect of female verbal crime, both men and women pronounced charms or enchantments. Therefore under the stern laws of the Justices of Lancashire, both cunning men and cunning women were imprisoned without mercy. Clearly, the cunning folk were in great demand by sick people of the community, but if they wanted to stay alive they were required to proceed with caution. During times of acute misfortune, the individuals, who were once their patients, could turn against them, especially if a member of the family being treated became ill or died. The evidence clearly points to infant deaths as the main source of discontent in the community and at such times the cunning folk were required to be unusually vigilant against the disconsolate individual with an axe to grind.

The evidence of each of the above petitions demonstrates that the position occupied by the cunning people was ambiguous. The situation varied from place to place, but a common explanation for a community turning against a cunning person is most obviously apparent where the cunning person failed in his or her efforts to cure a sick child. On other occasions, or when under pressure during a legal hearing, individuals who were afraid of being accused of sorcery, in order to shift attention from themselves, often divulged the names of other known practitioners of the healing arts. Although it was largely social deprivation that most often underscored the greatest numbers of instances of cursing, it was the cursing ritual itself, being strongly associated with the supernatural, that made the gravity of the situation all the more explicit. The evidence of Quarter Sessions records in the Northwest shows a consistent chronological pattern of accusation, from the early sixteenth century, and throughout the seventeenth century, with a sudden increase in the number of cases appearing in small communities of the Northwest particularly in the decade 1630 to 1640. A parallel situation occurred with accusations against the cunning folk. The period of 1630 to 1640 showed an increase in litigation in the Chester Consistory Court and the Quarter Sessions.

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135 Cheshire Record Office (hereafter referred to as CRO) CRO EDC5/1595/30 'Witchcrafte' accusation against Ellen Osbaldston.
136 CRO EDC5/1606/28 Defamation, Elene Smythe, of John Lathom.
137 CRO EDC5/1606/28 Defamation, Elene Smythe, of John Lathom.
138 CRO EDC5/1618/45 Libel, Elizabeth Botham against Elizabeth Boud.
139 LRO QSB1/33/16, 1627. The information of Dorothie Green of Skippoole.
140 LRO QSB1/33/16, 1627. The information of Dorothy Green of Skippoole. 'Demdyke' was reputedly the name of one of the Lancashire witches. By using the term 'Demdyke to refer to Green, Wilkinson strengthened his claims against her.
courts pertaining to those accused of speaking charms or enchantments. Whatever magical healing took place, the practices of the cunning folk were perceived as enchantments, charms or even witchcraft by the time they reached the Quarter Sessions courts. They were dealt with very harshly by Justices of the Peace, who were anxious to stamp out all evidence of magical or superstitious ritual reminiscent of the Catholic religion they despised. In the haste to rid society of the relics of Catholicism, the charge of superstitious practice fell upon a wider range of traditional activities. Into this category came the rituals of popular healing such as the 'blessings' and 'casting water' of the cunning folk. As the Puritan Justices gained a stronger foothold in the Northwest, they were vociferous in their prosecution of sorcery and ever vigilant in their attempts to control the remnants of traditional healing practices. During this period, the overall incidence of verbal crime increased and Justices of the Peace placed particular emphasis upon controlling the cunning folk by who were clearly targeted for their activities.
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