‘A Hellish Knot of Witches’: a regional approach to early-modern witchcraft beliefs and accusations in and around Selwood Forest

Critical commentary on a portfolio of evidence for examination for the qualification of PhD by published works.

AUTHOR: Andrew Pickering

Keele University
PhD by Publication
December 2022

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Candidate's qualifications and academic credentials

Qualifications:

MA Archaeology and Heritage (University of Leicester, 2001)
MA Victorian Studies (University of Keele, 1986)
PGCE History (University of Bath, 1986)
BA (Hons) Medieval and Modern History (University of Birmingham, 1983)

Academic credentials:

Programme Manager for University of Plymouth BA (Hons) in History, Heritage and Archaeology

Critical commentary

9968 words including footnotes but excluding acknowledgements, appendix and bibliography

Autobiographical context for the portfolio of evidence

For several years I lived in Frome Selwood, as did that most eminent of seventeenth-century demonologists, Joseph Glanvill, who was also vicar of Street, the church for which is literally a stone's throw from the college where I manage a University of Plymouth degree in History, Heritage and Archaeology. My present home in Bruton, on the edge of Selwood Forest, is very close to its seventeenth-century courthouse where, in 1689, local magistrates heard the Beckington witchcraft case, a main focus of my studies. Nearby are the settings of the most famous (alleged) sabbat meetings in early modern England, and so too is the Batcombe living at of another highly influential Selwood demonologist, Richard Bernard.

In addition to teaching the subject at various levels, I have written several books and papers on witchcraft and witch-hunting, the first being an A Level textbook, *Different Interpretations of Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe* (London: Heinemann, 2009). I first published material on the seventeenth-century Selwood Forest witchcraft cases and their associated demonologies in *Witch-Hunting in England* (Stroud: Amberley, 2010). Following good reviews in *Fortean Times* and elsewhere, this was republished as *Witch-Hunt: The Persecution of Witches in England* (Stroud: Amberley, 2013). This received a review from James Sharpe, Professor Emeritus of Early Modern History, University of York, in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 2013 who found it 'a lively and accessible book'.[1] It takes the form of a gazetteer of witchcraft cases organised by county and chronology and, as such, and somewhat surprisingly, seems to be a unique publication in this respect. It includes my original analysis and commentary on

[1] James Sharpe, '*Witch Hunt'*, *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5743, 26 Apr. 2013, pp. 26-27.

an obscure two-page tract I stumbled upon by chance in the Early English Books Online archive which described a witchcraft case at Beckington in Selwood Forest entitled *Great News from the West of England* (1689).[2] This case, also recorded in Richard Baxter's *Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* (1691), has been a focus of my recent research.

Between 2013 and 2017 I worked on an edited collection of modernized transcriptions of sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth- century accounts concerning the history of witchcraft and demonism in the West of England in the early modern period. This included the two accounts of the 1689 Beckington case, an analysis of which was published as 'The Witches of Beckington' by the Frome Society for Local Study in its *Yearbook* for 2015.

Designed primarily as a resource for my own undergraduate students, *The Devil's Cloister: Wessex Witchcraft Narratives* was published in 2017. David Amigoni, Professor of Victorian Literature, Keele University, read an embryonic version of this work and found it 'A compelling piece of work that assembles an important range of primary sources; sensitively modernised for clarity, these documents are framed by an informative, context-setting introduction; the whole collection will be really valuable as an aid to teaching and further research.'[3] The 'Wessex narratives', to which the title alludes, were those confined to the more westerly part of the Saxon kingdom comprising the counties of Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset, at the centre of which Selwood Forest straddles their borders. As far as I am aware this was the first book-length work published on the subject with this particular regional focus. In turn it paved

[2] According to the *English Short Title Catalogue* there is just one known extant copy of this document which is held in the collection of the Huntington Library in California.
[3] In Andrew Pickering, *The Devil's Cloister: Witchcraft Narratives* (Devizes: Ape or Eden Books, 2017), 3.

the way for my closer analysis of its Selwood epicentre and, subsequently, this portfolio of published works presented for examination.

Chronological description of the submission and the development of the work

The body of work supporting this application comprises a book of around 100,000 words, two associated articles, and a chapter in a collection of papers published in the course of its writing.

An earlier version of the book was entitled *The Witches of Selwood Forest: Witchcraft and Demonism in the West of England, 1625-1700* (CSP, 2017). This was reviewed by Mark Stoyle, Professor of Early Modern History, University of Southampton, in *Southern History: A Review of the History of Southern England*, 40 (2018), and by Marion Gibson, Professor of Renaissance and Magical Literatures, University of Exeter, in *The Seventeenth Century*, 34:1, (2019).

Certain themes in the book were elucidated and further developed in two articles published in the academic press: 'Witchcraft and evidence in a seventeenth century Somerset parish', *The Local Historian: Journal of the British Association for Local History*, Volume 48, Number 1, January 2018; 'Great News from the West of England: witchcraft and strange vomiting in a Somerset village', *Magic, Witchcraft and Ritual* (University of Pennsylvania), Volume 13, Issue 1, Spring 2018. I also discussed the subject in 'The Devil's Cloyster: putting Selwood Forest on England's seventeenth-century witchcraft map', a chapter in Nate, R., and Wiedemann J. (eds.), *Remembering Places: Perspectives from Scholarship and the Arts* (Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019). The advice of a dozen editors and anonymous expert referees, and scholarly developments and publications in the field of my enquiries, has culminated in the fully revised version of

the original book under a new title: *The Witches of Selwood: Witchcraft Belief and Accusation in Seventeenth-Century Somerset* (Gloucester: The Hobnob Press, 2021). In addition to stylistic and structural revisions, the 2021 book is informed by extensive further research in key areas. This new version includes a foreword by Dr John Chandler, County Editor (2011-2016) *Victoria County History* (Gloucestershire) and chair of the Publishing Committee of the British Association for Local History.

Bibliographical context

Most of the Selwood witchcraft narratives, spanning the eras of the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution, entered the historical record because of the philosophical wars that were waged through the printed works of members of the Royal Society, churchmen and other intellectuals. The first blast of the trumpet in Selwood Forest in the campaign against an emerging witchcraft scepticism was sounded in the 1660s by Joseph Glanvill, vicar of Frome Selwood's St John's. His *magnum opus*, the *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681) contained several Selwood 'relations' including his own experience of supposed *maleficia* at Tidworth and detailed histories of witchcraft in and around the parishes of Stoke Trister and Brewham. Although the later Beckington case of 1689-1690 has since shrunk into relative obscurity, for a short while it took centre stage through its inclusion as the most recent case in Richard Baxter's *Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits* (1691). This was a time when, as Jacqueline Pearson has observed, ghost stories and other supernatural phenomena gained a new lease of life because of their 'didactic usefulness' in confuting 'an alleged epidemic of atheism'.[4] My purpose in part has been to raise awareness of both the case and the man who told its story, Beckington's rector May Hill, as providing significant interventions in what has been termed 'the Glanvill-Webster debate'[5] concerning the reality of demonic interventions, a full ten years after Glanvill's death, and nine after that of his arch-critic John Webster.[6] As such the case is of particular interest to those seeking to understand the cause and nature of the dramatic demise of witch-hunting in England

[4] Jacqueline Pearson, "'Then she asked it, what were its Sisters names?': Reading between the lines in seventeenth-century pamphlets of the supernatural", *The Seventeenth Century*, 28:1 (2013), 64.
[5] James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 268.
[6] John Webster, *The Displaying of supposed Witchcraft* (1677).

in the second half of the seventeenth century which has been widely considered one of the least understood aspects of the subject.[7] While not resolving this conundrum, this body of work underlines the propensity for belief in, and rejection of, witchcraft paradigms and myths, notably that of the strange-vomiting phenomenon, to develop with relative rapidity and, probably, in regionally distinctive ways in relation to scale and distribution. In particular it contributes to 'from above' explanations for its decline by drawing attention to 'outside' influences in the shape of an Assize courts judge, the sceptical Lord Holt who, and previously this has not been fully recognized, seems to have commenced his personal history of *non culpa* verdicts in witchcraft cases with that of the Beckington witches in 1690.

The most well-known Selwood cases – those concerning alleged 'sabbat' meetings in the forest in the early 1660s – were considered by Walter Scott in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1884), and by Margaret Murray in her highly influential *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (1921), but of the equally significant Beckington case in 1689, a main focus of the book and articles presented for examination, they made no mention. The links between the two (and other cases for that matter) have been briefly considered by Barry,[8] but this body of work represents the first comprehensive study of the region and its extraordinarily rich legacy of seventeenth-century witch-hunting episodes and demonological texts. Otherwise, the Beckington case has largely eluded reference in important works published on the subject in recent times. In Peter Elmer's *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (2016), it receives a couple of footnote

[7] This has been most recently and comprehensively addressed by Michael Hunter in *The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020).
[8] Jonathan Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640-1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 'Robert Hunt and the Somerset Witches'.

references (one erroneously dated) and a single sentence in the main text.[9] Other Selwood cases including the dramatic episode of witch-swimming events in 1694 in Rode, despite being, as I argue below, pivotal in the history of the demise of witch-hunting, have received very little attention.[10] The later episode of a swimming at Frome in 1731 has received an occasional mention in a few important histories.[11]

The *Great News* document appears to have evaded public scrutiny until I subjected it to my initial analysis published in 2010. Subsequently it received a brief mention in Jonathan Barry's *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640-1789* (2012).[12] As Barry noted in his introduction to his book, previous studies have tended to focus on the pre-1640 period and regions other than the south-west, hence, on both accounts, a closer analysis of this and other later cases in the vicinity, he would concur, is of some value, even importance. Barry, legitimately, declared that in his book he addressed certain episodes in the history of witchcraft belief and its persecution which 'have never been subject to close academic scrutiny' and this claim is equally applicable to this body of work which complements Barry's own.[13]

Biographies and papers have been produced about those who recorded Selwood Forest's witchcraft beliefs and history at the time, most recently, Julie Davies' *Science*

[9] Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
, 191, fn. 51; 213, fn. 121; Elmer dates the 'witchcraft scare' there to 1690, the year of the trial but not that of the alleged witchcraft in 1689.
[10] The one reference I have found in modern scholarly texts to the Rode witch-swimmings is a two-sentence summary in Malcolm Gaskill's *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 83.
[11] This also, in a single sentence, is mentioned in Gaskill's *Crime and Mentalities*, 82.
[12] Jonathan Barry, *Witchcraft and Demonology in South-West England, 1640-1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Chapter 2; in his introduction to this volume he also comments on the listing of *Great News* in Emanuel Green's *Bibliotheca Somersetensis: A Catalogue of Books, Pamphlets, Single Sheets, and Broadsides in Some Way Connected With the County of Somerset* (Taunton: Barncott and Pearce, 1902).
[13] Barry, *Witchcraft*, Introduction.

in an Enchanted World (2018),[14] but usually without much regard for the immediate geographical and social contexts in which they wrote. Barry's investigation (2012)[15] of one of the less well-known of these, Robert Hunt, the Justice of the Peace who was Glanvill's principal informer, ventured into the largely uncharted waters that my book, further explores. As I discuss below, in revealing the connections between those involved in and writing about witchcraft cases in the region, evidence for a distinct, if not unique, demonological culture within that region emerges.

As a regional study of English witchcraft, and one that considers its subject as much from below as from above, my study like that of so many others, is indebted to the pioneering work of Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane.[16] In particular, it has taken inspiration from Macfarlane's methodology in building a social history of a specific region (Essex) through the rigorous hunt for, and analysis of, court records. As in Macfarlane's study, my own regional history, almost by default, includes the close study of just a few parishes within the designated region; in the absence of the abundance of legalistic material that Macfarlane had to hand I have had cause to rely more heavily on parochial records.

While overtly literal and functionalist interpretations of accounts of witchcraft cases have been treated with greater caution in recent histories,[17] the Thomas-Macfarlane 'charity refused' paradigm, for which several of the Selwood cases could be considered 'a good fit', has provided a useful starting place for considering the dynamics of accusation.

[14] Julie Davies, *Science in an Enchanted World: Philosophy and Witchcraft in the Work of Joseph Glanvill* (London: Routledge, 2018).
[15] Barry, *Witchcraft,* Chapter 2.
[16] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1971); Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 1970, 1999).
[17] For example, Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), Chapter 4, 78-109.

Whether or not these denial narratives are the invention of those who wrote them down it is hard to say, although there are enough specific local details (e.g. Mary Hill of Beckington's refusal to accompany Elizabeth Carrier on a trip to Frome to find spinning work; Margaret Agar's lethal bewitchment of Brewham's Overseer of the Poor after he failed to provide her children with clothes) to suggest there was more to these alleged quarrels than pure fiction conforming to stereotype.

The psychological approaches and interpretations of certain distinguished historians who helped move the discussion forward, notably Robin Briggs and Lyndal Roper,[18] have helped me to look beyond purely mechanistic perspectives in considering the complexities in the relationships between the bewitched, those accused, and their accusers. In particular, as explained below, I have found the work of Edward Bever and Kirsten Uszkalo[19] especially helpful in my consideration of psychosomatic and medical explanations for certain behaviours, especially in relation to the Beckington case of 1689. Brian Hoggard's investigations into the significance of witch bottles and their contents have been useful in relation to my work on related phenomena such as self-harm, embedding and 'strange-vomiting'.[20] The Selwood sabbats discovered by Hunt and published by Glanvill have provided an obvious focus for consideration of the place of inversion in witchcraft cases, a concept perhaps most effectively explored by Stuart Clark.[21]

[18] Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of Witchcraft* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).
[19] Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition, and Everyday Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Kirsten C Uszkalo, *Bewitched and Bedeviled: A Cognitive Approach to Embodiment in Early English Possession* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
[20] Brian Hoggard, 'Witch Bottles: Their Contents, Contexts and Uses' in Ronald Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain: A Feeling for Magic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 104.
[21] Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

The Witches of Selwood complements the handful of other regional and micro-histories that focus on witchcraft in the west of England, the most recent being John Callow's *The Last Witches of England* (2021).[22] In a field of study where the micro-historical approach has played such an important part in testing and developing the broad conclusions historians have claimed, these publications and my own work demonstrate the merit of close analyses of the south-west. Here witchcraft belief remained strong well-beyond the Restoration, and the enduring fascination with it is of particular interest for those attempting to unravel the complexities of the demise of witch-hunting.

[22] John Callow, *The Last Witches of England: A Tragedy of Sorcery and Superstition* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

An evaluative description of the originality of each output

1. Andrew Pickering, 'Witchcraft and evidence in a seventeenth century Somerset parish', *The Local Historian: Journal of the British Association for Local History*, Volume 48, Number 1, January 2018, 30-40.

As I noted at the start of this publication, Peter Marshall has observed that the task confronting the student of witchcraft narratives is one 'of making connections, assessing plausibility, and scratching for meaning out of the hard soil of the historical record'[23] – made all the harder by the simple fact that those both bewitched and accused, typically, made no record of their own. In assessing the plausibility of the two contemporary accounts of the Beckington case, the anonymous *Great News from the West of England* (1689) and Rector Hill's report published in Baxter's *The Worlds of Spirits* (1691), I explained my approach here as one that explores its subject from below on the premise that 'A good place to begin the study of any witchcraft case is to ascertain whether the people said to have been involved existed in the first place.' In this instance, as I further explained, searches of a range of parochial and personal records demonstrate the veracity of much of what is contained in otherwise seemingly *incredible* accounts. This in turn, the paper argues, validates attempts to make sense of the more remarkable aspects of the story without relying entirely on such interpretative tools as metaphor and fantasy.

Thus, building on my previous work, profiles of those involved in the Beckington case were reconstructed and considered in relation to current discourse and debates in the field of witchcraft studies. It acknowledges the broad consensus among historians that

[23] Peter Marshall, Peter, *Mother Leakey and the Bishop: A Ghost Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 189.

approximately 1000 known English trials in 9000 parishes across the course of 200 years implies these were very unusual events but argues that witchcraft accusation at a local and extra-judicial level, though unquantifiable, must have been much more frequent. The paper also considers the profiles of those accused in relation to gender approaches and psycho-historical studies rooted in psychoanalytical theory associated with such authorities as Robin Briggs and Lyndal Roper.[24] As Alan Crosby noted in his editorial,[25] the paper presented further evidence to support the argument of historians interested in the dynamics of a witch-hunt that the accused, their victims and their accusers were likely to be neighbours and, perhaps, kinsfolk. The paper also outlined some of the fascinating connections among those members of the local elite who became involved in the case. These I have discussed at greater length elsewhere.

The paper summarised a wealth of discoveries through painstaking analysis at a micro-historical level of a hitherto obscure episode, including the discovery of a recent epidemic in the village and the role of the principal 'witch', Elizabeth Carrier, in swearing the affidavits that the deceased were buried in wool and, probably, the laying out of the dead. 'Most importantly', it concluded, 'these reconstructions prove the veracity of the fundamental facts of the narrative. From this position the researcher is compelled to seek rational explanations for its more remarkable elements'.

[24] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*; Roper, *Witch Craze.*
[25] Alan G. Crosby, 'Editorial', *The Local Historian: Journal of the British Association for Local History*, Volume 48, Number 1, January 2018, 2.

2. Andrew Pickering, ‘Great News from the West of England: witchcraft and strange vomiting in a Somerset village’, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ritual* (University of Pennsylvania), Volume 13, Issue 1, Spring 2018, 71-97.

This paper builds upon its author’s collation of multiple accounts of the vomiting by the bewitched of indigestible material in English witchcraft cases, first published in 2017. This is the first detailed analysis of this key aspect of the history of the subject. The Beckington case of 1689 is used as the central case study because it provides an exceptionally well-documented, yet hitherto neglected, example of such phenomena. While this paper recognises the problems inherent in reductive medical explanations for the behaviours of ‘witches’ and the ‘bewitched’, it is aligned with the recent work of authorities including Edward Bever who, in 2008, posed the question, ‘What basis did early modern beliefs about witchcraft and magic have in reality?’[26] Historians have continued to apply psychological theory in attempting to unravel and explain the detail of witchcraft episodes, and one of these, Kirsten Uszkalo, who briefly touched upon the Beckington case, has made a strong case for the principle that ‘an awareness of current diagnostic categories can provide a necessary immediacy to the understanding of symptoms described in bewitchments.’ [27] Ronald Hutton has commented on psychosomatic evidence for the lethal effects of belief in bewitchment in anthropological studies in the twentieth century. [28] This paper shares such approaches in choosing to focus on aspects of reality in beliefs about witchcraft and magic as much as the elements of unreality. The paper considers a range of possible interpretations for extraordinary evidence and makes a strong case, for example, for

[26] Bever, *Realities of Witchcraft*, xiv-xvi; drawing on “new studies of cognition and perception” and “fringe phenomena” Bever has considered psychosomatic theory in the projection of hostility and its capacity for causing or contributing to a variety of ailments.
[27] Uszkalo, *Bewitched and Bedeviled*, 48.
[28] Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear from Ancient Times to the Present* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), 39.

the rationale of fabricating physical evidence of bewitchment to convince sceptical judges in the Beckington case. Indeed, it is unequivocal in its declaration at the start of the fifth, and most controversial, section ('Pica and Pin-voiding') that 'it is sensible not to take these early modern accounts of strange vomiting at face value'. Nevertheless it also challenges the easy assumption of most historians that, in the words of Owen Davies, such symptoms of the bewitched were 'obviously fraudulent' and 'the pin-voider was performing for an audience'.[29]

A main theme in the paper concerns the relationship between different forms of pin-related magic – *malephicial*, sympathetic, and symptomatic. It finds that the rise of the uniquely British (and colonial) custom of burying bottles with pins in them for protection against witches, coincided with the escalation of reports of strange vomiting in witchcraft cases and argues there is at least a suggestive connection between witch-bottle counter-magic and strange vomiting. The paper argues that pins and nails and their symbolic counterparts in the witch's poppet, the cunning-man's witch bottle, and the hands of the disturbed victims of supposed witchcraft, lay at the heart of the matter, as many contemporary writers recognized, and thus they deserve more than a peripheral mention as mere narrative devices and archaeological curios in modern histories of the subject. To substantiate this position the paper's end-pieces include an original table that collates from multiple sources accounts of more than two dozen English witchcraft cases featuring vomiting of strange objects and other related phenomena.

[29] Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 198.

The paper adopts an anthropological and, in this context, original approach to exploring the pin-magic and strange-vomiting phenomena. Critics might argue that the approach here is flawed in the same way that the collections of preternatural cases in seventeenth-century demonologies were, but, as far as the lay person can tell, the wealth of evidence accumulated by medical experts and others for instances of acuphagia and other forms of 'pica' in the modern world, some of which is outlined in this paper, is difficult to deny. Thus arises the tantalizing possibility that the seemingly fantastical vomiting described in the Beckington literature was not entirely invented: what now appears, at first, incredible, and to the seventeenth-century observer supernatural, becomes conceivably natural. Proof of the condition in early modern contexts is elusive to the point of being unavailable but the paper concludes there is no good reason to deny the *possibility* and even finds in the records a couple of likely examples. However, in its defence, the paper is consistent in its care not to leap to such conclusions, remarking at one point, for example, that 'One case of acuphagia in a community at any point in time must be considered an extremely rare circumstance and two cases, as in Beckington in 1689, that much more unlikely' (p. 90). However, in principle, modern psychological studies also offer an explanation for this and the paper goes on to consider the place of social contagion in witchcraft cases where certain behaviours, including the 'fraudulent', appear to *cluster* (i.e. to be shared/copied by one person or more).

The paper arrives at the conclusion that in stories of witchcraft such as the Beckington case in which many elements can be verified by other sources, researchers are bound to consider the possibility of other literal truths in these accounts. Modern sensitivities regarding the cultural contexts in which these were written and the language in which

they are conveyed should not blind the reader to the reality that disturbing things happened and these sometimes triggered accusations. While Briggs and others have proposed 'an unconscious psychic alliance between witch and victim, both acting out their part of the fantasy',[30] there is no reason to doubt that the playing of roles could engender extreme behaviours that combined the physical with the imagined.

An Italian academic and anthropologist, Davide Ermacora, at the time Honorary Fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and now at the University of Turin and co-editor of the Exeter University Press series *New Approaches to Legend, Folklore and Popular Belief*, praised this article as 'a great piece of scholarship'.[31] At the time of its publication Dr Ermacora was writing on a similar theme and he cited the article extensively, together with references to the book in which I first introduced the subject, *The Witches of Selwood Forest* (2017), in a paper published in 2019 as 'Embedded Pins and Migratory Needles: A Historical Folklore Perspective—Part 2'.[32] He further cites and discusses this body of work in his forthcoming book, *Pins and Needles, Nails, Witchcraft and Murder: Three Story-Complexes Between Fantasy and Reality*.

[30] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 142.
[31] Personal correspondence
[32] Davide Ermacora, 'Embedded Pins and Migratory Needles: A Historical Folklore Perspective—Part 2', *Contemporary Legend* series 3, vol. 9 (2019): 1-53.

3. Andrew Pickering, 'The Devil's Cloyster: putting Selwood Forest on England's seventeenth-century witchcraft map' in Nate, R., and Wiedemann J. (eds.), *Remembering Places: Perspectives from Scholarship and the Arts* (Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019), 35-54.

This paper, based on one read at the University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Germany, in June 2016, summarises the narratives of the principal witchcraft cases in and around Selwood Forest. In collating a wide range of contemporary texts it makes a strong case for presenting the Selwood material as a unified whole as opposed to an assemblage of disparate events and literary endeavours. In so doing it identifies hitherto unrecognised links between people as well as places within the region and elsewhere across the course of more than half a century. It makes a case for the tales and associated texts emanating from this particular part of the West of England as being of colossal importance in the final great debate in elite circles in England concerning the reality of demonic spirits and their witch acolytes until, for most, it was resolved, or merely abandoned, in England in the eighteenth century. Furthermore, even though there are hints of the phenomenon elsewhere, it argues that unequivocal accounts of alleged sabbat meetings in Selwood[33] – common enough in other European cases – are unique in the English record. The continental sabbat concept, an inversion of the Roman Catholic Mass, had made little impact on the early modern witch hunt in Protestant England, and even when it did in these early Restoration era episodes it was lacking in the sensational debauchery of its continental counterpart. Although this remains an enigmatic feature of the region's witchcraft history, the chapter builds on Barry's theory[34] regarding the possibility that these sabbats were in fact meetings, at the time of the Restoration, of religious non-conformists in a region

[33] Recorded in Joseph Glanvill's *Saducismus Triumphatus* (London: 1681).
[34] Barry, *Witchcraft*, Chapter 2.

with a strong Puritan culture. The paper provides much additional evidence regarding the post-ejection histories of ministers in the vicinity of Selwood Forest to the point of providing the names of likely candidates for the enigmatic men in black wearing clerical 'bands' in meetings with their congregations at Stoke Trister, Brewham and elsewhere.

In addition to spending time reconsidering these famous cases, the paper explores further episodes of witchcraft accusation in the vicinity in the years after 1665 which have received very little attention since the demise of the English witch-trials. It argues that this is necessary since they are, in their own right, fascinating and enlightening cases, and because close analysis reveals a continuum of related thought and action concerning witchcraft in Selwood Forest from *circa* 1660 to the mid-1690s. The paper ends with a consideration of this exceptional history as a regional heritage asset that had not yet received the recognition it deserves.

The paper further reiterates some incidental thoughts on the matter of Joseph Glanvill's well-known encounter with 'the Drummer of Tedworth' which the author had first considered in his collection of edited and modernised witchcraft-related texts, *The Devil's Cloister: Wessex Witchcraft Narratives* (2017). This builds on Michael Hunter's observation in 2005 that an anonymous but contemporary account that survives among the State Papers of the same 'poltergeist' episode recorded and published by Glanvill, was not written by Glanvill himself.[35] It argues that this might be explained by the simple fact that Glanvill was not alone when he visited Mr Mompesson's beleaguered home and that his travelling companion and fellow eye-witness, one Mr

[35] Michael Hunter, "New Light on the 'Drummer of Tedworth': conflicting narratives of witchcraft in Restoration England', *Historical* Research, vol. 78, no. 201 (August 2005), 325.

Hill, could have written it. This suggestion has since received the honour of being considered by Professor Hunter himself in a book that is expected to be regarded as a 'classic' in field of English witchcraft studies for decades to come: *The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (2020).[36]

[36] Hunter, Michael*, The Decline of Magic: Britain in the Enlightenment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), ,111, 214, fn. 93.

4. Andrew Pickering, *The Witches of Selwood: Witchcraft Belief and Accusation in Seventeenth-Century Somerset* (Gloucester: The Hobnob Press, 2021)

In her review of the earlier version of this book, *The Witches of Selwood Forest: Witchcraft and Demonism in the West of England, 1625-1700* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017),[37] Marion Gibson, Professor of Renaissance and Magical Literatures, University of Exeter, noted it was the first detailed regional history of witchcraft belief in and around Selwood Forest on the border of Wiltshire and Somerset. For the first time a clear and coherent case had been made for identifying the area as a place equally deserving of recognition as, in this context, the rather more famous royal forest of Pendle. While the Beckington case of 1689 provided ample material for an effective micro-history, Gibson acknowledged the author's goal of placing the Beckington case in the broader context of witchcraft belief across the region throughout the seventeenth century: '[Pickering] makes a good case for a wider monograph history of the Selwood Forest […] as an area of Britain whose culture of magic and witchcraft accusation has been relatively little studied'. She further emphasised the importance of this claim for the significance of this area 'in understanding seventeenth-century witchcraft more generally'. In addition, she acknowledged the 'wealth of new information about little-known people' that the book brought to light for the first time, all of whom played their parts in the history of witchcraft belief and its persecution.

Mark Stoyle, Professor of Early Modern History, University of Southampton, also reviewed the unrevised version of this book, this time in *Southern History: A Review of*

[37] Marion Gibson, 'The Witches of Selwood Forest: witchcraft and demonism in the West of England, 1625-1700', *The Seventeenth Century*, 34:1 (2019), 138-140.

the History of Southern England. In this, Stoyle noted several original areas of discussion in the book including the hypothesis that Julian Cox, tried and executed at Taunton in 1663, was a Selwood Forest witch, and discoveries concerning the principal Beckington 'witch' in 1689, Elizabeth Carrier, in particular her grim association with the laying out of the dead during a lethal epidemic. Stoyle concluded that, despite some structural shortcomings, 'the great strength of his book is the way that it draws on local records like these to illuminate the back-stories of the supposed "witches" of east Somerset and of those who believed themselves to be their victims'.

The restructured and fully revised manuscript, appearing in 2021 as *The Witches of Selwood: Witchcraft Belief and Accusation in Seventeenth-Century Somerset*, was warmly received by its publisher, John Chandler, County Editor (2011-2016) *Victoria County History* (Gloucestershire) and chair of the Publishing Committee of the British Association for Local History. In his 'Foreword' he describes the work as a 'penetrating micro-history' enriched by its author's 'deep understanding of local circumstances and topography'. He found it 'a compelling read for anyone who lives in and cares about this unique region of England's West Country'. It is gratifying to hear from this leading authority on the social and cultural history of the West of England that he considers it has made 'a major contribution' in this field.[38]

This book is the first attempt to study the history of witchcraft in the vicinity of Selwood Forest as a *regional* history. As such it deviates from the single-case approach of multiple recent micro-histories. It demonstrates the value and importance of studies of specific localities in broader regional settings, on this occasion setting the history

[38] John Chandler 'Foreword', Andrew Pickering, *The Witches of Selwood: Witchcraft Belief and Accusation in Seventeenth-Century Somerset* (Gloucester: The Hobnob Press, 2021), vi.

within the bounds of a royal forest which straddles county borders as opposed to the more common county-bound approach of comparable regional histories. Nevertheless, with its focus on witchcraft belief on the Somerset side of Selwood in the seventeenth century, despite fundamental differences in design and purpose, it complements Owen Davies' study of witchcraft belief in the county in the nineteenth century, *A People Bewitched* (1999).[39]

A main purpose of this book is to present, for the first time, the Selwood Forest witchcraft history as a whole, as a continuum of developing beliefs and inter-related episodes. Thus, it makes no apology for revisiting some well-known cases and the famous demonologies in which they have been preserved. By approaching cases from below in seeking inferences from extant parochial records I have developed this familiar historical record[40] in addition to my analysis of the less familiar.[41] In so doing I have demonstrated that what Malcolm Gaskill has described as the 'supporting cast' in witch-trial dramas is not entirely invisible, and plenty of leads, not least in the names of its chief protagonists, provide ample opportunities for further inquiry.[42] For example, the close analysis of those involved in the alleged Sabbat meetings at Brewham provides clear evidence, as in many other cases,[43] of the close and familial relationship between the accused, their accusers and their alleged victims – the 'neighbours' at the centre of Robin Briggs' compelling interpretation of the mechanics of witchcraft accusation.[44] In my discussion of the Julian Cox case heard at Taunton

[39] Davies, Owen, *A People Bewitched: Witchcraft and Magic in Nineteenth-Century Somerset* (Bruton: 1999).
[40] For example, Shepton Mallet (1658), Stoke Trister and Brewham (1665).
[41] Notably the Beckington case (1689).
[42] 'Witch-trials were not simple social reflexes; they were intricately plotted human dramas with a large, but often historically invisible, supporting cast': Malcolm Gaskill, 'Witchcraft, politics and memory in seventeenth-century England', *Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2007), 289-308.
[43] These themes, with copious examples, have been explored by Gaskill; Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities* (2000), 54-78.
[44] Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours.*

in 1663, I explain why Julie Davies' identification of her as 'the Taunton witch'[45] is misleading. Instead, I argue her tale probably emanates from Selwood Forest and hence its inclusion in this volume.

A principal objective in the writing of the book was to reveal, or at least further explore, personal and philosophical connections between the prime movers in this history of witchcraft beliefs in building my argument that key developments in this history can only be fully understood within this broader context. It builds on Barry's hunch that Richard Bernard, pastor of Batcombe (in Selwood) and author of the hugely influential demonology, *A Guide to Grand-Jury Men* (1627), and magistrate Robert Hunt, who provided Joseph Glanvill with several accounts of witchcraft, were acquainted before Bernard's death in 1642.[46] If so, Glanvill's friendship with Hunt also connected him with the long-deceased demonologist. A close analysis of the writings and movements of Bernard's curate and successor, Richard Alleine, raises his profile as a figure of some significance in the study of witchcraft in the region.[47] It is inconceivable that Glanvill did not become closely acquainted with Alleine who lived in Frome for most of the time he was vicar there. An argument is also made for the likelihood of an acquaintance between Alleine and May Hill, Beckington's curate, who, as rector, would take centre-stage in bringing to light the 1689 witchcraft episode.

Alleine is found to have engaged in a public debate with a man he named a friend, Frome's vicar and Joseph Glanvill's predecessor, John Humfrey, a prolific writer of sermons, letters, pamphlets on books on political, theological, and other matters,

[45] Davies, *Science in an Enchanted World*, Chapter 2.
[46] Barry*, Witchcraft,* 47.
[47] Barry briefly mentions Alleine on a couple of occasions as an example of a post-Restoration ejected minister.

including witchcraft.[48] It is highly likely that the two men knew each other personally, both having held Selwood Forest livings during the era of the Commonwealth. Quite possibly Alleine's powerful counter-argument that re-ordination is a "moral evil" was instrumental in Humfrey's brave decision to renege on his initial compliance when he accepted re-ordination in 1660. It was this decision which brought Glanvill to Frome as his successor. The coincidence of Glanvill being appointed to a living in Frome in the early 1660s must surely explain why he wrote so extensively on the subject. The early eighteenth-century historian of witchcraft, Francis Hutchinson, helped establish the simple myth that the emergence of the Royal Society was the decisive factor in determining the decline of belief in witchcraft among the elite.[49] In fact, through the advocacy of Glanvill, his colleague Henry More, and another Somerset demonologist and fellow of the society, John Beaumont,[50] it played a vital role in maintaining, possibly even reviving, belief in England and America in the closing decades of the seventeenth century.

Both Glanvill and Humfrey were admirers of the celebrated Richard Baxter. Glanvill heard him preach on a number of occasions,[51] and he corresponded with him on a range of theological matters over the course of several years. So too did Humfrey, that 'Credible Minister' as Baxter called him,[52] whose correspondence with Baxter dates

[48] He discussed one case he had personally examined in two pamphlets printed in 1708, *An Account of the French Prophets and their Inspirations* and *A Farther Account of Our Late Prophets.*
[49] Michael Hunter, 'The Royal Society and the Decline of Magic', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 65:2 (2011), 112; The 'Decline of Magic' in the sense of the broad acceptance of magical principles in educated society, as Hunter has explained, came later and seems to have happened in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Hunter, *Decline*, 168.
[50] Author of *An Historical Physiological and Theological Treatise of Spirits, Apparitions, Witchcrafts, and Other Magical Practises* (1705).
[51] Elmer notes, 'Glanvill admired Baxter's commitment to the rational investigation of providences, which mirrored his own', Elmer, *Witchcraft*, 216.
[52] Geoffrey K. Nuttall, N.H. Keeble (eds.), *Calendar of Correspondence of Richard Baxter*, Vol. 2, 1660–1696 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), letter 1036.

back at least as far as 1654. The two men maintained a lively correspondence which would continue over several decades, during which time they also exchanged manuscripts of their work,[53] and eventually they became close neighbours in London. In around February 1691 Humfrey introduced Baxter to May Hill whose account of the Beckington witch trial he would publish later that year in his *Certainty of the Worlds of Spirits*. Together they were all part of, in the words of Michael Hunter, "an alliance of Anglicans and nonconformists in confronting the irreligious threat".[54]

Outliving Glanvill, More, Baxter and Hill by many years, I argue Humfrey was the last of their generation to champion their common cause from the discovery of the Selwood witches at the start of the 1660s until his death, at the age of 98, in 1719. I also make a case for the strong possibility that one of his many printer-publishers was the same as that used by Hill for *Great News from the West of England.* The mysterious 'T. M.' in question is shown, almost certainly, to be Thomas Milbourne of Jewen Street, May Hill's brother-in-law. In addition to their Selwood connection (and I suggest Milbourne came from a Selwood family) I have shown that Humfrey and Milbourne were very near neighbours in London. Furthermore I have found certain clues that suggest Humfrey might, for a short time, have lived in Beckington and that he might even have been related to the Hills.

In turn I have proposed that the mysterious Mr Hill who accompanied Glanvill on his visit to Mr Mompesson's haunted house in Tidworth could well have been May Hill's father. If this was the case my portrayal of Hill as the heir to the campaign in Selwood

[53] In 1684, for example, Humfrey sent Baxter a presentation copy of his latest work, 'The Axe Laid at the Root of Separation'; Nuttall, and Keeble (eds), Vol. 2, letter 1147.
[54] Michael Hunter, 'The Decline of Magic: Challenge and Response in early Enlightenment England', *The Historical Journal*, 55:2 (2012), 408.

to root out witchcraft becomes all the more convincing. In investigating genealogical evidence for the Hill family, tantalising connections are made with the famous late-Elizabethan theologian, Adam Hill, and vicar of Westbury on the eastern side of Selwood Forest from 1577, who was probably born there in the mid-sixteenth century, perhaps hailing, like so many Hills, including May Hill's family, from Dilton.[55] In passing I have found compelling evidence to contest the claims of Foster's *Alumni Oxonienses*,[56] and both the nineteenth- and twenty-first-century editions of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, that he was buried at Salisbury Cathedral. Whether or not they were related, Adam Hill's declaration that by casting doubt over diabolical truths "the atheist is hardened",[57] he anticipated the arguments of later writers connected with the area who were concerned with the Devil, his acolytes and the reality of spirits. In this respect Glanvill's campaign against 'Hobbism' was a continuation, in these parts at least, of a much older tradition than historians sometimes suppose. I provide reasons for why I think it is unlikely Glanvill's 'Mr Hill' was May Hill (junior) himself, but I have proposed the likelihood the two men, as vicar of Frome and curate, ultimately rector, of neighbouring Beckington respectively, and Oxford men of a similar age and similar outlook, would have been acquainted. Thus, and this lies at the core of my main argument, we come much closer to understanding the Beckington case of 1689 once it is placed in its broader context both across and over time.

[55] According to his entry in the original *Dictionary of National Biography*; however, Henry Summerson in the more recent ODNB (2004) has him as a 'native of Salisbury' where he certainly spent part of his life.
[56] Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1891), 623.
[57] Adam Hill, *The Defence of the Article: Christ descended into Hell* (London: 1592), dedication to John, Archbishop of Canterbury.

Further evidence for a culture fascinated and alarmed by witchcraft in Selwood, and especially in Beckington, is unveiled in the identification of an unnamed nonconformist minister involved in the Mary Hill case in 1689 as Humphrey Philips, formerly minister at Sherborne (close to Selwood Forest) until his ejection in 1662. Thirty years before, in 1659, Philips was serving as an assistant or curate to a close acquaintance of Baxter's, Francis Bampfield, who found himself at the centre of witchcraft case recorded the following year in Richard Blome's *Fanatick History.* The 'witches' in question prove to have been mostly Quakers and Anabaptists 'near two hundred of them at one meeting'.[58] Their discovery and persecution as witches at this particular point in time, a time of political and religious crisis, fits well with recent constructions of belief and persecution.[59] This, of course, is also true of the 1689 episode in Beckington. In the interdenominational struggles of the 1650s accusations of witchcraft by one sect against another 'became the norm'[60] and the practice continued beyond the Restoration. In exploring this phenomenon in the Selwood context and elsewhere an old assumption that witchcraft prosecution had little if anything to do with confessional conflict[61] is shown to be untenable. Glanvill prosecuted certain Quakers in 1677 for not paying him tithes, and, in 1673, Hunt signed the warrants that suppressed a Quaker conventicle held in John Cary's barn in Bruton.[62] I have suggested it is possible that the people denounced as witches who met at night in the neighbouring parish of Brewham, ten years earlier and in less tolerant times, were part of the same emerging local Quaker community.

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58 Richard Blome, *The Fanatick History* (1660), 117–18.
59 See, for example, Elmer, *Witchcraft,* 183-84, 189, 191.
60 Elmer, *Witchcraft,* 154; see also Peter Elmer, 'Saints or Sorcerers: Quakerism, demonology and the decline of witchcraft in seventeenth-century England', in Barry , Hester and Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 152.
61 For example, according to Brian Levack 'It is *possible* that religious tensions had very little or nothing to do with the prosecution of witches'; Levack, *Witch-Hunt,* 124.
62 Barry, *Witchcraft*, 29.

A case is made for the argument that witchcraft allegations in Selwood Forest in this period were, in part at least, the consequence of circumstances in the most volatile period of England's post-medieval history, a time of recurring crisis, compounded in the mid-1660s by the widespread fear of religious 'Fanaticks' conspiring to assist an imminent Dutch invasion. Robert Hunt's rigorous investigation of witchcraft accusations at the time of the Restoration are found to chime with Elmer's conviction that 'godly magistrates were far more likely to invoke the threat of witchcraft at moments of acute political crisis such as regime change".[63] The timing of the Beckington case of 1689, in the turbulent era of the Glorious Revolution (1688-1689), was sufficiently impressive to the 'godly magistrates' who investigated it at Bruton to refer it to the Assize court.

My discussion of the alleged bewitchment of Richard Jones of Shepton Mallet in 1658 introduces my application of a psychological approach to certain Selwood Forest witchcraft cases. As Chadwick Hansen did with the Salem cases in *Witchcraft at Salem* (New York, 1969), it is tempting, albeit hazardous, to find a psychosomatic explanation for the boy's ailments.[64] In so doing I have taken inspiration from authorities such as Edward Bever who has noted that even without a belief in witchcraft "any strong negative emotion caused by another person's attitude or actions can cause, or contribute to, physical disorder";[65] indeed, I have concluded, this scientific fact could be an important reason *for* belief in magic as much as it might be a consequence of it. This approach, as described at length above, is central to my

[63] Elmer, *Witchcraft*, 8.
[64] Edward Bever, 'Witchcraft Fears and Psychosocial Factors in Disease', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (2000), 576–77.
[65] Bever, 'Witchcraft Fears', 581.

analysis and interpretation of events in Beckington in 1689. The psychological impact of sleep deprivation is discussed in relation to the investigation of Elizabeth Style of Stoke Trister in 1665. As explained above, the psychological dimension of recurring pin-magic and associated instances of 'strange-vomiting' is carefully considered. In relation to this, more pragmatic explanations are also proposed including the growing need for accusers to acquire more convincing, tangible evidence of witchcraft in order to persuade an increasingly sceptical judiciary.

In considering the history of witchcraft trials in the later seventeenth century particular attention is paid to the significance of the appointment of Sir John Holt as Lord Chief Justice in 1689. The last certain executions for witchcraft in England were those of the 'Bideford witches' at Exeter in 1682 and it is probable that Alice Molland suffered the same fate, also at Exeter, in 1685. The last guilty verdict in a witchcraft case on the Western Circuit, and the last in English history, is listed by Ewen (1933) as that of Margareta Young, tried before Sir John Holt at Salisbury on 13 July 1689.[66] However, Frederick Inderwick's earlier study of 1888, referencing Volume VIII of the *State Trials* (p. 1017), states Young's case was in fact heard by Robert Atkyns, Chief Baron, and that she was sentenced to death but afterwards reprieved.[67] Given Holt's subsequent history as the 'arch-sceptic' in witchcraft trials[68] (including the Beckington case he heard in 1690) Inderwick's account seems more likely.[69] Thus the Beckington case, probably the first of its kind heard by Holt, has been considered, as Thomas Wright

[66] C. L'Estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism* (London: Heath Cranton, 1933), , 445.
[67] F. A. Inderwick, *Side-Lights on the Stuarts* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1888), 173, 193; Barry in his introduction to *Witchcraft* references Inderwick's version and also declares the 'witch' was reprieved but curiously, and I think erroneously, proposes the case was heard at Taunton.
[68] Elmer, *Witchcraft*, 278
[69] Inderwick lists the Beckington case in the table of indictments on the Western Circuit (1670-1712) that ends his chapter on witchcraft but in this Mary Hill appears as Mary Hale and Elizabeth Carrier as Elizabeth Farrier; Inderwick, *Side-Lights*, 193.

proposed way back in 1851 in a muddled two sentence précis of the narrative, 'the first check put upon the courts of law'.[70] Howard Williams in *The Superstitions of Witchcraft* (1865) cited the case, again somewhat inaccurately, in his consideration of factors in the decline of witch-hunting. For him too Holt's verdict amounted to an intellectual turning-point in witchcraft cases which, predictably perhaps, came in the wake of an ideological political revolution.[71] These Victorian era observations point to the importance of my close analysis of a case which was once recognised as a pivotal moment in English witchcraft history and then largely forgotten.

When George Kittredge in 1907 acknowledged Holt's considerable contribution in hastening the end of witch-hunting in England through 'the acquittal of a dozen witches between 1693 and 1702' he neglected entirely the Beckington hearing of 1690. In bringing to light the Rode swimmings of 1694, in a parish abutting Beckington,[72] an extremely rare early incidence of what has been described as a 'reverse witch trial',[73] the years immediately before and after 1690 are identified as a turning point in the history of the decline of witchcraft prosecution.

[70] Thomas Wright, *Narratives of Sorcery and Magic* (London, 1851).
[71] Howard Williams, *The Superstitions of Witchcraft* (London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1865), 249.
[72] Very likely the 1689 Selwood episode was a catalyst for that of 1694. A further case of a witch-swimming, this one in 1730, is also examined together with other material indicating the survival of witchcraft beliefs in popular culture long after the last prosecution.
[73] Davies, *Bewitched.*

A critical review of the overall contribution to the research area which has been made by the body of work submitted for examination.

This body of work is the outcome of the first attempt to study the history of witchcraft in the vicinity of Selwood Forest as a *regional* history. It demonstrates the value and importance of studies of specific localities in broader regional settings. A wealth of discoveries have been made through the painstaking analysis at a micro-historical level. It has revealed the complex web of relationships over several decades that underpins Selwood's exceptional, but previously only partially recognised, witchcraft history. It has brought to light close, often surprising, connections between those who wrote about witchcraft in the area which were then woven into a tapestry of associations linking witch-finders, magistrates, clerics, theologians, philosophers, demonologists and their printer-publishers. It has raised the profile of the relatively unknown players in this history (May Hill, Richard Alleine, John Humfrey, Thomas Milbourne etc.) alongside the more familiar (Richard Bernard, Joseph Glanvill, Richard Baxter etc.). In adopting a regional and holistic approach, a case has been made for the vital part their relationships played both in shaping the surviving record of English witchcraft belief and persecution and its perpetuation through the second half of the seventeenth century.

Through the close analysis of under-investigated witchcraft episodes, the years around 1690 have been confirmed as a turning point in the history of the decline of witchcraft prosecution on the Western Circuit and beyond.

This work includes the first detailed analysis of the phenomenon of 'strange-vomiting' in relation to witchcraft cases. Relationships between different forms of pin-related

magic – *malephicial*, sympathetic, and symptomatic – have been explored and a strong case has been made the closer analysis of this important aspect of the subject.

Further information has been gleaned from a range of sources on various important aspects of witchcraft belief and accusation. These include the dynamics of accusation, the nature of bewitchment, and the forming of disreputable reputations. Further connections have been made between developments in witchcraft belief and accusation in the context of clerical ejections and confessional conflict in the region.

As Sharpe concluded in a consideration of witchcraft in another royal forest – Pendle – this body of work indicates the inhabitants of Selwood Forest in the seventeenth century were also living 'in an intellectual and social milieu where gossip about witchcraft, knowledge of witchcraft and worry about witchcraft were commonplace'.[74] Unlike those living in the vicinity of Pendle Forest– where remembrance of its dismal witchcraft history is writ large in tourist trails, museums, publications and commerce, the Selwood Forest history was, until very recently, an entirely forgotten one by those living here. By disseminating the findings of my ongoing research through numerous public presentations and academic lectures, several publications, and my various roles as a custodian of the region's heritage over the last fifteen or so years, this is no longer the case. This body of work has been cited in several texts during and since its publication. It provided almost all the material for a chapter in Allan Bunyan's *Somerset: A Troubled Century 1600 to 1699* (2021),[75] Julian Hite's account of 'The Witches of Selwood' in *Britain's Ancient Forest: Legacy & Lore* (2019),[76] and sections in my own

[74] Sharpe, *Instruments*, 202.
[75] Allan Bunyan, *Somerset: A Troubled Century 1600 to 1699* (Market Harborough: Matador, 2021).
[76] Julian Hite, *Britain's Ancient Forest: Legacy & Lore* (Frome: JH, 2019).

Secret Frome (2019),[77] and *Bruton in Selwood* (2021).[78] This hitherto neglected history is also now disseminated in three information panels at Bruton Museum, again drawn from the texts submitted for examination. Two related papers written by this author have now appeared in the excellent Frome Society for Local Study *Yearbook* – one on the 1689 Beckington case[79] and another on Joseph Glanvill.[80] Another appeared in a popular on-line magazine, *The Reaper* in 2016.[81] As detailed above, the work as a whole has already received reviews, citations and other attention in the academic press from several highly regarded historians. Within six months of its publication in 2021 almost 200 copies of *The Witches of Selwood* had been sold. This pioneering body of work has revealed the special significance of this locality in witchcraft studies in early modern England, and, as a direct consequence, its value as a heritage asset is now recognised.

[77] Andrew Pickering and Gary Kearley, *Secret Frome* (Stroud: Amberley, 2019).
[78] Andrew Pickering, *Bruton in Selwood* (Gloucester: The Hobnob Press, 2021).
[79] Andrew Pickering, 'The Witches of Beckington', *Frome Society Yearbook*, Volume 18, 2015, 9-19.
[80] Andrew Pickering, 'Joseph Glanvill, Vicar of Frome, Natural Philosopher and Demonologist', *Frome Society Yearbook*, Volume 24, 2021, 83-8.
[81] Andrew Pickering, 'A "witch" in South-West England', *The Reaper*, December 2016.

A critical reflection on the candidate's development as a researcher

In the course of this research I have developed a wide range of skills. These include:

- accessing publications and sundry other documents (e.g. in records offices and online)
- reading texts critically
- developing my knowledge and understanding of archaic language in seventeenth-century publications
- reading and interpretating seventeenth-century manuscripts such as wills and parish registers
- improving the accuracy, grammatical and otherwise, of my own writing in conjunction with professional proof-readers and editors
- writing with precision and accuracy
- building and substantiating arguments
- developing my knowledge and understanding of the subject's vast and complex historiography
- developing an awareness of interdisciplinary approaches
- understanding more fully the language, nature and processes of academic discourse

Conclusions and suggestions for future work.

In seventeenth-century England the publication of accounts of witchcraft cases, the bedrock of historical enquiries in this field, was a monopoly of the elite. The survival of the history of the Selwood "witches" is largely due to the good fortune that the investigating magistrate, Robert Hunt, kept detailed memoranda on their cases and other aspects of his work. While some witchcraft incidents, such as these, became very well-known and were retold in many subsequent publications, the detail for most is lost and will never be recovered. No doubt many are entirely unknown, and hundreds only appear in the scant records of gaol deliveries and the like. These all represent complex narratives of human dramas that remain hidden from history. Nevertheless, I have identified many hitherto unknown connections between specific events and people involved in this history across the course of the whole of the seventeenth century.

The accounts of meetings of alleged witches in out-of-the-way places in and around Selwood Forest, recorded by Hunt and Glanvill, are truly exceptional. These must be analysed with due consideration of sectarian divisions, the exclusion of nonconformist ministers, and the persecution of Quakers and other dissenters in the era of the Restoration. The history of the conventicles helps explain the mystery of the covens. This, in turn, suggests the value of a broader study of seventeenth-century witchcraft accusations in the region and the region and elsewhere in relation to non-conformist sectarianism.

This work argues that links between pin-magic in seventeenth-century England as counter-witchcraft and pin-magic as *maleficium*, have not yet received sufficient

attention. Since the publication of this body of work Hoggard's recent study of counter-witchcraft[82] has appeared which, building on a paper published in 2016,[83] includes the most comprehensive study of witch-bottles since Merrifield (1987).[84]

There is ample scope for taking my own thoughts on the correlation between supposed methods and symptoms of bewitchment in seventeenth-century England and the contents of 'witch-bottles' a step further. This could involve the analysis of early modern pin-related witchcraft cases through the consideration of evidence of popular belief and magical practices in more recent times. At the time of writing, I am working closely with one of my more mature students on a paper that aims to achieve this in attempting to reconcile poppet-related *maleficia*, embedding and strange vomiting, and sympathetic magic using a methodology that takes a long view and combines folkloric and historical approaches.

[82] Brian Hoggard, *Magical House Protection: The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2021).
[83] Brian Hoggard, 'Witch bottles', 91-105.
[84] Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1987).

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to air my thoughts in public talks, conferences, workshops and courses in association with a wide range of organisations, including: the universities of Winchester, Bath Spa, Plymouth, and Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, the Historical Association (Wiltshire branch), the National Trust (Dorset), Somerset and Wiltshire County Councils, the University of the Third Age (various groups), the Workers' Education Association (various groups), BBC Radio, and several local history societies and similar organisations. In addition, witchcraft belief and accusation in early modern Europe has been the principal theme of a Level 5 undergraduate module I have delivered annually on behalf of the University of Plymouth for over ten years. Preparing papers for general and academic audiences and discussing them with peers, students and other interested parties has greatly developed my own approaches to, and interpretations of, the intriguing questions this controversial subject invites.

I am indebted to the generous advice of at least a dozen editors, reviewers and academic referees, in particular Claire Fanger (Rice University, Texas), Heather Falvey (University of Cambridge, University of Oxford), and Richard Nate and his colleagues at the University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. I have welcomed the interest in my continuing studies and, ultimately, this submission, of Davide Ermacora (University of Venice), David Amigoni (Keele University), and Peter Marshall (University of Warwick). I am immensely grateful to my reviewers, James Sharpe, Marion Gibson, and Mark Stoyle, and my publisher, John Chandler, whose comments helped me to refine my thoughts and led me towards new areas of research. In writing this critical commentary I have

received and, I hope, acted on the invaluable advice and guidance of my supervisors at Keele University - Ian Atherton and Rachel Adcock.

Appendix: Selwood Forest

The poverty and disorder in parts of Selwood Forest in the seventeenth century were notorious.[85] The enclosure of Selwood Forest between 1627 and 1640 had provoked riots and the destruction of fences from the start of the 1640s up to the middle of the 1650s. Several Selwood communities, including the parishes of Beckington, Batcombe and Mells, were puritan strongholds in the bitter political and religious struggles of the Civil War period.[86] Hitherto Beckington's main claim to seventeenth-century fame has been the communion table dispute involving its Laudian rector, Alexander Huish, and his Puritan congregation rather than the less well-known witchcraft case that would trouble his successor and son-in-law, May Hill.[87] In the Restoration era the region was especially well-known for the prevalence of its nonconformism where meetings, it was recorded in 1670, were held 'in by-corners and in woods and edges of counties or hundreds' (as were its alleged sabbats).[88] Woodlands, close to Frome and the location of a vicious witch-swimming episode in 1730, was remembered in about 1800 as having been 'within the memory of man, the notorious asylum of a desperate clan of banditti, whose depredations were a terror to the surrounding parishes'.[89]

[85] David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 34.
[86] Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, 78.
[87] Margaret Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory: The Diocese of Bath and Wells in the Early Seventeenth Century* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1982), 297-302.
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