CHAPTER 5

ENGLISH ACCUSATIONS I - THE SOUTH AND WEST

The decision to set the analysis within the boundaries of county areas may appear unusual at the outset but the research must be related to the place of the livestock within the communities in any one county and in the context of the existing agricultural practices in that county. The county regulates the plants grown within it. Most plants which are related to witchcraft accusations and livestock or product losses are mainly native to Britain and cover wide areas of the country. There are a few exceptions and most of the available information concerning plants is given on a county basis by the sources used. An added advantage is that most documentary evidence of the case studies used is located in county archives in Britain, particularly in the case of England.*

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* The exact locations of settlements, farms, kirks and villages for places such as the Orkney Islands, Isle of Man and some of the Scottish and English villages, proved difficult to certify and the specific nature of plant life in those areas was unobtainable. This has a great deal of bearing on the analysis as it is beyond the knowledge of the author to pinpoint the exact location of the triunity of village, plant form and agricultural region. This could well have led to grave miscalculations concerning plant locations. Specificity is unprovable because of the time lapse and the lack of information extant for botanical locations in 16th and 17th century Britain.

In order to avoid misconceptions and totally incorrect analysis, as far as the plant ingestion/animal death was concerned, it seemed better to stay within the 16th and 17th century boundaries of the counties examined in the thesis. In this way, an overall verification or refutation of the thesis will emerge.

The analysis will begin with the south west of England and gradually move northwards, citing each livestock related case which has been found in each county. The difficulty of obtaining primary source material from record offices in England, is evidenced by the many gaps in the documents cited, as not every county is represented. The lack of representation in no way indicates whether witchcraft linked livestock death/disease existed in that county but the absence or current inaccessibility of potential resources.*

The section on English accusations has been divided into three chapters, the South and West, the East and the Midlands and the North. The analysis begins with the South and West and covers Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Sussex, Kent, Surrey, Bedfordshire, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire and Middlesex.

In the county of Devon on 7th June, 1658, Joan Badcock, a widow, was accused of witchcraft by Anne Wadland. Joan had suggested to Anne that the cause of the fire which burned down a neighbour's house was "enchantment". After Anne's accusation, other neighbours told of their cows which had become vicious and refused to give milk after certain people had been around them and of how other women might have been responsible for starting fires at Okehampton. On 4th August Anne Wadland was bound over on £10 to give evidence against Joan Badcock at the next Assizes and General Gaol Delivery.[1]

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* I am indebted to many dedicated record office personnel who gave much of their valuable time in answer to my written requests. I would like particularly to thank Janet Thompson for giving me the results of fifteen years research in the county archives of Devon.

1. Thompson, J. "Her Good Name and Credit" The Reputation of Women in Seventeenth Century Devon, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1987, p. 82 - 83, DRO/Uncatalogued/d. 3248 Okehampton Borough Sessions Book, 1648 - 1658

The loss of milk amongst Joan's neighbours' cows was related to food intake. Devon was a pastoral county where the moors were used for summer sheep and cattle grazing and the valleys used for fattening. The county was also undergoing a steady fertilisation process which was known as denshiring. Dug turves were burnt to ashes and the resulting ash was then spread over the land. Sand, seaweed, marl and lime were also used, an indication of a relatively good crop and pasture output.[2] However, 1657 - 1661 were bad harvest years for Britain[3] generally which meant that fodder was not readily available. One of the major factors affecting good milk output of the dairy cow is the large food intake required by the cow and the daily ration is extensive. It should include calcium and protein rich foods such as lucerne, peas, beans, wholegrain cereals, herbs and root crops. Grass tetany leads to aggressiveness in dairy cows and occurs after the consumption of lush green oats.[4] Oats were widely used as a fodder crop in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and, as Devon was a fattening and corn growing centre, it is very feasible that the dairy cows in question had access to oats.[5] The ability of the milker is also relevant as the animal's fear of people lessens the production of milk by interfering with the let down response at milking time.[6]

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2. Thirsk, J. (ed.) The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV 1500 - 1640, Cambridge, 1967, p. 71 - 73

   Rowse, A.L., The England of Elizabeth, London, 1950, p. 75

3. Hoskins, W.G., "Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480 - 1619", The Agricultural History Review, Vol. 16, 1968, Part 2, p. 18

4. Everist, S.L., Poisonous Plants of Australia, London, 1981, p. 299

5. Thirsk, J. (ed.), op. cit., p. 71 - 73

6. Baïracli Levy, J. de Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable, Emmaus, 1976, p. 302

Bridget Wotton was accused of killing Alice Blagdon's pig by witchcraft. Elizabeth Minterne and Blagdon testified that they saw Wotton pick up something in the street which Wotton said was a bird but which Minterne's mother thought was a toad. The pig was feeding at its trough but was taken mad and subsequently died after tumbling on its head.[7]

Pigs die suddenly from conditions such as heat stroke, nitrate or nitrite poisoning and milk fever in the case of lactating sows.[8] Sudden death with such notable symptoms is attributable to fast acting, acute poisonings and the pig's food trough may have contained any one of a number of poisonous plants such as elder, foxglove, hemlock or turnips. Bracken fern and rye grass are more likely candidates as they cause Central Nervous System (CNS) disturbances which are manifested by excitability, trembling and convulsions.[9] However, it cannot be assumed that the poisoning plant was located only in the trough. The feeding trough was merely the last thing the accusers associated the animal with before it died. Consequently, the animal may well have ingested any of the above cited plants in its daily feeding pattern.

In 1601 Joan Laishe refused Alice Trevisard of Hardness in Devon a half penny-worth of ale and Alice told her "That shall be a hard halfpenny worth" and "I will not leave you worth a groat". Two days later Joan's ale-casks "on a sudden leapt up of itself" and fell to the ground and, as the cask burst, all the ale was lost.[10]

As English ale was made from barley, oats, wheat or rye which had been malted, there are several processes within the manufacturing

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7. Thompson, J., op. cit., p. 143, Deposition Book, Exeter City Archives at DRO, Book 65, p. 1 - 2
8. Hungerford, T.G., Diseases of Livestock, Sydney, 1975, 427 - 433
9. ibid., p. 1146 - 1149
10. Kittredge, G.L. Witchcraft in Old and New England, New York, 1929, p. 19

of ale which caused problems. Malting a grain involved the sprouting or germination of the grain and then the drying of it before using it in the actual manufacturing process. Problems arose with the temperature, germination and aeration of the grain to be malted. When the malted grain is added to the hot water, a mixture called "wort" is produced and in this process both the water temperature and the grain quality determines the quality of the ale produced. The addition of the yeast and the fermentation of the wort is another area where potential problems arise and Joan Laishe's ale was spoilt because of the quality of her grain or her own negligence in the brewing process.[11]

Glastonbury in Somerset was the setting of an interesting case which came before Robert Morgan in 1653 and concerned Elizabeth Castle. Richard How of Glaston stated that about five years previously William Fry had a cow which fell ill and behaved strangely. The feeding cow would "catch up all her feed an after another and run from her meat with her mouth full of hay" and after being penned, she ran around the stall several times and fell down. She died that night and an autopsy revealed that her heart was full of pricks resembling thorn or pin pricks but only on one side. This is unmistakably nitrite poisoning which causes pinpoint haemorrhages in most organs and is engendered through consumption of blackberry, turnip tops, immature crops of oats, barley, wheat, rye and hays made from cereal crops.[12]

Richard How also stated that about the same time as Fry's cow was behaving peculiarly, Elizabeth Castle walked through Fry's land where his cattle were located and stooped down to pick something up in a corner of the field. How could not see if Elizabeth picked up any-

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11. Chambers's Encyclopedia, Oxford, 1966, Vo. II, p. 531; Vol. IX, p. 16

12. Dent, C., Nitrate and Nitrite Poisoning in Livestock, Sydney, Department of Agriculture, N.S.W. Agfact. No. 400/657, p. 1 - 2

thing but the cattle began to investigate the spot and one of them reared. How told Fry to move the cattle and, although he complied, the next morning one of the cattle had fallen over the hedge in the same corner where Elizabeth had stooped the day before. The cow had gone into the ditch but was rescued and recovered.[13]

In the case of William Fry, instanced by Robert How of Glaston, all the cattle not only belonged to William Fry but their unusual behaviour occurred at the same time and they exhibited similar symptoms. The cause of the two can unequivocally be linked with plant ingestion. Sudden deaths which occur in cattle are particularly related to gasping respiration and convulsions. Obstructional bloat which occurs after the animal has consumed root crops also causes sudden death in cattle, as they lapse into a coma and die. Taking into account the behaviour of the cow which fell into a ditch and later recovered, it is more probable that the animals consumed poisonous plants which affected their Central Nervous Systems (hereafter referred to as CNS) and these include bracken fern and ryegrass which are native to Britain and spread throughout the countryside. Ryegrass, in particular, engenders conditions of unco-ordination causing stumbling and falling. Animals can drown whilst under the influence of this poison because of the severe unco-ordination which prevents the animal from saving itself.[14]

Morris Raymond of Glaston, after outlining some neighbourly quarrels between himself and the Castles, went on to say that a pig of his father's farrowed shortly after the disagreements and all the

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13. Quaife, G.R., Wanton Wives and Wayward Wenches, London, 1979, p. 32 Somerset Record Office Q/SR 86 2/3-7

14. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 323 - 326

piglets died. A calf born on the farm died a fortnight after and let out a sudden roar, leaped upright and fell down dead. A week later its mother did the same thing but the cause was unknown. William Sticker of Glaston lived near Thomas Castle and his wife and, even though he had not fallen out with them, he had three cows die in the last three weeks and had no idea what caused the deaths. However, Jane Bytham of Glaston stated that Edith Stickler had refused Elizabeth Castle a cat and William Stickler's cat and dog had died shortly after. She also cited the dead cattle that Stickler had lost.

William Wilcox of Glaston gave evidence that four years ago he had had a calf born which suckled its dam but a fortnight later would only suck from another cow. A fortnight after that it went back to suckling its own dam. Three years ago he had a three week old calf which fell sick, and roared, leapt up and died two hours later.

Joan Clarke of Glaston stated that two years previously, after Elizabeth had asked her for and received fire from Joan, she had a hog which leaped like a greyhound, foamed at the mouth and then fell down and died. Joan later denied Elizabeth the loan of a lantern and her four cats had since lost their claws and legs but they still ate their food.[15]

Somerset was a pastoral county which supported a fattening industry and while the arable was not extensive, wheat oats, peas and apples were grown. Dairying was a major source of income[16] which accounts for the number of calves cited as lost in the accusations brought against Elizabeth Castle. All these incidents happened two or three years prior to 1653 and the similarity of symptoms indicates plant ingestion

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15. Quaife, G.R., op. cit., p. 33 - 35; Somerset Record Office, Q/SR 86 2/3-7

16. Trow-Smith, R., A History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700, London, 1957, p. 180; Thirsk, J., op. cit., p. 71 - 72, 79 - 80

was the cause. All the deponents had cattle or calves die and all but one of the cattle died after they had roared, leaped up into the air and collapsed, dying shortly afterwards. The pig behaved in the same manner and Morris Raymond's father lost all his piglets when his sow had farrowed. A cat and dog also died but Joan Clark's cats' survival of the loss of their claws and legs is very indicative of ergot poisoning. This is supported by the close proximity of all the neighbours and animals and they were probably all dependent on common pasture and fodder.

Ergotism caused by Claviceps purpurea is due to the ingestion of this fungus which infests rye grass, tall fescue grass and the seed-heads of other pasture grasses. Acute ergot poisoning occurs when large amounts of ergot are eaten in a short period. A Central Nervous System (CNS) condition arises and there is nervous depression, drowsiness, periods of blindness, lack of reaction to noise stimuli followed by convulsions. Seizures are painful and bellowing is common. Chronic ergot poisoning is a vasoconstrictive condition where the ergot makes the small blood vessels constrict after a two or three week ingestion period. Symptoms include the literal death of the skin, limb or claw of the animal and the whole claw or portion of the limb can slough off. Once animals start to eat ergotised grass and grains, they acquire a liking for it and continue to consume the infested plants.[17]

The piglets died from mineral deficiencies as stillborn litters are the result of iron, calcium, protein and Vitamin A deficiency.[18]

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17. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 1152 - 1153

18. ibid., p. 424, 481

Nevertheless, ergot causes abortion of a spontaneous nature and the sow may have consumed enough ergotised grain to induce the premature birth of her piglets. This is feasible in view of the concurrent cattle deaths in Glaston. The comparatively heavy rainfall and generally misty conditions of the Somerset levels which surround Glastonbury would encourage ergot growth.[19]

In 1530 Isobel Turner denied Christian Shirston a quart of ale at Castle Cary and "a stand of ale of twelve gallons began to boil as fast as a crock on the fire."[20] The symptoms outlined in the deposition indicate either a problem with the manufacturing process with the ale, or the poor quality of the grain and/or malting process. The quality of the ale is dependent on the quality of the ingredients and the control of water temperature during the manufacturing process.[21]

Joan Vicars denied Christian milk and afterwards her cow yielded only water and blood.[22] Bloody or red milk is commonly caused by a ruptured blood vessel, a large one if the milk is very bloody and a small one if the discolouration is a slight pink tinge.[23] Whilst it is usually seen after calving, it can also be attributed to the bursting or straining of the mammary glands after using the animal as a beast of burden[24] or milking her too harshly.

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19. Quaife, G.R.

20. Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 661

21. Chambers' Encyclopedia, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 531 and Vol. IX, p. 16

22. Thomas, K., op. cit., p. 661

23. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 238

24. McBarron, E.J., Poisonous Plants, Melbourne, 1963, p. 141 - 142

Henry Russe also refused Christian milk and could not make cheese until Michaelmas and he accused her of bewitching his cheesemaking.[25] The time between the bewitching and Michaelmas is not stated but good cheesemaking is dependent on good quality milk and good quality milk occurs only with good diet and the availability of food. Therefore Henry Russe's inability to make cheese is more than likely due to the quality of his milk, rather than Christian's activities.[26]

Thomas Howse's wife was accused of being a witch in 1577 by Henry Adderly, a sixty year old yeoman of Pamber in Hampshire. In a deposition Adderly states that Thomas Daw told him

> "Neighbour Adderly, it is not unknown to you that I have had of late much loss of cattle.....and I had now of late a sow died great with pig upon a sudden.... and I do suspect Howse's wife to be the cause thereof".[27]

The loss of young or newborn animals or aborted/stillbirths in livestock is a common cause of complaint against witches. However, the deposition indicates that the sow died in pig and, aside from age or internal complications, it is possible that malnourishment or undernourishment was the cause of the animal's death. Faulty feeding of pregnant sows engenders deficiency diseases and, as pigs consume a large amount of food and grow rapidly, deficiencies are shown up in decreased growth rate which leads to malnutrition

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25. Thomas, K., op. cit., p. 661

26. Bäiracli Levy, J., de. op. cit., p. 203 - 206

27. Hampshire Record Office, Deposition books in Consistory Court Cases, 1577. As the document was not able to be photocopied, the above information was all the record office could forward to me.

vitamin and iron deficiencies and eventual death. Feeding is very important for the pregnant sow.[28]

The emphasis on the lack of sufficient feed being the reason for the loss of Daw's sow is further compounded by his own admission that he had lost many cattle just lately. The loss of a cow and sow would be feasible as 1576 had been a bad harvest year [29] and is also feasible in view of the added losses Daw had suffered. However, as Daw seemed to feel that he had been singled out as regards losses, (as does his neighbour, Adderly,) perhaps he was overstocked and fodder was scarce. He may also have been suffering the ramifications of the poor harvest. Enclosure by agreement had occurred early in Hampshire and in the pastoral regions were good cattle, pig and sheep fattening areas and large numbers of the animals were kept. This could account for the losses experienced by Daw, as his farm may have been supporting too many animals to feed satisfactorily in the area.[30] It may also account for the unusual nature of his losses as far as he and Adderly were concerned.

Stedman, in Sussex, was the scene of an indictment by William Spuirior against Alice Stedman in 1579. She was accused of bewitching three cows and a steer and Spuirior was certain that she had caused the cows to calve.[31] The indictment does not say if the calves were born dead or alive but since Spuirior is convinced that a bewitchment has occurred, it can be assumed that he lost the calves. The loss of any young animal, whether born alive and dying soon afterwards, or born dead, represents the loss of income for a year and a replacement

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28. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 424, 427, 437

29. Hoskins, W.G. op. cit., p. 18

30. Thirsk, J., op. cit., p. 67 - 69
    Trow-Smith, R., op. cit., p. 186
    Zell, M. "Accounts of a Sheep and Corn Farm, 1558-60", The Agricultural History Review, Vol.27, 1979, Part II, p. 122

31. L'Estrange, Ewen, C., Witch Hunting and Witch Trials, London, 1929, p. 83

cost of another year's waiting for the cow to calve again. Abortions or stillbirths in cattle are related to serious poisonings, as weeds and fodder crops can induce them through too much consumption of rape, turnips and cabbage. They also occur spontaneously if ergotised grain, i.e. grain which has been infected with the ergot fungus, Claviceps purpurea, is consumed by the animal. The fungus contains a mixture of alkaloids which causes the contraction of the uterine wall muscles, so inducing premature birth and abortions.[32]

Ursula Welfare of Alfriston in Sussex, bewitched to death a sow, eight chickens and two hens which belonged to John Blount on 1st June 1579. In February that same year William Suzan claimed that she had bewitched his two oxen and killed them.[33] All these animals are grain consumers and as they are all different species, with different digestive systems, particularly the poultry and the herbivoures, it is reasonably certain that their deaths were the result of plant ingestion. Cereal crops are the most obvious choice, as they are the only common denominator in the feeding rations of the animals concerned. Sussex farmers grew wheat, barley, oats and rye for fodder crops and for sale to the London markets but oats was the major grain fodder crop grown all over the county.[34] Lack of information from the depositions can lead only to the conclusion that there may have been something wrong with the grain both men were using to feed their animals, as the size of the losses negates natural causes, other than disease. As the losses were considered unusual enough to warrant accusations of witchcraft, disease is not therefore a considered option.

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32. Emboden, W., Narcotic Plants, London, 1972, p. 82
    Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 1146 - 1149

33. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., P. 141

34. Thirsk, J., op. cit., p. 55 - 57, 58
    Clay, C.G.A., Economic Expansion and Social Change in England 1500 - 1700, Cambridge, Vol. I p. 56, 59 - 62

Margaret Pannell of Salehurst in Sussex was brought to trial for witchcraft, seven years after her alleged witchcraft practices had caused the death of one sow and eight piglets which belonged to Thomas French. French stated that the offence took place on 1st January, 1610.[35] The loss of the sow and her piglets is indicative of a deficiency disease, lack of food, starvation, and mineral deficiencies, as the loss of a sow and the piglets is not usual with parturition problems or disease. The piglets are weaker than the sow and are usually lost but either the sow or the piglets are lost, not both, with parturition problems.Lack of food is the most likely cause of death.[36]

Thomas Wilson of the Isle of Grayne in Kent is accused of bewitching three white hogs and thirty three quarts of wheat belonging to Robert Clifford which were "wasted and consumed". Jane Wilson, Thomas's wife, was also accused of bewitching the hogs on 1st April 1648 but the Wilsons were not indicted until 1652.[37] Jane Wilson and William Reynolds were also accused by Clifford of bewitching seventy of his sheep. The animals, bewitched on 29th May, 1649, were also "wasted and consumed".[38]

Kent was, apparently, very full of animal bewitchments and deaths from witchcraft from 1648 until 1652 and, in consequence, they have been linked together as analysis shows that plant ingestion is the common cause of the livestock losses.

On 1st March 1648, at Rayneham, Sarah Kempsely of Breadhurst, bewitched to death three geldings, one mare, two heifers and one cow which belonged to John Hartley of Rayneham.[39] Thomas Creede of

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35. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 209
36. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 426, 433; Hickey, K.Livestock Officer, Pigs, Department of Agriculture, N.S.W.
37. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit. p. 239
38. ibid. p. 242
39. ibid. p. 235

Cranebrook and Dorothy Avery bewitched "10 setts of oade" worth £60 at Cranebrook on 1st November 1648. The bewitchment resulted in the oats being impaired and destroyed, much to the chagrin of Thomas Ferror. Thomas Creede then bewitched a mare of Richard Harvey's to death on 14th March 1651 and a year later on 1st June he bewitched to death two mares of Thomas Lambe's.[40]

Agnes Heightoe of Benenden was thought to have bewitched to death ten of Richard Atkin's pigs on 20th May 1649[41] and Ellen/Eleanor Howell of Bruckland bewitched to death two mares, two cows and three sheep belonging to Peter Maplesdenn on 20th September 1652.[42] Anne Rabbett of Staplehurst was another who was accused of witchcraft at the Assizes because she bewitched to death a gelding of William Tolhurst's on 1st August 1651.[43]

All these Kentish cases are similar in nature because of the common theme in the accusations and because they all occurred between 1648 and 1652. The years 1646 - 1650 were bad harvest years for Britain[44] and the description of the thirty-three quarts of wheat and the loss of "10 setts of oade" which were wasted, consumed, impaired and destroyed, is evidence of poor quality and spoilage. This would be expected in poor harvest years. As Kent was a major grower of wheat, barley and oats, in response to the close proximity of the London markets,[45] there are obvious economic overtones in the accusations against Thomas Wilson, Thomas Creede and Dorothy Avery.

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40. ibid., p. 240 - 241

41. ibid. p. 242

42. ibid. p. 244

43. ibid. p. 246

44. Hoskins, W.G., op. cit., p. 18

45. Thirsk, J. op. cit., p. 55 - 59

In the case of Robert Clifford, who lost seventy sheep which were "wasted and consumed", the number of sheep alone indicates a definite link with food intake, particularly as the sheep and wheat both belonged to Clifford. The sheep were probably malnourished and affected by the spoiled grain they may have consumed. The three hogs in this case suffered from the results of eating mouldy hay and rotten cereal fodders. Nevertheless, plants which cause delayed deaths and which grew as natives and/or as introduced species in Kent during this period included bracken fern, Pheasant's Eye, buttercup, stinging nettles and Traveller's joy.[46]

The death of the other animals on an individual basis in the other cases can also be linked with the ingestion of elder, foxglove, hemlock, flax or linseed, turnips and vetch, as these are all quick acting poisons after ingestion.[47] However, as Kent was a large grower of cereal crops, grass and hay[48] for sale and for fodder, this, combined with the poor harvest of 1648 - 1650 and again in 1657 - 1661[49] indicates that the loss of livestock is attributable to poor quality fodder. The animals, in all likelihood, had to fend for themselves and ate what was available and as hunger dictated, with bad consequences.

The following case studies for Surrey reflect a similar situation to that just stated as existing in Kent. Agnes Water of Goldaming, in Surrey, was accused of bewitching "a hide fatt" or cow belonging to Thomas Allen of Goldaming and on 1st May 1571, Robert Bocher's ten bullocks were also bewitched by Agnes. Neither complainant made

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46. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 1146 - 1147

47. ibid., p. 1147 - 1148

48. Thirsk, J., op. cit., p. 59 - 62

49. Hoskins, W.G., op. cit., p. 18

the accusation until 1581, ten years later.[50] Alice Marten or Tosby of Bletchingley betwitched to death an ox, a ram, a sheep and a lamb, all of which belonged to Edward Tyrry. No date is given or the year, although it is possibly 1595, but Tyrry is certain it occurred on 30th April. He did not formally acuse her until 1596.[51] On 20th July 1598, Isabel Whyte of Purleigh, bewitched to death a ram lamb and nine pigs of Thomas Ward's. A month later she bewitched two of his cows.[52]

All these accusations involve the loss of large amounts of livestock, a cow and ten bullocks in 1571, an ox and three sheep in 1595 and a sheep, nine pigs and two cows in 1598. Herbivorous animals are pasture and grain dependent and, therefore, subject to harvest conditions. The harvest was of prime importance in sixteenth and seventeenth century Britain and a bad harvest in one year almost guaranteed a poor harvest in the following year through lack of seed. The populace ate next year's seed in bad harvest years. No documentation has so far appeared which indicates the effect of bad harvests on the incidence of foot-rot and murrain amongst meat animals. There is no evidence concerning the harvest of 1571 but 1595 was worse than the bad harvest of 1594 and cattle plague and sheep-rot were experienced. 1596 was a disaster but by 1598 the harvest was good again.[53] Because of the years and numbers of animals which were involved in the cases, it is reasonable to postulate that these cases of death amongst livestock were due to the ramifications of lack of adequate fodder. Where fodder was available, it was more than likely of poor quality and,

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50. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 149
    Cockburn, J.S. (ed.), Calendar of Assize Records, Surrey. Elizabeth I, London, 1975, p. 1324

51. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit. p. 184; Cockburn, J.S., op. cit. Surrey, Elizabeth I, p. 414

52. Cockburn, J.S., op. cit. p. 492
    L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 187

53. Hoskins, W.G., "Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480-1619" The Agricultural History Review, Vol. XII, 1964 Part I

during these food shortage periods animals ingested plants which they would normally reject as starvation/hunger encouraged them to eat what was available. Without more detailed information, it is impossible to directly pinpoint the cause of death.

Livestock husbandry in Berkshire was restricted by the unimproved stock and there was little or no conception of the potential of any animals owned. Cereal production included wheat and barley malt and, although beans, peas and vetches were grown, oats and rye were relatively unknown.[54] Margery Dickes or Thatcher of Bradfield in Berkshire was accused of bewitching a sow and eleven pigs to death on 1st March, 1590 at Bradfield or Bradfeilde.[55] The pigs were consumed and wasted, symptoms exhibited only when the animals are deficient in food and minerals. Minerals and trace elements are extremely important in animal diets, especially amongst those animals which have a high food intake, as do pigs. Lack of calcium, sodium, magnesium, copper and other minerals, results in slow growth, anaemia, dead or weak offspring, infertility, poor skin conditions and weakened bone structures.[56] All are available in nutritional foodstuffs and the abundance or otherwise of good fodder, directly influences the growth of animals. It is conclusive that Margery Dickes was not responsible for the death of the pigs but that their loss was due to poor quality fodder or the lack of food.

Sarah Godfrie of Lambourne in Berkshire appeared before the Essex Summer Sessions of Assizes at Chelmsford in 1616. All the charges made against her concerned incidents which had happened three years earlier, in 1613, and which spanned a two month period. The case is also unusual because her residence was stated as being Lambourne/Lamburn which is

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54. Trow-Smith, R., op. cit., p. 187 - 188; Thirsk, J. (ed.) op. cit. p. 64 - 67

55. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 173

56. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 480 - 481

in Berkshire but all her witching activities took place at Staplesford in Wiltshire, although she was tried in Essex.[57]

Arranged in chronological order, Sarah began her witching in Staplesford on 31st July, 1613, where she bewitched to death John Allam's hog.[58] On 7th August she bewitched his grey mare to death,[59] five days later, on 12th August, he lost a brown horse to her bewitchment and a third horse on 15th August.[60] Allam claimed to have lost £14 of horseflesh over a two week period, as well as a hog. No symptoms are given but the deaths are linked to plant ingestion which may have included bracken, columbine, crocus, lamb's tongue, naked lady, Pheasant's eye, buttercup, Traveller's Joy, rye grass and elder. All affect horses and are common in Wiltshire and Berkshire. It is more than likely that John Allam's losses can be attributed to a disease of the heart through cardioactive alkaloids or glycosides. The lack of symptomatic evidence makes the result circumspect but it is interesting to note that only one man brought charges against Sarah Godfried and there may have been underlying reasons for the accusations.

Widdow Wells was accused of bewitching the pigs of William Hopgood of Swathlinge and was examined on 16th September 1594. Widdow Wells lived at Allington and Hopgood suspected her as a witch because, in about 1589, she had come to the door of his house for two consecutive days and, asking for nothing, had sat awhile and then left. The next day, at about the time Widdow Wells had been at the house the day before, Hopgood's farrow of five or six young pigs behaved peculiarly. He stated that, whilst they had previously been well, they danced

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57. Cockburn, J., op. cit., Essex, James I, p. 170; L'Estrange Ewen, C. op. cit., p. 208

58. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 208

59. ibid., p. 208; Cockburn, J., op. cit., Essex, James I, p. 170

60. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 208

and "lipped" around in a strange way as though they had been bewitched. At the end of two hours of this dancing and leaping, the piglets died.

Hopgood commanded his servants to refuse Widdow Wells anything when she came begging at the door. She was refused and she demanded to know why she was being refused any relief. Hopgood followed her and accused her of bewitching his pigs but she denied the charge and had not come near his door again.[61]

Pigs die suddenly from acute plant ingested poisons, nitrate or nitrite poisoning and food poisoning. As the piglets were healthy, prior to Widdow Wells' visit and the reaction was so quick, a fast acting plant poison was the most likely cause of death. Pigs in Wiltshire were kept for the villagers' own use and were found in large numbers only where dairying and forested areas predominated.[62] It is not known what access the piglets had to forest or pasture but, besides bracken and rye grass which cause convulsions, other plants also cause alkaloid related convulsions and peculiar behaviour. These include elder, foxglove, hemlock, poison ivy and turnips.[63] Onset of illnesses which are short and which affect several animals at the same time and result in sudden death are due to consumption of cyanogenetic plants. Nitrate poisoning occurs after the consumption of lucerne, rape and grains.[64] Corn was grown in Wiltshire and other plants, particularly bracken, elder, foxglove, hemlock and rye grass were native to the region and, therefore, available for livestock consumption.[65]

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61. Hamilton, G.H., Book of Examinations and Depositions 1570-1594, Southampton Record Society, p. 158 - 159

62. Trow-Smith, R., op. cit., p. 185

63. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 1148, 1150

64. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 141; Dent, C., op. cit. p. 1 - 2

65. Trow-Smith, R., op. cit., p. 182 - 185

The case against Alice Prabury of Barnsley in Gloucestershire cannot be related to plant ingestion but is a good example of the peculiar nature of some witchcraft accusations. She was a white witch who was accused by the Churchwardens of witchcraft in 1563. They said she "useth herself suspiciously in the likelihood of a witch."[66] Alice was a cunning woman who tried to heal people and animals. Cunning women and men were consulted when the disease was rare, or if all other known remedies had been unsuccessful. If the cunning woman was successful, then her reputation and clientele could be large and financially rewarding. The Churchwardens in Alice's case were probably concerned with the influence her ministrations had in the community and, therefore, prosecuted her. As no more information has been forthcoming concerning Alice, the types of cures she effected are unknown.[67] It is, however, significant that it was not her clientele who informed on her but a jealous Church.

Jane Wenham of Walkerne in Hertfordshire was accused of witchcraft in March, 1712, and hers was the last trial for witchcraft in England. Mathewe Galston, a servant of John Chapman's had refused Jane straw and several valuable horses and cattle of Chapman's had died.[68] John Chapman had suspected for a long time that Jane had caused the deaths of many of his and his neighbours' horses and cattle. To date he had lost up to £200 in livestock deaths.[69]

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66. Horsley, R.A., "Who were the witches? The social roles of the accused in the European Witch Trials." Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Spring, 1979, p. 703

67. Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 252 - 300, Chapter 8, "Cunning Men and Popular Magic"

68. Guskin, P.J., "The Context of Witchcraft; The Case of Jane Wenham (1712)" Eighteenth Century Studies, Vol. 15, No. 1 Fall, 1981, p. 50

69. Deakin, R., Witchfinder General, London, 1976, p. 199

Thomas Adams caught Jane stealing turnips from his field and a few weeks later Adams's sheep had begun to die from the staggers.[70] Staggers is induced by the consumption of oats, ragwort, deadnettle or henbit, perennial rye grass and field stachys. In this case, however, it is more likely that the staggers was caused by the ingestion of turnip tops which are even more toxic if the crop is growing rapidly in heavily fertilised soil.[71] This is entirely possible considering that sheep in Hertfordshire were kept for their manure, not their wool, and that some farmers kept between fifty and one hundred sheep for this specific purpose.[72]

Staggers results from the accumulation of toxic alkaloids in the animal's body and, as this takes time, deaths occur weeks after consumption. Adams's sheep died from toxic substance accumulation after turnip top ingestion, not from Jane's bewitchment. Two hundred pounds worth of livestock was a greal deal of money during this period and Hertfordshire was a bountiful county as far as wheat, oats, barley, peas, grass, hay and vetch production was concerned.[73] These crops were produced for animal fattening purposes but fodder shortage is a possibility, particularly as Jane had asked for, and been refused, straw. Farm mismanagement on John Chapman's part cannot be discounted but the existence of a disease can be, as there is no mention of symptoms prior to death, although the timespan is not detailed.[74]

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70. Guskin, P.J., op. cit., p. 51

71. Thirsk, J. (ed.) op. cit., p. 50 - 51; Dent, C., op. cit., p. 1 - 2

72. Thirsk, J., op. cit., p. 50 - 51

73. ibid., p. 50 - 51

74. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 236

William and Prudence Lichfield were accused of bewitching a black cow of William Halfhead's and the beast was consumed and wasted. The accusation was brought before the 1650 Hertford court, even though the offence took place in 1648 in June. Wasting and emaciation in cattle is indicative of chronic mineral and plant poisoning, mineral deficiencies and bracken poisoning.[75] Added to this, the symptoms can also be related to the consumption of many other Hertfordshire natives, such as Pheasant's Eye, buttercups, stinging nettles and Traveller's joy.[76]

The same can be said of the cow bewitched by Helen Browne of Aspenden, who was indicted for witchcraft practices at the Hertfordshire Midsummer sessions of 1589. William Sewell of Aspenden accused Helen, a spinster, of bewitching his cow on 10th August 1588. The cow became sick and died on 21st August, having lingered for twenty-one days.[77]

Margaret Harkett of Stanmore in Middlesex was executed at Tyburn in 1585 for witchcraft practices. She was accused of bewitching peas, as it was thought she had prevented peas from growing in a field where she had previously been found picking a basketful of peas without permission. She flung the basket down in the field and peas never grew there again.[78] As Middlesex was located in the home counties, agriculture was heavily influenced by the close proximity of the London market and was, therefore, commercial by nature. The field may well have been overworked as, although peas thrive in a wide range of soils, the soil must be rich and fertile, well drained, limed and

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75. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 188

76. ibid., p. 1146 - 1149

77. Hertfordshire County Records of Quarter Sessions (no details were provided by the Hertfordshire County Archivist)

78. Thomas, K., op. cit., p. 663

kept free of weeds. Peas are also very susceptible to disease, viruses and downy mildew[79] and there is no reason to discount either an overworked field or disease, in relation to the loss of successive pea crops. No information was forwarded as to how many times the owner had attempted to plant peas in that field.

William Goodwin's servants denied Margaret yeast and the consequence was the drying up of his brewing stand. Yeast must have sufficient sugary or starchy liquid to survive and there is every possibility that Goodwin's yeast was dying anyway, as the yeast must regenerate its fungus cells to begin and maintain the brewing process.[80]

Another neighbour refused Margaret a horse and all his horses died but no indication is given as to how many horses he had. Horse production was not a standby in Middlesex but if the farmer did lose more than one horse, it was more likely to be the result of plant ingestion or a contagious disease.

A gentleman's servants were told not to give Margaret any buttermilk and after their refusal of Margaret's request, the servants could no longer make butter or cheese.[81] The availability and quality of the fodder affects milk production. Many plants lessen the flow of milk, especially mint, cabbage and kale. The effect of the plants is greater when the animals consume matured plants and plants where seconary growth and flowering have occurred.[82] However, the consumption of wood sorrell, which grows all over Britain, makes the milk from the

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79. Davies, D.R., "Peas" in Simmonds, N.W. (ed.) Evolution of Plant Crops, London, 1976, p. 174

80. The World Book Encyclopedia, Chicago, 1983, Vo. 21, p. 461 - 462

81. Thomas, K., op. cit., p. 663

82. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 213

cows which eat this plant difficult to churn into butter and this explains the problem of making butter. The quality of the milk may also have been responsible for the loss of cheesemaking.[83]

The cases for the South and West of England are a good indication of the potential link between witchcraft accusations and plant ingestion. The cases which exist for the East, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, are examined in the next chapter.

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83. ibid., p. 562

CHAPTER 6

ENGLISH ACCUSATIONS II - THE EAST

Essex is one of the most well known witching counties in Britain and over thirty percent of all accusations within the county relate to animal injuries and deaths.[1] The influence of the London market was strong on agricultural production which evolved to fill the needs of that market. The St. Osyth witchcraft trial of 1582 gives ample indication of the link between witchcraft accusation, livestock losses and the economic problems for the community when livestock was lost. The livestock/witch related cases have been grouped together, as an overall analytical view is more pertinent than taking each case and examining it individually.

Elizabeth Ewstace of Thorpe bewitched seven milking cows of Robert Sannuets so that they gave blood instead of milk. She also bewitched his hogs, causing their deaths by making them leap and skip about the yard in a strange way. Felicity Okey's geese were hurt by Elizabeth, particularly her favourite goose, and all this trouble arose because Felicity turned Elizabeth's geese out of her yard.[2]

Margaret Grevell possessed a number of imps which she sent to torment a bullock of Joan Chestons and plague her beasts with lameness. She was accused by Alice Manfield. Margaret denied the charges against her, which included the bewitching of five beasts, one bullock, several beer brewings and batches of bread. She also denied that she had bewitched John Carter's two brewings so that half a seam had to go to the swill tub, all because he would not give her

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1. MacFarlane, A. Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, London, 1970, p. 154

2. "W.W." "The St. Osyth Witchtrial" in Haining P. The Witchcraft Papers, London, 1974, p. 57; Seth. R. Stories of Great Witch Trials, London, 1967, p. 38

Godesgood. John's son unbewitched the brewing when he shot his arrow into the brewing vat after the third attempt. This was also strange as he was a good shot and stood close to the vat.

Nicholas Strickland's wife was sure that Margaret was responsible for her inability to churn butter and this eventuated because her husband had denied Margaret a neck of mutton.[3] The poor woman denied all the accusations against her, saying that she had lost several brewings, bakings and swine and declared that she "wished her gere were at a stay" and that she did not care if she was hung or burnt.[4]

Alice Manfield, a widow of Thorpe, declared that Margaret Grevell had sent her imp, Robin, to torment Joan Cheston's bullock but Alice also stated that she had received four imps Robin, Jack, William and Puppet or Mamet from Margaret twelve years ago. Alice had sent Puppet/Mamet to plague Joan's beasts with lameness and, on another occasion, to stop John Sayer's cart because he would not let his thatcher cover Alice's oven for her. The four imps then went to Clacton to burn a barn full of grain which belonged to a man named Richard Ross. She also claimed to have bewitched Ross's horse and beasts with Cysley Celles of Little Clapton.[5] Cysley undertook the bewitching because Ross had refused her a bushel of malt which she had come for, bringing a poke to put it in.[6]

Agnes Heard or Annis Herd was a St. Osyth witch and, among other things, she was accused by Bennet, the wife of William Lane, of bewitching her milk. Bennet gave Agnes milk for 2p but the next day her

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3. "W.W." op. cit. in Haining, P. (ed.) op. cit., p. 58

4. Notestein, W. A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 - 1718, New York, 1965, p. 44; Seth. R., op. cit., p. 38

5. "W.W." in Haining, P. (ed.) op. cit., p. 58; Seth. R., op. cit. p.58

6. "W.W." in Haining, P. (ed.) op. cit., p. 59; Seth, R., op. cit. p.38

milk could not be skimmed but would "rop and roll" like the white of an egg. The milk on the fire would not seethe but would "quail, burn and stink" which she thought might be due to the feeding of her beasts, or that her vessels were not clean enough, so she scoured them with salt but to no avail. When she put a red hot horse shoe in the milk however she could seethe it, fleet her cream and make butter as before.[7]

Agnes was also accused of bewitching to death one cow, ten sheep and ten lambs which all belonged to John Wade of St. Osyth on 1st January, 1582. She also bewitched swine belonging to West, beer brewings belonging to Diborne and several other losses of milk and cream. Thomas Cartwright testified that he had trouble with his cattle after he and Agnes had "had words".[8]

Richard Harrison was convinced that his wife's ducklings had been stolen by Agnes and that she had bewitched geese and hogs. He threatened her with a hanging but, when the case was brought before Lord Darcy, Agnes was acquitted.[9]

Joan Robinson was accused by some of the inhabitants of Walton who testified that a cat ate blood from her nose and that people who had offended her suffered various losses. These included a great wind which nearly blew down a house, a cow which could not calve, a goose which deserted its nest, beasts which broke their necks, a mare dying along with a dog which ate some of the carcase, a beast drowning in a ditch with

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7. "W.W." in Haining, P., op. cit., p. 61; Robbins, R.H. Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology, London, 1965, p. 462

8. MacFarlane, A., op. cit., p. 85; L'Estrange Ewen, C, Witch Hunting and Witch Trials, London, o. 146; Cockburn, J. Calendar of Assize Records, Essex, Elizabeth I, London, 1975, p. 225

9. "W"W" in Haining, P. (ed.) op. cit., p. 61 - 63; Seth, R., op. cit., p. 39; Notestein, W., op. cit., p. 44

very little water in it, a sow which behaved as though it were mad, a farrow of pigs dying and horses which strayed into a pond.[10]

The cause of Robert Sannuet's cows giving blood instead of milk, was broken, sore teats, caused by hard milking, as the blood comes from the chapped and deep fissures on the animal's teats.[11] As all seven cows were unlikely to be suffering from bloody milk caused by parturition, bruising from being used as beasts of burden, the milker was at fault.[12]

Apart from this one instance, all these cases are related, not only through their common association at the St. Osyth witchtrial in 1582, but through the general symptoms exhibited by the dead animals. Pigs died from leaping and skipping about the yard, geese died, animals were bewitched, beer brewings and bread bakings lost, cattle lamed, butter would not churn, cream that could not be skimmed, losses of milk and cream, beasts breaking their necks and drowning through straying into water.

Sudden illnesses which result in death and which affect several animals at once, often occur after hungry animals feed greedily on fodder, after confinement and after access to plant wastes. Plants which initiate such responses include common oats, lucerne, rape and variegated thistles.[13] Sudden deaths which are plant induced and associated with cattle convulsions and frenzy are caused by belladonna, bittersweet, bracken, buttercups, dropwort, water dropwort, laburnum, oats and radishes.[14] Perennial rye grass is abundant throughout Britain

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10. Newman, L.F. "Some Notes on the History and Practice of Folklore in the Eastern Counties." Folklore, March, 1946, p. 63
11. Bäircli Levy, J. de Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable, Emmaus, 1976, p. 146
12. Hungerford, T.G. Diseases of Livestock, Sydney, 1975, p. 238; Sebold, H., Witchcraft The Heritage of Heresy, New York, 1978, p. 172
13. McBarron, E.J., Poisonous Plants, Melbourne, 1963, p. 141 - 142
14. ibid. p. 141 - 142

and its consumption causes ryegrass staggers. Drowning occurs because the poisoned animals are lacking co-ordination to such an extent that they cannot save themselves.[15] Tall fescue grass poisoning occurs when animals begin to lose weight and become lame in the hindlimbs, beginning with the left side.[16]

St. John's Wort affects animals variously but its consumption leads to milk suppression in cows and animals appear demented as they charge around the field and throw themselves into the water. Convulsions often occur before death but it is the connection with water which underlies the reason for Joan Robinson's witching abilities. Horses strayed into a pond and a beast drowned as well as other beasts which broke their necks. All these incidents can be related to ingestion of St. John's Wort.[17] The effect of wood sorrel consumption, as regards the ability of milk to be churned into butter has been outlined, and the effects of ergotised grain consumption cannot be discounted in these cases, particularly as lameness and convulsive behaviour have been instanced in some cases.[18] All the accusations against these women concerning livestock losses are related to plant ingestion.

Margery Stanton of Wimbish was charged at Braintree in 1578 with destroying "of her malice aforethought" a white gelding and a cow which languished for four days from 20th - 24th August after the spell was cast on them. They then died. John Hopewood stated that his failure

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15. Everist, S.L., Poisonous Plants of Australia, London, 1981, p. 323 - 326; McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 15

16. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 320 - 322; McBarron, E.J., op. cit. p. 24

17. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 364; McBarron, E.J., op. cit. p. 99

18. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 562, p. 803 - 804; McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 3; Ramsbottom, J., Mushrooms and Toadstools, London, 1953, p. 142

to give Margery a leathern thong had resulted in the sudden death of his gelding. John Carnell denied her requests and his cows yielded water instead of milk but Robert Lathbury's refusal of her request cost him twenty hogs. She was also accused of tormenting chickens and making cattle give "gore stynking blood" instead of milk. Margery was found guilty.[19]

Unthriftiness and languishing in cattle is attributable to plant ingestion and is confined largely to alkaloid poisons, which are cumulative in nature and include bracken and oats. It is also a condition engendered by field larkspur, lupin and ragwort poisoning.[20] Watery or blue tinged milk is the dairy cow's response to very poor diet as the animal cannot produce good milk if it is undernourished. The causes of bloody milk is indicative of mastitis. The loss of such a large number of pigs and the lack of symptomatic evidence makes analysis difficult but the number indicates poor quality fodder, lack of fodder or a disease, probably viral, extant at the time.

Agnes Bryant of Great Bursted bewitched twenty brewings belonging to Gabriel Bee/Bec on 20th October in 1580. The brewings would not ferment and they were therefore lost. Fermentation is dependent on the activity of the yeast, if the yeast has insufficient sugary liquid on which to feed its fungus cells, then it dies and that was what happened to Bee/Bec's beer.[21]

James Jarvys lost three cows and seven ewes to the bewitchment of Alice Hynckson of Thaxstede. They all died four days after she

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19. Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 662; McFarlane, A., op. cit. p. 83; Sharpe, J.A. Crime in Early Modern England, London, 1984, p. 78; L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 82, 138; Cockburn J. op. cit. Essex Elizabeth I, p. 186; Kittredge, G.L., p. 44

20. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 599, 465 - 467, 180

21. The World Book Encyclopedia, Chicago, 1983, Vol. 21 p. 461-462

bewitched them on 20th January, 1572.[22] Ten animals is a large number to lose at any time and the languishing nature of the disease, four days, indicates plant ingestion as the cause. Bracken, common oat and ergot poisoning are all possibilities but nitrate/nitrite poisoning is more feasible because it affects mainly cattle and sheep. It results from the consumption of turnip tops, immature oats, barley, wheat, rye and hay made from cereal crops.[23] As January is in the British winter, the animals may have been fed cuttings from any source, such as yew or ash trees, and these are poisonous in any quantity, as the cumulative effect of the poison is faster acting when fed in this manner.

Malter's wife was thought to have bewitched the sheep of a neighbour as two of the farmer's sheep were taken with a sickness after he had failed to invite her to his sheep-shearing in 1570. She was also thought to have ill-wished the butter making of another woman.[24] The nature of the sheep's illness is not indicated but the accusation is more than likely related to guilt at lack of neighbourliness, rather than actual bewitchment. Wood sorrell consumption by animals makes the milk difficult to churn into butter and the plant was probably responsible for the woman's problem.[25]

William Rande of Great Totham bewitched to death Robert Carnell's cow on 12th January and it languished and died on 17th January, 1564.[26] Similarly, Anne Vale of Whyght Rodinge, bewitched to death eight pigs

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22. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 130; Cockburn, J., op. cit., Essex Elizabeth I, p. 125 - 126

23. Dent, C., Nitrate and Nitrite Poisoning in Livestock, Sydney, Department of Agriculture, N.S.W., Agfact No. 400/657, p. 1 - 2

24. Kingston, J. Witches and Witchcraft, London, 1976, p. 56; Thomas, K., op. cit., p. 664.

25. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 562

26. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 118; Cockburn, J., op. cit.Essex Elizabeth I, p. 33

belonging to John Berde so that they languished from 6th October to 28th October and then died.[27] Agnes Francys of Hatfield Peverell was accused of bewitching William Brodebelt's horse on 28th November 1573, as the horse languished until 30th November and then died. John Rome's cows also languished after Agnes had bewitched the three animals on 1st May but they survived for three days after.[28]

All these cases concern languishing cows, pigs and horses. Unthriftiness is normally due to cumulative liver poisons which affect all these animals and the poisonous alkaloids which affect livestock include ragwort, bracken, field larkspur, the field or red poppy and lupins, particularly in the case of sheep.[29] 1573 was a bad harvest year so it is likely that the animals were hungry enough to eat plants and fodder which they would normally reject but the availability of remaining plants had a lot to do with what was consumed. Yew and ash trees also induce symptoms but they must be fed with other fodder if the acute poisons within these plants are to be delayed in their action.[30]

Elizabeth Lowys was accused of witchcraft in 1564 as, according to Agnes Devenyshe of Waltham, she caused the death of a pig and the illness of another.[31] A second item against her concerned the death of a lamb. Elizabeth had become angry with the woman feeding the lamb as she was feeding it milk and bread. The next day, after Elizabeth's complaint, the lamb died.[32] Pigs die suddenly from acute poisoning,

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27. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 118; Cockburn. J., op. cit., Essex Elizabeth I, p. 30

28. L'Estrange, Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 127.

29. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 142 - 143

30. Hoskins, W.G.,"Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480 - 1619" The Agricultural History Review, Vol.16, 1968 p. 18; Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 688

31. McFarlane, A., op. cit., p. 307; Essex Record Office Archdeaconry Act Book D/AEA/2 (861)

32. ibid, p. 309; Young, A.R. "Elizabeth Lowys: Witch and Social Victim, 1564" History Today, No. 12, December 1972, p. 184

nitrate/nitrite poisoning and food poisoning.[33] Plant ingestion which causes this reaction in pigs is attributable to bracken, hemlock, foxglove, belladonna, thornapple and turnips. Lupin, rape, ryegrass, St. John's wort and clover[34] are also responsible. Languishing or pining amongst pigs is related to mineral and vitamin deficiencies, lack of proper food and internal diseases unrelated to plant consumption such as worms, pneumonia and bronchial disease.[35]

Whilst the digestive system of a lamb is well able to cope with milk if it is handfed, bread is beyond the capacity of the animal's digestive system, particularly if the animal is very small. Not only is bread an alien food for lambs, but the enzymes in a young lamb's stomach do not develop until the young animal begins to eat grass. The biological functions within the lamb's stomach are unable to cope with bread as the yeast in the bread is indigestible, causing the lamb to become ill and die.*

Elizabeth Spacy and Goody Mathewe were accused of bewitching Elinor Aylet and her family but, most importantly, were thought to have caused her cattle to "die, give no milk, or kick down the pails".[36] Faith Say/Sage of High Laver was also enmeshed in the case of Elinor Aylet as on 7th July 1634, "her cattle, butter, cheese and beer were said to have been attacked by witches. Powder, ointment for the udders of the cows and a parchment to be hung in a barrel were prescribed." Later that year all her agricultural problems appear to have ended although Elinor was still physically affected by a bewitchment.[37]

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33. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 427 - 433

34. ibid., p. 1146 - 1149

35. ibid., p. 435; Hickey, K., Livestock Officer, N.S.W. Department of Agriculture

36. McFarlane, A., op. cit., p. 208; Essex Record Office Archdeaconry Act Book, D/AEA/2 (1,207b)

37. ibid., p. 209 Essex Record Office Archdeaconry Act Book D/AEA/2 (1,207c)

* Personal experience.

Death, lack of milk and aggressiveness in cattle is attributable to grass tetany caused by eating lush green oats. The most obvious symptom of this plant poisoning is the loss of milk in dairy cattle and their depressed appearance. Even after removal from the pasture, milk supply takes a long time to return to normal.[38] The poor milk quality no doubt affected the butter and cheese production but the problem with the beer is more than likely to do with the grain or part of the brewing process.

Mathewe Hopkins, the Witch Finder General, was responsible for the accusations against Elizabeth Clark, Margaret Moone, Anne Leech, Elizabeth Gooding, Rebecca Jones, Margaret Landishe, Susan Cock and Joyce Boanes in Essex. The original confession of Anne West led to the confession of others but only those who were involved in agriculturally related witchcraft are included in the analysis.[39]

Elizabeth Clark allegedly told Hopkins that Satan would not leave her alone until she killed the hogs belonging to Edwards of Mannintree and Robert Tayler's horse.[40] George Turner stated that he had gone to Elizabeth accusing her of his brother's death thirty months ago. She told him that Anne West was responsible and that she had had nothing to do with his brother's death.[41]

Margaret Moone of Thorpe was informed against by Will Dammon, Bevis Vincent and Thomas Burles and they declared that they had heard her confess to killing a cow of Stephen Cookers and also two more of his cows "in handling". She said that she had killed a cow and sow belonging to Henry Robertson and that she and Elizabeth Clark had

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38. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 6 - 7
39. Deacon, R., Witchfinder General, London, 1976, p. 75 - 79
40. Anon, "The Labours of Satan; The Witch Trials of 1645" in Haining, P. (ed.) op. cit., p. 143
41. ibid., p. 145

spoiled three of Edwards of Mannintree's beer brewings. Margaret Moone and she had spoiled a batch of bread of Philip Berrimans and that Philip Daniels's horse had broken its neck going down a hill due to her witching activities.[42] Richard Caley of Thorpe concurred with all this testimony.[43]

Anne Leech of Misley was another who was caught in Hopkin's net as Richard Edwards of Mannintree gave evidence that a black cow of his, which he thought was well, fell down forty yards from Anne's house and died two days later. The next day, when he was driving his cows to pasture, a white cow collapsed and died a week later. An autopsy of both cows revealed nothing and no disease was found. Anne Leech confessed to the bewitchment of Richard Edwards's cows and also stated that thirty years ago she sent a grey imp to kill two horses belonging to Mr. Bragge of Misley and they died.[44]

Elizabeth Gooding, Rebecca Jones, Margaret Landishe, Susan Cock and Joyce Boanes implicated each other and this led to their own indictments for witchcraft. Elizabeth Gooding wanted to be trusted with a pound of cheese which she was eventually forced to pay for and Robert Tayler stated that his horse, which was in the stable,

> "was taken in a strange manner sick and lame; whereupon this informant sent for four farriers to have their best advice, who could not discover the cause of the disease; but the said horse about foure dayes after died: And this informant also saith, that it was observed by himself, and divers others who often went to see the said horse, that still upon their

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42. ibid., p. 161; L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit. p. 225

43. "Anon" in Haining, P. (ed.) op. cit., p. 162

44. ibid. p. 147 - 148

> coming into the stable, he lay quiet, and looked cheerfully, but as soon as the door was shut, and the horse alone, hee did violently beat himself, and that the belly of the said horse would rumble and make a noyse, as a foule chimney set on fire; And this informant further saith, that hee is induced to believe, that the said Elizabeth Gooding was the cause of the death of his said horse" 45

Rebecca Jones of St. Osyth stated that she had accepted some imps from a man, who she now thinks was the Devil, and "that the first time she imployed any of the said things, shee sent them to kill a sowe of one Benjamin Howes of Little-Clacton in the county aforesaid and the said cowe was killed by the said impe accordingly".[46]

Susan Cock had an imp called Besse and her imp and those of Rose Hallybread, Joyce Boanes and Margaret Landishe were sent to kill ten or twelve sheep of John Spalls, because his wife would not give her any curds. Susan's and Margaret's imps were also sent to kill six or seven shoots or hogs of Mr. Mannocks.[47] Margaret Landishe denied all the accusations made by Susan Cock.[48]

Joyce Boanes, however, supported Susan's testimony and also stated that she, Joyce, had sent her two imps to the house of Thomas Clynch where they killed a calf, a sheep and a lamb.[49]

The accusations against all these women amount to a lot of live-stock loss in the district prior to the 1645 court hearings. Edwards lost hogs, beer brewings and two cows but details concerning the deaths of the animals, other than the cows, are scant. The cows died strangely

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45. ibid., p. 146 - 147

46. ibid., p. 170 - 172

47. ibid., p. 169 - 170

48. ibid., p. 168

49. ibid., p. 168 - 169

as they both fell down whilst being driven and died days later. This behaviour is highly indicative of dead nettle or henbit poisoning, which affects cattle when they are moved from place to place.[50] Perennial rye grass poisoning, field larkspurs and field stachys consumption also cause sudden collapse and death after a few days.[51] Robertson lost a cow and two others in the handling, again common symptoms of perennial rye grass and field stachys. Robertson suffered further losses of a cow and sow, as did Mannock. He was thought to have lost six or seven hogs to witchcraft and both Spalls and Richards lost between ten and twelve sheep each. These amounted to a large number of livestock losses. Fodder shortage and subsequent consumption of any available fodder makes a link between plant ingestion and livestock deaths and illness a strong possibility, because 1645 - 1650 were noted bad harvest years.[52] The livestock and the land may have been under some pressure prior to 1646.

Tayler's horse however did die very strangely. The animal became sick and lame and died within four days but it is the nature of the symptoms which make this instance interesting. When provided with human companionship, the animal was calm but when alone it thrashed about and beat itself against the stall. The animal's stomach also rumbled continuously and four farriers could not ascertain the problem. Bittersweet or woody nightshade is a candidate for this reaction as it causes vertigo and delirium and death results from convulsions.[53] Bracken poisoning also causes severe muscle tremors the collapse of

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50. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 381, 599; McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 38; Grieve, M., A Modern Herbal, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 610

51. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 323 - 326, 387 - 388; McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 15, 45

52. Hoskins, W., op. cit., p. 18

53. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 660; Grieve, M. op. cit., p. 583

the animal and convulsive seizures with tetanic spasms before the horse dies.[54] Human companionship may have provided comfort for the horse and when this was removed, its behaviour changed. The horse may also have been blinded and was calm when accompanied and fearful when alone. No doubt the poisons in the animal's system were responsible for the stomach noises.

Farming in Suffolk was well developed by the early seventeenth century and had grown in response to national and European markets. Specialisation led to the development of, and developed from, three main regions, the sheep-corn husbandry region, grassland and fenland farming. The sheep-corn region was restrictive for tenant farmers, as their arable was greatly reduced by sheep pasturage and they concentrated on raising cattle, calves and pigs. Barley, rye and wheat were the main crops but oats, peas and bullimong, (a mixture of oats and peas) vetches and buckwheat were grown for fodder. The wood-pasture region had little arable and dairying was the predominant industry. Pigs were raised for the London market and the area bred the, as yet unstandardised, Suffolk Punch for heavy horse sales. Wheat, barley and rye were grown and, after the 1630s, carrots and turnips were grown for fodder and this enabled the production of butter for the London market throughout the winter. Grass and hay were the main fodder crops.[55]

On 1st April 1593 Stephen and Alice Hugrave of Aberton/Alderton in Suffolk bewitched to death four pigs and eight piglets which belonged to Thomas Clarke. Stephen was further accused of bewitching two cows belonging to John Smithe at Fingringh/Fingringhoe on 16th March 1594.[56]

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54. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 779

55. Thirsk, J., The Agrarian History of England and Wales IV 1500 - 1640, Cambridge, 1967, p. 41 - 43, 44 - 45, 46 - 48

56. Cockburn, J. op. cit., Essex Elizabeth I, p. 417; L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 181

The loss of four pigs and eight piglets, all at the same time, is attributable to malnutrition, food poisoning, nitrate/nitrite poisoning or a disease.[57] The bewitchment of the two cattle is not detailed and this makes analysis difficult, although the death of two animals at one time could be linked with plant ingestion. If disease was responsible, it must have been unknown to the owner as an accusation of witchcraft was unlikely to be forthcoming for a known disease.

Mother Palmer was refused a pot of beer by Robert Wayts in 1637 and his servants could not make beer which kept fresh after that. Mary Gunnell testified against Mother Palmer, or Anna, and told how she had visited the Wayts asking for a pot of beer and how she had left empty handed threatening that she (Mary) might want a cup of beer herself. After this the Wayts could not make beer that lasted more than three weeks. This accusation was made eight years after the alleged offence as the deposition was made in 1645.[58] The quality of the ingredients dictates the quality and the keeping time of beer and this has been outlined.[59]

In 1645 Thomas Sier accused Ellen Crispe of Sweslinge of causing his cow to dry up in two of her teats and then dry up completely, all because he had refused her husband a load of hay.[60] Dairy cows dry up if they are at the end of their milking life or are subjected to poor diet with insufficient minerals, vitamins and trace elements.[61] Some

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57. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 433 - 434; Dent, C., op. cit. p.1-2

58. Thomas, K., op. cit., p. 661; L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 304. citing British Museum Add MS 27402 fos 104 - 121

59. Chambers's Encyclopedia, Oxford, 1966, Vol. II, p. 531

60. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 296, citing British Museum Add MS 27402 fos. 104 - 121

61. Bäiracli Levy, J. de op. cit., p. 203 - 206

plants do cause losses in milk production and these include cabbage, mint, oats and ragwort.[62] Lack of fodder may be a preferred option because Ellen's husband had asked for hay, which may indicate that fodder was scarce at the time. This is further supported by the case of Susan Marchant of Hintlesham in 1645. She was tempted by one of her imps to strike lame a cow of her brother, Geoffrey, and she had succumbed to the temptation.[63] Lameness is engendered by ergot poisoning or, as is more likely in this case, by tall fescue grass. The latter is characterised by lameness in the left hindlimb and then spreads to the other limbs. The end result is gangrene.[64] 1646 - 1650 were years of bad harvest, perhaps the worst for the century, and fodder shortage was probably being felt at the time of Susan's and Ellen's prosecution,[65] thus making poisoning from plant ingestion even more feasible.

Ino Goodinge testified that she had sent one of her bird imps to Goodman Locks and it had caused one of his cows to skip over a stile and burst her neck. A second imp caused John Wolnose's horse to throw him in the water and yet another imp caused Aldus' cart "to stand fast on playne ground." All of these instances occurred in August 1645.[66]

The unusual behaviour of the cow indicates the ingestion of belladonna which induces frenzied states. St. John's wort also induces dementia which is characterised by the animal charging around the field and throwing its body about.[67] The problem with Aldus's

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62. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 213, 180

63. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 297, citing British Museum Add. MS 27402, fos. 104 - 121

64. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 320 - 322; McBarron, E.J., op. cit.p.24

65. Hoskins, W.G., op. cit., p. 18

66. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 295, citing British Museum Add. MS 27402, fos. 104 - 121

67. McBarron, S.L., op. cit., p. 99

horse is more difficult as the animal may have been just cantankerous, although the consumption of lush green oats causes aggressiveness in animals. However, as 1645 was a year of poor harvests, lush young oats may not have been available.[68]

Susanna Stegold had pigs and one of them was more ravenous than the others so "she wished it might never eat again and immediately it died." Rich Glanfield testified that Susanna said she killed her own pig to test her skill.[69] The pig probably choked to death because of the rate it consumed food and may have succumbed to obstructional bloat if root crops were being fed.[70]

Tho(masine?) Ratlifnup of Shelley fell out with George Waterbury and he testified that since that time he had had several cattle dying which had been perfectly healthy prior to this falling out. Thomas Monticute testified that he was felling a tree and denied Tho(masine) some twigs and was thereafter full of strange lice.[71] The time limit between the loss of the animals belonging to Waterbury and the falling out with Tho(masine) is not stated and analysis is difficult. However the loss of previously healthy animals and the fact that Waterbury thought their loss was strange, indicates poisonous plant ingestion. Turnips and other root crops cause obstructional bloat and the animal lapses into a coma and dies. Pigs die suddenly from acute poisoning, either from food or nitrate/nitrite poisoning and plants which cause this include foxglove, hemlock and turnip tops.[72]

Goodman Garnham seems to have been the receiver of several witching activities, all from different witches. Maria Bush of Bacto In

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68. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 297 - 299

69. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 298, British Muesum Add. MS 27402 fos. 104 - 121

70. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 139

71. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 300 British Museum Add. MS 27402 fos. 104 - 121

72. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 185, 427 - 433, 1146 - 1149

killed two cows of his and Margaret Benet sent her imp to Goody Garnham's so that the cow might give Goody a sound punch, but not to kill her, and the imp complied. All this resulted from Goody refusing to give Margaret a half pint of butter. Ellen Greenelif wished that Garna (Garnham's) cow might go lame.

Maria also employed her imps to kill three cows and twenty turkeys belonging to Mr. Pritimans because he took her collection (of what is not stated) from her. Margaret's imp also ensured that Widow Hoggards's cow and another languished after she'd taken some hair belonging to the cow. Ellen took a dislike to Hoggard and wished that his mare would go lame because he went for the searcher. She also sent lice to Mr. Lockwood.[73]

Lameness is due to ergot poisoning and ragwort consumption and affects all hooved animals.[74] Tall fescue grass is also responsible for lameness in hooved animals and the process by which the plant does this has been outlined.[75] The death of twenty turkeys can be attributed only to plant ingestion such as corn cockle seeds, as the number is so large but the lack of symptom information makes analysis difficult.

Thomas and Mary Everard confessed in 1645 that when they were employed in a brewhouse, they had bewitched the beer so that "the odiousness of the infectious stink of it was such and so intolerable that by the noisomness of the smell or taste many people died."[76] Thomas also claimed that he sent his imps to kill a deer and a rotten sheep.[77] The beer that the Everards bewitched was bad as the grain

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73. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit. p. 301 - 302 citing British Museum Add. MS 27402, fos. 104 - 121

74. Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 320 - 322; McBarron, E.J. op. cit. p.24

75. Everist, S.L., op. cit. p. 803; McBarron, E.J. op. cit., p. 3

76. Kittredge, G.L. Witchcraft in Old and New England, New York, 1929

77. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit. p. 310 citing British Museum Add MS 27402, fos. 104 - 121

used was either of poor quality or something had gone wrong in the brewing process. The different processes involved in brewing require temperature control, correct malting procedures and the blending of all the ingredients. The fermentation process is another area where problems arise and the beer is not drunk until that process is complete. It is interesting to note that people drank the beer although it smelt so bad.[78]

Jane Ruceulver of Powstead sent her imp Touch to kill a bullock and he returned saying that he had done so by striking it on the right side and it died accordingly.[79] This is extremely indicative of a heart attack or heart failure.

Anne Randall of Louenham claimed that she had had familiars for thirty years and that these were two blue coloured cat familiars called Hangman and Jacob. Hangman was sent to kill a horse of William Baldwin's of Thorpe because he had refused Anne wood, claiming that she should pay for the load she had had from him. Hangman killed two horses which were "lanquelled" together but he killed them by sending such a tempest "as was supposed by a Devil in Thunder". Fear of the storm may have killed the horses through heart failure or from thrashing about but heart conditions are engendered by consumption of foxgloves, yew tree, bracken, cabbage and Pheasant's eye. Either the heart rate is severely affected or the heart stops altogether.[80]

Stephen Humfries of Thorpe lost one of his hogs to Hangman in punishment for sending Anne away empty from his house when she had asked for alms. Anne also confessed to stealing Mr. Coppinger of Lavenham's

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78. Chambers's Encyclopedia, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 531

79. Stearne, J. A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft, London, 1648, p. 27 - 28

80 Schenk, G., The Book of Poisons, New York, 1955, p. 17; Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 780, 213, 620, 597

bushes which Jacob removed from a fence line along which the bushes had been laid ready for planting. Stearne states that he had since heard that the bushes had been found planted in another man's ground. The other man did not know how the bushes had got there but he did remember that they appeared the same night that Mr. Coppinger lost them.[81]

Anne Randall was a victim and whether she believed she was a witch or whether she had been tortured into confessing these incidents, all of them are coincidental and the whole confession is difficult to come to terms with, particularly when the bush stealing incident is examined. The fact that Stearne mentions the sequel to the bush story undermines the truth of the other aspects of Anne's confession.

Mother Gabley of Kings Lynn in Norfolk was accused of drowning fourteen sailors in 1583. They drowned because she boiled eggs in a pail of cold water, which caused a storm at sea and, on those grounds, she was arraigned for witchcraft.[82] There is no explanation for this type of weather witchcraft other than natural causes but Mother Gabley's position in the community must have been tenuous to have been the subject of community malice. Norfolk had a large population during this period but the settlements were not integrated or dependent on each other and this situation made Mother Gabley's position more untenable. Deaths associated with water could not have been uncommon in Norfolk as farming in the county had developed due to the river access it possessed.[83]

Dorothy Ellis of Brentwood was brought to trial on 30th May, 1647 and was accused of bewitching cattle. In 1646 she sent her imp

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81. Stearne, J., op. cit., p. 17

82. Hole, C., Witchcraft in England, London, 1945, p. 41 - 42

83. Thirsk, J. (ed.) op. cit., p. 41 - 42, 48 - 49

to bewitch four of Thomas Hitchal's cattle and they presently died.[84] No details of the animals' deaths appear in the confession Mathewe Hopkins extracted from Dorothy but plant ingestion can be offered as a cause because four animals do not die at the same time, unless they are diseased or poisoned. As the deaths were considered unusual, disease is not an option as a witchcraft accusation would not have been forthcoming. The field larkspur is very common in Cambridgeshire and its poisonous alkaloids affect cattle.[85] Death or gradual recovery is the outcome. Sudden deaths in cattle are also caused by obstructional bloat which occurs after the consumption of root crops.[86]

This concludes the case studies for the counties of Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk. The next chapter examines witchcraft in the Midlands and the North.

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84. L'Estrange Ewen, C., op. cit., p. 55

85 Hopkins, M, The Discovery of Witches, in Haining, P., op. cit. p. 22

86. Grieve, M., op. cit., p. 464; Everist, S.L., op. cit. p. 599

87. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 185; McBarron, E.J., op. cit. p. 139

CHAPTER 7.

ENGLISH ACCUSATIONS III - MIDLANDS AND THE NORTH

Mary, or Mother, Sutton of Milton near Bedford in Bedfordshire was brought to trial in 1613 by Master Enger. This landowner conceived the notion that Mary Sutton and her daughter, his tenants, were the cause of his ills as he claimed that he had been "damnified" in his property to the sum of £200 and blamed Mother Sutton. He brought the women to his house, had them scratched, stripped, searched and examined for marks and then bound and thrown into the mill pond, to prove that they were witches. All of this was done without any authority and eventually Enger prosecuted the two women and they were hanged in 1613.[1] Notestein gives no indication of his source and no symptoms are available[2] but the behaviour of Enger indicates that he was looking for a scapegoat for his mismanagement, overstocking or other economic problems.

In 1637 Goody Rose of Bedford was ducked because she had been refused a share of peas and that was the reason why she enchanted the crop so that every pea was worm eaten. She was also accused of making a fellow "always full of lice."[3] Peas are not hard to grow as they grow in any soil that is well dug, limed and free of weeds. However, peas are subject to disease, viruses and downy mildew and it was no fault of Goody's that the crop was full of worms.[4]

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1. Notestein, W. A History of Witchcraft in England, 1558 - 1718, Oxford, 1911, p. 197, 117 - 118

2. L'Estrange Ewen, C., Witch Hunting and Witch Trials, London, 1929, citing British Museum Additional Ms. 36,674, fol. 148

3. Hole, C., Mirror of Witchcraft, London, 1957, p. 91

   Newman, L.F. "Some Notes on the History and Practice of Witchcraft in the Eastern Counties", Folklore, March, 1946, p. 25

   Kittredge, G.L. Witchcraft in Old and New England, New York, 1929, p. 173

4. Davies, R. "Peas" in Simmonds, N.W. (ed.) Evolution of Plant Crops, London, 1976, p. 173 - 174

Ann Foster was hanged at Northampton for witchcraft in 1674. A Northamptonshire farmer accused her of witchcraft as thirty of his sheep were found dead with their "leggs broke in pieces and their bones all shattered in their skins."[5] Sheep were common in Northamptonshire as farmers reared them for fattening and wool production. Wheat, barley, rye, beans and oats were the main crops grown.[6]

Bone fragility in lambs and sheep has been related to bracken poisoning and has been proved beyond doubt to be linked with oat ingestion.[7] The actual chemical reactions in the body are not known but tests show that calcium, magnesium, and phosphorous in the bloodstream and copper in the liver are all at normal levels.[8] The condition is cured if the animals are removed to another pasture. As oats were common in Northamptonshire, there is no reason to suppose that ingestion of growing oats was not the cause of the bone fragility in the bewitched sheep.[9]

A young man of Denford in Northamptonshire confessed that he sent one of his imps to Cockes of Denford's cattle because he would not let him keep them and the cattle ran violently away from Cockes.

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5. Summers, M., A Geography of Witchcraft, Evanston, 1958, p. 151
   Notestein, W., op. cit., p. 252

6. Thirsk, J. (ed.) The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, 1500 - 1640 Cambridge, 1967, p. 92 - 93, 89

7. McBarron, E.J., Poisonous Plants, Melbourne, 1963, p. 6 - 7

8. Hungerford, T.G. Diseases of Livestock, Sydney, 1975, p. 148

9. ibid., p. 148

They foamed at the mouth and Cockes had great difficulty in catching them with a horse and had even more problems getting them home to his yard.[10] Foaming at the mouth is indicative of aconite poisoning and blue periwinkle poisoning. Blue periwinkle also has the effect of blinding animals and this may be the cause of Cockes' problem in herding and confining his cattle. Laburnum also causes this response and frothing at the mouth occurs with ingestion of lush green clover, lucerne and other green crops which cause frothy bloat.[11]

Cherrie of Thrapston in Northamptonshire confessed that he had done harm to Sir John Washington's cattle as Sir John had suffered strange losses of late. Cherrie stated that he had caused the deaths of so many cattle that he had lost count of the number and he said that the kinder Sir John was to him, then the more power Cherrie had over Sir John and that Cherrie's imps had to be employed.[12]

Large losses of cattle are usually attributable to disease or plant ingestion and, as no time span is given for the duration of Sir John's losses, it is difficult to know if a murrain was responsible or if the losses were due to fodder shortage. However, if the deaths occurred in the years between 1646 - 1650 (Stearne was writing in 1648) then the losses could have been caused by lack of or poor quality fodder, as these were bad harvest years.[13]

Joan Smyth had articles brought against her in 1609 as the Michaelmas Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1609, Staffordshire, indicate.[14]

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10. Stearne, J. A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft, London, 1648, p. 23

11. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 337

12. Stearne, J., op. cit., p. 35

13. Hoskins, W.G. "Harvest Fluctuations and English Economic History, 1480 - 1619" The Agricultural History Review, 1968, Vol. 16 Part II, p. 18

14. Michaelmas Quarter Session Rolls, 1609 Staffordshire. Extract kindly sent to me by M.W. Farr, County Archivist Warwickshire County Council. As the document was unable to be photocopied, it was translated and sent to me and is presented in full.

"Item she will not only filch and steale her neighbours goods but being questioned for the same she will most bitterly curse them and is vehemently suspected for a witch for that upon her cursing many catteile have myscarried..."[15] Miscarriage or abortion in cattle is mainly caused by ingestion of mouldy hay which can carry the ergot fungus, especially prevalent in wild and cultivated rye.[16] As the article claims that many cattle have miscarried, the probable plant causes include hemlock, mint, juniper, tansy and plants high in nitrate/ nitrite levels as well as fodder crops. Cattle do abort en masse if they are suffering the disease brucellosis, but this did not exist in Britain during this period.[17] Cattle were a prominent part of the Staffordshire farming community and many farmers had twelve or more cows and calves. Cattle herds were kept for fattening and breeding and stores were brought in from the moorlands and from the Welsh drovers. Dairying became important after the sixteenth century and a large market arose for butter and cheese.[18]

The investigation of the link between witchcraft and livestock losses in Lancashire is hampered by the loss of the Assize records for the whole of Elizabeth's reign and the loss of the Quarter Session Rolls for the same period.[19]

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15. Michaelmas Quarter Session Rolls, 1609 Staffordshire.

16. Bäiracli Levy, J. de. Herbal Handbook for Farm and Stable, Emmaus, 1976, p. 177

17. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 167 - 168, p. 1146 - 1149

18. Thirsk, J. (ed.) op. cit., p. 102 - 104

19. Haigh, C. Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire, Cambridge, 1975, p. 321

In 1612 twenty alleged witches were brought to trial in Lancashire. Anne Whittle or Chattox was accused by James Robinson of spoiling his ale. Robinson stated that in 1600 Anne had come to his house to help his wife card wool and, whilst there, she had dipped her cup into some freshly brewed ale several times. Robinson maintained that for eight or nine weeks after that their ale was spoiled. John Moore of Higham's wife had asked Anne to mend some sour ale but was not pleased when Anne employed "witchcraft" to effect a cure by reciting a charm over the ale. As a consequence of Mrs. Moore's displeasure Anne sent her familiar, Fancy, to bite on the head one of John Moore's brown cows. The cow went mad and died six weeks later. Hugh Moore of Pendle complained that Chattox bewitched his cattle and she was in the process of bewitching him for his trouble. All the instances occurred six years before in the case of Hugh and two years before the accusation in John's case.[20]

Madness and frenzy in cattle can be related to belladonna ingestion but, as it took the cow six weeks to die, belladonna would be too quick acting a poison to apply. St. John's wort, bracken poisoning and ergot can all be related to this case[21] but St. John's wort is the most likely candidate because animals behave as though demented and their frenzy, whilst eventually subsiding, causes loss of condition and some convulsions prior to the drawn out death of these animals, although a gradual recovery can occur.[22]

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20. Potts, T. The Wonderful Discoveries of Witches in the County of Lancaster, 1612, p. 42 - 43 in Rosen, B. (ed.) Witchcraft, London, 1969, p. 362 - 364

21. Everist, S.L., Poisonous Plants of Australia, London, 1981, p. 779, 804; Ramsbottom, J., Mushrooms and Toadstools, London, 1953, p. 142

22. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 99; Everist, S.L., op. cit. p. 364

Elizabeth Redfern, Chattox's daughter, begged a dishful of milk from John Nutter of Bullhole Farm and her mother poured the milk into a can, put two sticks over the top and began reciting a charm. Nutter's son kicked over the pail as he objected to her activities and next morning one of his cows fell sick and died after laying down for three or four days. Fancy had also been employed to kill a sow of Anthony Nutter's because he was friendly with Demdike's or Elizabeth Southern's family.[23]

Cattle languish for periods of days or months from the ingestion of plants which engender symptoms of unthriftiness, solitary habits and intermittent animal deaths amongst a group of animals. This is generally a result of cumulative liver poisons and the alkaloids which cause this are found in ragwort, bracken, oats and ergotised grains.[24] The loss of the cows had very little to do with the charming of the milk but followed from natural causes. Similar reasons can be cited in explanation of Elizabeth Southern's case. She was accused of bewitching a cow which John Nutter of Bullhole Farm had asked her to cure and of charming a can of blue milk so that it became a quarter pound of butter. The cow died the morning after Elizabeth's ministrations of the previous evening.[25] Blue milk is indicative of poor quality but no explanation for the arrival of the butter, other than subterfuge, exists.

Margaret Pearson of Padiham, another Pendle witch, was accused by Chattox of killing Dodgson's mare. According to Chattox , Margaret and her familiar crawled into the mare's stable through a loophole and

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23. Bennett, W. The Pendle Witches, Lancashire County Pub., 1980, p. 11, 13, 16, 23

    Catlow, R., The Pendle Witches, Nelson, 1976, p. 7; Peel. E. and Southern P., The Trials of the Lancashire Witches, Newton Abbott, 1969, p. 23

24. Lehane, B., The Power of Plants, London, 1977; Everist S.L. op.cit. p. 778 - 779
    Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 185; McBarron, E.J., op. cit. p. 25

25. Bennett, W., op. cit., p. 9; Peel, E. and Southern P, op. cit.

sat on the horse until it collapsed and died. The depositions and examinations concerning the death of the mare were many and are not only attributable to Chattox.[26]

Horses collapse and die suddenly from acute poisoning, colic and milk fever. Sudden collapses which are plant induced result from cabbage, elder, foxglove, hemlock, linseed or flax, turnip and clover ingestion.[27] Lancashire was mainly a pastoral county concerned with the production of store and fat cattle. Horses were not numerous but were fed on a diet of grass, and hay supplemented with oats, barley, wheat, rye, peas, beans and vetches and the animals had ready access to the poisonous plants referred to above.[28]

Jennet Wilkinson was turned out of her house by Thomas and Anne Harrison of Ellel around 1620 and she cursed them saying that they would incur a loss of £40. Afterwards the Harrisons suffered a great deal of loss through livestock deaths, according to the testimony of Edward Gervis's wife, Elizabeth, daughter of the Harrisons. Anne Harrison contended that the loss of livestock happened every year over the last nine or ten years since the eviction. She stated that one heifer, three cows and four oxen had sickened and died, over what period is unspecified. At least one ox carcase had been burnt so that it can be assumed that the carcase was inedible, yet another economic loss.[29]

The loss of a large number of livestock is attributable to disease and plant consumption but in the Harrison's case, the losses had been

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26. Bennett, W., op. cit., p. 24, 30, 19; Peel, E and Southern. P, op. cit., p. 71 - 72
27. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 737 - 738, 1147 - 1148
28. Thirsk, J. (ed.) op. cit., p. 81 - 83, 84 - 89
29. Lancashire County Council Record Office., QSB 1/64/21-23

continuous over a nine or ten year period. The farming techniques of the Harrisons are questionable as a steady loss indicates poor livestock husbandry or overstocked, overworked land. Sick and dying animals and the inedible carcase indicate poor quality fodder which may have included bracken, heliotrope, oats and ergot fungus.[30] The court record gives no more details so the cause of the losses is inconclusive.

Jennet and George Benton of Wakefield were accused of threatening Richard Jackson of Wakefield. The deposition brought by Jackson in 1656 stated that since the Bentons threatened him, he had lost eighteen horses and mares. He also declared that he had a great many swine which broke through two barn doors and he conceived that he had incurred all these losses because of the witchcraft or sorcery of Jennet and George Benton.[31]

Despite the fact that Jackson gives no time span in which his losses occurred, the loss of so many animals points towards a fodder problem or his husbandry techniques. No symptoms are given but weight is given to the link between animal deaths and plant ingestion by the well documented behaviour of Jackson's pigs. The horses do not appear to have died at the same time and the deaths can therefore be linked with the plants which have this cumulative effect. They include bracken, buttercup, columbine, Pheasant's eye, stinging nettle, Traveller's joy and privet.[32]

Prolonged illnesses which are accompanied by unthriftiness or failure to thrive and intermittent deaths in the group, are normally

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30. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 142 - 143, 3 , 32, 75; Everist, S.L. op. cit., p. 803, 778 - 779; Ramsbottom, J., op. cit. p. 142; Lehane, B., op. cit., p. 129

31. Hole, C., op. cit., p. 97

32. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 1146 - 1147

due to cumulative liver poisons[33] and ragwort is well documented as far as this type of poisoning is concerned. The plant is native to Britain and contains five poisonous principles which accumulate in the liver and gradually destroy it. Death eventuates as the animal gradually declines, a decline precipitated when hay containing ragwort is fed. The alkaloid accumulation is faster as the drying process does not destroy the alkaloids and the hay does not provide as much of a dilution as does fresh grass.[34]

Sudden behaviour changes, such as those exhibited by Jackson's pigs could be due to high spirits, a reaction to a long confinement, a sudden fright or an equally similar explanation. However, monkshood, belladonna, bracken, St. John's wort and ergotised grain all cause frenzies and odd behaviour in pigs and must be considered in relation to Jackson's pigs.[35] Yorkshire pasture was found mostly on the common as pasture was scarce and, for this reason, community regulations enforced bans on unrung pigs.[36] In view of this, it is feasible to argue that an overstocked Jackson suffered the consequences of shortage of pasture and insufficient fodder.

Durham county had to contend with border lawlessness, poor corn harvests and shortages. Serious shortages were common and in the late 1590's Durham underwent famine, plague and cattle sickness. The bulk of the crops grown, peas, beans, wheat and rye, were used as fodder and agricultural specialisation, such as dairying, grew in response to the coal mining industry in Newcastle by the end of the sixteenth century.[37] The county was relatively well off, the broad coastal

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33. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 142 - 143

34. Lehane, B. op. cit., p. 129; Grieve, M. A Modern Herbal, Harmondsworth, 1978, p. 669; Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 180; Baïracli Levy, J, de op. cit., p. 605

35. Fisher, J., op. cit., p. 71, 73; Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 596, 623, 803, 804, 364; McBarron, E.J., op. cit. p. 3, 25, 99

36. Trow-Smith, R., op. cit., p. 221

37. Thirsk, J. (ed.) op. cit., p. 25 28

plains of Durham supported villages where husbandry was mixed, the common fields were larger and the arable portion of the land often resulted in loss of commons so large that stints had to be placed on cattle numbers.[38]

Alice Colier of Wearmouth quarrelled with Alice Walsh in 1601 whilst they were milking at Wearmouth. Walsh alleged that Colier had poisoned a cow causing her to drop her calf and blamed Colier's "glowing eyes".[39] Abortions in cattle are related to serious poisonings and plants which induce them include hemlock, juniper, mint, tansy and plants high in nitrate/nitrite levels. Grain, tall fescue grass and paspalum grass all cause spontaneous abortion when invaded by the ergot fungus Claviceps purpurea. Large quantities of the alkaloids affect the uterine wall muscles and cause them to contract, thus inducing premature births. Abortion is also related to ingestion of too much rape, turnips and cabbage, which affects iodine levels in the body and it is this deficiency which induces the abortion. Nitrate/nitrite poisoning causes listlessness and two weeks illness followed by an abortion.[40]

John Jefferson was concerned for his cow's welfare when, in 1619, he said to Margaret Simpson "old witch and thefe...have I kept thee thus longe to harm me and my goods and I have a cow which is not well and I praye that thou doe not bewitch her."[41] This deposition is a good example of how witchcraft and livestock losses became connected.

Mary Hunter of Birkside in Northumberland had a deposition brought against her by John March of Edgebrigg on 9th April, 1673, who

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38. ibid. p. 25 - 28

39. Rushton, P. "Women, Witchcraft and Slander in Early Modern England; Cases from the Church Courts of Durham, 1560 - 1675" Northern History, 18, 1982, p. 128; Consistory Court Depositions of Durham, 7, 25th January, 1601

40. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 167 - 168

41. Rushton, P. op. cit., p. 128 Consistory Court Depositions, Durham 10b, fols. 415, 419 and 420

> "saith that about a month since, he went to a place called Birkside nook, and there Ann Armstrong, hearing him named, began to speak to him, and asked him if he had not an ox that had the power of one of his limbs taken from him. And he telling her he had, and enquiring how she came to know, she told him that she heard Mary Hunter of Birkside, and another, at a meeting amongst diverse witches, confess to the devil that they had taken the power of that beast....And this ox now continues lame, and has no use of his far hinder leg, but pines away and likely to die. He saith that Ann Armstrong told him that the said persons confessed before the devil that they bewitched a gray mare of his; and he saith that about a fortnight before Michaelmas last, he and his wife were riding home from Bywell on a Sunday at night upon the same mare, about sun-set; and there came a swallow, which above forty times and more flew through under the mare's belly, and crossed her way before her breast. And this informant struck at it with his rod above twenty times, and could by no means hinder it, until of its own action it went away. And the mare went very well home, and within four days died; and before she died was two days so mad that she was past holding, and was struck blind for four and twenty hours be fore she died." [42]

Apart from mechanical injuries, lameness in cattle is caused by foot rot and consumption of ergotised grain[43] which causes lameness in the hindfeet particularly. Most poisonings occur in the late autumn and early winter and, even though the incidence may be widespread in an area, only a small number of the animals in any one herd are affected.[44] Tall fescue grass also causes lameness which begins in the left hind leg and spreads to other limbs, eventually turning the limbs gangrenous.[45]

Convulsions and "madness" are associated with ergot poisoning which also causes trembling, staggering, depression and stupidity.

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42. Hole, C., op. cit., p. 98
43. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 168
44. McBarron, E.J., op. cit., p. 3
45. ibid., p. 24; Everist, S.L., op. cit., p. 320 - 322

Bracken poisoning makes normally quiet and manageable horses truculent and causes spasms or convulsions and they are unable to rise once they collapse.[46] However, none of these plants cause blindness but, as far as horses are concerned, the red field poppy, a native of Britain, causes blindness if ingested in large quantities. All three of these plants, bracken, ergot and poppies, are usually mixed with other fodder or in hay and this increases their effect, as the poisons are accumulated at a faster rate in the body. The swallow's role was innocent as the bird was probably collecting insects stirred up by the horse's feet.

Northumberland was not only subjected to continual border raids from the Scots but underwent poor corn harvests regularly and the quantity of barley, oats, wheat and rye grown never exceeded the needs of the inhabitants. Fodder crops consisted of peas and beans but famine and plague were constant threats and the 1590s exemplified this and were also years of cattle plague.[47] This situation may have led to the prosecution of Robert Todd. He was brought before the courts in 1601 on suspicion of being a "mediciner of Cattle or a charmer of hunger hurt." This refers to his curing of prolapses in cattle.[48]

Prolapse is nearly always caused by calving and occurs immediately after parturition a week later, or it can be related to hypocalcaemia. This also occurs after calving and the lowered amount of calcium in the bloodstream causes the cow to succumb to milk fever.[49] Robert Todd would have been an asset in the local community if he could perform prolapse operations as the whole uterus has to be placed back inside

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46. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 740 - 741

47. Thirsk, J., op. cit., p. 19 - 20

48. Rushton, P., op. cit., p. 120

49. Hungerford, T.G., op. cit., p. 324

the cow and then stitched. Recovery is usually good, providing the prolapse does not recur soon after.[50] Success may have eluded Todd on an occasion which resulted in an accusation.

This completes the examination of English witchcraft. The following chapter explores the plant ingestion/witchcraft link in the Celtic areas of Britain.

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50. ibid., p. 260, 324