

Wye Historical Society



Brabourne Church & Five Bells Pub

Newsletter September 2022

Society Matters

Wye Historical Society was founded in 1948 and is a registered charity with around 100 current members. Annual membership costs only £12, with subscriptions due in September. Membership forms and the full programme of lectures will be distributed later this month.

For information about membership (or any other matter), please contact the treasurer, Anna Clark on 01233 812640.

Email; annaclark45@gmail.com

The first lecture will be on Wednesday 5 October 2022 in the Lady Joanna Thornhill Primary School, starting at 7.30pm. It is titled

“Flying Past – The History of Aviation in Kent” (speaker: Guy Bartlett).

The Future Evolution of Wye Historical Society

Wye Heritage is currently working on the plans for the new Heritage Centre and once the building work is completed, this may include space for the Society’s archives. In addition, there will be access to on-line material and the main exhibition area may be available for study days.

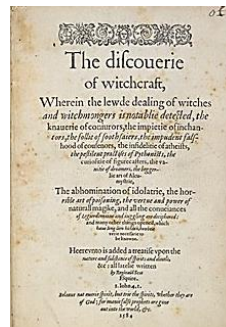
We plan to increase our profile on social media and are therefore seeking new, younger recruits to the Society’s Executive Committee. If you would like to be involved or know someone who might be interested, please contact the Chairman, Tim Betts, by email.

timbl64@btinternet.com

Reginald Scot of Brabourne

Renowned author of “*The Discoverie of Witchcraft*” (1584)

Wherein the Lewde dealing of Witches and Witchmongers
is notablie detected, in sixteen books ...



Reginald Scot is famous for helping to turn the tide of history in the late 16th century, when witchcraft accusations were at their height in England, and across Europe. He was present himself at several witchcraft trials, and so was fully aware of the prejudices that brought mainly older women to court, often fuelled by a spirit of revenge. His book did not bring these trials to an end, but it was certainly read widely, and persuaded magistrates to deal more fairly and objectively with the complaints before them. As the 17th century progressed, so did the march of science, and that of medicine – the latter being advanced of course by another son of East Kent, William Harvey, who was certainly also a witchcraft sceptic. Elsewhere in the world such superstitious ideas have still not been entirely eradicated. As a missionary in Malawi in the early years of the present century, I can testify that the country’s label as “the witchcraft heart of Africa” was certainly justified!

Scot published his vast tome *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* in 1584, and it went through several editions in the course of the next 100 years – despite its condemnation by James I, who ordered every copy of it to be seized and then burnt by the public hangman. (James, it should be explained, had earlier had a very rough crossing of the North Sea for which he could find no explanation other than seeing it as a deliberate plot against him that harnessed the powers of dark magic. *Sometimes one does wonder if weather forecasters today are missing a trick or two?*).

Here is the introduction to a later (1691) edition of Scot’s book:

“Reynolde [**Reginald**] Scot, a younger Son of Sir *John Scot* of *Scots-hall*, near to *Smeeth* in *Kent*, by his Wife, Daughter of *Reynolde Pimp* of *Pimps-court* Knight, was born in that County, and at about 17 years of age was sent to *Oxon*, particularly, as it seems, to *Hart* hall, where several of his Country-men and name studied in the latter end of *K. Hen. 8.* and in the Reign of *Ed. 6.* &c. Afterwards he retired to his native Country without the honour of a degree, and settled at *Smeeth*, where he found great encouragement in his studies from his kinsman Sir *Thos. Scot*. About which time taking to him a Wife, he gave himself up solely to solid reading, to the perusing of obscure authors that had by the generality of Scholars been neglected, and at times of leisure to husbandry and gardening, as it may partly appear from these books following.

“**A perfect platform of a Hop-garden**, and necessary instructions for the making and maintenance thereof, with notes and rules for reformation of all abuses.” [1573]

“**The discovery of Witchcraft**; wherein the leud dealing of Witches, and Witchmongers is notably detected, the knavery of Conjurers, the impiety of Inchantors, the folly of Southsayers, &c. With many other things are opened, which have long been hidden, howbeit very necessary to be known.” [1584]

“**Discourse upon Devils and Spirits**.—In this, and the former, both printed together, it plainly appears that the author was very well versed in many choice books, and that his search into them was so profound, that nothing slip’d his Pen that might make for his purpose. Further also in the

said *Discovery* and *Discourse*, though he holds that Witches are not such that were in his time and before, commonly executed for Witches; or that Witches were, or are not; yet they, which were written for the instruction of all Judges and Justices of that age, (being the first of that nature that were published in the Mother tongue,) did for a time make great impressions in the Magistracy and Clergy, tho afterwards condemned by *James King of Scots. 1597* ... and by several others since, among whom was *Rich. Bernard of Batcomb*, in his Epist. Ded. before his *Guide to Grand Jurymen, &c.* .”



Scot's Hall, Smeeth
demolished in 1803



St Mary's, Brabourne
where Reginald married & is buried

Scot's book has four dedications – to Sir Roger Manwood, baron of the exchequer, to his cousin, Sir Thomas Scot, a third jointly to John Coldwell, dean of Rochester (later, bishop of Salisbury), and William Redman, archdeacon of Canterbury (later, bishop of Norwich), and a fourth ‘to the readers.’ Its vast bibliography lists 200+ works in Latin (some translated from Greek or Arabic) and 20+ in English.

He aimed to prove that the belief in witchcraft was rejected both by reason and by true religion, and that many “spiritual” manifestations were either impostures or mental illusions fostered in their observers. He considered that much superstition had emanated from customs and teaching in the Roman Catholic Church; but agreed with the views of two liberal Catholics, Cornelius Agrippa (d.1535) and Johann Weyer (d.1588). His task was performed so thoroughly that the work became a vast encyclopædia about witchcraft, spirits, alchemy and magic.

He did, however, retain some misconceptions regarding medicine (e.g. he believed in the medicinal value of the unicorn's horn) and had great faith in the practice of astrology.

Bringing some clarity of rational thought to the subject of witchcraft, he wanted to protect those commonly accused of sorcery from persecution. Most were women, he observed, who were ‘... *commonly old and whose cheefe fault is that they are scolds*’. He explained how ‘*in tract of time the witch waxeth odious and tedious to hir neighbors; and they againe are despised and despited of hir: so as sometimes she cursseth one, and sometimes another; and that from the maister of the house, his wife, children, cattell &c. to the little pig that lieth in the stie ... Doubtlesse (at length) some of hir neighbors die, or fall sicke; or some of their children are visited with diseases that vex them strangelie: ... Which by ignorant parents are supposed to be vengeance of witches.*’

Scot listed the charges commonly brought against suspected witches:

They denie God, and all religion.

They curse, blaspheme, and provoke God with all despite.

They give their faith to the divell, and they worship and offer sacrifice unto him.

They doo solemnelie vow and promise all their progenie unto the divell.

They sacrifice their owne children to the divell before baptisme, holding them up in the aire unto him, and then thrust a needle into their braines.

They burne their children when they have sacrificed them.

They sweare to the divell to bring as manie into that societie as they can.

They sweare by the name of the divell.

They use incestuous adulterie with spirits.

They boile infants (after they have murthered them unbaptised) untill their flesh be made potable.

They eate the flesh and drinke the bloud of men and children openlie.

They kill men with poison.

They kill mens cattell.

They bewitch mens corne, and bring hunger and barrennes into the countrie; they ride and flie in the aire, bring stormes, make tempests, &c.

They use venerie with a divell called *Incubus*, even when they lie in bed with their husbands, and have children by them, which become the best witches.

(From *Discoverie*

Book II chapter 9

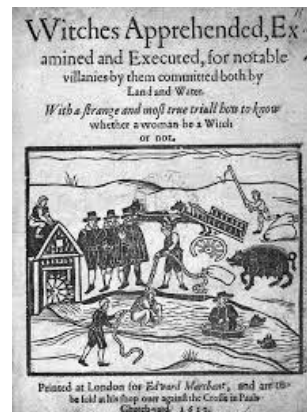
As well as the charge of ‘**mischief following anger**’, there were other ways witches were identified at trial. One was the presence of ‘**witch marks**’, a mark supposed to have been put on a woman’s body by the Devil. Witches were also said to have ‘**familiars**’, demonic creatures which might appear to be cats, dogs, mice, rats or other small animals; these familiars would do the witches’ bidding. Another claim was ‘**recovery after counter magic**’: if someone was unwell and a spell helped them recover, this was seen as evidence that the original illness was caused by witchcraft.

Water was another commonly used means of determining whether women were witches: water was seen as inherently pure, so a **suspected witch would be tied up and flung in a pond**. If the suspect sank (and possibly drowned if hands and legs had been bound, even though a rope was tied to haul her out), the water ‘accepted’ her and therefore she was not a witch; but if she floated, the water ‘rejected’ her and she was presumed a witch.

Another way to prove someone was a witch was to **extract confessions**; but of course, in fear of their lives and sometimes under **torture** (e.g. using thumb screws or heated leg-irons), there were those who confessed falsely and also named others as witches.



An extant ducking chair, by the river Stour in Canterbury



But chairs were uncommon!

Scot’s advice on the proper way to examine suspected witches

“These [*suspected*] are such as take upon them to give oracles, to tell where things lost are become, and finallie to appeach others of mischeefs, which they themselves most commonlie have brought to passe: whereby many times they overthrowe the good fame of honest women, and of such others of their neighbors, with whome they are displeased ... Letting passe a hundred cousenages that I could recite at this time, I will begin with a true storie of a wench, practising hir diabolically witchcraft, and ventriloquie An. **1574 at Westwell in Kent**, within six miles where I dwell, taken and noted by [*several persons of good reputation*]. **Mildred, the base daughter of Alice Norrington**, and now servant to *William Sponer* of *Westwell* in the countie of *Kent*,

being of the age of seventene yeares, was possessed with sathan in the night and daie aforesaid. About two of the clocke in the afternoone of the same day, there came to the same *Sponers* house *Roger Newman* minister of *Westwell*, *John Brainford* minister of *Kenington*, with others, whose names are underwritten, who made their praiers unto God, to assist them in that needfull case; and then commanded sathan in the name of the eternall God, and of his sonne *Jesus Christ*, to speake with such a voice as they might understand, and to declare from whence he came. But he would not speake, but rored and cried mightilie. And though we did command him manie times ... yet he would not: untill he had gon through all his delaies, as roring, crieng, striving, and gnashing of teeth; and otherwhile with mowing, and other terrible countenances, and was so strong in the maid, that foure men could scarce hold hir downe. And this continued by the space almost of two houres. But to make short worke ... she was convented before *M. Thomas Wotton* of *Bocton Malherbe*, a man of great worship and wisdom ... through whose discreet handling of the matter, with the assistance & aid of *M. George Darrell*. esquire, being also a right good and discreet Justice ... The Pythonist of west-well convicted by hir owne confession the fraud was found, the coosenage confessed, and she received condigne punishment. **Neither was hir confession woone, according to the forme of the Spanish inquisition; to wit, through extremitie of tortures, nor yet by guile or flatterie, nor by presumptions; but through wise and perfect triall of everie circumstance ...** but after due triall she shewed hir feats, illusions, and trances ... [*evidently directed at her mother Alice, whom she hated*].

(From *Discoverie* Book VII chapters 1,2

The needful qualities in any proper examination, according to Scot, are seen therefore as wisdom, discretion and patience. Here the 17 year old Mildred's extraordinary behaviour was discovered to lie in her terrible relationship with her mother Alice, rather than in any secret pact with Satan. (*Mr Darrell, incidentally, may well have been a Darrell of Calehill Manor near Little Chart - the house itself was demolished in the 1950s after having been effectively trashed by the troops who occupied it during WW2. The better known members of the same family owned Scotney Castle for many years.*)



In later sections of his book, Scot describes a range of conjuring tricks, complete with diagrams of useful kit:

The art of juggling discovered, and in what points it dooth principallie consist.

To make a little ball swell in your hand till it be verie great.

To throwe a peece of monie awaie, and to find it againe where you list.

To eate a knife, and to fetch it out of anie other place.

To thrust a bodkin into your head without hurt.

To thrust a peece of lead into one eie, and to drive it about (with a sticke) betweene the skin and flesh of the forehead, untill it be brought to the other eie, and there thrust out.

To cut halfe your nose asunder, and to heale it againe presentlie without anie salve.

*To cut off ones head, and to laie it in a platter, &c: which the jugglers call the decollation of *John Baptist*.*

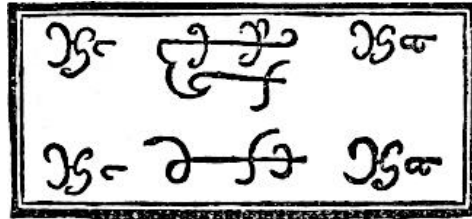
To drawe a cord through your nose, mouth or hand, so sensiblie as is woonderful to see.

(And many more in similar vein ...

Scot also exposes fanciful nonsense!

To know of treasure hidden in the earth

RITE in paper these characters following on the saturdaye, in the houre of Ɔ, and laie it where thou thinkest treasure to be: if there be anie, the paper will burne, else not. And these be the characters.



This would be much practised if it were not a cousening knacke

The reception of Scot's 'Discoverie'

Scot's book certainly made a great impression upon the magistracy and the clergy; there is evidence too that its arguments gained purchase among the *educated* laity. But even members of the educated classes remained slow to accept the full implications of his thesis, so **Scot's position remained that of a minority within the country.**

Many contemporaries regarded it as tantamount to atheism to deny the reality of spirits or the possibility of supernatural intervention in daily affairs. What continued to influence judges and jurymen was not a denial of the possibility of witchcraft as such, but a *heightened sense* of the difficulty of proving it to be at work in any particular case: it might be *an act of God*; it might be *the direct work of the Devil*; it might be *the result of some imposture*; or it might have *purely natural causes*. All these other possibilities were to be investigated carefully before a witchcraft accusation was levied. Even then, *how could one know for certain the identity of the witch?*

Familiar "remedies" continued to gain the popular vote

"Witchcraft is in truth a cousening art, wherin the name of God is abused, prophaned and blasphemed, and his power attributed to a vile creature. In estimation of the Vulgar people it is a supernaturall worke, contrived betweene a Corporall old woman and a spirituall divell. The maner thereof is so secret, mysticall and strange, that to this daie there hath never beene any credible witnes thereof. **It is incomprehensible to the wise, learned or faithfull, a probable matter to children, fooles, melancholike persons and papists**".

(From *Discoverie* Book XVI chapter 2)

RODNEY SCHOFIELD

ARCHAEOLOGY IN WYE

The main activity of the 'Dig for History initiative was on four Saturdays when we hosted several members of the Shorne Archaeology Group from near Gravesend with their equipment for soil resistivity surveys. Our first survey on the Churchfield Green yielded some possible signals near the diagonal path, which could not be confirmed by augering because of subsoil flints. It also showed what is believed to be the site of the wartime Observer Corps hut with its protective blast bank. There is a probable indication of where the aerial land mine landed on 18 January, 1943, which blew out the west window of the church, so splendidly replaced in 1947.

The Parish Council would allow the indications to be followed up by small temporary exploratory trenches, but this is for the future. However, a piece of Roman pottery has been found in a garden near the junction of Churchfield Way and Abbots Walk This has been identified as a rim fragment of a 'Belgic' jar of the first century A.D.

The central settlement of Roman Wye seems to have been roughly coterminous with the Churchfield estate, within which there have been four finds of coins, two of tiles and two of pottery. The coins range in date from the first to the fourth century,

Two Saturdays were spent on surveys in the large arable field belonging to Harville Farm between the railway and the river. Just below the railway is the probable site of the main residential villa of Roman Wye, partially excavated in 1973. The remains are much degraded by soil erosion. I have photographed a complete third century bowl from it which is in Ashford Museum. But we investigated a group of riverside buildings, of which two were known, and we found two more. It is a project for the future to seek evidence whether the Stour was navigable to this point before it was interrupted by water mills and weirs and depleted by pumping from aquifers. Dredging the river here in the 1990s brought up hundreds of pieces of Roman pottery.

One Saturday was spent on the site of the lost village of Bruneford, half a mile south of Wye, where the Roman belt buckle and dagger were found. The survey found the remains of the White House farmstead, demolished in the nineteenth century, and faint traces, probably of long lost wooden buildings. Only excavation would show if they are Roman or medieval.

Dr. Steven Willis, an archaeologist on the staff of the University of Kent, is planning to investigate Roman Wye, with the help of some of his students, and I am seeking to facilitate necessary permissions. Meantime I have drafted a paper on 'Wye as a Roman villa estate'. I am grateful for the book on Roman agricultural buildings given by Wye Historical Society. I think one of the Harville riverside buildings is a grain store incorporating a grain drier with a furnace at one end, and that one of the others may be a brewery. How about that?

PAUL BURNHAM.