**Witchcraft in Exeter:**

**The Cases of Bridget Wotton and Margaret Nightingale**

Over the last few years, I have published transcripts of several original documents relating to the prosecution of supposed ‘witches’ in Exeter between 1563 and 1627 in *DCNQ*; all of them drawn from the records of the city’s quarter sessions court. None of these documents had appeared in print before, and most of them had been unknown to previous historians. The cases of alleged witchcraft which were heard by the city magistrates during the Civil War and Interregnum periods are a good deal better known, however, and accounts of those cases have appeared in several previous works.[[1]](#endnote-1) Rather than providing readers of *DCNQ* with transcripts of the witch-related documents which were drawn up by the officials of the city court during the 1640s and 1650s, therefore, I felt that it might be more helpful to offer copies of some documents relating to the cases which were brought before the JPs during the post-Restoration period: cases which have, again, languished in comparative obscurity hitherto, but which are full of vivid detail. The present article highlights the cases of two Exeter women who were accused of witchcraft at the very start of Charles II’s reign, during the years 1660-61. In a subsequent piece, I hope to turn my attention to several other female residents of the city who were denounced as witches later in that same decade.

The first set of depositions which is reproduced below relates to Bridget Wotton, of Exeter, widow, who, within six weeks of Charles II’s accession to the throne, found herself accused of having bewitched Margaret Lake, the wife of John Lake of St David’s, weaver, causing her to fall gravely ill.[[2]](#endnote-2) On 19 July 1660 a man and four women came forward to inform the justices of the dramatic scenes which they had seen enacted at the sick woman’s bedside earlier that day. The man, John Deeble, admitted ‘that hee together with another person’ - perhaps John Lake - had attempted ‘to carry the said Bridgett Wotton upp’ into Margaret’s Lake’s bed-chamber, but that he had been unable to do so, while one of the female witnesses, Margaret Smyth, testified that she had seen John Lake ‘desire the foresaid Bridgett Wotton to come into his house to see his wife, [she] lying extreme sicke’.[[3]](#endnote-3) The evidence of Deeble and Smyth suggests that John Lake, already convinced that Wotton had bewitched his wife, had decided to force her to confront her supposed ‘victim’ face-to-face: presumably in the hope that his wife would be able to recognise, and denounce, her occult tormentor.[[4]](#endnote-4) This is certainly what appeared to eyewitnesses to happen next, for Smyth went on to testify that, the moment that Wotton appeared in the sick woman’s bedchamber, Margaret Lake ‘did p[re]sently leepe upp in the bedd neere halfe A yard high Crying & screeching out and not able to speake, and the said … Wotton being afterwards forced to goe to the Bedside & touching the said … Lakes wifes hand, shee then p[re]sently cryd out againe very vehemently, lying still in the same Condicion’.

The other three witnesses, Elizabeth Staplyn, Susanna Arundell and Mary Weekes - all of whom appear to have been present in Lake’s bed-chamber at the time that Wotton was ‘forced’ to approach the sick woman - told much the same story. Nor were these the only charges of alleged *maleficia* to be laid at Bridgett Wotton’s door, because - on the same day that the five individuals whom we have already met informed the magistrates of the disturbing scenes which they had just witnessed at the Lakes’ house - another woman, Elizabeth Minterne, came forward to allege that Wotton had deployed ‘familiar spirits’, or attendant demons, in the shape of toads, both to cripple Minterne’s mother and to kill a pig in North Street some twelve years before. Having heard these alarming testimonies, the mayor and the other justices who had examined the witnesses clearly felt that Wotton’s activities warranted further investigation; accordingly, they directed that she should be ‘delivered unto Bayle to appeare att the next Sessions & Gaole deliv[er]ye … to answer &c’.[[5]](#endnote-5) Two local men were found to stand as sureties for Wotton - that is to say, to pledge themselves in the substantial sum of £90 that she would, indeed, make her appearance at the next sitting of the sessions court - and she was released on bail soon afterwards.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Margaret Lake may well have been dismayed to hear that the woman whom she believed to have ‘ill-wished’ her had not been committed to prison but had instead remained at liberty, for six days later she rose from her sick-bed and herself appeared before the mayor in order to provide further testimony against Wotton. Like so many alleged victims of witchcraft, Lake was convinced that her misfortunes had stemmed from her reluctance to accede to the requests of an importunate neighbour. She began by declaring that she had first fallen ill ‘about two yeares since’, after she had refused to lend Wotton a ‘baskett of charcoales’, at her mother’s house in St Pauls parish, at which Wotton, ‘conceiving some displeasure against her, went away grud[g]inge & discontented, saying “Will you not? Will you not?”. Lake clearly took these muttered words to be a veiled threat of revenge through occult means, and from this moment onwards, she deposed, her health had begun to go downhill. Nor was this all, she went on, for she had also been terrified by apparitions of the woman whom she believed to have bewitched her, which had appeared ‘in a corner of … [her] chamber’ as she lay sick in bed: both at her mother’s house and at her husband’s house in St Davids. It was evidently Lake’s anguished claims that she could see ‘the p[er]son or shape of the said Brigett’ in her bedchamber on 18 July which had convinced her husband to go in search of the alleged witch - a decision which had led up, in turn, to the dramatic confrontation between the two women on the following day.

Margaret Lake concluded her testimony by declaring that ‘verie often, before the said Brigetts late binding over to aunsweare for her offence, [she had] found seemingly some creeping thing to creepe upp & downe her bodie on the inside of her skin, much afflicting her’. These words provide us with an unsettling insight into the gruesome ways in which individuals could experience the physical symptoms of supposed bewitchment. It is worth noting too, that, Lake’s assertion that she had only suffered from these bizarre sensations **before** Wotton had been bound over to appear at the next sessions bears witness to the contemporary belief that, once a ‘witch’ had been delated to the magistrates, the attendant demons through which she had previously exercised her dark powers would desert her, even if she had not yet been imprisoned or tried.[[7]](#endnote-7) From Lake’s point of view, this was just as well, because - for reasons which remain unclear - some nine months were to elapse before Wotton was eventually summoned to appear in court. During the intervening period, she evidently remained at large in the city and continued to attract the opprobrium of local people, because, in January 1661, the widow herself came forward to the JPs to complain ‘that she is afraid that Alice Follet, the wife of Josias Follett, of this Cittie, tayler, will beate, mayhem [i.e. maim] or kill her, or doe her some other bodilie hurte’. The justices responded to this plea by binding over Follet, too, and by warning her to be of good behaviour towards Wotton until the next sessions.[[8]](#endnote-8)

In April 1661 the city magistrates finally prepared to try Wotton’s case. On 5 April, John Lake entered into a legal obligation to ensure that four of the women who had told their stories to the magistrates during the previous summer - Alice Blagdon, Margaret Smyth, Susanna Arundell and Maria Weekes - should appear in person at the next sitting of the sessions court in order to give evidence against Bridgett Wotton ‘*in causa Magia voc[atas]* Witchcrafte’.[[9]](#endnote-9) Two days later the Easter sessions were held as usual at Exeter’s Guildhall, and a formal indictment was drawn up against Wotton; this document is transcribed and translated below. As the indictment shows, those who compiled the charge against Wotton eventually decided not to pursue the case of her alleged occult attacks in North Street during the 1640s, and to concentrate on the much more recent ‘bewitchment’ of Margaret Lake instead. The indictment charged Wotton with having afflicted Lake in all her limbs through the exercise of ‘witchcraft, charms, inchantments and sorceries’, and the charges were sworn to by an impressive number of witnesses, including John and Margaret Lake themselves, five of the six women who had originally come forward in July 1660, and four more women as well: Ruth Jewell, Agnes Keiffe, Edith Dawton, and Katherine Somerton. The grand jurors who initially considered the evidence brought against Wotton clearly felt that her case warranted a formal trial, for they declared the bill of indictment to be ‘a true bill’. The fact that the document was subsequently endorsed ‘*non cul[pabalis*]’, however, reveals that Wotton was eventually found not guilty - either by the trial jury, by the judge, or possibly by both - and therefore that - like most people accused of *maleficia* in the post-Restoration era, a period during which judicial scepticism about the possibility of proving the supposed crime of witchcraft was steadily continuing to grow - she escaped with her life.

In his important study of witch-hunting and politics in early modern England, published in 2016, Peter Elmer has raised the possibility that the accusations which were levelled against Wotton should be viewed, at least in part, as the product of ‘sectarian tensions’ in Exeter: as an attempt by local puritans and nonconformists - among whom, as he shows, both the wealthy Deeble family and the more humble Lakes were surely numbered - to re-assert their own politico-religious principles in the city following the collapse of the English Republic and the Restoration of the monarchy.[[10]](#endnote-10) If this was indeed the case, and if - to build on Elmer’s insight - what we now know to have been Wotton’s eventual acquittal may be said to have represented a reverse for Exeter’s (witch-fearing?) puritan/nonconformist faction, and a fillip for their (more sceptical?) Cavalier/ Anglican opponents, then a similar dynamic may conceivably have been playing out in the interstices of the second witch-case to surface among the city sessions records during the first two years of Charles II’s reign. This was the case of Margaret Nightingale, another widow, who was denounced to the JPs as a witch in June 1661.

The depositions which were made against Nightingale by William Knowsley, a baker of Holy Trinity parish, and his wife, Marie, appear in the third document transcribed below. As these sad testimonies reveal, the Knowsleys had a six-week old baby who suffered from fits: terrifying episodes which, so William had been advised by a neighbour, could only be the result of a malefic spell. As Margaret Nightingale had happened to be in the Knowsleys’ house when the baby’s distressing symptoms first appeared, and as the worried parents knew that she already possessed a dark reputation - having been ‘convicted for witchcrafts & inchantments’ at some previous, unspecified, time - they had at once put two and two together and concluded that the widow must have bewitched their child. Soon after he had testified before the JPs, William entered into a bond to guarantee that he and his wife would appear at the next sessions to give evidence against Nightingale, and on 30 September 1661 her trial took place at the Guildhall.[[11]](#endnote-11)

The formal indictment which was drawn up against Margaret Nightingale still survives, as does the list of the jurors who sat at her trial; a transcription and translation of the indictment appears below.[[12]](#endnote-12) From it we learn, first, that the infant whom Nightingale was alleged to have bewitched was the Knowsleys’ daughter, Marie - here described as just a month old at the time when she initially fell ill - and second that the afflicted girl had died on 8 July, thus turning what had originally been a charge of causing bodily harm through witchcraft into one of committing murder through the same dark art. Once again, the grand jurors decided that there was a case to answer, and, once again, several witnesses appeared to give evidence against the alleged witch at the resultant trial: including not only the Knowsleys themselves but also two women, possibly neighbours of theirs, named Sarah Gladon and Johan Moodie.[[13]](#endnote-13) (An erased reference to ‘William Nightingale’ on the back of the indictment suggests that it had originally been intended that one of the widow’s own relatives should testify against her, but that, for whatever reason, he had not appeared). Once again, however, the evidence presented in court against the alleged ‘witch’ was eventually found insufficient to result in her conviction, for Nightingale’s indictment, like that of Wotton before her, was subsequently endorsed ‘*non cul[pabalis]*’ and she therefore went free.[[14]](#endnote-14)

There is a curious footnote to Nightingale’s story, moreover, one which - as has already been observed - hints that, in her case, just as in that of Wotton, powerful politico-religious cross-currents may conceivably have been tugging beneath the surface of what at first sight seems to be a relatively ‘straightforward’ witch-prosecution. Following the restoration of Charles II in 1660, representations had been made to the new regime on behalf of the thousands of former Royalist soldiers who had been wounded during the Civil Wars, and who had fallen into destitution as a result. These pleas had fallen on receptive ears, and an Act of Parliament had therefore been passed in 1662 ‘for the reliefe of [such] poore and maimed … souldiers who have faithfully served His Majesty and His Royal Father in the late Wars’.[[15]](#endnote-15) The Act laid down that money to provide distressed ex-Royalist soldiers with yearly pensions should be raised on a county basis, and that the JPs of each county should be responsible for determining which of the claimants who appeared before them merited, or did not merit, a pension.[[16]](#endnote-16) In addition, the act provided for further, unspecified, payments to be made by the JPs ‘from time to time’, as they saw fit, for the ‘reliefe’ of the widows and orphans of men who had died in the king’s service; such payments were to be drawn from the ‘surplusage’, should any exist, of the monies raised for the maimed soldiers’ pensions.[[17]](#endnote-17) This Act applied to the city and county of Exeter, of course, just as it applied to every other county in England and Wales. At the general sessions of the peace held at the Guildhall on 7 April 1662, therefore, the city magistrates drew up a list of twelve ‘maymed souldiers and souldiers widows’ resident in the city, each of whom were henceforth to receive a yearly pension. Remarkably, one of the names which appeared on this list was that of ‘Margarett Knightingall, wid[ow]’, whose husband, the clerk of the court observed in a marginal note, had been ‘slayne’ in the king’s service and who was therefore granted the considerable pension of £2 *per annum*.[[18]](#endnote-18)

There must have been dozens of ex-Royalist soldiers’ widows living in Exeter in 1662. Bearing this in mind, it seems highly unlikely that Margaret Nightingale - a woman who, if we believe Knowsley’s earlier testimony, had already been convicted once for witchcraft, and who had narrowly escaped conviction on precisely the same charge at the sessions court just six months before - would have been universally regarded by Exonians as the most obviously deserving candidate in the city for a widow’s pension. The city magistrates’ decision to award Nightingale a regular pension - as opposed to the one-off gratuity with which ex-Royalist soldiers’ widows usually had to be content - seems all the more remarkable, moreover, when we note that only one other Exeter woman was awarded such a pension in 1662 - and, indeed, that only three Exeter soldiers’ widows in total were awarded a pension over the entire thirty-eight year period between 1662 and 1700.[[19]](#endnote-19) Was this, then, a case of a former Royalist soldier’s wife first being targeted as a ‘witch’ by local puritans/nonconformists, and then, after her triumphant acquittal, being pointedly picked out for special favour by Cavalier/Anglican figures among the city’s ruling elite? We will probably never know - but we can be certain that Margaret did not live to enjoy her pension for long. When the next list of maimed soldiers and widows was drawn up, in April 1663, it again included the name ‘Margarett Knightingall’, but at some subsequent point that name was crossed out and the single, ominous word ‘mort’ was written beside it.[[20]](#endnote-20) In January 1664, moreover, the magistrates sitting at the sessions court ordered ‘that John Browning of this Citty weaver shall have the pencion for maymed souldiers that was formerlie paid to Margarett Knightingall, deceased’, making it impossible to doubt that the widow was now dead.[[21]](#endnote-21) The place of her burial has not yet been ascertained, but when Margaret finally went to her grave, many Exeter people must have noted her passing: not only as a soldier’s widow in receipt of a coveted civic pension - but also as a reputed witch.[[22]](#endnote-22)

*I – The depositions of July 1660*

‘The informac[i]on of Elizabeth Minterne wife of [blank] Minterne of this Citty taken before Chr[istopher] Clarke Esq, Maior, Richard Sweete Ralph Herman and Nicho[las] Brooking Es[quir]es, Justices &c the 19th day of July 1660:

Who being examined uppon her oath sayeth that about 12: yeares since this Exa[m]in[an]ts mother named Charity Cozens, wife of Nicholas Cozens of this Citty Cordwyn[er], did see Bridgett Wotton widowe to take upp something in the streete w[hi]ch shee said was A Litle Bird but this Exa[m]in[an]ts said mother said she beleived it was A Toade and [Wotton] cast the same into Alice Blagdons piggs Trough and imediatly her pigg then feeding att the Trough was taken Madd w[i]th A wrey neck & tumbling upp & downe on his head from the said Blagdons house to Northgate & dyed. And sayeth farther that sometyme before that, the said Bridgett Wotton com[m]ing into this Exa[m]in[an]ts fathers house in Northgatesteete aforesaid, there came p[re]sently after her A Toade into the house, and that it was as much as three people could doe to gett it to the fire to burne it, whereatt the said Bridgett takeinge notice said it was but A Litle frogg. And this depon[ent] further sayeth that longe after her said mother was taken in A very sadd Condic[i]on & Lampst [i.e. lamed] in all her Limbes and soe hath layen ever since not able to help herselfe.

Alice Blagdon, wife of Thomas Blagdon of this Citty Blacksmith, uppon her oath sayeth that her pigg was taken in that manner & dyed as the said Elizabeth Minterne hath before related. And more sayeth not.

Margarett Smyth, wife of Thomas Smyth of this Citty worstedcom[ber], uppon her oath alsoe sayeth that this p[re]sent day John Lake A weaver[[23]](#endnote-23) did in this inform[an]ts hearing desire the foresaid Bridgett Wotton to come into his house to see his [~~hi~~] wife lying extreame sicke, who com[m]ing upp to the higher staire of the Chamber where the said Lakes wife lay in bedd, the said Lakes wife did p[re]sently leepe upp in the bedd neere halfe A yard high Crying & screeching out and not able to speake, and the said Bridgett Wotton being afterwards forced to goe to the Bedside & touching the said Lakes wifes hand, shee then p[re]sently cryed out againe very vehemently, lying still in the same Condic[i]on.

Elizabeth Staplyn widd[ow] and Susanna Arrundell, wife of John Arrundell of this Cittie worstedcom[ber] doe alsoe informe that, before the said Bridgett Wotton came upp into the Chamber, the said Lakes wife lay still in bedd, but as soone as the said Bridgett Wotton came upp to the staire head the said Lakes wife p[re]sently heaved upp her belly neere 3 quarters of A yard high from the bedd, crying & screeching out & her mouth drawne aside in the [word illegible or deleted] first pull or fitt.

Mary Weekes wife of Nicholas Weekes affirmeth the informac[i]on of the foresaid Elizabeth Staplyn & Susanna Arrundell to bee true.

John Deeble, sonne of Mr Walter Deeble, alsoe informeth that hee togeather with another p[er]son endeavored what they could to carry the said Bridgett Wotton upp into the Chamber yet could not, but afterwards shee went upp of her owne accord and com[m]ing upp to the staire head Lakes wife p[re]sently cryed out, raising upp her body from the bedd halfe A yard high.

M[emoran]d[um]: None of these witnesses are yet bound over to give evidence’.

[Source: Devon Heritage Centre [hereafter: DHC], Exeter City Archives [hereafter: ECA], Exeter Quarter Sessions Order Book [hereafter: EQSOB], 65 (1660-1670), ff.1r-2]

‘Before Christopher Clarke Esq[uir]e Maior &c the xxvth daie of July 1660.

Margarett Lake the wife of John Lake Weaver informeth uppon her oath that aboute two yeares since Brigett Wotton of this Citty widd[ow] came to this informants mothers house in Pauls parishe to borrowe a baskett of Charcoales, this informant then aunsweared her she could not Lend the same without the consent of her mother, whereuppon the said Brigett conceivinge some displeasure against her went awaie grud[g]inge & discontented, sayinge will you not, will you not, & since that tyme this informant hath found much distemperature in her bodilie health, and hath alsoe conceived that she hath seene the person of the said Brigett in a corner of this informants mothers Chamber where she this informant then laie sicke, and on Wednesdaie last the xviiith of this moneth this informant beinge in her bed sicke in her husbands house in Davids parishe she thought then to have againe seene the p[er]son or shape of the said Brigett caryinge a round tub under her arme & a wad uppon her head & hath verie often before the said Brigetts late bindinge over to aunsweare for her said offence found seemingly some creepinge thing to creepe upp & downe her bodie on the inside of her skin much afflicting her’.

[Source: DHC, ECA, EQSOB, 65, f.3r]

*II – The Indictment of April 1661*

1 - Transcription of the original indictment.

‘Civitas Exon: Jur[ati] p[ro] d[omi]no Rege sup[er] sacr[amentu]m suum p[re]sentant q[uo]d Bridgetta Wootton, nup[er] de Civit[ate] Exon’ in Com[itatu] Civit[atis] Exon’ p[re]dict[e] vidua decimo nono die Julii Anno regni d[omi]ni n[ost]ri Caroli s[e]c[un]di dei gra[tia] Anglie Scotie Francie et Hib[er]nie Regis fidei defensoris &c duodecimo, deum pre occulis suis non h[ab]ens sed instigac[i]one diabolica seduct[a] ex malicia sua p[re]cogitat’ quasdam malas & diabolicas artes Anglice vocat[as] *witchcrafte, inchauntments, Charmes & sorceries* nequiter diabolice & felonice practizavit usa fuit et exercuit in & sup[er] quandam Margaretam Lake ux[or]em Joh[ann]is Lake nup[er] de parochia S[anc]ti David in Com[itatu] Civit[atis] Exon’ p[re]dict’ textoris ea intenc[i]one ad spoliand’ devastand’ & distruend’ usum membror[um] d[i]c[t]e Margarete Lake, Quar[um] quidem diabolicar[um] arti[um] p[re]textu p[re]d[i]c[t]a Margareta Lake adtunc & ib[ide]m in toto corpore suo devast’ consumpt’ et stupid’ fact’ fuit contra pacem d[i]c[t]i d[omi]ni Regis nunc Cornonam & dignitatem suas &c Necnon contra formam Statut[i] in hu[ius]mod[i] casu nup[er] edit[i] et p[ro]vis[i] &c’.

[In the margin of the indictment:] ‘1. Jac. 12’.

[At the bottom left hand corner:] ‘fo.1’

[At the bottom right hand corner:] ‘Izaacke’.

[Subsequently endorsed:] ‘po[nit] se non cul[pabalis]’.

[On the reverse of the indictment:] ‘John Lake, Margarett his wife, Margarett Smyth, Mary Weekes, Susan Arrundell, Alice Blagdon, Elizabeth Staplyn: Sw[orn]; Ruth Jewell, Agnes Keiffe: Sw[orn]; Edeth Dawton; Katherin Somerton Sw[orn]’.

[Endorsed:] ‘Billa Vera’.

2 - Translation:

‘City of Exeter: The jurors for our lord the king present on their oath that Bridget Wootton, formerly of the county and city of Exeter aforesaid, did, on the nineteenth day of July in the twelfth year of the reign of our lord Charles the second, by the grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, defender of the faith, not having the fear of God before her eyes, but being moved and seduced by the instigation of the devil, and by her own premeditated wickedness, wickedly, diabolically and feloniously make use of certain wicked and diabolical arts, called in English ‘witchcrafte, inchauntments, Charmes & sorceries’ in and upon one Margaret Lake, the wife of John Lake, formerly of the parish of St Davids in the county and city of Exeter aforesaid, weaver, with the intention of spoiling, devastating and destroying the limbs of the foresaid Margaret Lake, by means of which diabolic arts the foresaid Margaret Lake was then and there in all of her body devastated, consumed and stupefied, contrary to the peace of our lord the king, his crown and dignity, and contrary to the Statute in such cases proclaimed and provided’.

[Margin:] ‘1. Jac. 12’.

[At foot of page:] ‘[see the depositions in] fo[lio].1 [of the order book]’

[Signed:] ‘Izaacke’.

[Endorsed:] ‘[She] pleads not guilty; [she is found] not guilty’.

[On the reverse of the indictment:]

[Prosecuted by] ‘John Lake, Margarett his wife, Margarett Smyth, Mary Weekes, Susan Arrundell, Alice Blagdon, Elizabeth Staplyn: Sw[orn]; Ruth Jewell, Agnes Keiffe: Sw[orn]; Edeth Dawton; Katherin Somerton Sw[orn]’.

[Endorsed:] ‘We find this to be a true bill’.

[Source: DHC, ECA, Exeter Quarter Sessions Rolls [hereafter: EQSR] 6 April 13 Charles II (1661)]

*III – The depositions of 27 June 1661*

‘Coram Cristofero Lethbridge Ar[miger] Maior &c 27 die Junii 1661

William Knowsley of the Cittie of Exeter Baker deposeth that on Tuesdaie last was Fortnight this Inform[an]ts childe being aboute sixe weekes olde was violently taken in fitts, and this deponent was informed that the said childe was bewitched by some p[er]son, and this inform[an]t saieth that when his childe was soe taken the first time one Margaret Knightingall of the said Cittie, widowe, was then in his house who hath beene formerlie convicted for witchcrafts & inchantments and this inform[an]t verilie beleiveth that the said Margarett Knightingall did practice on his childe & is cause of its distemper and that the childe hath beene taken in such fitts since att the sight of the said Margaret Knightingall.

Marie Knowsley the wife of the said William Knowsley informeth that the deposic[i]on of the said William Knowsley is true’. [Margin – ‘*Com[mitted*]’]

[Source: DHC, ECA, EQSOB, 65, f. 35]

*IV – The Indictment of September 1661*

1 - Transcription of the original indictment.

‘Civitas Exon SS: Jur[ati] p[ro] d[omi]no Rege sup[er] sacr[ament]um suum p[re]sentant quod Margareta Nightingall nup[er] de Civitat[e] Exon’ in Com[itatu] Civit[atis] p[re]dicte vidua undecimo die Junii Anno Regni d[omi]ni n[ost]ri Caroli s[e]c[un]di dei gra[tia] Anglie, Scotie, Francie & Hib[er]nie Regis fidei defensor[is] &c t[er]cio decimo Ac div[er]sis aliis dieb[us] post dict’ undecimu[m] diem Junii quasdam artes diabolicas [&] detestand’ Anglice vocat[as] *Witchcrafts, Inchantments, charmes and Sorceries* apud p[ar]ochia[m] S[anc]te Trinitatis in Com[itatu] Civit[atis] Exon’ p[re]dict[e] ex malicia sua p[re]cogitat’ nequiter & felonice usa fuit practicavit & exercuit in sup[er] & contra quandam Maria[m] Knowsley infantem aetatis vigint[i] & octo dier[um] filiam cuiusdam Willi[elm]i Knowsley de p[ar]ochia S[anc]te Trinitatis p[re]dicta in Com[itatu] Civit[atis] p[re]dict’, pistor, p[er] quas quidem Artes diabolicas dicta Maria Knowsley a p[re]d[ic]to undecimo die Junii Anno Regni d[ict]i d[omi]ni Regis nunc decimo tertio suprad[ic]to usq[ue] octavum die[m] Julii tunc p[ro]x[ime] sequen[tem] apud p[ar]ochia[m] S[anc]te Trinitatis [pre]dict’ in Com[itatu] Civitat[is] Exon’ p[re]dict’ periculosissime ac mortaliter egrotabat & languebat. Ac eodem octavo die Julii Anno decimo tertio suprad[ic]to eadem Maria Knowsley partes p[re]dictas apud p[ar]ochia[m] S[anc]te Trinitatis in Com[itatu] Civit[atis] p[re]d[ic]t’ obiit. Et sic Jur[ati] p[re]dict’ p[re]sentant q[uo]d eadem Margareta ip[s]am Maria[m] apud p[ar]ochia[m] S[anc]te Trinitatis p[re]dict[am] in Com[itatu] Civitat[is] Exon’ p[re]dict’ modo & forma ex malicia sua p[re]cogitata voluntarie diabolice, nequiter & felonice partes p[re]d[i]c[t]as occidit & interfecit contra pacem d[ic]ti d[omi]ni Regis nunc &c Ac contra forma[m] Statuti in hu[ius]mo[d]i casu inde nup[er] edit[i] & p[ro]vis[i] &c’

[At the bottom-left of the indictment:] ‘fo. 35’.

[At the bottom-right, the signature:] ‘Izacke’.

[Subsequently endorsed:] ‘po[nit] se non cul[pabalis]’.

[On the reverse of the indictment:]

‘W[ilia]m Knowsley

Marie Knowsley

Sarah Gladon

[~~William Knightingall~~ (?)]

Johan Moodie’

[Endorsed:] ‘Billa Vera’.

2 - Translation:

‘Sessions for the city of Exeter. The jurors for our lord the king present on their oaths that Margaret Nightingall, lately of the city and county of Exeter, aforesaid, widow, on the eleventh of June in the thirteenth year of the reign of our lord Charles the second, by the grace of god, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, defender of the faith, and on many other days after the aforesaid eleventh of June, did wickedly and feloniously make use of, exercise and practice certain devilish and hateful arts called in English Witchcrafts, Inchantments, charmes and Sorceries, due to her premeditated wickedness, at the parish of Holy Trinity in the county and city of Exeter aforesaid, in, upon, and against one Maria Knowsely, an infant of the age of 28 days, the daughter of one William Knowsley of the parish of Holy Trinity in the county of the city aforesaid, baker, by means of which devilish arts, from the foresaid eleventh of June in the thirteenth year of the reign of our lord the king aforesaid until the eighth day of July then following, the said Maria Knowsley was perilously and fatally ill and languished thus in the parish of Holy Trinity in the city and county of Exeter aforesaid. And on the same eighth day of July in the thirteenth year aforesaid, the same Maria Knowsley, the party aforesaid, died in the parish of Holy Trinity in the county and city aforesaid. And thus the aforesaid jurors present that the same Margaret voluntarily, devilishly, wickedly and feloniously murdered and killed the said Maria, the party aforesaid, in the manner and form aforesaid, at the aforesaid parish of Holy Trinity in the county and city aforesaid, due to her premeditated wickedness, against the peace of our aforesaid lord the present King &c, And contrary to the form of the statute regarding the same now proclaimed and provided’.

[At the bottom left of the indictment:] ‘[See] fol[io] 35 [of the order book]’

[At the bottom right, the signature of:] [Samuel] ‘Izacke’ [Town-clerk]

[Subsequently endorsed:] ‘[She] pleads not guilty; [she is] found not guilty’.

[On the reverse of the indictment:]

‘[Prosecuted by:]

W[ilia]m Knowsley

Marie Knowsley

Sarah Gladon

[~~William Knightingall~~ (?)]

Johan Moodie

[Endorsed:] ‘We find this to be a true bill’.

[Source: DHC, ECA, EQSR, 30 September 13 Charles II (1661).]

1. See W. Cotton and H. Woollcombe, *Gleanings from the Municipal and Cathedral Records Relative to the City of Exeter* (Exeter, 1877), pp. 149-152; J. A. Thompson, *Wives, Widows, Witches and Bitches: Women in Seventeenth-Century Devon* (New York 1993), pp. 113-17; J. Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550-1750* (London, 1997 edition), pp. 68, 158; and M. Stoyle, *Witchcraft in Exeter, 1558-1660* (Exeter, 2017), chapter 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For previous discussions of the case of Bridget Wotton, drawing on the initial depositions against her which appear in the sessions order book, but not on the further documents which are contained in the sessions rolls, see Sharpe, *Instruments*, p. 223; Thompson, *Wives*, pp. 104, 111, 116, 118; P. Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 190-91; and Stoyle, *Witchcraft in Exeter*, pp. 54-55. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. On the identity of Deeble, who was the son of Walter Deeble, ‘a prominent member of the corporation in the 1650s’, see Elmer, *Witchcraft*, p. 190. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For the case of a suspected witch who was confronted with a woman whom she had allegedly bewitched by the supposed victim’s relatives in precisely the same way during the 1650s, see Stoyle, *Witchcraft in Exeter*, p. 48. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter [hereafter: DHC]; Exeter City Archives [hereafter: ECA]; Exeter Quarter Sessions Order Book [hereafter EQSOB], volume 65 (1660-1672), f.2r. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. DHC, ECA, Exeter Quarter Sessions Roll [hereafter EQSR], 8 April 13 Charles II (1661), recognisance of 19 July 1660. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For the treacherous propensity of familiars to desert their human allies once the latter had fallen into the hands of the representatives of lawfully-constituted authority, see, for example, W. Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part I* (1591), Act V, Scene Three. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. DHC, ECA, EQSOB, 65, f.21r.; and ECA, EQSR, 22 April 13 Charles II (1661), document dated 11 March 1660/61. It is interesting to note that in a list of charitable payments made to the poor of St Pauls - a document which is undated, but which was clearly drawn up during the 1660s – monies are noted to have been paid both to ‘Widdow Wottun’ and to ‘Josias Follatt’, see ECA, Miscellaneous Petitions to the Chamber for Relief, file 3, item 34. Follatt was still listed among the poor of St Pauls in 1671, but by this time Wotton had disappeared. See W.G. Hoskins (ed.), *Exeter in the Seventeenth Century: Tax and Rate Assessment, 1602-1699* (Devon and Cornwall Record Society, New Series, Volume 2, 1957), pp. 76-77. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. DHC, ECA, EQSR, 8 April 13 Charles II (1661), document dated 5 April 1661. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Elmer, *Witchcraft*, pp. 190-91. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. DHC, ECA, EQSR, 30 September 13 Charles II (1661), document dated 27 July 1661. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid., list of jurors in the cases of Margaret Nightingall and others; and indictment of Margaret Nightingall. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. The names of ‘Edward Moodye & wife’ appear two lines above those of ‘William Knowsley & wife’ in the list of poll tax assessments for Holy Trinity parish which had been drawn up in 1660, see Hoskins, *Exeter in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 23. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. DHC, ECA, EQSR, 30 September 13 Charles II (1661), indictment of Margaret Nightingall. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. For the text of the act, see J. Raithby (ed.), *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5, 1628-1680* (London, 1819), pp. 389-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. See M. Stoyle, ‘Memories of the Maimed: The Testimony of Charles I’s Former Soldiers, 1660-1730’, *History*, volume 88, issue 2, no. 290 (April 2003), p. 208. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Raithby, *Statutes of the Realm: Volume 5*, pp. 389-90. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. DHC, ECA, EQSOB, 65, f. 63. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See DHC, ECA, EQSOB, 65, ff. 63 and 102; and EQSOB, 66 (1682-89); EQSOB, 67 (1688-93) and EQSOB, 68 (1698-1707), *passim*. For the evident reluctance of provincial JPs to award full pensions to Royalist soldiers’ widows after 1662, see S. Beale, ‘Military Welfare in the Midland Counties during and after the British Civil Wars, 1642-1700’, in *Midland History*, volume 45 (2020), pp. 2, and 14-15. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. DHC, ECA, EQSOB, 65, f.102. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., f.129 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. The registers of Holy Trinity parish - the parish in which we may suspect Margaret Nightingale to have lived - are, sadly, imperfect for the early 1660s. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. It should be noted that the clerk who copied Smyth’s deposition into the order book originally wrote ‘John Clarke, A Blacksmith’ here. These words were later crossed out, however, and replaced with the words ‘John Lake, A weaver’, while other, subsequent, references to the name ‘Clarke’ in the accompanying depositions were similarly expunged and replaced with the name ‘Lake’. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)