

CHAPTER I

Practical Magic *Practices and Demands*

This first chapter focuses on some basic facts that form the foundations for the rest of the book: namely, the common ends for which magic was practised on a daily basis. Primarily using my database of magic cases, the aim is to show how common different demands on magic were and assess whether these changed over time. Different methods of practising magic are explored in the process, noting which continued throughout the period, evolved, or died out. The chapter's argument is based partly on statistical analysis and the frequency with which magic cases appear in ecclesiastical and secular court records. This method has potential limitations, the most obvious being that it might only track official concern about certain practices rather than the actual frequency of their use. Fortunately, the sources themselves help here, as many of the instances of magic use I have found do not prioritise magic as the main crime. Frequently the cases focus on defamation, theft, or fraud, and magic is mentioned as a secondary detail. In this sense, the cases do not so much track an increased focus on magic by authoritative bodies, but the situations in which magic most commonly appears in other aspects of people's lives. The second issue is that far more records survive for the period after 1450, which makes tracking continuity of practice problematic. To counter this, further contextual evidence, including sermons and *pastoralia*, edicts, and visitation articles, is employed to gauge concern over contemporary practices where individual instances do not survive. By treating all forms of evidence sensitively and factoring in the limitations of each source type, it is possible to present a broad image of magic use over time.

The chapter is broken into sections covering the five major uses for practical magic in order of popularity. We therefore begin with a discussion of healing and 'unwitching', then move on to theft and goods recovery, followed by divination, then love magic, finishing with a summary of magic used to find hidden or buried treasure. By the end, we should have a good grounding in how magic could commonly be helpful in the

everyday life of late medieval and early modern people, and how the use of magic changed over the period. This helps to inform the discussions of subsequent chapters, which cover changing perspectives and habits of magicians and their clients.

Healing and Unwitching

As a crucial aspect of daily life, while also one of the hardest to control, it should come as no surprise that health and healing generated a constant demand for magic. Lea Olsan among others has demonstrated the proliferation of healing charms, both Latin and vernacular, during the late medieval period, while the frequent protestations from churchmen and university-trained doctors demonstrate magical medicine's continued popularity during the early modern era.¹ Overall, 21 per cent of the cunning folk I have recorded practised some form of healing or 'unwitching' – removing a bad witch's curse from a human, animal, or item – peaking at 34 per cent during Elizabeth I's reign. Some diseases appear to have been treated with magic throughout the period; others, notably those related to witches' curses, are less continuous.

Comparatively few (44) presentments concerning magic survive between 1350 and 1450, and of those, just two pertain to healing (see Table 1.1).² Given that previous scholarship has demonstrated that charms were a widespread aspect of medicine, this is likely to reflect more about the attitudes towards magic in medicine than it does about the frequency of its practice.³ Olsan's extensive research on magic in manuscripts shows that charms and prayers were copied and shared among 'unlearned healers and professional surgeons' alike, surviving in dozens of texts and often, according to the glosses, tried and found to

¹ Thomas R. Forbes, 'Verbal Charms in British Folk Medicine', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 115.4 (1971), 293–316; Lea Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition', *Oral Tradition*, 7 (1992), 116–42; Lea Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice', *Social History of Medicine*, 16 (2003), 343–66; Jonathan Roper, *English Verbal Charms* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia, 2005); Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 89.3 (2015), 406–33.

² The indictment of Roger Clerke (1382), Henry Thomas Riley, *Memorials of London and London Life in the XIII, XIV & XV Centuries* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1868), pp. 464–66; Agnes Hancock (1438), T. S. Holmes, *The Register of John Stafford, Bishop of Bath and Wells, 1425–1443* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1915), pp. 225–27.

³ For compendia of late medieval English charms, see Forbes, 'Verbal Charms'; Roper, *English Verbal Charms*.

Table 1.1 *Proportions of use*

Date Range	Healing	Theft and lost goods	Divination	Love magic	Treasure hunting	Other/ unknown	Total
1350–1399	1	7	2	1	0	4	14
1400–1449	1	7	1	3	2	16	30
1450–1499	6	11	6	4	2	23	51
1500–1549	25	14	14	5	8	52	118
1550–1599	63	30	12	12	7	99	223
1600–1650	22	27	10	4	6	47	116
Total	118	96	45	29	25	241	552

be effective.⁴ Despite the theological discomfort around such practices and questions as to whether they could be used legitimately, there was clearly enough support and interest to ensure that they were translated into the vernacular at various points.⁵ Some charms were effective or popular enough to be shared orally, and by the fourteenth century there are clearly archetypal formulae for certain ailments. Such themes include invoking the River Jordan or Longinus to stem the flow of blood from a wound; St Peter or St Apollonia as a cure for toothache; and Job for worms.⁶ These charms largely survive in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts, which by their nature would have been expensive and exclusive to the literate. It is therefore debatable whether such charms were widespread among cunning folk. There is evidence that medics were covetous of their charms: John Arderne, an English physician practising in the fourteenth century, warned that the incantation for a spasm charm should be kept safe to avoid its being seen by a layperson.⁷

This elitist attitude seems to be reflected in the sole case of healing magic found in the late fourteenth century: that of Roger Clerke, indicted in 1382 for pretending to be a medical man. Clerke sold Roger atte Hacche a charm for his feverish wife. In exchange for 12*d.*, plus a larger sum once it had worked,

⁴ Olsan, 'Latin Charms', p. 139.

⁵ The fourteenth-century cleric Thomas of Cobham prohibited incantations while collecting medicinal herbs, unless they were the Creed or the Lord's Prayer; however, the thirteenth-century friar Raymond of Peñafort was more lenient, allowing that laying parchment with written prayers (essentially a charm) on the patient was legitimate. See Catherine Rider, 'Medical Magic and the Church in Thirteenth-Century England', *Social History of Medicine*, 24.1 (2011), 92–107 (pp. 95–96).

⁶ Olsan, 'Latin Charms', p. 130.

⁷ Olsan, 'Latin Charms', p. 136.

Clerke gave Hacche ‘an old parchment, cut or scratched across, being the leaf of a certain book, and rolled it up in a piece of cloth of gold’ to hang around his wife’s neck. The cure proved ineffective, and Hacche took Clerke to court. Clerke insisted that the charm worked, and read ‘*Anima Christi, sanctifica me; corpus Christi, salva me; in sanguis Christi, nebria me; cum bonus Christus tu, lava me*’, but when unrolled the parchment was bare. The prosecutors seemed more concerned by Clerke’s unlearned status than by the charm’s magical nature, emphasising that Clerke ‘was in no way a literary man ... altogether ignorant of the art of physic or of surgery’ and that ‘a straw beneath his foot would be of just as much avail for fevers’. Indeed, Roger atte Hacche himself emphasised that ‘no physician or surgeon should intermeddle with any medicines or cures within the liberty of the city aforesaid, but those who are experienced in the said arts’, suggesting that Hacche either knew what the best way would be to secure a conviction, or that he was genuinely disgruntled at having been taken in by an unqualified physician. Clerke’s punishment focused on his falsehood: he was led bareback through London with the charm and a whetstone (the symbol of a liar) around his neck and urinals (the symbol of a physician) tied to his front and back.

There are two points of interest in this case. First, despite his obvious illiteracy, Clerke knew the verbal charm he had wished to use, showing that there was some form of knowledge exchange between literate and illiterate. Second, the punishment suggests that posing as a learned physician was considered more heinous than practising magic. This is important, as healing magic makes up only a small minority of cases before 1500. This grew to almost one-third after 1500, apparently reflecting a change in public opinion and the concerns of secular and spiritual leaders. Between 1350 and 1450, therefore, concern over medical magic was at best lukewarm; apparently it only drew attention when someone lost money and impersonation of a trained doctor was involved.

Specific Diseases

Magic seems to have been reserved for particular illnesses, contradicting suggestions that cunning folk acted as a cheaper or more accessible alternative to doctors.⁸ It is true that a handful of practitioners claimed

⁸ Owen Davies, *Cunning Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London; New York: Hambledon Press, 2003), p. 88; Lea Olsan corroborates this conclusion in her research on healing charms. She argues that certain illnesses were more easily addressed through charms because of the biblical precedents of some cures. See Olsan, ‘Charms and Prayers’.

to have cure-alls, but more specified that they would only cure a limited range; for example, Henry Lillingstone stated in 1520 that 'he has no other cure except to cure stones and colic', while Ann Greene claimed that she could cure heartache and headache, but 'medles nott with any other diseases' in 1653.⁹ It seems more likely, therefore, that magicians felt they had particular healing powers, and so restricted themselves to what they were good at. It is possible that this limited range of diseases was cheaper for a service magician to cure than a trained physician or other medic, though this seems unlikely. We will discuss the financial cost of magic in the following chapter, but for now it is worth stating that prices charged for magical healing could be as extortionate as those of physicians.

Childbirth

While magical diagnostic tools and cures for some conditions seem to have risen and fallen in popularity throughout the period, others remained consistently in demand. Magical aid in childbirth, for example, is present from the fifteenth century and continued into the seventeenth, and seems to have been among the most complex. Agnes Marshall, a midwife, was indicted for using incantations in her role in 1481.¹⁰ Though the record is not explicit as to what she said, a roughly contemporary Latin charm suggests the sort of power invoked. It calls on the Holy Trinity; Saints Mary, Ann, and Elizabeth; the Sator Arepo magic square formula; St Cecilia; and Lazarus; and finishes with the entreaty '*O infans, siue vivus, siue mortuus, exi foras qui a te vocat ad lucem*' (Oh child, whether alive or dead, come forth because you are called to the light). This particular formula was intended to be bound to the leg of the mother, perhaps to help physically draw the child out. Others demanded that the mother recite certain words, for example *Agios Agios Agios* – mercifully easy to remember in the circumstances.¹¹ The act of tying a charm around the mother may explain the exhortation of the bishop of Salisbury, Nicholas Shaxton, in 1538 that midwives not 'use any Girdels, Purses, Mesures of our Lady ... to be occupied

⁹ E. M. Elvey, *The Courts of the Archdeaconry of Buckingham, 1483–1523* (Welwyn Garden City: Buckinghamshire Record Society Publications, 1975), pp. 257–58; James Raine, *Depositions from the Castle of York, Relating to Offences Committed in the Northern Counties in the 17th Century* (Durham: Frances Andrews, 1861), pp. 64–65.

¹⁰ James Raine, *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, XXXV (Durham: Surtees Society, 1859), p. 260.

¹¹ Raine, *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, p. 260; Forbes, 'Verbal Charms', pp. 302–3.

about the Woman while she laboureth'. It is likely that these were all forms of protective charm, probably inscribed with prayers.¹²

The indictment of Agnes Marshall suggests that concern over magic in midwifery was rising during the late fifteenth century, but it was not until the sixteenth that it attracted widespread condemnation. Parliament formally engaged with the issue of women using healing magic through the 1511 Physicians and Surgeons Act. The Act's preamble complains of 'a grete multitude of ignoraunt persones ... [including] Women, boldeley and custumably them grete curis ... In which they partely use sorcery and whichcrafte'.¹³ Visitation articles specifically target magic in midwifery, highlighting a continuous concern: Bishop Bonner's 1554 London Injunctions, for example, demand that any present or future midwife 'shall not use or exercise any witchcraft, charms, sorcery, invocations or prayers'. Similarly, the 1613 archidiaconal articles for Leicester inquire 'Whether any in your parish ... use sorcerie, wichcraft, charmes, unlawfull prayers, or innovations in Latine or English: namely, midwives in the time of womens travaile', specifically emphasising this profession, suggesting that midwives were thought to regularly use cunning magic in their ministrations.¹⁴ Charms surviving from the late sixteenth century indicate that the healing tradition continued in a similar vein throughout the period.¹⁵

Despite repeated warnings from church and secular authorities against using magic in childbirth, there are very few surviving records of such activity being prosecuted. This either means that childbirth magic was less common than was feared, and thus the concerns expressed by Bonner and his fellow ecclesiastics were misplaced, or that they were simply not reported. Given the continuous presence of childbirth charms throughout the period, the latter interpretation seems more likely. Labour was a dangerous time, riddled with potential complications. The idea that magic would be eschewed at such a perilous juncture is improbable, especially when it was employed for adjacent healing practices like staunching bleeding (see later in this chapter). As such, the under-reporting of magic in

¹² W. H. Frere, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation: With Introduction and Notes* (London: Longmans, Green, 1910), II, pp. 58–59; Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals'.

¹³ George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1956), p. 38.

¹⁴ Kenneth Fincham, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*. Church of England Records Society (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), I, p. 129.

¹⁵ Roper, *English Verbal Charms*, p. 62.

childbirth suggests a discrepancy between official policy and popular attitudes; something that we will see time and again throughout this study.

Staunching Blood and Curing Toothache

Continuity of magic use extends to other healing practices. Jonathan Roper's database of English charms has shown that staunching blood and healing wounds remained among the most common throughout the period 1350–1650, and a lesser emphasis was given to fevers and toothache.¹⁶ The evidence from my own data shows a continued recourse to magic and cunning folk for fevers; the first instance, from 1382, was described earlier in the chapter, and examples present themselves in every century thereafter. These include the indictments of John Stokys (1480), Isabel Mure (1528), Thomas Harding (1589), Thomas Hartford (1600), and Ann Greene (1653).¹⁷ The methods used include both spoken and written charms: Mure's involved saying 'xv Pater noster, xv Ave Maria and thre credes', Harding's included 'certain words in a scroll of parchment' to be worn around the patient's neck (perhaps similar to that of Roger Clerke).¹⁸ Ann Greene had a more direct method: 'for paines in the head she requires their water and a locke of their heir, the which she boyles together, and afterwards throwes them in the fire and burnes them'.¹⁹

Despite the evidence from medical texts, actual cases of magic used for curing toothache and staunching blood are less common. I have found only three cases of cunning folk curing toothache, in 1499, 1528, and 1634; unfortunately the records are not detailed enough to show what method was employed. The 1634 case, which saw Edith Clarke excommunicated for contumacy after healing Joan Mayes' teeth on the Sabbath, mentions that she charmed the pain away, but does not elaborate.²⁰ I have not found any indictments involving stopping haemorrhaging, though some cunning folk claimed to have cures for 'all maner deseasses', which could

¹⁶ Roper, *English Verbal Charms*, pp. 62–63.

¹⁷ William Hale, *A Series of Precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Causes, Extending from the Year 1475 to 1640; Extracted from Act-Books of Ecclesiastical Courts in the Diocese of London* (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1847), p. 3; Raine, *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, p. 273; W. J. Hardy, *Hertford County Records: Notes and Extracts from the Sessions Rolls 1581–1698* (Hertford: C. E. Longmore, 1905), 1, p. 3; Raine, *Depositions from the Castle of York*, pp. 64–65.

¹⁸ Raine, *Fabric Rolls of York Minster*, p. 273; Hardy, *Hertford Sessions Rolls*, 1, p. 3.

¹⁹ Raine, *Depositions from the Castle of York*, pp. 64–65.

²⁰ E. R. C. Brinkworth, 'The Laudian Church in Buckinghamshire', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 5 (1955), 31–59 (p. 50).

reasonably include bleeding.²¹ Cure-alls tended to involve simple formulae, such as ‘Jhesus that sauid bothe you and me from all maner deseases I aske for seynte cherite Our Lord iff it be your wille’, or reciting a set number of Paternosters, Ave Marias, and Creeds.²² Such a dearth in references to bleeding is surprising, though it may be explained by the practices of the medical profession at the time. Successful orthodox practitioners like the fifteenth-century doctor Thomas Fayreford and Gilbertus Anglicus, whose thirteenth-century medical treatise was reproduced into the sixteenth, both recommended spoken and written charms to stop haemorrhaging.²³ If such approaches appeared in mainstream texts, this could explain why no one was indicted for using them.

Unwitching

Though there is continuity in some medical services offered by service magicians, others varied over the period. The most notable is the demand for and tenor of ‘unwitching’ services. ‘Unwitching’ is a relatively broad term, referring to magic used to remove a bad witch’s curse from a human, animal, or item. Occasionally cunning folk were called upon to unwitch items, such as milk that would not churn, which does not really count as healing. However, the majority of unwitching cases concerned sick humans and animals, and always involved countering something that was intended to cause harm. Thus, I consider healing magic and unwitching, though distinct, to be closely related.

The earliest instance I have found of unwitching dates from 1532, when Joan Gardyner sued Thomas Jennyn for calling her a witch. According to the record, Jennyn had said he had heard that of two magical practitioners, one of whom ‘Twynyth [while] the other untwynyth’ – this is, one performed *maleficium*, while the other undid it.²⁴ The next example dates from significantly later – 1556 – though in itself it demonstrates that unwitching was a well-known practice by this point. The reference comes from John Halle’s *An Historicall Expostulation*, which is a self-proclaimed tirade against ‘Beastlye Abusers, Both of Chyrurgerie and Physyke’, including

²¹ Elvey, *Courts of the Archdeacons of Buckingham*, pp. 257–58.

²² Elvey, *Courts of the Archdeacons of Buckingham*, pp. 257–58.

²³ Olsan, ‘Charms and Prayers’, p. 361.

²⁴ R. Houlbrooke, ‘Magic and Witchcraft in the Diocese of Winchester’, in *Cross, Crown and Community: Religion, Government and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. by David J. B. Trim and Peter J. Balderstone (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 113–41 (p. 126).

cunning folk. Halle describes one scene from Maidstone in Kent, where he confronts a cunning man's landlady:

Is this ... the cunnyng sothesayer, that is sayde to lye at your house? Sothesayer, quod she; I knowe no suche thyng by him ... Why, quod I, suche men ... enformed me that he can tell of thynges loste, and helpe children and cattell bewitched and forspoken, and can tell by loking in ones face ... their fortune to come. Yea, and all this in dede he can doe, quod she.²⁵

Helping 'children and cattell bewitched and forspoken' is mentioned without any need of explanation. It should be noted that Halle took pains to refute the efficacy of unwitching, which suggests that it was widespread enough to warrant the attention. No wonder, perhaps: after this date there is a proliferation of unwitching cases, actually making up 44 per cent of healing cases performed by cunning folk in the latter half of the sixteenth century.

This sharp rise could reflect an actual increased demand for unwitching, or be the result of the changed legal status of witchcraft and magic after 1563. The Act against Conjuracions, Enchantments and Witchcrafts prohibited 'all maner of practise use or exercise of Witchcrafts Enchantment Charme or Sorcerye', thus widening the remit of secular authorities and in theory bringing magical healing and unwitching under their jurisdiction.²⁶ However, no specific mention is made of magic used for healing, and besides, it seems that most unwitching cases continued to be handled by the ecclesiastical courts. The new law does emphasise the potential threat of magic to people, livestock, and goods, suggesting heightened national concern over the physical harm that magic could cause. It may be that a concern over forespeaking prompted people to suspect cunning folk as secretly harmful, thus causing more cunning folk to be reported to the authorities and more frequent mention of forespeaking as a result. However, although some cunning folk who unwitched were occasionally suspected of being harmful witches, the majority were not, and throughout the late sixteenth century cunning folk were relied upon to identify and counter witches' actions without risk to their own reputation. It is more likely, therefore, that a heightened awareness of forespeaking provoked

²⁵ John Halle, 'An Historicall Exposition', in *Early English Poetry, Ballads, and Popular Literature of the Middle Ages, Edited from Original Manuscripts and Scarce Publications*, ed. by T. J. Pettigrew (London: Percy Society, 1844), xi, p. 6.

²⁶ Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550–1750* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 4.

more people to suspect it as the cause of illness, thus encouraging people to seek cunning folk who could address the issue. George Gifford's 1593 *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft* took great pains to show that cunning folk were useless in countering witchcraft, which in itself demonstrates a greater recourse to them during the later sixteenth century.²⁷

The methods used in counter-witchcraft are well documented. They normally relied on the idea of a sympathetic link between malefactor and victim, with the understanding that this link could be manipulated to the patient's benefit. Driving hot iron into cursed milk, or taking the victim's urine, fingernails, or other bodily elements and boiling them, both worked on the same basic assumption that the victim was linked to the witch, and that the harm could travel the other way.²⁸ This theory in itself stretches back at least to the medieval period, and applied to a range of diseases: it was thought that a link could be formed between the ailment and something similar in nature (haemorrhaging and running water, for example), and by affecting one, it was possible to affect the other.²⁹ This idea of the sympathetic link seems to have also applied to magical diagnoses and people 'touched by a fairy'; the later discussion of girdles illuminates this. Thus, although cures varied from case to case, a common logic appears to underpin them.

Another method of unwitching was to use some form of amulet to either absorb or repel the intended harm. During the infamous witch trials at St Osyth, for example, one of the victims, Annis Glasscocke, was prescribed a counter-magic charm by a cunning man named Herring. The charm was composed of 'a little linnen bagge of the breadth of a groate, full of svrall thinges like seedes, and willed her to put the same where her payne was most'. The record is not explicit about how the charm was supposed to work, but apparently it was effective. It may be that the seeds were particularly selected for their healing and protective qualities and intended to either draw the pain out of Annis, or protect the affected area from further harm. Either way, there was clearly some variation in the way that counter-magic might be approached.

²⁷ George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches & Witchcrafts*, 1593 (London: Percy Society, 1842).

²⁸ The concept of a sympathetic link is not a new discovery; Keith Thomas, among others, has previously discussed the idea in some detail. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), pp. 223–28.

²⁹ The perceived importance of urine as a diagnostic tool in medieval and early modern medicine almost certainly informed this approach, too: the idea that urine was affected by and reflected the inner workings of the body was widely understood at a popular level. See Michael Stolberg, *Uroscopy in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 31.

The methods used for unwitching also evolved during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though there is evidence of continuity of theory if not continuity of practice. While Gifford referred to driving a heated spit into cream as a matter of course at the turn of the sixteenth century, ‘witch bottles’ only really appear from the mid-seventeenth century.³⁰ These bottles, normally stoneware, were variously filled with a patient’s urine, hair, or nail trimmings, iron pins, and other items, and stoppered, buried, or boiled to torment the witch and lift the curse.³¹ I have found just one possible pre-1650 reference to a witch bottle in England, related by Joseph Glanvill in his book *Saducismus Triumphatus*. The incident dates from somewhere between 1630 and 1660, and the textual research conducted by Annie Thwaite, combined with Brian Hoggard’s survey of magical material culture, places the majority of witch bottles in the seventeenth century and later.³² However, there are clear parallels between earlier English practices and what would eventually evolve into the witch bottle. The first specific case I have found of an English cunning person using something akin to a witch bottle is from 1610, when octogenarian Joan Bayly, from Rye, Sussex, advised Susan Hart on how to cure her bewitched child. Bayly told Hart to take 60 needles and a halfpenny worth of pins, and tie them in a red cloth. She then put the bundle into the fire and pierced it with a dagger, saying that it would soon bring the witch to the door.³³ This instance carries many of the component parts of the witch bottle, which often utilised red cloth, sometimes cut into the shape of a heart, as part of the magic. The use of a dagger suggests that Bayly wanted the witch to come to a particularly nasty end.

³⁰ Gifford, *Dialogue Concerning Witches & Witchcrafts*, p. 59.

³¹ The term ‘witch bottle’ was only coined in the nineteenth century, and thus is not a contemporary term. It is used here for ease of reference. See Annie Thwaite, ‘What Is a “Witch Bottle”? Assembling the Textual Evidence from Early Modern England’, *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, 15.2 (2020), 227–51 (p. 228).

³² Joseph Glanvill, *Saducismus Triumphatus, or, Full and Plain Evidence Concerning Witches and Apparitions* (London: J. Collins, 1681), pp. 169–70, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&ctx_id=xri:eebo:image:201492; for dating of the story, see Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (New York: New Amsterdam, 1988), pp. 171–72; Thwaite, ‘What Is a “Witch Bottle”?’, pp. 228, 236; Brian Hoggard, ‘The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Magic’, in *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. by Owen Davies and Willem de Blecourt (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 167–86 (pp. 170–73); Brian Hoggard, ‘Witch Bottles: Their Contents, Contexts and Uses’, in *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain: A Feeling for Magic*, ed. by Ronald Hutton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 91–105.

³³ *The Manuscripts of Rye and Hereford Corporations; Capt. Loder-Symonds, Mr. E. R. Wodehouse, M.P., and Others, 13th Report, Appendix*, ed. by William John Hardy, Historical Manuscripts Commission (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1892), iv, p. 145.

Earlier instances of witch bottle use exist from mainland Europe. The *Liber Exorcismorum*, a sixteenth-century Dutch compilation of exorcism techniques, recorded that in 1562, a Minorite friar named Henrick van Ryssel cured a patient by shaving off the man's hair, clipping his nails, and then boiling them together with iron nails in the patient's urine for nine days. The patient fully recovered.³⁴ The method may have become common knowledge in England via Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), though if so it took some time to spread and make its way into the historical record. Scot's account describes a priest who consulted a cunning woman about an incubus. She told him to urinate into a chamber pot and immediately cover it, which would cause the witch behind the incubus to reveal herself before the day was out. According to Scot, the witch did indeed arrive that evening complaining of a full bladder.³⁵

Clearly some demands and magical practices did evolve during the period, though some more noticeably than others. Broadly related to counter-magic measures is the use of girdles in healing, which seem to have been employed especially in cases where one was suspected as harmed by fairies or suffering from some other kind of wasting sickness. The use of girdles and blessing clothes to heal seems to have been adapted over the period as new, potentially more effective methods were found. Agnes Hancock is recorded in 1438 as boasting that she could diagnose a person's disease, when they contracted it, and how, through their clothes alone. Her specialism appears to have been treating children who had been touched by the 'feiry', and apparently the girdle was best for diagnosis.³⁶

Measuring the girdle appears again in 1566, this time paired with 'five Paternosters in the worship of the five Wounds of our Lord, five Aves in the worship of the five Joys of our Lady, and one creed in the worship of the blessed Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost ... and the holy Apostles'. After reciting these words the healer, Elizabeth Mortlock, would measure the girdle 'of any such persons being sick or haunted, from her elbow to her thumb, craving God for Saint Charity's sake that if [they] be haunted with a fairy, yea or no, she may know'. Most helpfully, Mortlock actually explained her method: 'if it be so the band will be shorter and her cubit

³⁴ Hans de Waardt, 'From Cunning Man to Natural Healer', in *Curing and Insuring: Essays on Illness in Past Times: The Netherlands, Belgium, England and Italy, 16th–20th Centuries*, ed. by Hans Binneveld and Rudolf Dekker (Hilversum: Verloren, 1993), pp. 33–41 (p. 37).

³⁵ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. by Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), pp. 47–48.

³⁶ Holmes, *Register of John Stafford*, pp. 225–27.

will reach further than it commonly doth'. Keith Thomas posits that there was a perceived sympathetic link between the belt and its owner, and the belt was thought to contract as a result of the sickness; if so, the method ties strongly to those used for unwitching.³⁷ However, there may also have been an element of cold reading (making a prognosis on circumstantial evidence) involved: a belt regularly worn will show the normal girth of its wearer. If it had been tied or fastened in a new place recently, then it would be a fair indicator of substantial weight loss, and thus offer a relatively clear prognosis. Given that being 'touched by a fairy' often indicates some form of wasting sickness, this may have been quite an effective test. This observational approach may explain why, in 1590 when Mistress Bolton was presented at the church courts in York for measuring the girdle, the judges could not decide whether she 'be a charmer or no'. Interestingly, Bolton put the girdle around her patient to give her diagnosis, something her predecessors did not do. Matilda Allin used the girdle and other lengths of cloth ('kerchiefs, fillets ... and partlets') in a similar fashion two years later, this time to measure swine and 'divers sick persons'.³⁸ In this sense the practice seems to have evolved by the end of the sixteenth century, both in the way that it was used – the girdle becomes a unit of measurement rather than the object to be measured – and in its function – broadening from diagnosing diseases caused by fairies to diagnosing a range of illnesses.

The girdle seems to have acquired further uses during the sixteenth century. In 1532 a wandering beggar advised Joan Sargeant on how to cure her sick child: 'cutte her saide childes gyrdill in fyve peces and then go to the churche and say v Paternosters and fyve aveyes and then to take the same peces of the gurdill and hide hit in v sundry growndes'.³⁹ This is the only instance I have found of a cut girdle as a form of healing; generally parchment or cloth was tied around the affected area (like the childbirth charm already discussed), rather than removed and destroyed. However, there is a rough logic if the underlying theory behind the girdle is again based on a sympathetic link. Perhaps it was thought that the girdle partially absorbed the illness, and by praying over and burying it the illness was cleansed and removed from the child's body.

In terms of gender variation in healing, there is a difference in the methods used by cunning men and women. Women seem to have been far

³⁷ Thomas, *Religion*, p. 184.

³⁸ Thomas, *Religion*, p. 184.

³⁹ Richard Holworthy, 'Discoveries in the Diocesan Registry, Wells, Somerset', *Genealogists' Magazine*, 2 (1926), 4–8 (p. 7).

more likely than men to consult with and cure through fairies, for example. Only one instance of a man using fairies appears, in the 1566 account of the examination of John Walsh; otherwise, both diagnosis and use of fairies seem to be the preserve of women.⁴⁰ All written charms were used by men (perhaps unsurprisingly given the higher literacy rates among men during the period), while the majority of those using oral charms were women (twelve women to five men). Reciting the Paternoster as part of a cure, however, was undertaken almost equally by both (six women to five men). Two women and one man are recorded as using a 'Moses rod', and always to cure animals. Moses rods – staves thought to carry some of the power described in Exodus as bestowed on Moses' own staff – were in use from at least the late fifteenth century. In the case of the cunning man John Thornton, who was presented at the church courts in Leicester in 1523, he had apparently been using Moses rods for 30 years.⁴¹

Magical healing was clearly not an unchanging practice, but rather adapted and expanded according to the demands of magicians' clients. This is seen most clearly through the rise of unwitching services, which seem to have been all but unheard of until the mid-sixteenth century. Sympathy magic, blessings, and oral and written charms appear to have been the staples of magicians' toolboxes, but there were clearly several magicians who limited themselves to only one or two practices. Some practitioners claimed to specialise in only specific diseases or used the same practices to cure all things. We will see in future sections that this specialisation was not something limited to magical healers; other magical practitioners also claimed a particular skill and restricted their services as a result.

⁴⁰ 'Chanter 855B', fos. 310–12, Devon Heritage Centre; *The Examination of John Walsh: Before Maister Thomas Williams, Commissary to the Reuerend Father in God William Bishop of Excester, Vpon Certayne Interrogatories Touchyng Wytchcraft and Sorcerye, in the Presence of Diuers Ge[n]tlemen and Others. The XXIII of August. 1566.* (London: John Awdely, 1566), http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:2247; see also Agnes Hancock (1480) in Holmes, *Register of John Stafford*, pp. 225–27; Margaret Harper (1567) in J. S. Purvis, *Tudor Parish Documents* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1948); Joan Willmot (1618) in *The Wonderful Discouerie of the Vvitchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower* (London: G. Eld, 1619), http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:2511; Ann Jeffries (1645) in Moses Pitt, *An Account of One Ann Jeffries, Now Living in the County of Cornwall, Who Was Fed for Six Months by a Small Sort of Airy People Call'd Fairies, and of the Strange and Wonderful Cures She Performed with Salves and Medicines She Received from Them, for Which She Never Took One Penny of Her Patients: In a Letter from Moses Pitt to the Right Reverend Father in God, Dr. Edward Fowler, Lord Bishop of Gloucester* (London: Richard Cumberland, 1696), http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:50283.

⁴¹ A. P. Moore, 'Proceedings of the Ecclesiastical Courts in the Archdeaconry of Leicester, 1516–35', *Associated Architectural Societies, Reports and Papers*, 28 (1905), 117–220.

Theft and Goods Recovery

After healing, the identification of thieves and recovery of lost goods were service magicians' most common services; they constituted 17 per cent of the total cases identified. If the total number of cases is restricted to only those where the purpose is explicit, this proportion jumps to about 30 per cent. This coheres with Keith Thomas' and Owen Davies' conclusions that discovering thieves was among the most popular services for the early modern period, and it may have been equally popular – or even more so – during the late medieval.⁴² It comprises half of cases between 1350 and 1399 and was apparently a long-established concern by that time – potentially explaining its preponderance in ecclesiastical records. The thirteenth-century bishop of Worcester, Walter de Cantilupe, advised priests to ask their parishioners about anyone who used 'incantations, as is common when something is stolen'; this signals that such activity was recognised by spiritual authorities and treated, at least by some, as an issue.⁴³ This continued in the fourteenth century: in 1311 Bishop Baldock of London requested that his archdeacon investigate sorcery and divination for theft, and in 1340 Michael of Northgate, the author of the *Prick of Conscience*, censured those who 'for pence' scribed in thumbnails and swords to detect thieves.⁴⁴ Such concerns appear in every century thereafter, and are helpful in shedding light on the methods used. The following section largely focuses on some of these methods, noting which were continuous and which fell in or out of fashion.

Practices

Walter de Cantilupe's priests' manual describes the practices clergy might hear about during confession. Magic described in priests' manuals can sometimes be outdated, especially during the High Middle Ages when authors took their direction from early Christian and Classical authorities and transplanted the received information without necessarily amending

⁴² Thomas, *Religion*, pp. 251–52; Davies, *Cunning Folk*, p. 96.

⁴³ Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 133.

⁴⁴ Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, p. 187; Dan Michel, *Dan Michel's Ayenbite of Inwyrt, or Remorse of Conscience: Richard Morris's Transcription Now Newly Collated with the Unique Manuscript British Museum MS Arundel 57*, ed. by Pamela Gordon (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1, p. 43.

parts that had become irrelevant. This is especially true of divination methods. Practices like scapulomancy, haruspicy, and augury receive more attention than they warrant in a late medieval English context, where there is no evidence that any of these were employed.⁴⁵ In Walter's case, however, the methods seem to largely reflect contemporary practice. Incantations, 'using a sword or basin, or by writing out names, sealing them in a mud plaster, and placing them in holy water' were all apparently common.

Clay Balls

The 'clay ball method' Walter described appears in a defamation case from 1382. One Henry Pot was employed by Simon Gardiner to discover who had stolen his mazer (a kind of drinking bowl). According to the record,

the said Henry ... promised that he would let him know who had stolen the cup, and so cause him to regain it. And hereupon, the same Henry made 32 balls of white clay, and over them did sorcery, or his magic art: which done, he said that the same Christina had stolen the cup.⁴⁶

Apparently Pot 'had many times before practised divers like sorceries'. The method appears again in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, where Foxe describes two friars employed by John Sparke to recover some money stolen from his wife. The friars

gaue him counsaile to make two balles of clay, and to put them in the water and in the same balles to inclose the names of the[m] whom he suspected, and so doying the sayd Sparke came to his money agayne.⁴⁷

This account first appears in the 1570 version of *Acts and Monuments*, but is recorded as having taken place in 1521. I have not found any later instances of the method being used. That Walter de Cantilupe describes

⁴⁵ According to Gerald of Wales, the idea of scapulomancy was introduced to the Welsh by the Flemish settlers of Haverford. The practice apparently did not travel across the Severn, however, as I have not come across any evidence of its use in England. Giraldus Cambrensis, *The Itinerary through Wales and the Description of Wales*, ed. by William Llewellyn Williams (London: J. M. Dent, 1908), pp. 80–82.

⁴⁶ Riley, *Memorials of London*, pp. 462–63.

⁴⁷ John Foxe, *Actes and Monumentes of the Church, Containing the Ful History of Thinges Done and Practised in the Same, from the Time of the First Christened King Lucius, King of This Realme of England, Which Is from the Yeare of Our Lord 180. Vnto the Tyme Now Present* (London: John Daye, 1570), vii, p. 994.

putting the clay balls in holy water suggests that the original theory was one similar to casting lots: the rate at which the balls disintegrated in the water (or possibly which ones sank) was decided by God and thus revealed the answer through Him. It is possible that the ‘incantations’ and ‘sorcery’ mentioned were appeals to God to intervene and reveal the thief.

Divine intervention underlies many attempts at thief discovery. The early medieval practice of trial by ordeal survived at least into the seventeenth century in the form of the ‘holy morsel’, which appears sporadically. In such cases, each of the suspected thieves was fed a small piece of food, such as bread or cheese, which had either been crossed or inscribed with a charm. The records do not specify how this was meant to reveal the thief, but choking on the food seems likely. Either way, the expected physical intervention of God suggests that the method evolved from the same principle that gave rise to trials by ordeal.

Sieve and Shears

God’s prompting is also evident in a divination practice that involved balancing a sieve on a pair of shears: the way the sieve tipped or turned in response to a question revealed the answer.⁴⁸ The method for using the sieve and shears is simpler, normally involving reciting suspects’ names and invoking Saints Peter and Paul or the Holy Trinity. A Worcestershire cunning woman even justified the method in 1633 by claiming that Saints Peter and Paul had invented it.⁴⁹ The earliest reference I have found to the sieve and shears dates from 1554, when William Hasylwoode used it to discover who had stolen 14 groats. The practice must be at least a generation older as, in his indictment, Hasylwoode explained that although this was the first time he had used the technique he was prompted to try it on ‘remembryng, that he being a chylde, dyd hear his mother declare that when any man hadd lost anny thing, then they wold use a syve, and

⁴⁸ It is tempting to think that Walter’s mention of a ‘sword or basin’ refers to the sieve and shears; however, it is more likely to refer to a scrying practice used in ritual magic. Rider, *Magic and Religion*, p. 142.

⁴⁹ ‘The Manuscripts of Miss Buxton, at Shadwell Court, Norfolk’, in *Report on Manuscripts in Various Collections* (Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1902), pp. 283, 309, <https://archive.org/details/variousmanuscriptsofgreauoft/page/226>. Though the sieve and shears is not recorded before the mid-sixteenth century, the association of goods finding with Peter and Paul is witnessed far earlier. For example, John Smith was charged with openly teaching that fortune-telling and conjuring were condoned by the saints in 1417. See *The Register of Bishop Philip Repingdon 1405–1419*, ed. by Margaret Archer, 3 vols (Hereford: Publications of the Lincoln Record Society, 1963), 1, pp. 194–96.

a payre of sheeres'.⁵⁰ The sieve and shears therefore were probably being used at least in the first half of the sixteenth century, but how much further back is difficult to assess. Using a sieve to divine is itself an ancient process, mentioned as it is by Theocritus in 275 BCE. How exactly the sieve was used, however, and whether it was used in the same way as early modern practitioners are unclear. Different translations of Theocritus' *Idylls* offer varying levels of detail, and interpret the method in different ways. Neil Hopkinson translates the relevant passage in Theocritus' third idyll, which involves the narrator consulting a diviner on whether he is loved by his paramour, as simply reading 'Agroeo, too, the sieve diviner ... spoke truly when she said I was besotted with you but that you make no account of me'.⁵¹ Hopkinson interprets this as 'Probably [involving] small objects such as beans or bones [that] were shaken in a sieve and omens taken from their arrangement, as with tea-leaves today'.⁵² However, Thomas Creech, who produced a translation in the latter half of the seventeenth century, translated the passage as 'To Aggrio too I made the same demand, A cunning Woman she, I crost her hand; She turn'd the Sieve and Sheers, and told me true, That I should love, but not be lov'd by you'.⁵³ This may well say more about the context in which Creech was translating, rather than the understanding or intention of Theocritus. The act of turning the sieve and shears, rather than placing anything inside the sieve, seems to have been the common early modern practice. When Ann Bellett was indicted in 1633, for example, it was for doing the 'juggling trick of the sive [sic] and shears'.⁵⁴ The language suggests some level of balancing act as well as an element of entertainment or display; a method that seems to be reflected in Creech's use of the verb 'turn'.

The familiarity Creech shows with the sieve and shears, and the use to which one might put the method, shows a continuity of understanding

⁵⁰ Hale, *Series of Precedents*, p. 139; this is an earlier date than that listed in the *Oxford Dictionary of Superstitions*, whose first early modern reference to the sieve and shears comes from Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). See Iona Opie and Moira Tatem, 'Sieve and Shears: Divination', *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192829160.001.0001/acref-9780192829160-e-1273.

⁵¹ *Theocritus Muschus Bion*, ed. by Neil Hopkinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 63–65.

⁵² Hopkinson, *Theocritus*, p. 63, fn. 13.

⁵³ Thomas Creech, *The Idylliums of Theocritus with Rapin's Discourse of Pastorals Done into English* (Oxford: L. Lichfield, 1684), pp. 23–24, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:45071.

⁵⁴ 'Manuscripts of Miss Buxton', p. 309.

and demand for the practice from the mid-sixteenth century to beyond our period of interest. Keith Thomas' assertion that the sieve and shears technique was popular during the early modern period clearly holds, therefore, and it seems to have been popular for an extended period.⁵⁵ As Creech-via-Theocritus also demonstrates, the sieve and shears was not a method confined to finding thieves, which will be discussed further below; what prompted its rise in the early modern period rather than earlier is not clear.

If the sieve and shears was an early modern practice, there was no shortage of techniques for late medieval magicians. A method known as 'turning the loaf' was in active use in London during the fourteenth century, but seems to have died out shortly after. Two cases appear in the commissary court there, in 1375 and 1382, and describe very similar procedures. The first, performed by cunning man John Chestre, involved turning 'a loaf with knives', which apparently failed to give any useful information. Chestre was imprisoned until he returned the fee advanced to him by his client, and was ordered never to perform such a deception again.⁵⁶ Seven years later, Robert Berewold attempted the ritual, though slightly more elaborately: 'he took a loaf, and fixed in the top of it a round peg of wood, and four knives at the four sides of the same, in form like a cross; and then did soothsaying and the art magic over them'. Berewold proclaimed Johanna Wolsy the thief – an accusation that resulted in a defamation suit. Berewold's punishment was more humiliating than Chestre's; he was pilloried for an hour with the loaf – complete with knives and peg – around his neck, while the town sheriffs publicly announced his crime.⁵⁷ Perhaps the punishment deterred others, or the method was too complex and ineffectual to be worth trying; either way, I cannot find any evidence that it was attempted again.

Book and Key

A further method that crops up fairly regularly is that of the book and key. This was often used to discover lost objects, and, according to Karen Jones and Michael Zell, was in use at least from the thirteenth century (though they do not provide evidence for this).⁵⁸ I have found three instances of book and key use from the fifteenth century, three from the sixteenth, and

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Religion*, p. 258.

⁵⁶ A. H. Thomas, *Calendar of Select Plea and Memoranda Rolls, London, 1364–1381* (London, 1929), 23 January 1375.

⁵⁷ Riley, *Memorials of London*, pp. 472–73.

⁵⁸ Karen Jones and Michael Zell, "'The Divels Speciall Instruments': Women and Witchcraft before the 'Great Witch-Hunt'", *Social History*, 30.1 (2005), 45–63 (p. 52).

one from the seventeenth, suggesting it was a method used throughout the period. It involved some fundamental elements, including psalms, holding a book and key, and expecting some kind of movement from either key or book. There appears to have been some variation in approach, however, which might be evidence of change over time or simply individual preference. For example, the Abbot of Coggeshall used the following method in 1536:

[he] takes a key, a book, and a man's name, and [he] puts the key on his fourth finger, and he says certain psalms and other ceremonies unlawful, and if the book falls down, he believes presently the matter to be of truth.⁵⁹

The 1549 deposition of William Wycherley describes a similar approach, involving reciting Psalm 50:18, '*Si videbis furem, correbas cum eo, et cum adulterem portionem tuam ponebas*'.⁶⁰ However, Wycherley's actions differ from the abbot's. His method apparently involved asking his client for the names of suspected thieves,

Which names he put severally into the pipe of a kay, and laying the kay upon the verse of the spalter [sic] book, viz. Si veidebis furem &c ... And whan this verse was said over one of the names, which was a woman, the book and key tourned rounde ...⁶¹

These approaches differ significantly. Wycherley places the key in the psalter, not on his fourth finger. The book is also expected to turn and not fall. It is unclear in either case how exactly the book is held, though in the latter it seems likely that it was suspended between two people's outstretched hands (or possibly balled fists, which is more stable), as this would have given the book freedom to turn. The same, or a very similar, method was used by John Dixson in 1448, a key 'placed in a book, that is to say a psalter, with a bill containing the name of him who is under suspicion'.⁶² Keith Thomas describes another method from St Owen's, Gloucestershire, in 1551, where the vicar William Newport 'inserted the

⁵⁹ Quoted in James Edward Oxley, *The Reformation in Essex* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965), pp. 102–3.

⁶⁰ 'When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers'.

⁶¹ J. G. Nichols, *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation, Chiefly from the Manuscripts of John Foxe the Martyrologist; with Two Contemporary Biographies of Archbishop Cranmer* (London: J. B. Nichols, 1859), pp. 332–35.

⁶² 'cum clave posita in libro, videlicet psalterio, cum billa nomen ilius qui redditur suspectus continente' (my translation), taken from Bishop Alnwick's Court Book, partly reproduced in A. H. Thompson, *The English Clergy and Their Organisation in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), p. 222.

key and tied the book up with string. He then invoked the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, bidding the key to turn when he reached the name of the guilty party'.⁶³ Here it is the key that is expected to turn and not the book, though how it was to do so is, again, not explicit.

Reginald Scot provides perhaps the most detailed exposition of the method, though once more the method deviates from others. Claiming to describe the writings of Nicolaus Hemingius, Scot relates that 'Popish priests'

doo practice with a psalter and a keie fastned upon the 49. psalme, to discover a theefe. And when the names of the suspected persons are orderlie put into the pipe of the keie, at the reading of these words of the psalme [If thou sawest a theefe thou diddest consent unto him] the booke will wagge, and fall out of the fingers of them that hold it, and he whose name remaineth in the keie must be the theefe.⁶⁴

Thomas previously asserted that cunning folk's practices were largely devoid of any underlying theory as to how the magic worked.⁶⁵ This may be true to an extent, given what we have seen regarding the book and key. No two approaches are the same, and there are major discrepancies in the function of the moving parts. However, there is a framework to which they all cohere. All agree that some form of invocation should be spoken, and most agree that it should be Psalm 50:18; that the key, book, and names are vital ingredients; and that some form of movement from either book or key exposes the guilty party. That the book is often specified as a psalter or Bible demonstrates the shared belief in the power of these books above others, and the reference to a prayer or psalm feeds into the widespread belief that divine intervention – not demons – was behind the magic. The passage from Psalm 50 pertains to thieves, showing a simple, clear causality and rationale behind the magic. Meanwhile, the fact that the 1448 account corresponds very closely with that of Scot shows that, over a century on, this rationale was durable enough to survive the inevitable garbling it underwent through word of mouth and regional variation.

Divination

Divination and soothsaying are closely tied to discovering thieves and lost goods in that they often use similar methods. In my database 8 per cent of

⁶³ Thomas, *Religion*, p. 254.

⁶⁴ Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 277.

⁶⁵ Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 272.

the magicians offered divination or some form of fortune-telling as part of their services. That divination makes up such a low proportion of cases is surprising, but may, counterintuitively, be explained by the frequency of its use. While certain methods, discussed later, seem to have been complex enough to justify employing a magical specialist, individual cases of passive divination like watching crows land on the roof and simple, do-it-yourself methods are more likely to have gone unreported, and thus unrecorded. The number of cases would also inevitably rise if astrology was incorporated wholesale into this analysis. The activities of the astrologer-physicians Simon Forman and his protégé, Richard Napier, alone compose upwards of 76,000 incidences of horary astrology. Most of these relate to diagnosing illnesses, but several also feature divinatory questions such as whether a woman was pregnant and what the sex of the baby might be; whether the querent had an enemy; or the whereabouts of a missing person.⁶⁶ I have excluded most of these cases on the grounds that the method used was treated as natural insofar as it was reading and interpreting the effects of stellar influences: a practice that, though occult, was largely treated as natural philosophy rather than magic during the period in question.⁶⁷ That being said, astrologers had the skills to stray into magical practice at times, and indeed Richard Napier resorted to angel magic for some of his consultations (discussed further in what follows).⁶⁸ It is worth noting, therefore, just how blurred the boundaries between magic, religion, and natural philosophy could be – especially when it came to the provision of divinatory services where astrologers and magicians could be called upon to answer similar questions.

Compounding the uncertainty surrounding how frequently divination magic was commissioned is the fact that ecclesiastical records also tend to be vague in their references to what might be divination. Many of the indictments only record *sortilegium* as the crime, and as *sortilegium* can also be synonymous with magic, I have excluded cases from my analysis unless the record explicitly specifies that some form of divination or soothsaying occurred.

⁶⁶ Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, et al. (eds.), 'CASE692'; 'CASE88'; 'CASE637', *The Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634: A Digital Edition*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk>.

⁶⁷ Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, and John Young, 'Early Modern Astrology', *A Critical Introduction to the Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634* (2018), <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/astrological-medicine/early-modern-astrology>.

⁶⁸ See Ofer Hadass, *Medicine, Religion and Magic in Early Stuart England: Richard Napier's Medical Practice* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018).

Sortilegium and ‘soothsaying’, alongside terms like *nigromancia* and *incantacione*, apparently required little explanation to officials. This means that there is rarely any elaboration on the methods used. Where details are recorded, it is clear that both the book and key and sieve and shears were used as divination methods on occasion. These methods were by nature versatile: in theory any binary question can be answered. The sieve and shears was used twice regarding pregnancies, for example, once to discover the sex of a baby, and once to know whether or not two women were pregnant.⁶⁹ Though a simple enough method, it does not seem to be the case that just anyone would practise the sieve and shears. There are definite instances of people paying for others to perform the service for them, suggesting that there was either more to the practice than met the eye (the appropriate words were not known by everyone, perhaps) or that there was a belief that some people were more adept than others at getting answers. Several individuals had reputations built around their skill with the sieve and shears: apparently one Thomas Shakilton, living in Aldersgate, London, in the 1540s, had ‘doon therwith many praty feates, and many trouthes tryed out’.⁷⁰ Palmistry makes a relatively early appearance in 1469, when Gilbert Leche appeared before the Canterbury courts for its use.⁷¹

More complex methods existed for both thief finding and divination. Astronomy and astrology, especially the calculating of nativities, was a well-known practice even before our period. It could be used to discover whether a business venture would be successful, when a marriage should take place, and whether stolen goods might be recovered.⁷² It was used to this

⁶⁹ Wilcocks (1589) in Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (1970, reprint London: Routledge, 1999); ‘D/ACA/15’ (Chelmsford), fols 80–80v, Essex Record Office; Alice Scolfield (1641) in ‘QSB 1/255/38’ (Preston), fols 70–1, Lancashire Record Office.

⁷⁰ Nichols, *Narratives*, pp. 334–35.

⁷¹ ‘DCb Y.1.10’ (Canterbury), fol. 21v, Canterbury Cathedral Archives; Palmistry also appears again in Bishop John Hooper’s 1551–52 interrogatories for Gloucester and Worcester Diocese, asking ‘whether any of them [clergy] teach, talk, reason, or defend any prophecies and lies of men besides God’s Holy Word, or use themselves, or suffer any other to use, witchcraft, palmistry, and such other forbidden arts; or whether any of them put their trust in such forbidden and damnable arts’; see Frere, *Visitation Articles of the Reformation*, II, pp. 300–1.

⁷² Several exemplary works have been published on the uses for astronomy in late medieval Europe, including, for example, Hilary M. Carey, *Courting Disaster: Astrology at the English Court and University in the Later Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992); Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France* (Leuven: Brill, 1997); Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2013); Sophie Page, *Astrology in Medieval Manuscripts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

end in the early sixteenth century by the service magician-cum-astronomer John Steward, who also offered treasure-hunting services through the conjuration of spirits; likewise John Vaux, who in the 1630s could be called on to find lost goods.⁷³ Similarly, scrying in a 'glass' or mirror could also be used to discover thieves, find someone's whereabouts, or foretell events. In one case dating from the mid-fifteenth century, one man used a human limb to find 40 shillings on behalf of a client.⁷⁴ How he was using this limb is unclear, though it is possible that it was utilised as part of a conjuration or consultation with spirits. Astrology, necromancy, and glass-scrying took more resources than simpler methods like the sieve and shears, which used ubiquitous household items; the latter were certainly easier and less controversial to employ than a cadaver. These complex methods likely came at a higher cost for the client, as well as potentially demanding more time and skill on the part of the practitioner. The necromancer using the human limb was John Dixon, mentioned earlier as a user of the book and key and recorded as being cook to the prior of Stonley Abbey (*coke de pri-ratu de Stonle*).⁷⁵ His intimate connection with an ecclesiastical institution likely aided his access to the materials needed in both his practices, as well as lending him some knowledge of the exorcising rituals that may have formed a part of his necromancy.

As mentioned at the outset of this section, conjuring angels and other spirits was also sometimes used to divine the answers to a variety of questions, and indeed was a very versatile method for those who had the knowledge and skill to use it. William Byg, alias Lech, claimed to use angels as part of his goods-finding services in the 1460s.⁷⁶ Apparently Byg was unable to see the angels himself, but under his direction a pre-pubescent boy whom he employed was able to summon and see angels while gazing into a crystal. Byg would apparently ask the questions and the boy would relay the angels' answers. Richard Parkyn of Rotherham also confessed to summoning a 'good angell' as part of his services diagnosing illnesses, which he achieved by reciting prayers over patients' clothes.⁷⁷

⁷³ James Raine, 'Proceedings Connected with a Remarkable Charge of Sorcery', *Archaeological Journal*, 16 (1859), 71–81; *The Acts of the High Commission Court within the Diocese of Durham* (London: Surtees Society, 1858), xxxiv, pp. 34–42.

⁷⁴ 'operator huiusmodiartem cum membro defuncti, per quam artem asseruit Elizabetham Bold de Swyneshede defunctam restaurasse lx s. per eam in vita sua a viro su furtive ablato', Thompson, *English Clergy*, p. 222.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *English Clergy*, p. 222.

⁷⁶ Raine, 'Remarkable Charge of Sorcery', p. 80.

⁷⁷ *The Register of Thomas Rotherham, Archbishop of York 1480–1500*, ed. by E. E. Barker (Torquay: Canterbury and York Society, 1976).

In the 1530s, the nobleman William Neville employed the magician Richard Jones for his soothsaying abilities. Apparently Jones had a range of divination methods, including communicating with angels through dreams and summoning ‘king devils’ to answer his questions.⁷⁸ Richard Napier recorded in his own notes that he used the method on multiple occasions between 1610 and 1629, inquiring about issues ranging from whether a client was bewitched, to how their business ventures might fare, to their marriage prospects.⁷⁹ Napier consulted a number of angels as part of his work, including Raphael, Michael, Asariel, Gabriel, Aladiah, and Uriel as aids to his prognostications. Aside from enabling more developed answers than those allowed by simpler divination methods, the level of skill suggested by conjuring would have been more impressive to clients, and it is possible that magicians touting more complex rituals charged more for their services.

Love Magic

The final two uses under discussion – love magic and treasure hunting – appear far less frequently in the historical record than any of those already discussed. By love magic I refer to sexual relationships, including magic to aid or hinder fertility. Love magic is the fourth most common use for cunning magic in the period, making up 5 per cent of the total. It is thus much smaller than healing or finding lost goods, despite evidence that it was of enduring interest throughout the period. There are several possible reasons for this, discussed later in the section.

The first indictment I have found dates from 1435, when Margaret Lyndyssay sued three men for defamation for claiming she had made them impotent through sympathy magic. Magically induced impotence was long established as a concept by this time: in the thirteenth century there were already clear instructions on when it constituted grounds for divorce.⁸⁰ Other kinds of love magic also appear in confession manuals, mentioning magic to attract as well as repel lovers. One thirteenth-century

⁷⁸ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1533* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1882), vi, pp. 115–16; this case is discussed further in Part II of this volume.

⁷⁹ Kassell et al., *Casebooks*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/search?fi=document-type=Case%3A%3AEntry;sort=sort-date;f2-info=Angelic%20consultation;f3-astrologer=Mr%20Richard%20Napier%20%5BSandy%5D%20%5BRichard%20Napier%20%5BSenior%5D%5D%20%28PERSON%5218%29>.

⁸⁰ Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa on Marriage*, trans. by Pierre J. Payer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2005), p. 66.

example demonstrates this dual concern, asking the penitent whether they have ‘cast hate or enmities between some people, or arranged for it to be cast, or has ever put something in anyone’s food or drink in order to bind him or her to illicit love’.⁸¹ The Church was therefore aware of love magic long before 1435, and it may have been an important aspect of service magicians’ trade. Margery Jourdemayne, who was burned as a heretic in 1441, may have specialised in love magic. She provided love potions to Eleanor Cobham, the Duchess of Gloucester, to aid conception, and had been peddling her wares for at least a decade before her death: she is recorded as imprisoned at Windsor in 1430 for ‘sorcerye’, but clearly found the practice lucrative enough to continue despite the risk.⁸²

Though the best known, Margery was not the only cunning person to offer such services in the fifteenth century. I have found seven cases of love magic from this time: five to procure husbands or lovers, one to cause impotence (above), and one to ensure marital bliss, specifically using holy water to make a husband ‘humble and obedient to [his wife’s] will’.⁸³ Attracting a lover or a marriage partner was the most common use of love magic between 1350 and 1650, much more than sowing discord or improving relationships. During the sixteenth century, eight service magicians from this sample engaged in ‘attraction’ magic, compared to two who inspired love within a relationship and only one who aided conception. This instance of conception is noteworthy: the cunning woman Edith Hooker claimed to be able to make women conceive without the need for human semen, apparently administering the ‘spawn of a trotter’ instead.⁸⁴ Four cases survive from the period between 1600 and 1650, one of which involved a sorcerer of unknown gender conjuring a spirit to coax a woman into marriage, one to make a man more attractive, another that involved making wax images (presumably to bind two lovers), and one to aid conception.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Catherine Rider, ‘Women, Men, and Love Magic in Late Medieval Pastoral Manuals’, *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft*, 7.2 (2012), 190–211 (pp. 199–200).

⁸² *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, ed. by Harris Nicholas, 7 vols (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1835), IV, p. 114; R. R. Tighe and J. E. Davis, *Annals of Windsor: Being a History of Castle and Town* (London: Longman, 1851), I, pp. 301–2.

⁸³ ‘DCb Y.1.10’, fol. 209v; translation from Jones and Zell, ‘Divels Speciall Instruments’, p. 54.

⁸⁴ ‘sine virili semine’; ‘21M65/C3/1’ (Winchester), fols 71, 75, Hampshire Record Office.

⁸⁵ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, 1598–1601* (London: British History Online, 1869), p. 523; Cecil L’Estrange Ewen, ‘Robert Radcliffe, Fifth Earl of Sussex: Witchcraft Accusations’, *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 22.2 (1936), 232–38.

That finding a partner was the most popular use of love magic is unsurprising, but the low number of cases dealing with conception or love within relationships is unexpected. We know from charm evidence that conception magic was relatively common. We also know that such charms existed in the early medieval period.⁸⁶ The paucity of indictments suggests an ecclesiastical dearth of interest in conception magic, which corresponds with Catherine Rider's research. Rider demonstrates that, where love magic is discussed at all, medieval *exempla* are most concerned by magically induced desire, impotence, or hatred. Impeding or aiding conception and predicting a future spouse are discussed less often, and correspondingly appear in fewer indictments.⁸⁷ Surprisingly, I have found little evidence of cunning folk using magic to sow discord between lovers. One instance of attraction magic apparently had a dual impact, causing hatred between two suitors for the same woman, but that is all.⁸⁸

If *exempla* and confession manuals were less concerned by conception magic, this would explain why it did not appear often in the church courts: confessors were simply not asking about it. There are several possible reasons why it avoided comment. During the fifteenth century, the relatively high use of charms in conventional medicine puts conception aids in a grey area between illicit magic and medical orthodoxy. Another potential factor is the broader pastoral concern over deviancy. Trying to gain an extra-marital lover or coerce someone into marriage was prohibited by the Church regardless of the method, so it is understandable that magic used to such ends would be reported by neighbours and clerics. Conception, however, was at the heart of the purpose of marriage, and the duty of both husband and wife. Using magic towards a conventional end, though technically forbidden, may have been viewed more sympathetically. Indeed, all conception cases discussed contain taboo elements beyond mere magic: Eleanor Cobham stood accused of attempted regicide when she admitted employing Margery Jourdemayne to help her conceive, while Edith Hooker was trying to impregnate women without the involvement of human males. The only other instance I have found is of the professional cunning woman Mary Woods, whose 1613 indictment primarily concerned a client who had asked Woods to poison her husband. During the deposition,

⁸⁶ Lea Olsan, 'The Corpus of Charms in the Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books', in *Charms, Charmers and Charming*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 214.

⁸⁷ Rider, 'Women, Men, and Love Magic', p. 195.

⁸⁸ Hale, *Series of Precedents*, p. 7.

Woods admitted giving the Countess of Essex a powder to wear around her neck to aid conception.⁸⁹ Of these cases, therefore, two involved noble clients and attempted murder, and the third involved a woman trying to get other women pregnant through pig semen. These aspects are likely to have been more of a concern than fertility magic itself, which seems to have been low on the list of moral priorities.

Methods

Possibly due to the dearth of recorded cases, there are no strong trends when it comes to methods for performing love magic. The range of methods is in fact very varied: wax or lead images, sympathy magic, powders and potions, charms to be worn about the body, conjuring spirits, and misuse of holy water all make an appearance. The desired outcome seems to have helped determine which method was used; each use of images was associated with trying to inspire affection, for example, and sympathy magic is more closely tied to impotence.⁹⁰

Interestingly, each instance of image magic involves a member of the nobility, (as a result, these cases will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). However, it is worth noting at this point that the four major episodes date from the 1370s, 1470s, 1570s, and 1610s, implying a continuous idea of what love magic was seen to look like in courtly circles. Thomas Walsingham recorded a rumour in his fourteenth-century chronicle that Alice Perrers, mistress to Edward III, fashioned images of herself and the king out of wax.⁹¹ From the fifteenth century, Jacquetta of Luxembourg was accused of using magic to prompt the marriage of her daughter, Elizabeth Grey, to Edward IV. The accusation alluded to the existence of two lead images fashioned into the shape of the couple, but they were not presented in court.⁹² The 1570s episode was similar in that it involved small dolls engraved with people's names, with the ostensible intention to attract specific people to each other. This incident was controversial at the

⁸⁹ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, James I, 1611–1618* (London: British History Online, 1858), pp. 186–89.

⁹⁰ Thomas Walsingham, *The St Albans Chronicle: The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, 1376–1394*, trans. by John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs, and Leslie Watkiss, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 1, pp. 97–100; *Rotuli Parliamentorum; Ut et Petitiones, Placita in Parlamento. Ab Anno Duodecimo R. Edwardi IV, Ad Finem Ejusdem Regni*, vi, p. 232.

⁹¹ Walsingham, *St Albans Chronicle*, 1, pp. 97–100.

⁹² *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1467–1477* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1900), p. 190.

time, as there was concern that the female mommet found, inscribed with the name Elizabeth, was a magical assassination attempt against the queen. The issue was debated by contemporaries: some, including the noted sceptic Reginald Scot, argued that it was clearly a foolish attempt at love magic rather than anything dangerous.⁹³ The theory behind this is expounded in the play *Fedele and Fortunio*, which was performed for Elizabeth I in the years after the mommets were found (c. 1584). In the play, the service magician/witch Medusa explains that an 'Image of a man, made out in Virgin waxe, / Which being prick't, or toasted in the flame of burning Flare./ Hee that you loove shall come and throwe him selfe before your feet: more humble then a Lambe, to doo what you shall think is meet'.⁹⁴ The wax image in the play is inscribed on the forehead with the name of the man it is meant to represent, and the intended lover's name written over the heart.⁹⁵ Whether the mommets found in the 1570s were intended to harm or not, the fact that a debate could even take place about their purpose demonstrates that there was a contemporary awareness such dolls could be used for love magic. The immediate staging of a play elaborating on how such magic worked helps to confirm that the method was indeed extant and, if it was not already in wide circulation, perhaps even helped popularise the practice. The 1610s case involved Frances Howard, Countess of Essex, and her lady-in-waiting Ann Turner, who apparently commissioned a magic image of 'a naked man and woman knowing one another carnally' that was intended to bind their respective lovers to them.⁹⁶ Again, the implications of these rumours and accusations will be discussed in later chapters. Whether or not they were true, though, the survival of the image method from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries is striking.

Conjuring spirits also features as a method of love magic in the late sixteenth century, mostly in relation to threats and coercion. There are three instances of women being threatened with spiritual attack if they did not bow to another's wishes. In 1585, for example, a student at Temple in London was reported for using magic to seduce Edetha Best. Apparently he made 'sorceries and threats against her, threatening to trouble her with

⁹³ Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 275.

⁹⁴ M. A., *Fedele and Fortunio, the Two Italian Gentlemen*, ed. by Luigi Pasqualigo (London: Malone Society, 1909), act 1, sc. 3, ll. 378–81.

⁹⁵ M. A., *Fedele and Fortunio*, act 2, sc. 2.

⁹⁶ Alastair James Bellamy, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England: News Culture and the Overbury Affair, 1603–1666* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press), p. 149.

the sight of the devil, unless she consented to his desires'.⁹⁷ A decade later, Agnes Williams was threatened with similar repercussions if she did not consent to her daughter marrying one William Divers. Apparently William Walsall, who was sent to petition Agnes on Divers' behalf, said that

if you ... will not geve your consent that William Divers shall have your daughter Elizabeth I will be the meanes and so deale wth you that your mynd shall never be quiet in the day tyme and in the night you shalbe trubled and vexed wth straunge sightes and noises which you shall se and heare.⁹⁸

The magic in these cases does not directly provoke love, as is the intention with the wax images, but rather relies on fear of threatened consequences to bring about the marriage/seduction. In theory, therefore, the same magic of summoning an aggressive demon could be used, for example, for extortion or punitive action against a suspected thief. Interestingly, though, I have not come across any such examples. It may be that the women involved were seen as impressionable or easily frightened, and therefore more likely to give in to the men's private desires through these threats. Whether demons were ever expected to do more than this in love cases is unclear. Another demon was involved in one further episode from 1552 where Joan Hall, a servant, sued her neighbour for fraud. We do not encounter the magician himself in the record and it is possible that no magician was actually commissioned. Hall's complaint was that Mrs Hudson had defrauded her of twenty shillings on the pretence of consulting a magician on her behalf, in order to secure a 'rich marriage'.⁹⁹ After the intended husband failed to materialise Hall decided to prosecute, at which point it emerged that Hudson had threatened that, if Hall called off the deal, the spirit the magician had supposedly conjured would attack her. This seems to purely be a threat from an individual profiteering off another's trust. However, the fabrication suggests an understanding that spirits were a feature of love magic, and that such magic was violent or dangerous. What the women actually imagined the demon would do to provoke marriage, though, is unspecified.

⁹⁷ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I, 1581–1590* (London: British History Online, 1865), pp. 241, 246–48.

⁹⁸ Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 108.

⁹⁹ *Depositions Taken before the Mayor & Aldermen of Norwich, 1549–1567*, ed. by Walter Rye (Norwich: Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, 1905), p. 34, <https://archive.org/details/depositionstakeoosociogoo/page/n44>.

The final common method to appear in the records is love powders and potions. Several references are made to 'drinks' or potions in the sixteenth century, though the practice is clearly far older. The tragedy of Tristan and Iseult, for example, which survives from at least the High Middle Ages and was printed in Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, is enabled by a mis-administered love potion.¹⁰⁰ In Malory's version, the drink was intended for King Mark and Isolde on their wedding day, and 'Kynge Marke sholde drynke to La Beale Isode – and than ... ayther shall love other days of their lyff'.¹⁰¹ The same basic principle of giving the intended partner a drink to provoke love is reflected in the later cases, though whether both parties should take the drink is unclear. In 1582, for example, Goodwife Swan of Margate, Kent, was examined for boasting that she could make a drink that 'if she give it to any young man she liketh well of, he shall be in love with her'. Whether she also needed to drink it for the magic to work is not stated, and the method might be determined by the contents of the potion. There are several medieval references to consumable love spells, some of which incorporate human fluids, including menstrual blood. The thirteenth-century theologian William de Montibus copied a passage from Burchard of Worms' *Decretum* that rather graphically described some ingredients used in love spells. These included 'either a fish which has died in her vagina, or bread which was made on her buttocks with blood, or menstrual blood [given] to her husband to eat or drink so that his love will be more inflamed'.¹⁰² Such a method clearly relies on a sympathetic link formed between the woman and her intended, which presumably means that the woman would not also need to consume the food or drink. In instances where both parties drank the potion, it is possible that the recipe relied on heating spices or other ingredients associated with provoking desire. References to love potions appear in Shakespeare's plays and include such ingredients as wild pansy; other substances like pepper, cinnamon, eryngium (sea holly), and savory were also associated with lust.¹⁰³ It is possible that the basic method through which the magic was meant to

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur: Or the Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table*, ed. by Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), pp. 256, l. 28–257, l. 8.

¹⁰¹ Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, p. 256, ll. 34–36.

¹⁰² Rider, 'Women, Men, and Love Magic', p. 204.

¹⁰³ William Shakespeare, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 401–23, act 2, sc. 1; Jennifer Evans, *Aphrodisiacs, Fertility and Medicine in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), pp. 94–95.

work (though much of the result could be attributed to physiology and the natural aphrodisiac effect of the ingredients) was by drinking the concoction in the company of the intended lover, so that the person administering it was associated with the resultant desire.¹⁰⁴

Treasure Hunting

The final topic under discussion is treasure hunting. I have found twenty-five cases of treasure hunting, though the regularity of the intervals between instances suggests that it was a continuous practice from at least the early fifteenth century. We know that hunting for treasure, with or without magic, was a common exercise during the late medieval and early modern periods and was quite heavily policed by successive monarchs.¹⁰⁵ In this context it is surprising that more cases of magical treasure hunting do not survive in England, but this dearth may be remedied by more intensive archival research than the scope of this book allows. Johannes Dillinger has investigated magical treasure hunting in England to an extent, but as part of a wider body of research that covers all of Europe and North America. While that is an insightful and useful study, therefore, there is still capacity for work focusing specifically on England.

As stated, magical treasure hunting appears at regular intervals from the early fifteenth century onwards, beginning in 1418 when Thomas Forde was prosecuted for fraud. Forde apparently offered magic for treasure hunting and goods recovery, and in the instance that brought about his indictment, he had promised to recover £200 for a widow whose husband had buried the money in a secret location before his death.¹⁰⁶ Subsequent cases in the fifteenth century appear in 1448, 1465, and 1499. During the sixteenth century cases appear with increasing regularity, though this increase does not appear to be linked with the successive Acts against Conjurations. Henry VIII's 1542 Act explicitly outlawed magical treasure hunting and specified the death penalty on the first offence, but I have found only one prosecution during the seven years in which the Act was in force, and that case focused on an investigation into potential treason rather than treasure

¹⁰⁴ Evans, *Aphrodisiacs*, pp. 90–96.

¹⁰⁵ Johannes Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting in Europe and North America: A History*, Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 9–20.

¹⁰⁶ Reginald R. Sharpe, *Calendar of Letter-Books of the City of London 1400–1422* (London: British History Online, 1909), 1, pp. 195–206, www.british-history.ac.uk/london-letter-books/vol1/pp.195-206.

hunting specifically.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, the three decades leading up to the Act feature five prosecutions, and another appears in 1549, two years after the Act was repealed. The cases then seem to peter out until 1570, at which point there are four cases in five years, and then further instances in every decade for the remainder of Elizabeth I's reign.

Unlike goods discovery, where a variety of practices were employed ranging from high ritual to simple methods, treasure hunting seems mostly to have been the preserve of magicians who dealt with demons and complex spells. This is likely linked to the pervasive belief that many treasure troves were protected by spirits, and thus conjurations, exorcisms, or spirits to counter the treasure's guardians were needed in order to recover the goods. In the 1510 case, for example, John Steward and three companions were arrested for trying to conjure a demon and recover treasure buried at Mixindale Head, near Halifax. The magic involved was clearly of a complex, ritual nature, involving three magic circles of virgin parchment and a lead tablet inscribed with the names of several demons; these were necessary as the treasure chest was apparently defended by another demon.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, a hoard purported to be buried 22 feet from a cross near Kettering, Lincolnshire, was said to be guarded by a male and a female spirit in 1527.¹⁰⁹ The party looking for the treasure had acquired this knowledge through a cunning man who was not present at the dig, and were scared off when they heard a rumbling in the ground. Fearing it was the spirit guardians, the men abandoned their excavations.¹¹⁰ Dillinger suggests that the link between treasure and demons was threefold: first, anything underground was more closely associated with demons, as this was believed to be where demons normally dwelled. Second, the corrupting power of wealth meant that it was more likely to attract demons as part of their means to further corrupt humans. Third, 'the power of the demons over treasure troves was simply another element of their huge magical potency'.¹¹¹ That the connection between demons and buried treasure was cemented in the beliefs of English society is demonstrated by the fact that 70 per cent of the treasure-hunting cases I have found explicitly reference demons or spirits.

¹⁰⁷ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, 1546–1547* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1910), 21/2, pp. 101–4.

¹⁰⁸ Raine, 'Remarkable Charge of Sorcery'.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Peacock, 'Extracts from Lincoln Episcopal Visitations', *Archaeologia*, 48.2 (1885), 249–69 (pp. 254–56).

¹¹⁰ Peacock, 'Lincoln Episcopal Visitations', pp. 254–56.

¹¹¹ Dillinger, *Magical Treasure Hunting*, p. 62.

Of the remaining cases that do not involve conjuring spirits to help either locate or recover treasure, some records are not detailed enough to establish what exactly was used. Thomas Forde, for example, is only described as having had ‘sotell instrumentes þat longen to his craft’, without any elaboration.¹¹² Other cases show that further methods included necromancy, consulting fairies, or using Moses rods to dowse for the location. The latter two seem to have been methods favoured by female treasure hunters more than male, though this is not a hard rule. We will discuss the gender and specialisms of magical practitioners in the following chapter, focusing for now on the mechanics of these methods. There are three instances of using Moses rods to locate treasure, by Marion Clerk in 1499; by John Scott, accompanied by the astrologer William Lilly, in 1634; and by Anne Kingsbury, also in 1634, who claimed to have learned the method from Lilly.¹¹³ Lilly explains the basic method for divining treasure in his autobiography, where he claims that John Scott ‘played the hazel rod round about the cloyster; upon the west-side of the cloysters the rods turned one over another, an argument that the treasure was there’.¹¹⁴ This tells us three things: first, at least in some cases, the Moses rod method involved, in fact, more than one rod; second, as with the sieve and shears and book and key, Moses rods worked through the movement of one or more parts; and third, the type of wood was sufficiently important as to be worth mentioning. In this case the wood was hazel; when Marion Clerk was practising the method two centuries earlier, she used a wand of holly.¹¹⁵ Why or how these woods were significant is not explained by the records, but in Clerk’s case the wand was given to her by fairies. She had it blessed by an unwitting priest on Palm Sunday, which presumably imbued it with extra power. Use of fairies to uncover treasure is not as common as spirits, but still appears twice. Susan Swapper and Anne Taylor may have been communicating with fairies when they dug for treasure in 1609; apparently spirits appeared to Swapper in a dream dressed in green and white, which Annabel Gregory argues were colours typically associated

¹¹² Sharpe, *Letter-Books of the City of London*, 1, pp. 195–206.

¹¹³ *The Register of John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1486–1500, Norwich Sede Vacante, 1499*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill, 3 vols (Woodbridge, UK: Canterbury and York Society/Boydell Press, 2000), III, p. 216; E. E. Trotman, ‘Seventeenth-Century Treasure-Seeking at Bridgewater’, *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries*, 27 (1961), 220–21; William Lilly, *William Lilly’s History of His Life and Times, from the Year 1602 to 1681* (London: Charles Baldwyn, 1822), pp. 78–81.

¹¹⁴ Lilly, *William Lilly’s History*, p. 79.

¹¹⁵ Harper-Bill, *Register of John Morton*, III, p. 216.

with fairies.¹¹⁶ The charlatan magician Judith Philips also claimed to be able to find treasure through the help of the Queen of the Fairies, which was apparently sufficiently believable that she was able to swindle clients through the story.¹¹⁷

This use of fairies – and the correlation between women and fairies, and between men and demons or other spirits – is interesting, and it is worth questioning whether the type of supernatural creatures advising treasure-hunting missions was determined by class or education level. Many of the treasure hunters who faced spirits had at least one cleric in their party, which suggests that they would have had more exposure to the theory around demons or spirits, and knowledge of appropriate exorcism rituals.¹¹⁸ Clerk, on the other hand, was a young girl who came from a family with a tradition of speaking with fairies.¹¹⁹ It may be that the same basic theory of sprites protecting treasure or knowing its whereabouts was interpreted differently according to the treasure seeker's background.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to give an overview of some of the most common ends to which magic was practised during the late medieval and early modern periods, and how – or whether – these practices changed over time. We have seen that, for the most part, the demands made of magic were fairly continuous: healing, discovering lost goods, treasure hunting, and love magic populate the historical record throughout the period. Certain aspects of these increased or decreased in popularity, however, as did the methods used. The clearest example of this is unwitching, which rose in popularity in tandem with fears over witchcraft. Certain methods died out while others became more fashionable: turning the loaf

¹¹⁶ A. Gregory, 'Witchcraft, Politics and the "Good Neighbourhood" in Early Seventeenth-Century Rye', *Past & Present*, 133.1 (1991), 31–66 (pp. 35–37).

¹¹⁷ *The Brideling, Sadling and Ryding, of a Rich Churle in Hampshire, by the Subtill Practise of One Iudeth Philips, a Professed Cunning Woman, or Fortune Teller: With a True Discourse of Her Vnuomanly Vsing of a Trype Wife, a Widow, Lately Dwelling on the Back Side of S. Nicholas Shambles in London, Whom She with Her Conferates, Likewise Cosoned: For Which Fact, Shee Was at the Sessions House without New-Gate Arraigned, Where She Confessed the Same, and Had Iudgement for Her Offence, to Be Whipped through the Citie, the 14. of February, 1594* (London: Thomas Creede, 1595), http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_val_fmt=&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:10918.

¹¹⁸ Richard Kieckhefer (ed.), *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 14.

¹¹⁹ Harper-Bill, *Register of John Morton*, III, p. 216.

to find lost goods does not seem to have survived the fifteenth century, while witch bottles appear to have reached England from the Continent in the seventeenth century and gained ground as a trusted method. Love magic is likely to have been under-reported, and therefore occurs rarely in my database of cases. From contextual evidence, however, it seems likely that it was in more common usage than the numbers suggest.

It is worth noting that Table 1.1 includes a sizeable number of cases that fall into the category of 'other/unknown'. Most of these cases are not explicit about the magic's purpose, but several do mention ends that do not fit neatly into the five categories delineated. Such ends include protection magic that made warriors impervious to harm in battle, weather magic, discovering the whereabouts of missing persons, fostering friendship, and causing harm. Examples of each of these purposes are sufficiently sparse as to not justify statistical analysis, but the broad range of uses to which magic might be put bears mentioning. Most of these cases appear in subsequent chapters as, though not the bread and butter of service magicians' work, they still make up the fabric of the magical universe in which premodern society functioned.

The main message from this chapter is that magic was ubiquitous in the late medieval and early modern periods, and its utility and importance in everyday life meant that it was treated as a commodity by many. In that sense, magicians were treated as service providers from whom magical solutions to everyday problems could be bought. As we will see throughout the rest of this book, this commoditisation of magic affected the way in which magic and magicians were seen and treated by clients, lawmakers, and theologians.