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JOHN STEARNE'S *CONFIRMATION AND DISCOVERY OF WITCHCRAFT*

TEXT, CONTEXT AND AFTERLIFE

Scott Eaton

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Between 1645 and 1647, John Stearne led the most significant outbreak of witch-hunting in England. As accusations of witchcraft spread across East Anglia, Stearne and Matthew Hopkins were enlisted by villagers to identify and eradicate witches. After the trials finally subsided in 1648, Stearne wrote his only publication, *A confirmation and discovery of witchcraft*, but it had a limited readership. Consequently, Stearne and his work fell into obscurity until the 1800s and were greatly overshadowed by Hopkins and his text.

This book is the first study which analyses Stearne's publication and contextualises his ideas within early modern intellectual cultures of religion, demonology, gender, science, and print in order to better understand the witch-finder's beliefs and motives. The book argues that Stearne was a key player in the trials, that he was not a mainstream 'puritan', and that his witch-finding availed from contemporary science. It traces *A confirmation*'s reception history from 1648 to modern day and argues that the lack of research focussing on Stearne has resulted in misrepresentations of the witch-finder in the historiography of witchcraft. This book redresses the imbalance and seeks to provide an alternative reading of the East Anglian witch-hunt and of England's premier witch-hunter, John Stearne.

Scott Eaton teaches history at Queen's University Belfast. He is a religious and cultural historian, with a particular interest in early modern witchcraft, magic, art, and print cultures.

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Introduction

In March 1645, two witch-finders emerged from the town of Manningtree, Essex, and began a systematic pursuit of witches. Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne were minor gentlemen from the same locality and both had a puritan ethos. Their shared religious outlook may have inspired them to begin witch-hunting, in an attempt to restore harmony to communities that had been impacted by the experience of the First Civil War. Their method was to identify and eject witches from local communities, using scripture as guidance. They did so while operating within a traditional discourse of supernatural activity, and in their pursuit of witches they solicited testimonies of familiar spirits that sat uneasily with the Biblicist trajectory of mainstream puritan culture.[1] Nonetheless, the confessions extracted from suspected witches provided sufficient evidence for conviction in many cases: from 1645 to 1647, Hopkins and Stearne aided in the investigation of 240 individuals who were suspected of witchcraft – half of whom were executed.[2] The activities of the witch-finders were recorded in several contemporary pamphlets, which circulated widely in the expanding print culture of south-east England. Two of these pamphlets were authored by Hopkins and Stearne, and these texts illuminate the witch-finders' convictions and motives. They are especially useful for constructing a picture of John Stearne, whose sole publication, *A confirmation and discovery witchcraft* (1648), is the focal point of this book.

Little is known of John Stearne before his witch-hunting days. Much what we do know has been summarised and expanded by Malcolm Gaskill's *Witchfinders* (2005) – a popular history of the East Anglian witchcraft trials. The manuscripts Gaskill used to construct a biography of Stearne are scattered across south-east England and can be found in the Bodleian Library (Oxford), the West Suffolk Record Office (Bury St Edmunds), the East Suffolk Record Office (Ipswich), the Public Record Office (National Archives, Kew), and the Essex Record Office (Chelmsford).[3] Although information on Stearne's biography is fragmentary, it is certain that he was born around 1610 and died in January 1670. Stearne came from a family of gentry and divines that can be traced to Cambridge during the fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century, the Stearnes branched

out from Cambridge into Norwich, Norfolk, Essex, and eventually Suffolk. Stearne's sister, however, did not travel far and was still living in Fordham, Cambridge, in 1662.[4] During Stearne's life he had a wife named Agnes Cawston (or Causton) with whom he had seven children. Their first child, a girl, was born early in 1644 and their second, named Mary, was born in January 1648. Stearne and his family lived in Lawshall, Suffolk, near Bury St Edmunds, may have rented out a house in nearby Manningtree and held land in Little Clacton, Essex.[5] Historians have tended to describe him as a man of the lower gentry who was a staunch puritan with a 'censorious manner', the latter partially due to his involvement in legal trials in the 1640s and 1650s.[6] Unfortunately his occupation in the 1640s is unknown, but by 1662 he was a scribe or 'sometymes servant to Mr Cabeck of Herringswell', the long standing Presbyterian minister of St James Church, Bury St Edmunds (now St Edmundsbury Cathedral).[7] In the 1640s, however, Stearne was held in esteem by the locals of Manningtree and was a politically significant individual who had connections to the local magistrates Sir Harbottle Grimston, 1st Baronet of Bradfield, Essex, and Sir Thomas Bowes. According to Stearne's account, the first woman suspected of being a witch, Elizabeth Clarke, was interrogated by townsmen until she confessed. The locals then approached Stearne and asked him to corroborate their findings with his own investigation. The evidence gathered by Stearne and the locals was taken to the magistrates, Bowes and Grimston, who readily gave Stearne permission to search for additional witches. It is interesting to note that both witch-finders claim to have been the instigators of the hunt, providing two possible scenarios. Hopkins maintained that he discovered a witches' gathering near his house, where he heard a witch talking to her imps. Hopkins implied that he reported this to the magistrates and started the hunt. The historian Frances Timbers, however, believes Stearne was the initiator of the investigations, not Hopkins, based on a critical piece of textual evidence. Timbers points out that Elizabeth Clarke threatened to kill Stearne with a toad-shaped familiar because he 'would have swome her' – her anger was clearly directed towards Stearne.[8] According to Timbers's argument, Stearne would have encountered Clarke during his preliminary investigation, which took place without Hopkins. This hypothesis is strengthened by extant legal records. Although these records are not complete, as far as we can tell, a tailor from Manningtree named John Rivet was the first to accuse Elizabeth Clarke of witchcraft, and of bewitching his wife to death. In this light Hopkins seems less instrumental in beginning the East Anglian witch-hunt; the onus for that rests upon others, such as Rivet, Stearne, and the local magistrates. Throughout the trials, Hopkins and Stearne played their part in extracting confessions from suspected witches, but communities had already identified local witches prior to their arrival. In many cases the witch-finders confirmed pre-existing suspicions and made attempts to secure successful prosecutions at the assizes. The witch-hunt was therefore a collaborative

effort to eject witches from local communities, not the will of an individual or a small group of individuals.

At the beginning of the witch-hunt, two magistrates gave witch-finding their approval, and therefore credence. But the magistrates Bowes and Grimston were by no means credulous Justices of the Peace (JPs). In 1638 Grimston condemned three women to death for practicing witchcraft, and Bowes had been involved in a witchcraft trial in 1642. When the official trials did begin in July 1645, Grimston, Bowes, and Robert Rich, the Earl of Warwick, sentenced nineteen to death (see Chapter 1 for more detail).[9] But some of the local population shared the magistrates' concerns over witchcraft. Indeed, in Essex in the summer of 1645, over ninety individuals came forward to testify against suspected witches; therefore, it is not surprising that the magistrates passed a warrant enabling Stearne to investigate others since it elicited popular enthusiasm.[10] Effective witch-hunting required participation from many individuals from all levels of society, to identify and testify against suspects. Such support was readily found in East Anglia.[11]

Once the witch-finding warrant was enacted, Hopkins appeared and offered Stearne his aid. Then the witch-hunt quickly branched out from Manningtree.[12] After Stearne, Hopkins and their female searchers successfully discovered local witches, they moved on to Great Wenham and went their separate ways. Hopkins headed east and Stearne went west, never straying too far from his family in Lawshall. The witch-hunters met each other when they were summoned to court to testify against witches at the assize courts, which probably amounts to a few occasions, but otherwise they worked independently.[13] Hopkins eventually died of 'consumption' (tuberculosis) on 12 August 1647.[14] In the same year Hopkins published his pamphlet *A discovery of witches*, which was designed to defended his witch-finding against the assize judges in Norfolk who called his techniques into question. Hopkins's text was first printed in Norwich in May 1647 and then printed in London in the same month. *A discovery* was printed by Richard Royston in Ivy Lane, and was intended to be sold at a shop in Norwich owned by Edward Martin.[15] Following Hopkins's death, Stearne conducted one final hunt in the Isle of Ely, after which he retired and wrote his own retrospective work entitled, *A confirmation and discovery of witchcraft* (1648), which was printed by William Wilson, from 'Little Saint Bartholomewes neare Smithfield' in London. Like Hopkins, Stearne turned to print to clear his name and defend his actions against his detractors. In his text Stearne claimed that he had been labelled as a swindler, had been sued by two anonymous men in Colchester for his witch-finding, and therefore could not or would not return to his house in Essex. Stearne found this ironic as he was still awaiting payment for his witch-finding from many villages, which he threatened with further litigation. By publishing *A confirmation*, Stearne may have wanted to fix his version of the witch-hunt in print, and prove to his critics that he had operated within the law and according to Scripture – ultimately, he was not successful in the

latter.[16] Despite the similarities between the two witch-finders, Stearne also highlighted the distance between himself and Hopkins in his text: Stearne seemed to be unaware of Hopkins's pamphlet that was published the previous year, believing, in 1648, that 'we never printed anything until now'.[17] *A confirmation* is evidently a valuable text, particularly since archival sources on Stearne's life are lacking. His pamphlet provides us with an insight into his mind, and the minds of those who confessed to witchcraft. Throughout *A confirmation* Stearne presents witches' confessions as irrefutable evidence for the existence of malefic witches, testimonies which he corroborated with biblical and historical precedents to convince his readers of the veracity of his conclusions.

This book is the first full-scale study of Stearne and his *Confirmation*. It provides an analysis of Stearne's pamphlet and demonstrates how the witch-finder's beliefs related to and interacted with other intellectual frameworks during the English Civil War. It is a micro-history which seeks to contextualise Stearne's work within the social and intellectual environment which produced it, reconstructing the readership for which it was produced, and its transmission in succeeding centuries. Stearne's pamphlet was not widely circulated in the 1640s, and it remained unknown to most scholars until the twentieth century. This, coupled with a paucity of research focussing on Stearne, has resulted in misrepresentations of him in the historiography of witchcraft, which has portrayed him as Matthew Hopkins's assistant, a staunch puritan, and as an opportunist whose sole motivation for witch-hunting was monetary gain.[18] Although Stearne has not been completely overlooked by historians, he is often overshadowed by his partner, Hopkins, whose role in the episode historians have exaggerated. This book will redress this imbalance and investigate the beliefs articulated by Stearne in *A confirmation* to enhance our understanding of the witch-hunter and his sole publication. While some of Stearne's ideas were analogous to mainstream seventeenth-century intellectual and puritan cultures, others deviated from these standards. The various ideas presented by Stearne in *A confirmation* do not correspond to those of a homogenous body of beliefs upheld by popular, learned or puritan cultures in East Anglia. This complicates attempts to use Stearne as a symbol for a larger group of people in south-east England or nationwide. Studies on Stearne and the driving forces behind the witch-hunt therefore need to be more nuanced and should view the trials in their local contexts. This book will provide an alternative reading to the traditional historiography relating to the East Anglian witch-hunt. In order to do so it will rely on a variety of primary and manuscript sources, and will also make use of the evidence and interpretive frameworks of English, Scottish, and European scholars. The following section will give a very broad overview of modern historiographical trends related to the study of English witchcraft, the East Anglian witch-hunt, and John Stearne to aid students and researchers unfamiliar with the topics.

Literature Review

In the early twentieth century, Wallace Notestein, C. L. Ewen, and R. Trevor Davies published influential works on Stearne and Hopkins.[19] Notestein's traced *The history of witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1716* (1911), relying on a wealth of printed primary sources to provide a synopsis of the topic. According to Notestein's research, English witchcraft beliefs were not domestic but foreign in origin. Protestant members of Edward VI's court had been exiled to Geneva during Mary's reign, where they learned European demonology. Once Elizabeth ascended to the throne, the Marian exiles returned to England, bringing their European ideologies with them – hence the passing of an act against witchcraft in 1563.[20] The exiles were primarily concerned with conjurers, but ordinary people also became involved in prosecutions by identifying witches within their communities and demanding their punishment.[21] These events formed the basis for English witch-hunting, which peaked under the reign of Elizabeth I and declined until the outbreak in the 1640s.[22] Notestein claims that Stearne and Hopkins capitalised on the 'judicial anarchy' caused by the Civil War. While there was disruption to the assize courts, 'anarchy' is an exaggeration.[23]

In 1947, R. Trevor Davies attributed the East Anglian witch-hunt to an exogenous ideology by following Notestein's line of thought, producing the most convincing argument for the Marian exiles' role.[24] Davies argued that the introduction of the persecution of witches gained its impetus from returning Protestant refugees who had been living in 'cities where the witch-burnings were taking place on a most extensive scale'.[25] In *Four centuries of witch-beliefs* Davies cited sources to link the development of the English social elite's theories of witchcraft to those of Calvinist Europe, and suggested a top-down process through which witchcraft belief was disseminated to the lower orders in the form of 'sensational popular pamphlets'.[26] When concentrating on the 'witch-mania' in East Anglia, Davies concluded that

> the influence of the returned exiles was by no means the only cause of the growth of witch-belief. The south-east of England was at this time the most highly developed industrially and commercially. Consequently, economic as well as geographical reasons brought it into the closest communication with the Continent.[27]

He continued by claiming that Calvinism 'would be likely to spread most readily in an industrial and commercial community'.[28] Davies argued that mercantile trading in East Anglia, with its close proximity and ideological links to the continent, made Calvinist doctrine likely to spread in its commercially orientated community; industrial areas attracted more European commerce and this increased the prevalence of continental witchcraft beliefs.[29] According to Davies, by the seventeenth century the European

belief in demonic witches was widespread in England, and the prosecution of witches was only mitigated by Charles I, who suppressed witch-trials. Davies noted that by the outbreak of the Civil War, witchcraft belief had combined with anti-Catholic and anti-Royalist sentiments, literally demonising these groups in the minds of many puritans and supporters of Parliament. In this light, the witch-hunt undertaken by Hopkins (Stearne is mentioned twice in passing) in the puritan heartland of East Anglia was an attempt to eradicate the demonic influences of Royalist supporters, Catholics, and Laudians. Davies suggested that once puritans gained the upper hand in the Civil War, they began to systematically investigate those believed to be witches, after decades of repression.[30]

Both Davies and Notestein overstate their arguments, primarily because they suggest a top-down process that was applied by the social elite. This neglects the fact that witchcraft accusations operated at a village level and so came from 'below', rather than 'above'. Even in the East Anglian trials, locals accused their neighbours of *maleficia*, and if suspects were found guilty by Justices of the Peace they were hauled before the courts.[31] This is how Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne found suspected witches: they were invited to villages and aided by locals in their search for witches. While some of Davies's arguments are valid, the impetus behind the East Anglian witch-trials cannot be solely attributed to puritanism, as Laudians and religious radicals engaged with witch-hunting at a local level. Puritans were also divided on their religious beliefs and on witch-hunting: some supported the practice, while others tried to suppress it.[32] Indeed, Stearne's beliefs were not fully compatible with 'orthodox' puritanism (Chapter 2), and he therefore cannot be said to represent a group of East Anglian puritans intent on rooting out witches. Notestein and Davies's argument that seventeenth-century witchcraft trials are indicative of the Protestant exiles' imported European demonology is problematic when we consider the lack of the witches' sabbat and the prominence of familiar spirits in English witchcraft beliefs. Familiars were supernatural agents that, as a concept, were almost unique to England and they sat uneasily alongside 'orthodox' Protestant beliefs – they were heavily referenced in Stearne's pamphlet.[33]

More attention was paid to these native English traditions in C. L. Ewen's book, which suggested that English demonology gradually developed, with some influences from Europe, without being directly imported from the continent.[34] Ewen, however, is better known for his outstanding archival work. For his first publication, Ewen collected and edited all the extant witchcraft indictments for the Home Circuit from 1559 to 1736 in 1929.[35] This was soon followed by *Witchcraft and demonianism* (1933), which contained the depositions and confessions of indicted witches.[36] Both of these publications relied heavily on Stearne's work when discussing the East Anglican witchcraft trials. Unfortunately Ewen's work did not gain much recognition during his lifetime. For modern researchers, though, his work is indispensable and scholars now regard it as 'pathbreaking'.[37]

Other scholars did achieve notoriety for their flawed methodology and literal readings of primary texts. Margaret Murray, author of *The witch-cult in western Europe* (1921), used English and Scottish sources to speculate that witches were members of a pre-Christian religion who worshiped a horned god.[38] When these covens met to worship, a male leader impersonated their god and performed sexual rites with attendees. In this respect, Murray was influenced by the anthropologist George Frazer and his multivolume work, *The golden bough* (1890).[39] Frazer's account of the ritual killing of a priest-king appealed to Murray, leading her to believe that the witch-coven's leader, or a substitute, would be sacrificed cyclically to ensure the fertility of their crops.[40] Because the coven's god was horned, she argued, Christian theologians demonised and subsequently persecuted the 'witches' for their heterodox beliefs. But Murray expounded this to suggest that the 'chief female' of these congregations was the 'Elfin Queen', thus merging fairy and witchcraft beliefs. The fairy queen was not part of folklore; instead the figure emanated from the memory of real people – an ancient dwarf race of humans from northern and western Europe who sheltered in earth mounds. According to Murray, witches were identified with 'fairies' and were demonised by theologians. To Murray, this explained why fairy-lore featured in Scottish witchcraft trials: both were remnants of a pre-Christian religion and were still active in popular religion.[41] Although Murray was innovative in attempting to study the witch-hunts dispassionately, her work has been completely discredited by historians due to her unsubstantiated theories; however, the concept of an ancient pagan cult has found purchase with modern Wiccans, for whom it is of central importance.[42] The scholar most effective at demolishing Murray's methodology was Norman Cohn in his seminal work, *Europe's inner demons* (1976). He applied 'historical criticisms' to *The witch-cult* and convincingly showed how Murray had manipulated the evidence by misquoting texts, which were taken out of context. In the same publication he demonstrated how the idea of demonic witchcraft emerged in the later middle ages out of pre-existing conceptions and concerns of magic and heretical sects – not from a pre-Christian fertility ritual.[43]

Montague Summers did not share Murray's sentiment of a wrongly persecuted cult, calling her work 'radically and wholly erroneous' because it suggested that the Dianic cult may have rivalled the Christian Church.[44] When Summers wrote *The history of witchcraft* (1926) and *The geography of witchcraft* (1927), he had an explicit agenda: 'I have endeavoured to show the witch as she really was – an evil liver; a social pest and parasite; the devotee of an obscene creed'.[45] To him, witchcraft was a not past threat but remained a very real one that still threatened to disrupt society in his time.[46] His analysis did not gain much credence among scholars, most of whom he viewed with contempt.[47] Both Murray and Summers treated witchcraft as a modern reality and sought to prove this using primary materials. This resulted in biased interpretations, as well as selective readings

of their sources. With regard to the East Anglian witch-hunters, Summers labelled Hopkins as a swindler whose primary concern was money, and only referred to Stearne when calling him 'Hopkins' satellite'.[48] Likewise, Murray used Stearne's text as a source but said little of the author, except when calling him 'Hopkins's co-worker'.[49] Murray used Stearne's *Confirmation* in her narrative about the witch Joane Wallis. Stearne recorded that Wallis confessed, 'the Devill came to her in the likenesse of a man, in blackilish cloathing, but had cloven feet'.[50] Murray used this passage as evidence of 'the Devil's costume' – that is, how the leader of the witch-coven dressed in a black suit and cleft shoes when its members met.[51] Despite its flaws, her interpretation of witchcraft gained popular acceptance, even appearing in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Murray's argument was not seriously challenged until the 1970s by Norman Cohn, Alan Macfarlane, and Keith Thomas.[52]

In an attempt to understand and reinterpret John Stearne's world, Keith Thomas and his student Alan Macfarlane revolutionised English witchcraft studies by utilising social anthropology, based on E. E. Evans-Pritchard's findings in *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande* (1937).[53] Macfarlane used legal records and printed pamphlets to study witchcraft in Essex, whereas Thomas used the same 'history-from-below' approach to investigate a variety of supernatural beliefs in early modern England. Macfarlane's work took the form of a micro-study while Thomas's focus was much wider in scope.[54] Both historians linked witchcraft accusations to socio-economic tensions at the village level – this became known as the 'charity-refused-model'. In the refused-charity paradigm, those relying on charity may have acted aggressively and cursed an individual who refused to provide it. If, after a curse was muttered, something happened to the person who refused the beggar charity, they could be accused of *maleficia* (harmful magic). As the population increased and the richer members of society became commercially orientated, the gap between them and the poor widened, leading to increased interpersonal tensions. This clashed with ideals of charity and neighbourliness, which were fundamental aspects of everyday life either side of the Reformation.[55] However, some members in English society may have already viewed local beggars and the vagrant poor with distain, regarding them as potential burdens to their community, therefore adding to their suspicion. The charity-refused-model theorises that individuals were torn between public (the poor law) and private charity, creating feelings of guilt. Apart from ascribing unexplainable misfortune to the witch, Thomas and Macfarlane suggested that accusations may also have been the manifestation of psychological guilt. Witchcraft accusations served to alleviate their guilty conscience by construing the beggar as a malefic witch.[56]

By exploring this functionalist model of English witchcraft accusations, Thomas and Macfarlane highlighted the popular impetus behind trials and contested the paradigm of imposed European demonological thought.[57]

They also shed light on the cunning-folk of England, who operated as counter-witches, healers, and diviners for the public. For this, Macfarlane and Thomas took inspiration from Evans-Pritchard's anthropological study of the African Azande tribe. Evans-Pritchard separated African sorcerers from witches and magic (*ngwa*) from witchcraft (*mangu*). The Azande believed that witchcraft was everywhere; it was hereditary and part of daily life. In contrast, sorcery was voluntary, relying on spells and rituals. If witchcraft was suspected, the Azande tribe had a complicated system of oracles to consult, in order to locate witches and cure a bewitched individual. Macfarlane and Thomas applied this conceptual framework of counter-witchcraft to England to locate and examine cunning-folk, and to identify village social-strains present in the early modern period. One early English example similar to the Azande's methods of consultation and discovery can be found in the 'Witches of Warboys' case, in Huntingdonshire. From 1589 to 1595, the Throckmorton family's servants and children were stricken by bouts of illness, which were eventually attributed to witchcraft. Before witchcraft was diagnosed and prosecutions were brought against the Samuel family by the Throckmortons, the latter consulted two physicians (who prescribed medicine four times), two divines, neighbours, family members, and friends, including Lady Susan and Sir Henry Cromwell (Oliver Cromwell's grandfather).[58] But a simple example directly related to this study involves John Rivet, who we encountered earlier. He suspected that Elizabeth Clarke had bewitched his wife and so he consulted a cunning-man who confirmed this: Stearne's help was then sought and the East Anglian witchcraft investigations were initiated.

Thomas's and Macfarlane's publications remain influential. To date, Macfarlane is the only scholar to have produced a regional study of witchcraft and magic beliefs in Essex. In the introduction to the second edition of Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1999), the lack of historiography on this area led James Sharpe to remark that 'we need a new doctoral thesis on Essex witchcraft'.[59] Despite being influential since publication, Macfarlane's and Thomas's theories are not without issue and cannot be used as blanket explanations for Europe as a whole or, more narrowly, the English witch-trials of the 1640s. As scholars applied their model to other countries (primarily in the 1990s), it appeared that England was not as idiosyncratic as its scholars had assumed; rather, it was like many other parts of Europe. It was discovered by researchers such as Robin Briggs that, like England, European witchcraft prosecutions were sporadic and were usually driven by the villagers, not by the ruling elite.[60] As Briggs noted, stimulus from the higher orders or socio-economic tensions at a localised level were certainly factors, but they were a few explanations within a nexus of many.[61] Nonetheless, Thomas and Macfarlane created a heightened awareness of the popular impulse behind English accusations and this led to further research into the beliefs underpinning them. Although Thomas regarded the witches' confessions of the 1640s as completely atypical because

of Hopkins and his reading of European demonology, James Sharpe challenged this by re-examining the witchcraft beliefs presented in these trials.[62] Sharpe argued that popular English witchcraft theory, although not as diabolic as its European counterpart, did contain demonic content (familiar spirits, sex with demons, the witch's mark and even hints of the witches' sabbat), therefore suggesting a blend between learned and popular beliefs (this has been recently reinforced by Charlotte-Rose Millar's work).[63] A combination of these is evident in the mid-seventeenth century witch-trials, which John Stearne detailed in his pamphlet.

One constant between learned and popular beliefs in both England and mainland Europe was that the vast majority of witches were women. In *A confirmation* Stearne recorded that it was 'evident' that 'of Witches in general, there be commonly more women then men'.[64] But this was not only evident to Stearne and his contemporaries. In the 1970s feminist historians turned their attention to the European witch-hunts and interpreted them as women-hunts. One of the most radical historians asserting this was Mary Daly, who viewed the European witch-craze as one of many historical episodes that clearly highlighted the brutal suppression and domination of females by the ruling male elite.[65] Others, like Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English in *Witches, midwives and healers* (1973), saw witch prosecutions as an attempt to root out female healers. According to Ehrenreich and English, women were persecuted as witches by the ruling elite in order to ensure a male monopoly on medical practice. Female healers were by no means ignorant of medicine nor did they solely rely on 'magic'; instead, their knowledge threatened to usurp their male counterparts. Ehrenreich and English claimed that 'it was witches who developed an extensive understanding of bones and muscles, herbs and drugs, while physicians were still deriving their prognoses from astrology'.[66] These are exaggerations and the alleged role of women healers is unfounded, as David Harley has shown, but the question of woman-hunting is more complex.[67] As Clive Holmes has demonstrated, some witch-hunting may have been driven by misogyny, but in English witch trials women were directly involved in witch-finding, contributing to at least half of all witchcraft accusations by the early seventeenth century.[68] Nonetheless, feminist historians in the 1970s forced scholarship to consider the role of gender in witchcraft more seriously. Some of the earliest researchers to do so were E. William Monter and Jeffrey B. Russell. Monter recognised the preponderance of female witches, and concluded that 'misogyny was a basic force underlying these trials'.[69] Working with earlier sources, Russell, like Monter, identified a connection between witchcraft, women, and subversive heretical groups.[70] According to Monter, it was only in the fifteenth century, with the publishing of the *Malleus Maleficarum,* when witchcraft became an activity particularly identified with women.[71]

In a similar vein, Sigrid Brauner and Christina Larner noted links between state-building, heresy, and witchcraft. In 1995, Brauner attributed

witch-hunting to the changing status of women, as defined 'by influential members of the early modern urban elite in Germany', before 'the great wave of witch-hunts' occurred in the 1560s.[72] Rather than examining German witchcraft trials per se, Brauner examined some well-known figures, including Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger (authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*), Martin Luther, and the plays of Paul Rebhun and Hans Sach. Based on these sources, Brauner's work asserted that the reformers' witch-hunting was designed to force adherence to Protestant, patriarchal views of marriage and society. While the *Malleus* linked witchcraft to female sexuality, Lutherans linked it to the concept of being a bad housewife – a woman who failed submit to their husband's control, manage the household or represent moral virtue.[73] Larner, on the other hand, maintained that Scottish governmental authorities took measures to eliminate witchcraft and heresy, both of which involved the prosecution of women. But Brauner's and Larner's interpretations are problematic in relation to England, since there was no state-led witch-hunt. Witchcraft prosecutions did rise in the early reign of James VI and I in Scotland but they declined markedly after his accession to the English throne. James VI and I even attempted to actively subdue witchcraft and investigated cases of suspected fraudulent bewitchment himself.[74] Returning to the role of gender, Larner reached a conservative conclusion: witch-hunting was sex-related, not sex-specific. In this way, the attributes of a witch were sex-related because of the specificities of the witch-figure stereotype, but these characteristics could be, and were, applied to males a well.[75] This interpretation is congruent with that of John Stearne, who, when speaking of witchcraft, remarked that 'one may fall into this sinne as well as into any other (if God prevent it not) and therefore whether men or women'.[76]

By the 1990s, historians were also developing another conceptual framework that concentrated on the emotions behind witchcraft accusations in an attempt to further our understanding. One such study was Lyndal Roper's, *Oedipus and the devil* (1994), which considered witch-hunting and gender. Roper's research focussed on early modern Germany, and used a psychoanalytical approach to investigate masculinity, femininity, and the body, in relation to the human psyche. Roper construed witchcraft accusations as projections of fear stemming from motherhood. Based on the sources studied, the victims of such accusations were mostly lying-in-maids. Maids lived with and were employed by families during the lying-in period to feed and care for the new-born child until the mother recovered. Roper argued that this led to ambiguity in the mother's role, which could result in anxiety and envy towards the maid. According to Roper, the mother became confused as to her role in the household while the maid stayed with the family to care for the child. During this period the infant was vulnerable and its mother was physically weak. Concerned with the potentially dangerous and envious old woman, the new mother projected her fears onto the maid. The maid was thus conceptualised as the antithesis of