

# *The Trial of Bridget Bishop*

*Cotton Mather took no direct part in the Salem trials, except to urge the judges privately to be cautious in the use of spectral evidence, and yet he has ever since been known as one of the leading persecutors. He would have escaped "unscathed in reputation but for his vanity, and his desire to pose as the official champion of Massachusetts justice," says Samuel Eliot Morison, adding that his biased account of the affair, "by wrapping a mantle of sanctity about the foul and dreadful doings of the Salem courts, exposed Mather to the charge of hypocrisy." Thus the scene is set for Mather's version of the trial of Bridget Bishop, the first of the Salem witches to be executed.*

## **The Trial of Bridget Bishop, Alias Oliver At the Court of Oyer and Terminer, Held at Salem June 2, 1692**

She was indicted for bewitching of several persons in the neighborhood, the indictment being drawn up according to the form in such cases usual. And, pleading "not guilty," there were brought in several persons who had long undergone many kinds of miseries which were preternaturally inflicted and generally ascribed unto a horrible witchcraft. There was little occasion to prove the witchcraft, it being evident and notorious to beholders. Now, to fix the witchcraft on prisoner at the bar, the first thing used was the testimony of the bewitched. Whereof several testified that the shape of the prisoner would oftentimes very grievously pinch them, choke them, bite them, and afflict them. Urging them to write their names in a book, which the suspect called "ours. One of them did further testify that it was the shape of this prisoner with another, which one day took her from her [spinning] wheel and carry her to the riverside, threatened to drown her if she did not sign the book mentioned which yet she refused. Others of them did also testify that the shape did in her threats brag to them that she had been in the death of sundry persons then by her named, that she had ridden a man then likewise named. Another testified the apparition of ghosts unto the specter of Bridget Bishop, crying out "You murdered us!" About the truth whereof there was, in the matter of fact, but too much suspicion.

It was testified that at the examination of the prisoner before the magistrates the bewitched cast her eyes on them, they were presently struck down; and this in such a manner as there could be no collusion in the business. But upon the touch of her hand upon them when they lay in their swoons, they would immediately revive, and not upon the touch of anyone else. Moreover, upon some special actions of her body, such as the shaking of her head or the turning of her eyes, they presently and painfully fell into the like postures. And many of the like accidents now fell out, while she was at the bar. One at the same time testifying that she said "She could not be troubled to see the afflicted thus tormented."

There was testimony likewise brought in that a man striking once at the place where a bewitched person said the shape of this Bishop stood, the bewitched cried out that he had tore her coat then peculiarly specified that the woman's coat was found to be torn in that very place.

Deliverance Hobbs, who had confessed to be a witch, was now tormented by the specters for her confession. And she now testified that this Bishop tempted her to sign the book again and to deny what she had confessed. She affirmed that it was the shape of the prisoner which whipped her with iron rods to compel her to. And she affirmed that Bishop was at a general meeting of witches in a field at Salem Village and there partook of a diabolical sacrament of bread and wine.

To render it further unquestionable that the prison at the bar was the person truly charged in this case of witchcraft, there were produced many evidences of other witchcraft by her perpetuated. For instance, John Cook testified that about five or six years ago, one morning about sunrise, he was in his chamber assaulted by the shape of the prisoner, which looked on him, grinned at him, and very much hurt him with a blow in the side of the head. And that on the same day about noon the same shape walked in the room where he was and an apple strangely flew out of this hand into the lap of his mother, six of eight foot from him.

Samule ray testified that about fourteen years ago he woke on a night and saw the room where he lay full of light and that he then saw plainly a woman between the cradle and the bedside which looked upon him. He rose and it vanished, though he found the doors all fast [locked]. Looked out at the entry door her saw the same woman in the same garb again and said, "In God's name, what do you come for?" He went to bed and had the same woman again assaulting him. The child in the cradle gave a great screech, and the woman

disappeared. It was long before the child could be quieted, and though it were a very likely thriving child yet from this time it pined away and after many moths died in a sad condition. He knew not Bishop nor her name, but when he saw her after this he knew by her countenance and apparel and all circumstances that she was the apparition of this Bishop which had such troubled him.

John Bly and his wife testified that they bough a sow of Edward Bishop, the husband of the prisoner, and was to pay the price agreed unto another person. This prisoner being angry that she was thus hindered from fingering the money quarreled with Bly. Soon after which the sow was taken with strange fits- jumping, leaping and knocking her head against the fence. She seemed blind and deaf and would neither eat nor be sucked. Whereupon a neighbor said she believed the creature was overlooked [bewitched by being looked upon]. And sundry other circumstances concurred which mad the deponents believe that Bishop had bewitched it...

John Louder testified that upon some little controversy with Bishop about her fowls, going well to bed he did awake in the night by moonlight and did see clearly the likeness of the woman grievously oppressing him, in which miserable condition she held him unable to help himself till near day. He told Bishop of this, but she denied it and threatened him very much. Quickly after this, being at home on the Lord's Day with the doors shut about him, he saw a black pig approach him at which he was going to kick it, it vanished away. Immediately after sitting down, he saw a black thing jump in at the window and come and stand before him. The body was like that of a monkey, the feet like a rooters, but the face like a man's. He being so extremely affrighted that he could not speak, this monster spoke to him and said: "I am a messenger sent unto you, for I understand that you are in some trouble of mind, and if you will be ruled by me you shall want for nothing in this world." Whereupon he endeavored to clap his hands upon it, but he could feel no substance, and it jumped out of the window again but immediately came in by the porch, though the door were shut, and said, "You had better take my counsel [advice]!" He then struck at it with a stick but struck only the ground and broke the stick. The arm with which he struck was presently disenabled, and it vanished away. He presently went out at the backdoor and spied this Bishop in her orchard going toward his house, but he had not power to set one foot forward towards her. Whereupon returning into the house, he was immediately accosted by the monster he had seen before; which goblin was now going to fly at him, whereat he cried out, "The whole armor of God be between me and you!" So it sprang back and flew over the apple tree, shaking many apples off the tree in its flying over. At its leap it flung dirt with its feet against the stomach of the man, whereon he was then struck dumb and so continued for three days together. Upon the producing of this testimony, Bishop denied that she knew the deponent [Louder] yet their two orchards joined and they had often had their little quarrels for some years together...

Many other pranks of this Bishop's, this deponent was ready to testify. He also testified that he verily believed that Bishop was the instrument of his daughter Priscilla's death, of which suspicious reason were assigned.

To crown all, John Bly and William Bly testified that being employed by Bridget Bishop to help take down the cellar wall of the old house wherein she formerly lived they did in hold of the old wall find several puppets made up of rags and hogs' bristles, with headless pins in them, the points being outward. Whereof she could now give no account unto the court that was reasonable or tolerable.

One thing that made against the prisoner was her being evidently convicted of gross lying in the court several times while she was making her plea. Buy besides this, a jury of women found a preternatural teat upon her body, but upon a second search within three of four hours there was no such thing to be seen. There was also an account of there people whom this women had afflicted. And there might have been many more if they had been inquired for. But there was no need of them.

There was one very strange thing more, with which the court was newly entertained. As this woman was under a guard, passing by the great and spacious meetinghouse of Salem, she gave a loom toward the house and immediately a demon, invisibly entering the meetinghouse, tore down a part of it, so that though there was not a person to be seen there yet there was a strange noise. Running in they found a board which was strongly fastened with several nails transported into another quarter of the house.

Excerpted from:

Cotton Mather. *The Wonders of the Invisible World: Being an Account of the Tryals of the Several Witches Lately Executed in New England* (1693)