

Court Depositions of South West England, 1500-1700

Case 19: The Pregnancy of Charity Pearce

Case type: Bastardy

Summary: A child is conceived out of wedlock in the parish of Bremhill.

Source: Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, A1-110-1693E

Original Spelling Transcription

Deposition 1

The Informac[i]on of Charity Peirce of the parish of Bremhill in this County singlewoman¹ taken before S[i]r Thomas Earle Kn[igh]t² and Sir John Ivey Esq[ui]r[e]² two of their Ma[jes]ties Justices of the peace³ of the said County the sixth day of February Anno Diu[m] 1692⁴ and in the fourth year of their Ma[jes]ties reign &c.

Who on her oath saith that Francis Hicks is the onely naturall father of the bastard child⁵ of which she was lately delivered and that ye said Francis Hicks begott her this Examinant with child in ye kitchen at Cadnam in ye evening when the election was last at Calne, it being done in the settle¹¹ in ye said kitchen whilest neats tongues⁷ were boyleing over the fire⁶: And further she saith that she was delivered of her said bastard child about three weeks and some odd dayes after Midsummer last past⁸, and she further saith that the said Francis Hicks did [...] had carnall knowledge¹² of her this body twice it being about a week between the first time being in the kitchen at Cadnam aforesaid [...] and further she saith not

signed Charity ~ Peirce ^her mark⁹

Capt et jurat die et Anno supdict coram nobi Sr Jo: Ivey¹⁰

Deposition 2

The Examinac[i]on of Charity Peirce of the parish of Bremhillsinglewoman¹ taken before S[i]r George hungerford Kn[ig]ht² one of their Ma[jes]ties Justices of the peace³ of this County the 23d day of May Anno diu[m] 1692 and in the 4th year of their Ma[jes]ties Reign &c.

Who on her oath saith that she this Examinant is now with child and that Francis hicks of the parish of Bremhill aforesaid Labourer² is the onely natural father of the bastard child or children⁵ she this Exam[ina]nt now goes with and that about the latter end of September last past the said Francis hicks had carnal knowledge¹² of this Exam[ina]nts body in ye punch house at Cadnam on a Munday night at near eleaven of the clock. And further that about a week after the said Francis hicks had again carnall knowledge¹² of this Exam[ina]nts body in the Kitchen at Cadnam afores[ai]d in ye night time: And further she saith not,

Signed Charity ~ Peirce ^her mark⁹

Capt et jurat die et Anno supdict coram me Hungerford¹⁰

Modernized Spelling Transcription

Deposition 1

The Information of Charity Pierce of the parish of Bremhill in this county, singlewoman¹, taken before Sir Thomas Earle, knight², and Sir John Ivy, esquire², two of their Majesty's Justices of the Peace³ of the said county on the sixth day of February of the year 1692⁴ and in the fourth year of their Majesties' reign.

Who on her oath says that Francis Hicks is the only natural father of the bastard child⁵ of which she was lately delivered. And that the said Francis Hicks begot her, this examinant, with child in the kitchen at Cadnam in the evening when the election was last at Calne, it being done in the settle¹¹ in the said kitchen whilst neat's tongues⁷ were boiling over the fire.⁶ And further, she says that she was delivered of her said bastard child about three weeks and some odd days after Midsummer last past⁸. And she further says that the said Francis Hicks did [...] had carnal knowledge¹² of her this body twice, it being about a week between the first time being in the kitchen at Cadnam aforesaid and further she says not.

signed Charity ~ Peirce ^her mark⁹

Taken and witnessed the day and year above specified before me Sir John Ivy¹⁰

Deposition 2

The Examinaion of Charity Pierce of the parish of Bremhill, singlewoman¹, taken before Sir George Hungerford, knight², one of their Majesty's Justices of the Peace³ of this county the 23d day of May of the year 1692 and in the 4th year of their Majesties Reign.

Who on her oath says that she this Examinant is now with child and that Francis Hicks of the parish of Bremhill aforesaid, labourer², is the only natural father of the bastard child or children⁵ she this exam[ina]nt now goes with and that about the latter end of September last past the said Francis Hicks had carnal knowledge¹² of this examinant's body in the punch house at Cadnam on a Monday night at near eleven of the clock. And further, that about a week after the said Francis Hicks had again carnal knowledge¹² of this examinant's body in the kitchen at Cadnam aforesaid in the night time. And further she says not.

Signed Charity ~ Peirce ^her mark⁹

Taken and witnessed the day and year above specified before me Hungerford¹⁰

Notes

¹ (technicalities of the court) Female depositions: marital status descriptors (e.g. singlewoman, widow, wife) were typically recorded in the brief biographical statement at the beginning of the deposition.

² (technicalities of the court) Occupational or social status descriptors (e.g. baker, joiner, yeoman) were typically recorded for men.

³ (gloss) A Justice of the Peace was a high-status man appointed to preside over the county courts.

⁴ (technicalities of the court) Until the Gregorian Calendar was adopted in 1752, the English New Year began on 25th March. According to our modern dating system, this case actually took place in 1693.

⁵ (interpretation) The court is interested in the paternity of the child to ensure he contributed towards the maintenance costs of the child born out of wedlock.

⁶ (interpretation) The unattended pot as a common mode of cooking suggests that women spent less time cooking than has traditionally been assumed, and instead were engaged in other work activities.

⁷ (gloss) A neat's tongue is the tongue of a cow.

⁸ (interpretation) In describing when a particular event had taken place, witnesses often reported the time in relation to the liturgical calendar (e.g.referring to church seasons and feast days).

⁹ (technicalities of the court) Witnesses were asked to sign their depositions: signatures range from full names to simply initials or marks (sometimes images linked with trades).

¹⁰ (technicalities of the court) Signature of the Justice of the Peace.

¹¹ (gloss) A settle is a wooden bench.

¹² (gloss) Carnal knowledge is an archaic term for sexual intercourse, often used in legal documents.

Prepared as part of the Womens Work in Rural England project.