

Court Depositions of South West England, 1500-1700

Case 17: A Broken Leg? The Assault of Ann Bowier

Case type: Assault

Summary: In a street in South Wraxall in Somerset, Ann Bowier is assaulted by her neighbour, Francis Isles.

Source: Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, 1673T

Original Spelling Transcription

Deposition 1

The Information of Millicent Batchelor of Southwraxall in the county aforesaid Spinst[er]¹: taken upon Oath before me John Hall one of the Justices of the Peace² of the County aforesaid against Francis Isles the wife¹² of Philipp Isles of Southwraxall aforesaid Rough Mason³ this 23th day of June Anno dom[ini] 1673

Who sayth that twesday morneing last as shee was comeing from Milkeing⁴ she mette Ann Bowier wife¹² of James Bowier of South wraxall aforesaid neere unto the said Philipp Isles his house in South wrax[all] w[i]th whome she discoursed some litle tyme untill she saw Francis the wife¹² of the s[ai]d Philipp come out of her house And then. Ann Bowier parted from this Infor[mant]: to goe to her owne house And as shee was goeing the said Francis mett her and Asked her why shee had abused her and her Children in Language. w[hi]ch Ann Bowier denied that shee had ever given her any Ile Language, But the s[ai]d Francis affirmed shee had and then said shee would have her into the Poole And p[re]sently laid violent handes on the s[ai]d Ann Bowier and eyther threw her or strooke her downe from the highway into the said Poole⁵, which when this Inform[ant] saw shee went p[re]sently to assist Ann Bowier And Just as shee came to them shee saw Francis Isles Rise off from Ann Bowier And being Asked by this Inform[ant] why shee would abuse the poore old woman soe she made Answer to this Inform[ant] did not know how Ann Bowier had abused her, And this Inform[ant] further sayth that she and one Elizabeth keepeing helped Ann Bowier out of the Poole and when she came to her selfe againe she told this

Inform[ant] and Elizabeth Keepeing that her Legge was Broke⁶ and further Sayth
nott

Millicent Batchelor⁷

J Hall¹¹

Deposition 2

The Informac[i]on of James Bowier taken upon oath aforesaid the day & yeare first
above written before me John Hall Esq[ui]er] &c. ag[ain]st the s[ai]d Francis Iles &c.

Who sayth that his wife¹² Ann Bowier keeps her Bed her Legge being broaken⁶
twesday morneing by the said Francis Iles as his said wife¹² tould him this
Inform[ant]:

James Bowier ^his mark⁷

J Hall¹¹

Deposition 3

The examinac[i]on of the said Francis Iles taken the day & yeere first above written
&c. before me John Hall [...]

Who Sayth that on Twesday last in the morneing as shee was goeing to a well
in South wraxall aforesaid for watter⁹ shee mett with James Bowiers wife¹² of
Southwrxall aforesaid there who Called this examinatt whore⁸ and said that shee
and her daughter had been in her garden and broke downe her Colletts¹⁰ or kale,
upon which this examinatt being much moved went neere her and w[i]th a thrust
with her handes shee the said Ann Bowier fell downe But shee Could not have any
harme thereby for being helped upp by one Millicent Batchilor the same Anne Bowier
went home to her house & further sayth nott &c.

Signu[m] Francis Iles ^her mark⁷

J Hall¹¹

Modernized Spelling Transcription

Deposition 1

The Information of Millicent Batchelor of South Wraxall in the county aforesaid, spinster¹; taken upon oath before me, John Hall, one of the Justices of the Peace² of the county aforesaid against Francis Isles, the wife¹² of Philipp Isles of South Wraxall aforesaid, rough mason³, this 23rd day of June 1673.

Who says that Tuesday morning last as she was coming from milking⁴, she met Ann Bowier, wife¹² of James Bowier of South Wraxall aforesaid, near unto the said Philip Isles his house in South Wraxall with whom she discoursed some little time until she saw Francis, the wife¹² of the said Philip, come out of her house. And then Ann Bowier parted from this informant to go to her own house. And as she was going, the said Francis met her and asked her why she had abused her and her children in language, which Ann Bowier denied that she had ever given her any ill language. But the said Francis affirmed she had and then said she would have her into the pool. And presently laid violent hands on the said Ann Bowier and either threw her or struck her down from the highway into the said pool⁵, which when this informant saw, she went presently to assist Ann Bowier. And just as she came to them, she saw Francis Isles rise off from Ann Bowier. And being asked by this informant why she would abuse the poor old woman so, she made answer: this informant did not know how Ann Bowier had abused her. And this informant further says that she and one Elizabeth Keeping helped Ann Bowier out of the pool and when she came to herself again, she told this informant and Elizabeth Keeping that her leg was broke⁶ and further says not.

Millicent Batchelor⁷

J Hall¹¹

Deposition 2

The Information of James Bowier taken upon oath aforesaid the day and year first above written before me, John Hall, Esquire, against the said Francis Isles.

Who says that his wife¹², Ann Bowier, keeps her bed, her leg being broken⁶ Tuesday morning by the said Francis Isles, as his said wife¹² told him this informant.

James Bowier ^his mark⁷

J Hall¹¹

Deposition 3

The examination of the said Francis Isles taken the day and year first above written before me, John Hall. [...]

Who says that on Tuesday last in the morning as she was going to a well in South Wraxall aforesaid for water⁹, she met with James Bowier's wife¹² of South Wraxall aforesaid there, who called this examinant whore⁸ and said that she and her daughter had been in her garden and broke down her colletts¹⁰ or kale. Upon which, this examinant being much moved went near her and with a thrust with her hands she, the said Ann Bowier, fell down. But she could not have any harm thereby, for being helped up by one Millicent Batchilor, the same Anne Bowier went home to her house and further says not.

Signed Francis Isles ^her mark⁷

J Hall¹¹

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

³ (technicalities of the court) Occupational or social status descriptors (e.g. baker, joiner, yeoman) were typically recorded for men.

⁴ (interpretation) Milking: evidence of women's work taking place in the morning.

⁵ (interpretation) Although this is not unusual, women were less frequently charged in the courts with physical violence than men.

⁶ (interpretation) Ann is described as a poor old woman. If she was elderly, it is possible that she may have sustained as serious an injury as a broken leg through falling into the pool.

⁷ (technicalities of the court) Those giving depositions were asked to sign their depositions: signatures range from full names to simply initials or marks (sometimes images linked with trades).

⁸ (interpretation) Being called a 'whore' could be extremely damaging to a woman's reputation and it was an actionable word in the church courts.

⁹ (interpretation) Fetching water: evidence of women's work. In the seventeenth century, few rural houses had their own water supplies and most relied on communal wells.

¹⁰ (gloss) Colletts are a similar vegetable to kale.

¹¹ (technicalities of the court) Signature of the Justice of the Peace.

¹² (technicalities of the court) Marital status descriptors (e.g. singlewoman, widow, wife) were typically recorded for women.

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