

# Court Depositions of South West England, 1500-1700

## Case 1: Adultery in the Hay Harvest

Case type: Fornication

Summary: Office v Wilmota Rogers: a master attempts to bribe his servant to commit adultery with him as they work together in the hay harvest.

Source: Devon Heritage Centre, Chanter 855

### Original Spelling Transcription

xxiii octo[bris] 1556

Officiu[m] div[inus] co[n] Wilmota Rogers<sup>1</sup> de Alfington

Ex[am]i[n]ata dicit that the weke before S. peters day at mydsomer<sup>2</sup> last past this r[esp]ondent then bieing the s[er]vaunt of one Richard Stone of the same p[ar]ishe was pitchyng hay up<sup>5</sup> unto the said Richard being upon his hay tollett<sup>3</sup> Induced by all the meanes possibill this r[esp]ondent to adult[er]ie and desired this r[esp]ondent come to cum[m]e uppe unto hym And he wold give her money and p[ur]ches a lyving for her w[i]t[h] many fair p[ro]mises And after that he gave this r[esp]ondent xls<sup>4</sup> upon the co[n]dit[i]on that she shuld have mett w[i]t[h] hym in his stabill the wensday before S. petters day<sup>2</sup> aforesaid And then to have other xls<sup>4</sup> and therfor he to have had his pleasur of her And this r[esp]ondent had & receaved the said xls<sup>4</sup> but she kept not appoyntment w[i]t[h] hym but went the same wensday to Reap<sup>6</sup> w[i]t[h] Mr Morley and neaver offended w[i]t[h] hym.

### Modernized Spelling Transcription

23 October 1556

Office v Wilmota Rogers<sup>1</sup> of Alphington

She says that the week before St. Peter's Day at Midsummer<sup>2</sup> last past, this respondent then being the servant of one Richard Stone of the same parish, was

pitching hay up<sup>5</sup> unto the said Richard, being upon his hay tollett<sup>3</sup> [who] induced by all the means possible this respondent to adultery and desired this respondent come to come up unto him. And he would give her money and purchase a living for her, with many fair promises. And after that, he gave this respondent 40s<sup>4</sup> upon the condition that she should have met with him in his stable the Wednesday before St Peter's Day<sup>2</sup> aforesaid. And then to have [an]other 40s<sup>4</sup> and therefore he to have had his pleasure of her. And this respondent had and received the said 40s<sup>4</sup> but she kept not appointment with him but went the same Wednesday to reap<sup>6</sup> with Mr Morley and never offended with him.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> (technicalities of the court) This is an 'ex officio' (office) case. Office cases were initiated by church authorities against individuals and typically focused on moral transgressions such as adultery.

<sup>2</sup> (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).

<sup>3</sup> (gloss) A hay tollett is a colloquial term for a hay loft, a space above a barn or stable used to store hay.

<sup>4</sup> (gloss) 's' used after a number refers to shillings (e.g. 40 shillings).

<sup>5</sup> (interpretation) Pitching hay involved lifting, hoisting or throwing hay, in this case into the hay loft. It is interesting to find female servants involved in fairly physical forms of agricultural labour.

<sup>6</sup> (interpretation) Reaping was an agricultural activity in which crops were harvested (cut and gathered) from a piece of land. It is interesting to find female servants involved in fairly physical forms of agricultural labour.

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