

Court Depositions of South West England, 1500-1700

Case 4: The Price of Mutton

Case type: Defamation

Summary: Margaret Read v Richard Lace: Richard calls Margaret a whore as they argue over a quarter of mutton in Thomas Bedill's shop in Newport (Isle of Wight).

Source: Hampshire Record Office, 21M65-C3-9

Original Spelling Transcription

5 M[ar]tii 1585¹²

Sup[er] Li[bel]lo ex p[ar]te M[ar]garete Reade con Rich[ard]um Lace¹³ dat.

Deposition 1

Thomas Bedill de St Crosse iux[t]a NewportButcher¹, ubi mora[m] ferit p[er] xxx ann[orum] etate circit[er] lv ann[es] libe[ere] &c testis &c dicit q[uo]d p[ar]tes litigan b[e]n[e] novit./

Ad 1 refert se ad iur[a] /

Ad 2 depo[n]it et dicit. That betwene michellmas & Christmas last², (ut recolit et al[ite]r non recolit tempus) this depo[n]it upo[n] a wenisday in ye morning abowt lecture tyme, coming fro[m] his howse towards ye Church to ye lecture, & having his man keping his shopp⁴ in ye Towne of Newport³, when he was almost at his shop⁴ espyed both ye said M[ar]garet Reade and ye said Richard Lace dep[ar]ting fro[m]his shopp⁴ w[i]thowt bieng any meate viz lace first & M[ar]garett afterwards This depo[n]it asked ye reason of his servant who awnswered they wold not give to ye value w[i]thin a while aft[e]r eith[e]r of the[m] had furth[e]r veiewed ye m[ar]kett, first ye said m[ar]garett returneth to this depo[n]ites said shop⁴ & demanded of W[illia]m farnam his servant⁵ aforesaid wheth[e]r she shold have ye quarter of mutton for ye price she had before offered to him (this depo[n]it the[n] being at his shopp⁴) No q[uo]d You shall & you will q[uo]d farna[m] you know ye p[ri]ce therof. /

Then cutt it owt q[uo]d she whereupo[n] the said farnam was a Cleving of it owt⁶ /
And as he was so doing ye said Lace also returned & asked wheth[e]r he shuld have
ye half shepe / farnam awnswered / I have sold a quarter of it to the mayde here /
No q[uo]d Lace she shall not have it I have bought it, whereupon som[e] wordes
encreased betwixt the said Richard Lace & M[ar]garett Reade / Emongst w[hi]ch this
depo[nen]t well reme[m]breth yt in heate he hard the said Lace in his heate & hast
speke these wordes in effect to the said m[ar]garett viz Thow art a shitten whore⁷
& an arrant whore⁷ ~~or to the said effect~~ & this depo[nen]t hering ye said speches &
ther brablinge their went fro[m]his shopp⁴ & left them there a wording. ut depo[ni]t et
al[ite]r nescit depon[er]e.

Ad 3 nescit depon[er]e.

Ad 4 ver[um] est

Ad 5 refert se ad iur[a]

Ad ult p[re]depo[s]ita p[ar] eu[m] sunt ver[a] &c.

Idem sup[er] Interrogatoriis.

Ad 1 r[esp]ondet q[uo]d oriund fuit ap[u]d Estampsted in Berks & was seased at xiii L
yn goodes in the last subsedye boke.⁸ resid satisfert./

Ad 2. et 3. r[esp]ondet p[ro]ut ad 2 ar[ticu]lum li[bel]li dep[oni]t et al[ite]r nescit
depon[er]e./

Ad 4 nescit r[esp]ondere

Ad 5. et 6. r[esp]ondet nega[tiv]e.

Ad 7 r[esp]ondet q[uo]d p[ar]tibus indifferens et vellet victoriam ins habenti:/

Ad 8. 9. et 10. r[esp]ondet nega[tiv]e.

Ad 11 et 13 r[esp]ondet That aft[e]r those speches w[hi]ch the said lace uttered
against ye said m[ar]garett / she called him shittin cap. et al[ite]r r[esp]ondet
nega[tiv]e.

Ad 12 r[esp]ondet nega[tiv]e.

Ad 14 r[esp]ondet nega[tiv]e.

By me Thomas bedill⁹

Deposition 2

12 m[ar]tiii.¹⁵⁸⁵¹²

Will[iamu]s Farnham de Newportbutcher¹ ubi mora[m] ferit circit[er] v ann[es] oriund ap[u]d Coscom in Com[itatus] dors[et] etate circiter xxiii ann[es] libe[re] &c testis &c dicit q[uo]d p[ar]tes litigan b[e]n[e] novit./

Ad 1 refert se ad iur[a]

Ad 2 depo[ni]t et dicit yt upo[n] a wenisday abowt iii wekes before Xpemas last² ut recolit et al[ite]r no[n] recolit tempus, this depo[nen]t being inthe shop⁴ of Thom[a]s Bediall his Mr in Newport to sell flesh⁶ / the said Lace cam[e] into the shopp⁴ to buye two hinde quarters of Mutton¹⁰ & aft[er] he had agreed w[i]th this depo[nen]t to have the same, he went furth[er] into ye m[ar]kett not paying this depo[nen]t for yt mutton. / in the meane while the said M[ar]garett Lace Reade cam[e] to the s[ai]d shop⁴ & wold have bought one of those hinde quarters & as this depo[nen]t was cleving of it owt⁶ the said Lace returned back againe to ye shopp.⁴ to whom this depo[nen]t sayde, goodma[n] Lace migg must have one of these quarters, he awnsvered yt she shuld not she said she wold if this depo[nen]t wold lett her have it / hereupo[n] Lace grew into a greate heate & rage & uttered these wordes in effect to her the said m[ar]garett Lace viz Thow art an arrant whore⁷. & those wordes the said Lace iterated to her once or twise more / in such vehemencye as besides the wordes he was likely also to have striken the said m[ar]garett w[i]th one of the quarters of mutton if this depo[nen]t had not stayed him to the contrary At the premises was p[re]sent lening against the shopp⁴ bulke Thom[a]s Bedill aforesaid et al[ite]r nescit depon[er]e.

Ad 3 ar[ticu]lum nescit depon[er]e.

Ad 4 depo[ni]t yt the said Lace dwelleth at the Cowes in the Isle of Weght et al[ite]r nescit depon[er]e.

Ad 5 refert se ad iur[a]

Ad ult p[re]depo[s]ita p[ar] eu[m] sunt ver[a] &c.

Idem sup[er] Interr[ogatoriis]

Ad 1 r[esp]ondet q[uo]d satisfert in exordio deponis sue.

Ad 2 et 3 r[esp]ondet q[uo]d satisfert p[re]depo[s]ite p[ar] eu[m].

Ad 4 nescit r[esp]ondere

Ad 5. et 6. r[esp]ondet nega[tiv]e.

Ad 7 r[esp]ondet q[uo]d vellet victor[iam] ins henti.

Ad 8. 9. et 10. r[esp]ondet nega[tiv]e.

Ad 11. r[esp]ondet That ~~the said~~ he is verie certaine of it yt the said m[ar]garett Reade did not at that tyme in ~~this depou~~se any opp[ro]brious or malapart speches to the said Lace, before such tyme as the said Lace towld her yt she was an arrant whore⁷, ut rondet./

Ad 12 r[esp]ondent yt ~~some idle flicing speches he this r[esp]ondent hath harde to the effect ar[ticu]late,~~ but p[re]cisely of whom he hard any such report, or how true ye report is this r[esp]ondent cannot tell. / et al[ite]r nescit r[esp]ondere

Ad 12 r[esp]ondet That Emanuel Barker afor michellmas last² towlde this r[esp]ondent that he was w[i]th the said M[ar]garett Reade in the litle p[ar]lor at Mrs in her mistress howse in the night tyme¹¹ et al[ite]r nescit r[esp]ondere /

Ad 13 et 14 that aft[er] the said Lace had called ye said M[ar]garett arrant whore⁷, she replied unto him imediately & sayde she he was a shitten Cap[er] & furth[e]r she towlde him to this effect. / you have ye world at will now you have litle hell at Cows, whereto Lace awnswered I wold thow shuldst know it we have as honest women there as thow or thy grete grandmoth[e]r ut r[esp]ondet al[ite]r nescit r[esp]ondere

William Farnam⁹

Modernized Spelling Transcription

5 March 1585¹²

The libel on the part of Margaret Read against Richard Lace.¹³

Deposition 1

Thomas Bedill of St Cross near Newport, butcher¹, where he has lived for 30 years, age 55. He says he knows the litigant parties well.

To 1 he refers himself to the law.

To 2 he deposes and says that between Michaelmas and Christmas last ²(he recalls and otherwise cannot recall the time), this deponent upon a Wednesday in the morning about lecture time, coming from his house towards the church to the lecture and having his man keeping his shop⁴ in the town of Newport³, when he was almost at his shop⁴ espied both the said Margaret Read and the said Richard Lace departing from his shop⁴ without buying any meat viz. Lace first, and Margaret afterwards. This deponent asked the reason of his servant who answered they would not give to the value. Within a while after either of them had further viewed the market, first the said Margaret returned to this deponent's said shop⁴ and demanded of William Farnam, his servant⁵ aforesaid, whether she should have the quarter of mutton for the price she had before offered to him (this deponent then being at his shop)⁴~~No~~, said 'You shall and you will' said Farnam, 'you know the price thereof'. 'Then cut it out', said she, whereupon the said Farnam was cleaving of it out.⁶ And as he was so doing, the said Lace also returned and asked whether he should have the half sheep. Farnam answered, 'I have sold a quarter of it to the maid here'. 'No', said Lace, 'she shall not have it, I have bought it'. Whereupon some words increased between the said Richard Lace and Margaret Read, amongst which this deponent well remembers that ~~in~~ ~~heat~~ he heard the said Lace in his heat and haste speak these words in effect to the said Margaret viz: 'Thow art a shitten whore⁷ and an arrant whore⁷' ~~or to the said effect~~ and this deponent hearing the said speches and their brabbling, there went from his shop⁴ and left them there a wording. [This] he deposes and otherwise knows nothing.

To 3 he knows nothing.

To 4 he says it is true.

To 5 he refers himself to the law.

To the final he says that what he has deposed is true.

Interrogatories

To 1 he responds that he was born in East Hampstead in Berkshire and was seized at £13 in goods in the last subsidy book.⁸ and the rest he has already satisfied in his deposition.

To 2 and 3 he responds as to Article 2 of the libel and otherwise he knows nothing.

To 4 he knows nothing.

To 5 and 6 he responds no.

To 7 he responds that he wishes victory to the parties equally.

To 8, 9 and 10, he responds no.

To 11 and 13 he responds that after those speeches which the said Lace uttered against the said Margaret, she called him 'shittin cap' and otherwise he responds no.

To 12 he responds no.

To 14 he responds no.

By me, Thomas Bedill⁹

Deposition 2

12 March ^1585¹²

William Farnham of Newport, butcher¹, where he has lived for five years, born in Corscombe in the county of Dorset, age 23. He says he knows the litigant parties well.

To 1 he refers himself to the law.

To 2 he deposes and says that upon a Wednesday about three weeks before Christmas last² he recalls and otherwise cannot recall the time, this deponent being in the shop⁴ of Thomas Bediall, his Mr, in Newport to sell flesh⁶, the said Lace came into the shop⁴ to buy two hind quarters of mutton.¹⁰ And after he had agreed with this deponent to have the same, he went further into the market, not paying this deponent for that mutton. In the meanwhile, the said Margaret Læe Read came to the said shop⁴ and would have bought one of those hind quarters and as this deponent was cleaving of it out⁶ the said Lace returned back again to the shop⁴, to whom this deponent said, 'Goodman Lace, Migg must have one of these quarters'. He answered that she should not. She said she would if this deponent would let her have it. Hereupon Lace grew into a great heat and rage and uttered these words in effect to her, the said Margaret Læe viz: 'Thow art an arrant whore⁷'. And those words the said Lace iterated to her once or twice more, in such vehemency as besides the words, he was likely also to have struck the said Margaret with one of the quarters of mutton if this deponent had not stayed him to the contrary. At the premises was present, leaning against the shop⁴ bulk, Thomas Bedill aforesaid. And otherwise he knows nothing.

To Article 3 he knows nothing.

To 4 he deposes that the said Lace dwells at the Cowes in the Isle of Wight and otherwise he knows nothing.

To 5 he refers himself to the law.

To the final he says that what he has deposed is true.

Interrogatories

To 1 he responds that he has already satisfied this in the beginning of his deposition.

To 2 and 3 he responds that he has already satisfied this in what he has already deposed.

To 4 he cannot answer.

To 5 and 6 he responds no.

To 7 he responds that he wishes victory to either party.

To 8, 9 and 10 he responds no.

To 11 he responds that ~~the said~~ he is very certain of it that the said Margaret Read did not at that time ~~in this depo~~ use any opprobrious or malapart speeches to the said Lace, before such time as the said Lace told her that she was an arrant whore⁷.

~~To 12 he responds that some idle flying speeches he this respondent has heard to the effect, but precisely of whom he heard any such report, or how true the report is, this respondent cannot tell. And otherwise he knows nothing.~~

To 12 he responds that Emmanuel Barker before Michaelmas last² told this respondent that he was with the said Margaret Read in the little parlour at Mrs in her Mistress' house in the night time¹¹ and otherwise he knows nothing.

To 13 and 14 that after the said Lace had called the said Margaret arrant whore⁷, she replied unto him immediately and said she he was a shitten caper and further she told him to this effect: 'You have the world at will, now you have little hell at Cowes', whereto Lace answered 'I would thow should know it, we have as honest women there as thow or thy great grandmother' and responds that otherise he knows nothing.

William Farnam⁹

Notes

- ¹ (technicalities of the court) Male depositions: occupational or social status descriptors (e.g. baker, joiner, yeoman) were typically recorded in the brief biographical statement at the beginning of the deposition.
- ² (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).
- ³ (interpretation) Patterns of work: Thomas Bedill's servant, William Farnham, is responsible for looking after the shop in his master's absence.
- ⁴ (interpretation) The shop, where these male butchers worked, was near to (and perhaps part of) Newport market.
- ⁵ (interpretation) In the biographical preamble to his deposition (below), William Farnham is referred to as a butcher, but he is also described as Thomas Bedill's servant. Male servants often adopted the occupational identity of their employers.
- ⁶ (interpretation) Butchery: evidence of men's work. However, some women recorded in court depositions also performed tasks relating to butchery.
- ⁷ (technicalities of the court) 'Whore' was an actionable word in the church courts.
- ⁸ (technicalities of the court) Statement of worth: in interrogatory questioning, witnesses were often asked to state how much they (or another witness) were worth (all debts paid). The question was designed to discredit witnesses based on their economic value. Reputation and credibility was linked to economic wealth; those of higher social status and wealth were presumed to be more trustworthy. Some described their worth as a cash value, some in terms of the goods they owned and others talked about their worth in much broader terms (e.g. 'not much worth').
- 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 (interpretation) Both men and women were engaged in commerce (buying and selling).
- ¹¹ (interpretation) As Margaret Read (the plaintiff) has allegedly been defamed, it is important that the interrogatory questioning attempts to establish her dishonesty or poor reputation. Here, William Farnham suggests she had illicit relations with Emmanuel Barker in her mistress' house.
- ¹² (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 deposition was actually taken in 1586.
- ¹³ (technicalities of the court) This is a dispute between private parties, known in the church courts as an instance suit.

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