

## THE CASE OF GRACE SHERWOOD

*Princess Ann ss. At a Court held the 3<sup>d</sup> of Jan<sup>r</sup> 1704.*

Whereas Luke Hill and uxor<sup>1</sup> Som<sup>d</sup> Grace Sherwood to this Court<sup>2</sup> in Suspetion of witchcraft and she faying to apear it is therefore ord<sup>r</sup> that attachm<sup>t</sup> to the Sherr<sup>3</sup> do Issue to Attach her body to ans<sup>r</sup> the s<sup>d</sup> Som next Court.

[*Under February 6, 1705/6.*]

Suite for Suspition of witchcraft brought by Luke Hill ag<sup>t</sup> Grace Sherwood is ord<sup>r</sup> to be referr till to morr<sup>e</sup>.

[*Under February 7, 1705/6.*]

Whereas a Compl<sup>t</sup> was brought ag<sup>t</sup> Grace Sherrwood on Suspition of witchcraft by Luke Hill, etc.: and the matter being after a long time debated and ord<sup>r</sup> that the s<sup>d</sup> Hill pay all fees of this Compl<sup>t</sup> and that the s<sup>d</sup> Grace be here next Court to be Searched according to the Compl<sup>t</sup> by a Jury of women to decide the s<sup>d</sup> Differr: and the Sherr is Likewise ord<sup>r</sup> to Som an able Jury accordingly.

[*Under March 7, 1705/6.*]

Present: Col<sup>r</sup> Edward Moseley, Lieu<sup>t</sup> [Col<sup>r</sup>] Adam Thorowgood, Maj<sup>r</sup> Henry Sprat, Cap<sup>tn</sup> Horatio Woodhouse, M<sup>r</sup> Jn<sup>r</sup> Cornick, Cap<sup>tn</sup> Henry Chapman, M<sup>r</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Smith, M<sup>r</sup> Jn<sup>r</sup> Richason, Cap<sup>tn</sup> Geo: Handcock, Justices.

<sup>1</sup> Luke Hill and wife. Against them in December, 1705, Grace Sherwood had brought action for assault and battery, claiming £50 of damages and receiving twenty shillings. What this affray may have had to do with the charge of witchcraft does not appear.

<sup>2</sup> The court was the county court, its members a group of "gentlemen of the county, called justices of the peace." Their names appear just below, in the entry for March 7. Such a panel of the court heads the record of each of the sessions named, but its repetition has seemed unnecessary. Grace Sherwood's case was only one of many dealt with at each session. Usually only four or five justices were present.

<sup>3</sup> Sheriff.

Whereas a Complaint have been [made] to this Court by Luke Hill and his wife that one grace Sherrwood of this County was and Have been a Long time Suspected of witchcraft and have been as Such Represented wherefore the Sherr at the last Court was ord<sup>d</sup> to Som a Jury of women to this Court to Serch her on the s<sup>d</sup> Suspicion, She assenting to the Same. And after the Jury was impannell'd and Sworn and Sent out to make Due inquiry and Inspection into all Circumstances, After a Mature Consideracion They bring in this verditt: wee of the Jury have Serch<sup>d</sup> Grace Sherwood and have found Two things like titts w<sup>th</sup> Severall other Spotts: Eliz<sup>b</sup> Barnes, forewoman, Sarah Norris, Marg<sup>th</sup> Watkins, Hannah Dinnis, Sarah Good-acre, Mary Burgess, Sarah Sergeant, winifred Davis, Ursula Henly, Ann Bridg<sup>e</sup>, Ezable waples, Mary Cotle.<sup>1</sup>

[Under May 2, 1706.]

Whereas a former Compl<sup>t</sup> was brought ag<sup>t</sup> Grace Sherwood for Suspicion of Witchcraft, w<sup>th</sup> by the Atturney Gen<sup>l</sup> Report to his Ex<sup>ty</sup> in Councill was to<sup>2</sup> Generall and not Charging her with any perticular Act, therefore represented to them that Princess Ann Court might if they thought fitt have her ex-

<sup>1</sup> At this point the court reached the limit of its powers, and Luke Hill, doubtless at its instance, petitioned the highest tribunal of the colony, the General Court, i. e., the Governor and Council, informing them that "one Grace Sherwood of Princess Anne County being suspected of witchcraft upon his complaint to that county court that she had bewitched the petitioner's wife, the court ordered a jury of women to search the said Grace Sherwood who upon search brought in a verdict against the said Grace, but the court not knowing how to proceed to judgment thereon, the petitioner prays that the Attorney General may be directed to prosecute the said Grace for the same." But the attorney general, to whom on March 28 the matter was referred, reported on April 16 that he found the charge too general and that the county court ought to have made a fuller examination of the matters of fact, and that "pursuant to the directions and powers to County Courts given by a late act of Assembly" they ought, if they thought there was sufficient cause, to have committed the accused to the general prison of the colony, "whereby it would have come regularly before the General Court." Wherefore he suggested "that the said County Court do make a further Enquiry into the matter," and, if they find cause for action, to follow the said law; and it was ordered that a copy of his report "be sent to the court of Princess Anne County for their direction in the premises." (Cf. Palmer's *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, I. 100: at some points this corrects Mr. James's readings, at others needs correction by them.)

<sup>2</sup> Too.

amined De Novo, and the Court Being of Oppinion that there is great Cause of Suspicion Doe therefore ord<sup>r</sup> that the Sherr take the Said Grace into his Safe Costody untill She Shall give bond and Security for her Appearance to the next Court to be examined Denovo and that the Constable of that precinkt go with the Sherr and Serch the Sd graces House and all Suspicious places Carfully for all Images<sup>1</sup> and Such like things as may any way Strengthen The Suspicion, and it is likewise Ordered that the Sherr Som an Able Jury of Women, also all Evidences as Cann give in anything ag<sup>t</sup> her in Evidence, in behalf of our Sovereign Lady the Queen, To Attend the next Court Accordingly.

[Under June 6, 1706.]

Whereas Grace Sherwood of this County have been Com-  
plained of as a person Suspected of Witchcraft, and now being  
Brought before this Court in ord<sup>r</sup> for examinacion, this Court  
have therefore requested m<sup>r</sup> Maxm<sup>ll</sup> Boush to present In-  
formacion ag<sup>t</sup> her as Councill in behalf of our Sovereign Lady  
the Queen in order to her being brought to a regular Tryall.

Whereas an Informacion in Behalf of her Mag<sup>ty</sup> was pre-  
sented by Luk Hill, to the Court in pursuance To M<sup>r</sup> Gen<sup>ll</sup>  
Att<sup>ny</sup> Tomson report on his Excell<sup>ty</sup> ord in Councill the 16<sup>th</sup>  
Aprill Last About Grace Sherwood being Suspected of Witch-  
craft, have thereupon Sworn Severall Evidences ag<sup>t</sup> her by  
w<sup>ch</sup> it Doth very likely appear.

[Under June 7, 1706.]

Whereas at the Last Court an ord<sup>r</sup> was past that the Sherr  
should Sommons an able Jury of Women to Serch Grace Sher-  
wood on Suspicion of witchcraft, w<sup>ch</sup> although the Same was  
performed by the Sherr yet they refused And did not appear,  
it is therefore ord<sup>r</sup> that the Same persons be againe Som<sup>d</sup> by the

<sup>1</sup> Such "images," of course, as witches were believed to make of those they wished to afflict (see above, pp. 104, 163, 219, 228). "They have often," says Dalton, whose book these justices doubtless had open before them, "Pictures of Clay or Wax (like a Man, etc., made of such as they would bewitch) found in their House, or which they roast, or bury in the Earth, that as the Picture consumes, so may the parties bewitched consume."

Sherr for their Contempt To be Dealt w<sup>th</sup> according to the uttmost Severity of the Law, and that a new Jury of Women be by him Som<sup>d</sup> To appear next Court to Serch her on the aforesaid Suspicion, and that he likewise Som all evidences that he Shall Be informed of as materiall in the Complaint, and that She continue in the Sherr Costody unless She give good bond And Security for her Appearance at the next Court, and that She be of the Good behaviour towards her Majestic and all her Leidge people in the mean time.

[*Under July 5, 1706.*]

Present, Mr Jn<sup>o</sup> Richason, Cap<sup>tn</sup> Jn<sup>o</sup> Moseley, Cap<sup>tn</sup> Henry Chapman, Cap<sup>tn</sup> W<sup>m</sup> Smyth, Justices.

Whereas for this Severall Courts the Business between luke hill and Grace Sherwood on Suspicion of witchcraft have Been for Severall things omitted, perticularly for want of a Jury to Serch her, and the Court being Doubtfull That they Should not get one this Court, and being willing to have all means possible tryed either to acquit her or to Give more Strength to the Suspicion that She might be Dealt w<sup>th</sup> as Deserved, therefore it was Ord<sup>d</sup> that this Day by her own Consent to be tried in the water by Ducking,<sup>1</sup> but the weather being very Rainy and Bad Soe that possibly it might endanger her health, it is therefore ord<sup>d</sup> that the Sherr request the Justices precisely to appear on wednesday next by tenn of the Clock at the Court house, and that he Secure the body of the Sd Grace till that time to be forth Coming, then to be Dealt w<sup>th</sup> as afore sd. Jn<sup>o</sup> Richason, Henry Chapman.<sup>2</sup>

[*Under July 10, 1706.*]

Whereas Grace Sherwood being Suspected of witchcraft have a long time waited for a Fit uppertunity For a Further Examinacion, and by her Consent and Approbacion of this Court, it is ord<sup>d</sup> that the Sherr take all Such Convenient assistance of boats and men as Shall be by him thought Fitt, to meet at Jn<sup>o</sup> Harpers plantacion in ord<sup>d</sup> to take the Sd Grace forthwith and put her into above mans Debth and try her how

<sup>1</sup> As to this water ordeal for witches see above, p. 21, and note 3.

<sup>2</sup> These gentlemen were doubtless a committee charged with the matter.

She Swims Therein, alwayes having Care of her life to preserve her from Drowning, and as Soon as She Comes Out that he request as many Ansient and Knowing women as possible he Cann to Serch her Carefully For all teats spotts and marks about her body not usuall on Others, and that as they Find the Same to make report on Oath To the truth thereof to the Court, and further it is ord<sup>r</sup> that Som women be requested to Shift and Serch her before She goe into the water, that She Carry nothing about her to cause any Further Suspicion.

Wheras<sup>1</sup> on complaint of Luke hill in behalf of her Majesty that now is ag<sup>t</sup> Grace Sherwood for a person Suspected of witchcraft, and having had Sundry Evidences Sworne ag<sup>t</sup> her, proving Many Cereumstances to which She could not make any excuse or Little or nothing to say in her own Behalf, only Seemed to Rely on what the Court should Doe, and there-upon consented to be tryed in the Water and Likewise to be Serched againe, w<sup>th</sup> experim<sup>ts</sup> being tryed and She Swimming when therein and bound Contrary To Custom and the Judg<sup>t</sup> of all the Spectators, and afterwards being Serched by Five antient women who have all Declared on Oath that She is not like them nor noe Other woman that they knew of, having two things like titts on her private parts of a Black Coller, being Blacker than the Rest of her Body, all which Cereumstance the Court weighing in their Consideracion Doe therefore ord<sup>r</sup> that the Sherr take the Sd Grace Into his Costody and to Commit her body to the Common Goal of this County there to Secure her by irons, or otherwise there to Remaine till Such time as he Shall be otherwise Directed in ord<sup>r</sup> for her coming to the Common Goale of the country<sup>2</sup> to bee brought to a Future Tryall there.<sup>3</sup> Edward Moseley and M<sup>r</sup>. Richason.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This entry is made later on the same day: the court had merely taken a recess for the "ducking."

<sup>2</sup> *I. e.*, at Williamsburg. See p. 439, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> If, at the next session of the General Court, Grace Sherwood came up for trial, the records are missing, and probably perished in the burning of the State Courthouse in 1865. She at least survived the trial; for in 1708 she was confessing judgment for six hundred pounds of tobacco, and in 1733 willing her estate to her three sons. It is not till 1740 that the proving of that will shows her deceased.

<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the committee that drafted this verdict.