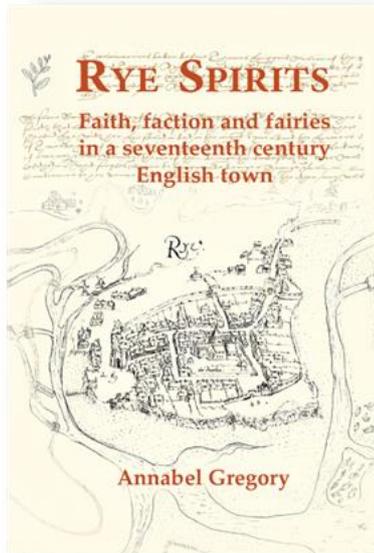




The Hedge Press



RYE SPIRITS

Faith, faction and fairies
in a 17th century English town

by Annabel Gregory

Paperback • Price £15

320 pages + 8pp col. section • 20 B&W illustrations

234 x 156 mm

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Social and cultural history / History of witchcraft

When the mayor of the godly but quarrelsome port of Rye in Sussex died suddenly in 1607, some people suspected witchcraft. These suspicions were still only loosely formulated, however, when the town clerk recorded a voluminous and inchoate dossier of evidence for the ensuing trial. This brings to life the concerns and even the speech of inhabitants—enabling the author to give a richly detailed account of life in early-modern Sussex. The women accused of witchcraft were far from the stereotype of popular legend.

Unravelling the story, however, was challenging—which may explain why it has not been published before. Only when the author delved into the pre-history of the case did a story begin to emerge. This witchcraft case—in which the mayor was both judge and prosecutor—was revealed to be one episode in a series of conflicts which periodically, over a couple of centuries, rent the town into competing factions.

The course of the case was complicated by the intervention of the government, who apart from suspecting malpractice on the part of the Rye magistrates, saw an opportunity to challenge the privileges of this semi-autonomous jurisdiction.

The spirits of the title range from fairies playing pranks on the inhabitants of Rye, to angels announcing the impending apocalypse. They are also, perhaps, the ordinary people of Rye— independent spirits, many of whom have bit parts in this extraordinary story.

“This fascinating and important book reconstructs the very rich context, to explain how a Puritan housewife, with some marginal claims to be a healer, could ultimately be accused of bewitching the richest man in Rye to death” — Robin Briggs, University of Oxford

“In its sheer breadth and depth and detail ... Gregory's story has a European feel to it, if only because English records are generally too sparse for such a reconstruction.”

— Malcolm Gaskill, *Continuity and Change*

“... a delightfully layered and deep picture of a community ... a pleasant, conversational read ... a good story and a good history, well told”

— Marion Gibson, *The Seventeenth Century*

Further details overleaf ...

The Author started researching early-modern Rye many years ago when she was a student at Sussex University (Ph.D. 1985), and is co-editor (with Michael Hunter) of *An Astrological Diary of the 17th century: Samuel Jeake of Rye, 1652-99* (OUP, 1988). She lives in London with her husband, and has an adult daughter.

Readership: The book is written in an engaging and readable style, with some fine illustrations, and is suitable for general readers who have an interest in social history and/or witchcraft.

Read sample chapters online (or download them)
at www.thehedgepress.co.uk

Contents

Preface

Part 1 The Story

Prologue * read online *

1 Approaching Rye * read online *

2 Susan's Story * read online *

3 The Interrogators

4 Anne Taylor

5 Faith and Faction

6 Attempts at Reconciliation

7 Healers

8 Entertaining Fairies

9 Many Eyes Fixed upon this case

10 Economic Decline

11 Thomas Hamon and the crisis of the 1590s

12 The Accusers

Epilogue

13 The Wider Context

Part 2 Of mirth and godliness

Appendix: Timeline

Notes

Bibliography

Index

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