

Edward Bocking (?)

A marueilous woorke of late done at Court of Streete in Kent
London

1527 (?)

This pamphlet told the story of a miraculous cure which happened at the chapel of Court-of-Street in the parish of Lympne. Of the 700 copies that were printed, not a single one survives. Even so, from the accounts of people who had seen it, we can form a fairly clear idea of its contents; and here I try to pull the evidence together.

On Sunday 23 Nov 1533, nine prisoners were brought from the Tower of London to do penance at Paul's Cross. One was a woman – Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent, about to be unmasked as an impostor. The others were her accomplices: two monks of Christ Church, Edward Bocking and John Dering; two Observant friars, Hugh Rich and Richard Risby; two parish priests, Henry Gold and Richard Master; and two laymen who had been caught up in the affair, Thomas Lawrence, the archdeacon of Canterbury's registrar, and Thomas Gold, Henry's brother.* Standing on a high platform rigged up for the purpose, they were denounced for their crimes by the preacher, John Capon, abbot of Hyde and bishop-designate of Bangor. When the sermon was finished, Elizabeth read or recited a written confession; and then she and her companions were taken back to the Tower.

* These are the victims named in a report which seems to have been written for Cromwell immediately after the event (Gairdner 1883, pp 28–9). Henry Gold and Richard Master had both owed their preferment to archbishop Warham. Gold was rector of Aldermay church in London and vicar of Hayes in Middlesex; Master was rector of Aldington and vicar of Eastry.

None of this was impromptu. The whole performance had been scripted in advance. Elizabeth's confession had been written for her; Dr Capon's sermon had been written for him.* (Even the jokes – nudge nudge, wink wink – were scripted.) No doubt he had been made to rehearse the sermon privately first, so that he knew what gestures were required. At suitable moments, he was expected to point his finger at his victims, or at one of them in particular: "these persons present afore you", "this nun here present", "this parson of Aldington", "this Dr Bocking", "this old man, one Lawrence", and so on. Mostly "you" means the audience; but at one point he had to turn sideways and speak to the victims directly: "Of which heresies and errors it will be hard for you here present to avoid, if they shall be laid to your charge."

* Once finished with, both documents were returned to Cromwell's office and kept on file. That is why they survive. According to Gairdner, the script for the sermon was written by the same hand as the report mentioned in the previous note. Some excerpts from it were quoted by Jenkyns (1833), in the footnotes which he appended to Cranmer's letter (see below). (At that time the document was to be found in the Chapter House at Westminster, "Theological Tracts, vol. vii. fol. 16".) There is a summary of it in Gairdner (1883, pp 29–30). It was printed in full by Whatmore (1943) – but something has gone wrong with the text which Whatmore did not notice or put right. Not having seen the original, I cannot be sure; but it looks as if

some of the leaves are out of order. I reprint the relevant parts of the sermon below (doc 1).

As well as a script, Dr Capon was also supplied with some props. At suitable moments again, he was expected to brandish two books which would reveal the full extent of the fraud, in the perpetrators' own words. One was a "printed book" – "a certain printed book made of the wonderful work done at Our Lady at <of?> Court-of-Street". The other was a "written book" – "the great book written with the hand of Dr Bocking".*

* Of this there existed also a fair copy, "redy to be a copie to the printer, when the sayd boke shulde be put to stampe" (Berthelet 1534, fo 15r). It was Thomas Lawrence's only crime that he had made that copy.

Two weeks later, on Sunday 7 Dec 1533, the performance was repeated at Canterbury, in the graveyard alongside the cathedral. The identical sermon was delivered again, this time by Nicholas Heath.* The archbishop, Thomas Cranmer, presided; some days later he wrote a report for the king, assuring him that the event had passed off well, and that the audience had got the right message (Jenkyns 1833, pp 76–7).*

* The script required some small adjustments, to allow for the change of place and lapse of time. One name, Thomas Gold's, was deleted, "being at St. Paul's Cross but not Canterbury" (Whatmore 1947, p 474, n 2). According to Jenkyns (1833, p 76, n 1) these alterations were made by Cranmer himself.

* For a while, it seems to have been thought that this might be the end of the affair. In one of Cromwell's to-do lists, two items appear which must have been written just before 7 Dec: "What the King will have done with those who will go to Canterbury to do penance. ... The King's pleasure for sending the Nun to Canterbury, and whether she shall return" (Gairdner 1882, p 551). But Cromwell soon discovered that it did not satisfy the king to have the nun and her friends humiliated publicly – once or twice or any number of times. They all had to die, and it was his job to bring that about. (In the end only six of them died: Elizabeth herself, the two monks, the two friars, and the parson of Aldermary.)

Cranmer was back at Lambeth by 20 Dec. From there he wrote a long letter to a friend of his, Nicholas Hawkins, who had been abroad for more than a year.* (He was serving as ambassador to the imperial court, the same post which Cranmer had held until he was called back to England and made archbishop). Much of this letter is taken up with an account of the seditious proceedings of the nun of Kent, and what Cranmer says about the first phase of her career is clearly derived from the pamphlet mentioned in the sermon, copies of which, as we learn from his letter, were still in circulation. Once the miraculous cure had been accomplished, "a book [was] written of all the whole story thereof, and put into print, which ever since that time hath been commonly sold and gone abroad amonges all people."

* The letter is printed by Todd (1831, pp 89–95), Jenkyns (1833, pp 79–84), and Cox (1846, pp 272–4), and summarized by Gairdner (1882, p 624). I reprint part of it below (doc 2), from Jenkyns's edition.

After March 1534, possession of this pamphlet became a criminal offence, punishable by the loss of all one's property and an open-ended term of imprisonment. It is not exactly surprising, therefore, that no copy is known to survive: the surprise is rather that one copy did survive, long enough to be seen by William Lambard. He gives a fairly full description of it (1576, pp 148–52).* On the whole, provided that one filters out the sarcasm, this description seems to be reliable; I add just three short comments.

* This chapter is included in the original draft, written during the winter of 1570–1 (Maidstone, Kent History and Library Centre, U47/48 Z1, fos 60v–5r). I reprint the relevant parts of it below, as it was printed in 1576 (doc 3). The second edition (Lambard 1596, pp 187–94) has one added phrase (see below) and various small adjustments to the wording. There are also two new paragraphs at the end (p 194): the information reported here all comes from the act of attainder (Berthelet 1534).

(1) Against "About the time of Easter, in the seuenteenth yeare of the Reigne of King Henrie the eight", a sidenote gives the date as "1525". Lambard had not done his homework. The Easter which fell in that regnal year was 1 Apr 1526.

(2) Lambard says bluntly that the pamphlet was "printed by Robert Redman"; and I suppose it must be true that Redman's name did appear somewhere (on the titlepage or in the colophon) in the copy that he got to see. But Cromwell's enquiries led to a different result. The printer, he discovered, was John Skot. These are Cromwell's memoranda on the subject: "To remember that Dr. Bokking did put unto Skotte all the Nun's book to print, and had five hundred of them when they were printed, and the printer two hundred. ... Touching the confession of the printer that printed the Nun's book" (Gairdner 1882, p 648).* My guess would be that the 500 copies printed for Bocking did not give the printer's name, and that the extra 200 gave Redman's name instead of Skot's, because they were going to be sold through his shop. (It was, I gather, not uncommon for books to say that they were "printed by" when in fact they were "printed for".) On that supposition, the copies seen by Cromwell would be the unsold copies seized from Bocking, while the copy seen by Lambard would be one of the copies "printed by [Iohn Skot for] Robert Redman".

* The significance of these memoranda of Cromwell's was first pointed out by Duff (1905, p 149). John Skot (occ 1521–37) was a jobbing printer of no particular importance. There does not seem to be anything much to add to Duff's account of his career.

(3) The second edition of Lambard's Perambulation (1596) differs from the first in what it says about the authorship of this pamphlet. Instead of "penned I wote not by what doltishe dreamer" (1576, p 149), the second edition has "penned [by Edward Thwaytes, or] I wote not by what doltish dreamer" (1596, p 188). It is clear from the wording that Lambard was not at all sure about this – not intending to state it for a fact. He was, I suppose, relying on a passage in the act of attainder where it is said of Thwaites that he "translated and wrote diuers quaires and shetes of paper, concerning the said fals feined reuelations & miracles of the

said Elisabeth" (Berthlet 1534, fo 15r). But that does not refer to the "printed book". I take it to mean that Thwaites had made himself a copy of some part of Bocking's "written book" of Elizabeth's revelations. In any case, Thwaites is not the prime suspect. Though apparently Bocking could never be brought to admit it, I think we can assume that he was the author of the pamphlet; he was certainly the person who arranged for it to be printed.

Doc 1 – Script for a sermon to be preached at Paul's Cross, Sunday 23 Nov 1533 (Whatmore 1943)

... The original ground of this ungracious conspiracy is this nun here present, a nun of St. Sepulchre's in Canterbury, named Elizabeth Barton, who, at the beginning of this illusion, was a woman servant with one, Thomas Cobb, the archbishop's farmer at Aldington in Kent.

This Elizabeth at that time, as she herself hath confessed, had an impostume in her stomach, which divers times redounded upwards to her throat and was like to stop her breath. Which sickness troubled and vexed her sore for the space of seven months, whereby she was brought into such weakness and such idleness of her brain, that she often times trifled and spake such words as she remembered not herself when she came to good avisement.

And among those words, she spake certain things concerning the seven deadly sins and the ten commandments (as the Parson of Aldington <Richard Master> here present did report) percase not very truly, for he cannot now rehearse what the said words were.

This Parson of Aldington upon this occasion rid to the Archbishop of Canterbury, <William Warham> lately deceased, and informed him that the said Elizabeth Barton had spoken certain words of high and notable matters in her sickness, to the great marvel of the hearers, and desired to know the said archbishop's pleasure and counsel concerning the same. Who willed him that, if she had any more such speeches, he should be at them as nigh as he could and mark them well.

In the meantime, whilst this Parson of Aldington was with the said Archbishop of Canterbury, the said Elizabeth voided the said impostume by her mouth, and had by force of nature a great purgation therewithal, and thereby was restored to perfect health before the return of the said parson – saving only that she was weak by reason of her long disease.

When this said parson came home, he shewed her that the said archbishop took the matter very well, and said it was notable; and commanded him to be present if she had any more such speeches and to mark those same: affirming that the speeches that she had spoken came of God, and that she should not refuse neither hide the goodness and works of God. And likewise said unto her Thomas Cobb her master. And as soon as she was able to sit up her master caused her to sit at his own mess with her mistress and this Parson of Aldington.

And thereupon she, perceiving herself to be much made of, to be magnified and much set by by reason of the said trifling words spoken unadvisedly by idleness of her brain, conceived in her mind

how she (having so good success and furtherance of so small occasion, being nothing to be esteemed in deed) might further enterprise and essay what she could do, being in good avisement and remembrance, to illude the people giving audience unto her, who were so ready to make so much of her idle and trifling words aforesaid.

And so, after that, she feigned herself to have trances; and spake in them such words as might right well proceed of such a foolish person as she was. As may well appear to them who have read, or will read, a certain printed book made "of the wonderful work done at Our Lady at Court-of-Street". Among which speeches, uttered in her feigned trances, one was, that she should at a certain day appointed go to the chapel of Our Lady of Court-of-Street, and there she should be restored to health by miracle, through the power of God and His Blessed Mother Mary.

And when the said day appointed by her came, Dr. <Edward> Bocking and this Parson of Aldington here present, with other clerks and religious men, accompanied with two thousand and more of the King's Grace's people, went in procession with this false and dissembling person from her said master's house to the said chapel of Court-of-Street, singing the litany and saying divers psalms and orations by the way.

And when she came thither, and mass with note was begun, she feigned herself to be in a trance and disfigured; and lay upright upon the ground, her eyes staring, her tongue appearing abroad (somewhat without her teeth), her nether jaw some time let down and some time moved towards the one side and the other, wresting her body and her arms as she had been in a pang of sickness.

And at divers places of the mass she feigned and spake divers sentences as though she had been in another world.

And after mass she kneeled afore the image of Our Lady of Court-of-Street and said then she was made perfectly whole. Whereas she was perfectly whole afore she came thither – as she hath plainly and openly confessed afore divers of the King's Grace's council and afore the most part of the lords of this realm, by her confession subscribed with her own hand.

And this is the great miracle that is so much spoken of in the said printed book, feigned by this person now being a nun!

And when this was passed this Dr. Bocking rode up to the said Archbishop of Canterbury, and shewed him that a great miracle had been done upon her at Court-of-Street by the mightful power of God and His blessedful Mother Mary; and desired him to declare the same for a miracle, and that it might please him to sequester that elected person of God to the nunnery of St. Sepulchre's at Canterbury.

To whom the said archbishop answered, that he would not be hasty therein, but would counsel thereupon with the prelates and clergy of his diocese and with his learned council. And that he was contented that the said Elizabeth should be in the mean time in the nunnery of St. Sepulchre's if the prioress would take her. And that Dr. Bocking should be her ghostly father, because he informed the said archbishop that a voice had spoken in her in one of her trances, that it was the pleasure of God that he should be her ghostly father.

And soon after his return from the said archbishop, this Dr.

Bocking sent his letters to the Parson of Aldington to convey the said Elizabeth secretly to him to Canterbury. And she came with the said Bocking's servants to Canterbury in an evening; and Dr. Bocking brought her to the said Priory of St. Sepulchre's in the morning!

...

You shall further understand that, among those lies be planted and written divers errors and heresies, both in the printed book and also in the great book written with the hand of Dr. Bocking, by which it may well and evidently be manifest unto you, that her feigned revelations were not of God. And for an example I will shew you six or seven errors or heresies contained in the said book<s>.

First, in the printed book, the said Elizabeth Barton, when it was demanded of her by Dr. Bocking and other men then present, Whether the Son sat on the right hand of the Father, as it is written in our Creed, "sedet ad dexteram Patris", she answered: "Nay, it was not so, but One was before Any Other, and One in Neither". Which answer was put in print and set forth to the world, albeit there is denied in the same an article of our creed. And the said answer is praised of Dr. Bocking (as it appeareth in the said printed book) as "catholic and very notable". Which answer in the estimation of wise men who have read the said book is a shaft of Dr. Bocking's quiver!

Item, the said Doctor and others have caused to be set forth in this printed book this sentence spoken by Elizabeth as "true and catholic", which is neither true nor catholic:

"If thou the Sunday see not God in the face;
If thou die that week suddenly without confession,
Thou standest, man, in the way of damnation."

Item, it is written in the said printed book, that if any creature suddenly or by mischance departed this world, or having deadly wounds, if he be promised unto Our Lady at Court-of-Street heartily, he shall be restored to life again, to receive shrift and housel, and after to depart this world with God's blessing.

...

There be manifold other erroneous or heretical propositions contained in the said books, which evidently convicteth them not to be of God, but devised by false seducers of the people. Of which heresies and errors it will be hard for you here present (the nun and her complices, who have devised these books, imagined the matter contained in them, have written these books, have read and praised those same, and have shewn abroad the contents thereof) to avoid if they shall be laid to your charge.

And that all such things as I have shewn unto you concerning this matter be not feigned by me, but be matters of truth, if any man doubt thereupon, those same things and every one of them may be shewn unto him in the said books, printed and written, and by the confessions of these persons present afore you, to which I refer myself.

Doc 2 – Thomas Cranmer to Nicholas Hawkins, dd Lambeth 20 Dec 1533 (Jenkyns 1833, pp 79–84)

... These be to ascertain you of such news as be here now in fame

amonges us in England.

And first ye shall understand, that at Canterbury within my diocese, about eight years past, there was wrought a great miracle in a maid <Elizabeth Barton> by the power of God and our Lady, named our Lady of Courteupstret; by reason of the which miracle there is stablished a great pilgrimage, and ever since many devout people hath sought to that foresaid Lady of Curte of Strett.

The miracle was this: the maid was taken with a grievous and a continual sickness, and in during her said sickness she had divers and many trances, speaking of many high and godly things, telling also wondrously, by the power of the Holy Ghost as it was thought, things done and said in other places, whereas neither she was herself, nor yet heard no report thereof. She had also in her trances many strange visions and revelations, as of heaven, hell, and purgatory, and of the state of certain souls departed, and amonges all other visions one was, that [she] should be conveyed to our Lady of Courte of Strett, where she was promised to be healed of her sickness, and that Almighty God should work wonders in her; and when she was brought thither and laid before the image of our Lady, her face was wonderfully disfigured, her tongue hanging out, and her eyes being in a manner plucked out and laid upon her cheeks, and so greatly disordered. Then was there heard a voice speaking within her belly, as it had been in a tun; her lips not greatly moving; she all that while continuing by the space of three hours and more in a trance; the which voice, when it told any thing of the joys of heaven, it spake so sweetly and so heavenly that every man was ravished with the hearing thereof; and contrary, when it told any thing of hell, it spake so horribly and terribly that it put the hearers in a great fear. It spake also many things for the confirmation of pilgrimages and trentals, hearing of masses, and confession, and many such other things. And after she had lain there a long time, she came to herself again, and was perfectly whole, and so this miracle was finished and solemnly rung, and a book written of all the whole story thereof, and put into print, which ever since that time hath been commonly sold and gone abroad amonges all people.

After this miracle done, she had a commandment from God in a vision, as she said, to profess herself a nun. And so she was professed, and hath so continued, in a nunnery at Canterbury, called St. Sepulcre's, ever since. And then she chose a monk of Christ's Church, a doctor in divinity, <Edward Bocking> to be ghostly father, whose counsel she hath used and evermore followed in all her doing. ...

Doc 3 – Lambard 1576, pp 148–52

... But bycause the midst, and end of this Pageant, is yet fresh in the knowledge of many on liuing, and manifested to al men in bookes abroad: And for that the beginning thereof is knowne to verie fewe, and likely in time to be hid from all, if it be not by some way or other continued in mynde: I will laboure only to bewray the same, and in suche sorte, as the maintainers thereof them selues <149> haue committed it to writing.

For not long since, it chaunced me to see a litle Pamphlet, conteining foure and twentie leaues, penned I wote not by what doltishe dreamer, printed by Robert Redman, Intituled: "A marueilous woorke of late done at Court of Streete in Kent, and published (as it pretendeth) to the deuout people of that time for their spirituall consolation:" in whiche I founde the very first beginning, to haue beene as followeth.

About the time of Easter, in the seuteenthe yeare of the Reigne of King Henrie the eight, <1 Apr 1526> it happened a certaine maiden named Elizabethe Barton, then seruaunt to one Thomas Kob, of the Parishe of Aldington, twelue myles distant from Canterbury, to be touched with a great infirmitie in her body, whiche did ascend at diuers times vp into her throte, and swelled greatly: during the time whereof, she seemed to be in grieuous paine, in so muche as a man would haue thought, that she had suffred the panges of deathe it selfe, vntill the disease descended, and fell downe into the bodie againe.

Thus she continued by fittes, the space of seuen monethes, and more, and at the laste, in the Moneth of Nouember <1526> (at whiche time also a yong Childe of her Maisters lay desperatly sicke in a cradle by her) she being vexed with the former disease, asked (with great pangs and groning) whether the Childe were yet departed this life, or noe: And when the women that attended vpon them bothe in their sicknesse, aunswered no, she replied that it should anone: whiche woord was no sooner vttered, but the childe fetched a great sighe, and withall the soule departed out of the body.

This her diuination and foretelling, was the first matter, that moued her hearers to admiration: But <150> after this, in sundry of her fits following, althoughe she seemed to the beholders to lye as still as a deade body (not mouing any part at all) as well in the traunces themselues, as after the pangs passed also, she told plainly of diuers things done at the Church, and other places where she was not present, whiche neuerthelesse she seemed (by signes proceeding from her) most liuely to beholde (as it were) with her eye: She tolde also, of heauen, hell, and purgatorie, and of the ioyes, and sorrowes, that sundry departed soules had, and suffered there: She spake frankly againste the corruption of manners and euill life: She exhorted repaire to the Churche, hearing of Masse, confession to Priestes, prayer to our Lady and Sainctes, and to be short, made in all pointes, confession and confirmation of the Popish Creede and Cathéchisme, and that so deuoutly and discretely (in the opinion of mine authour) that he thought it not possible for her to speake in that manner.

But amongst other things, this one was euer much in her mouthe, that "She woulde goe home," and that she had beene at home, whereas (to the vnderstanding of the standers by) she had neuer beene from home, nor from the place where she laye: wherevpon being (in a tyme of another traunce) demaunded where That home was, she aunswered, Where she sawe and hearde the ioyes of heauen, where S. Michael wayed soules, where Sainct Peter carried the keyes, and where she her selfe had the companie of our Lady at Court of Strete, and had hartely besought her to heale her disease, who also had commaunded her, to offer vnto her a Taper in her Chappell there, and to declare boldly to all Christian people, that our Lady of Court of Strete,

had recouered her from the verie point of death: and that her pleasure was, that it shoulde be rong for a miracle.

<151> Whiche wordes when her Maister heard, he sayde, that there were no Belles at that Chappell, wherevnto the Mayden answered nothing, but the voice that spake in her proceeded, saying, "Our blessed Lady wil shew moe miracles there shortly, for if any departe this life soudainly, or by mischance, in deadly sinne, if he be vowed to our Lady heartely, he shal be restored to life againe, to receiue shrift, and housell, and after to depart this worlde with Gods blessing." Besides this, she tolde them what meate the Heremite of that Chappell of our Lady at Court of Strete had to his supper, and many other things concerning him, whereat they maruailed greatly.

And from that time forwarde, she resolued with her selfe, to goe to Court of Strete, and there to pray and offer to our Lady, whiche also she did accordingly: And was there delayde of her cure for a certaine season, but yet (in the meane time) put in assured hope of recouerie. During whiche meane while, the fame of this marueylous Mayden was so spread abroade, that it came to the eares of <William> Warham the Archebishop of Canterbury, who directed thither Doctour <Edward> Bocking, Master <William> Hadleighe, and Barnes, three Monkes of Christes Church in Canterbury, father Lewes, and his fellowe, two obseruants, his Officiall of Canterbury, and <Richard Master> the Parson of Aldington, with commission to examine the matter, and to infourme him of the truthe.

These men opposed her of the chiefe pointes of the Popishe believe, and finding her sounde therein, not only waded no further in the discouerie of the fraud, but gaue it great countenance, and ioyned with her in setting foorth of the same: So that at her nexte voyage to oure Lady of Court of Strete, she entered the Chappell with "Aue Regina Caelorum," in pricksong, accompanied with these <152> Commissioners, many Ladies, Gentlemen, and Gentlewomen of the best degree, and three thousande persons besides, of the common sort of people.

There fell she eftsones into a marueilous passion before the Image of our Lady, muche like a body diseased of the falling Euill, in the whiche she vttered, sundrye metricall and ryning speaches, tending to the worship of our Lady of Court of Strete (whose Chappell there, she wished to be better mainteined, and to be furnished with a dayly singing Priest) tending also to her owne bestowing in some Religious house, for suche (sayde she) was our Ladies pleasure, and to the aduancement of the credite, of suche feyned miracles, as myne authour reporteth. This done and vnderstoode to the Archebishop, she was by him appointed to S. Sepulcres, a house of Nonnes in Canterbury, where she laboured sundry times of her disease, and continued her wonted working of wonderous myracles, resorting often (by way of traunce onely) to our Lady of Court of Strete, ...

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First posted May 2013