

Fields, Fairs and Festivities: Telling the Time Before the Industrial Revolution

Existing Research (1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

1967 - E. P. Thompson writes about how employment changes, factories and industrialisation impacted people's perception and use of time

1986 - M. Harrison discusses the use of time telling to organise gatherings in Bristol from 1790-1835, using newspapers as his source

2017 - K. Wrightson uses court witness testimonies from Durham between 1615 and 1631 to record time references used in urban and developing urban areas

2020 - M. Hailwood examines patterns of work and perceptions of time in rural South West England from 1500-1700 through court records

2020 - G. Verhoeven investigates time telling in London from 1724-1825 using Old Bailey witness testimonies, focusing on the use of timepieces

My PhD: Answers from the Archives (6)

- ◆ **Partnership** with Staffordshire Record Office Bawdy Courts project working with **archive staff** and **volunteers**
- ◆ Archive catalogue provides **demographic information** for the witnesses, allowing comparisons to be made according to gender, occupation, literacy and age
- ◆ All witness testimonies will be from cases heard by the **Lichfield Consistory Court** so all cases have a **consistent** administrative process and format within the same court
- ◆ The Lichfield Consistory Court covers much of the **Midlands in England**, encompassing a mixture of cities, urban, rural, industrial and agricultural areas to enable **direct comparisons** according to community type
- ◆ Using court cases from **1550—1800** to provide a **longitudinal** view of developments in time telling in the context of wider **societal** changes and **technological** developments

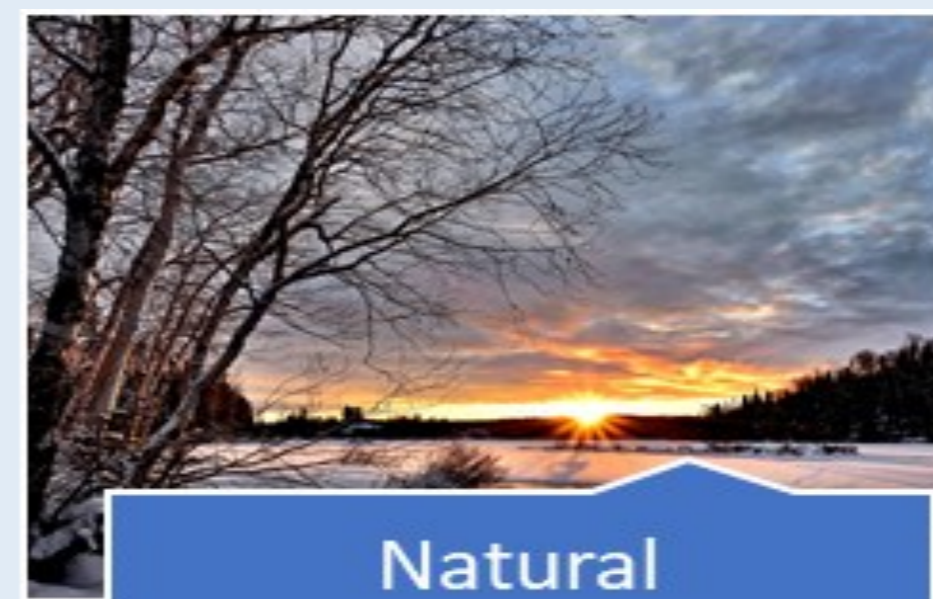
Time References



Ecclesiastical
"around Michaelmas last past"



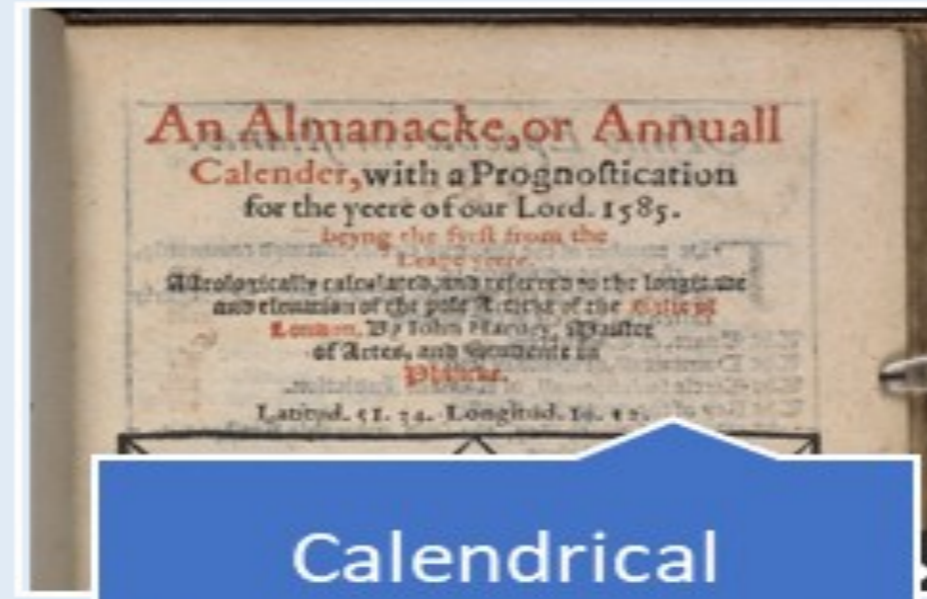
Agricultural
"in harvest tyme"



Natural
"as the sun was setting"



Clock
"about 10 of the clock at night"



Calendrical
"upon a Thursday in June in anno dm 1601"

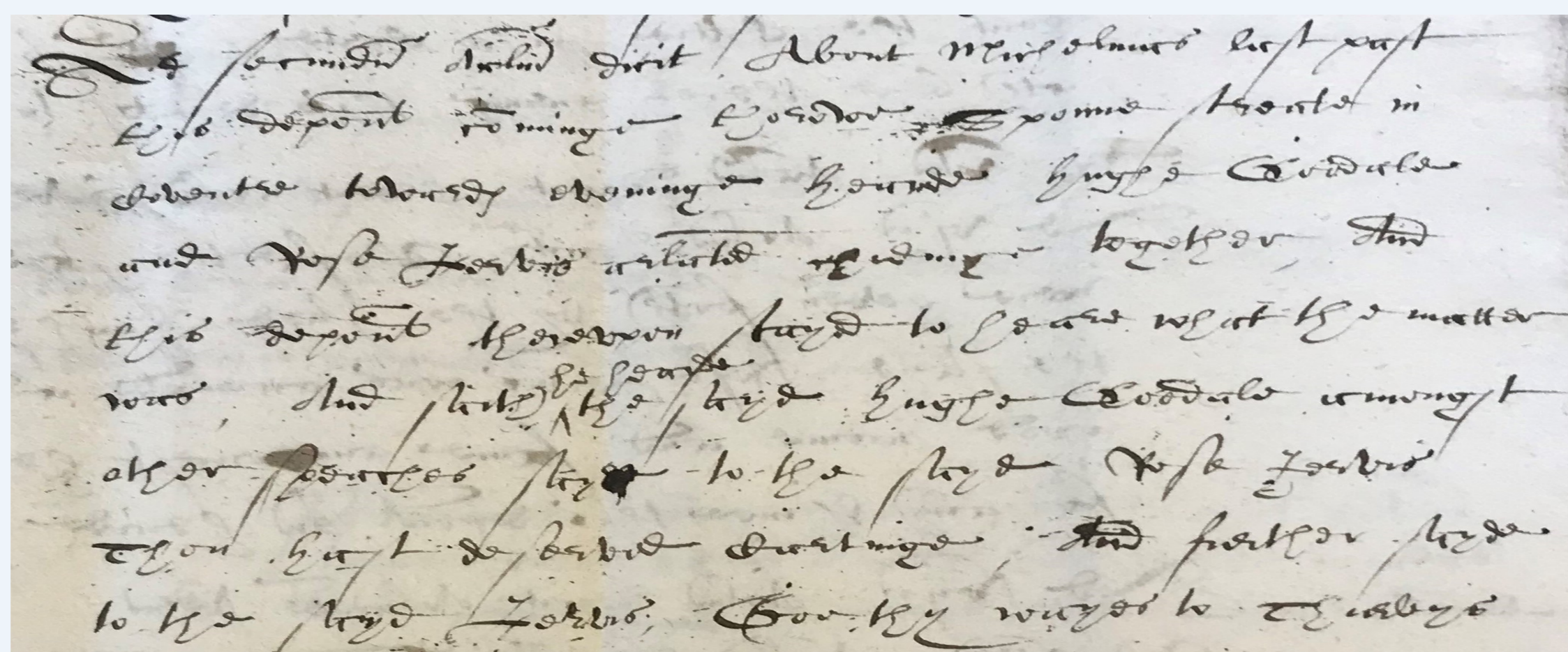


Events
"when I was on my way to Burton Fair"

Witness Testimonies as a Data Source (7)

Benefits

- ◆ Their standardised format makes them easy to navigate
- ◆ Close as possible to the witness' own words
- ◆ Diverse range of people give evidence in court
- ◆ Staffordshire Record Office has a substantial archive collection with thousands of complete cases



Constraints

- ◆ Some earlier documents use Latin as well as English
- ◆ Palaeography skills are needed to decipher the handwriting
- ◆ Witnesses use obsolete words
- ◆ Court scribes may have filtered the witness' original wording
- ◆ A sampling plan is necessary due to volume of documents

1. E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism", *Past and Present*, 38:1, (1967): 56-97
 2. Mark Harrison, "The Ordering of the Urban Environment: Time, Work and the Occurrence of Crowds 1790-1835", *Past and Present*, 110:1, (1986): 134-168
 3. Keith Wrightson "Popular Senses of the Past Time: Dating Events in the North Country, 1615-1631", in *Popular Culture and Political Agency in Early Modern England and Ireland*, eds. Michael J. Braddick and Phil Withington (London: Boydell Press, 2017), 91-107
 4. Mark Hailwood, "Time and Work in Rural England, 1500-1700", *Past & Present*, 248:1 (2020): 87-121
 5. Gerrit Verhoeven, "Clockwise? Timekeeping in London in the Long Eighteenth Century (1724-1825)", *Cultural and Social History*, 17:4, (2020): 451-471
 6. <https://lichfieldbawdycourts.wordpress.com/>
 7. Staffordshire Record Office, B/C/5/1590/4; image reference IMG1068