

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### The Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634: A Digital Edition. Edition

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mentioned above with the Strode attribution, this type of search could raise questions about the authorship of some poems, allowing scholars to compare, for example, attributions given to a poem in various manuscripts. This open access digital tool offers researchers the ability to quickly compare material from different archives. In general, the Folger's *Union First Line Index of English Verse* is an excellent first step in helping trace a manuscript, a poem, and an author.

BEATRICE MONTEDORO

University of Oxford

**Kassell, Lauren, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, John Young, Joanne Edge, Janet Yvonne Martin-Portugues, and Natalie Kaoukji, eds.**

***The Casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634: A Digital Edition. Edition.***

The Casebooks Project. Cambridge: University of Cambridge. Accessed 6 March 2019. [casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk](http://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk).

The Casebooks Project, a digitized archive of eighty thousand medical and astrological consultations, presents the casebooks of two early modern English medical practitioners. One, urban, was Simon Forman who practised in London. The other, rural, was Richard Napier who practised in Great Linford, Buckinghamshire. They, and occasionally their associates, recorded cases from 1596 through 1634 in casebooks intended for the use of the practitioners themselves. Entries contain a mixture of English and Latin, many abbreviations, erratic punctuation, astrological casts for nearly every patient, and notes, some unrelated to the case beside which they are jotted.

Despite the difficulties the casebooks present to modern readers, their value as a source for social and medical history, the demographics of a medical practice, and understanding how early modern English people from all walks of life lived and died is unrivaled. For those who wish to find out whether (and how) an event, person, or subject (witchcraft, for example) is mentioned and treated in these manuscripts, this digital project makes it possible to search and browse the enormous trove of manuscript material in a number of ways.

The project is housed on four websites. The main site ([casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/](http://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk/)) contains both the edited case transcriptions and a detailed critical introduction to the project. The introduction explains the many ways in which information can be retrieved and offers helpful discussions about such topics as handwriting, punctuation, manuscript symbols, and how to understand the dates present in the cases. The edition provides a transcription of the first part of each case—usually the patient’s name, the name of the person asking about the patient (the querent, who may be the patient or the practitioner or someone else), the patient’s habitation, the date and time of the consultation, and the question, i.e., why the consultation is desired. Once a reader has selected a case through the site’s search or browse functions, several choices appear on the case page offering links to related material in the database. This website provides the jumping-off point for browsing or searching the edition and also links to three other closely related websites.

A second website, housed on GitHub ([github.com/CasebooksProject?tab=repositories](https://github.com/CasebooksProject?tab=repositories)), contains the raw XML transcriptions for this searchable edition. These are open source and their data are freely available to users. A third website, hosted by Cambridge Digital Library ([cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/casebooks/1](http://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/casebooks/1)), presents digital facsimiles of all sixty-six casebooks, part of the Ashmole Manuscript Collection owned by and physically housed in Oxford’s Bodleian Library. This site arranges the manuscripts by Ashmole MS volume number. These are not temporally consecutive. For each practitioner, however, volume numbers indicate the temporal order of the manuscripts he wrote. Forman, volume 1, for example, is Ashmole MS 234 (his earliest casebook), while Napier, volume 1, is Ashmole MS 175. These digital facsimiles provide full access to each casebook and allow readers to “turn” the images of the manuscript pages to see not only the complete case but also materials surrounding it in the practitioner’s casebook.

A fourth site ([casebooks.wordpress.com](http://casebooks.wordpress.com)) contains five hundred fully transcribed exemplary cases and a selective index of information of interest across the corpus. This site can be accessed only with permission from its owner. My permission was granted in under twenty-four hours. All three additional websites are accessible directly from the main site’s home page.

I studied a number of the Ashmole manuscripts included in this edition at the Bodleian Library, completing my work as this project was being conceived. I am deeply interested in how this resource might aid researchers and how

complete is the material it provides. The *Casebooks Digital Edition* is at once both simple to use and quite complex, depending on a user's interests and needs. The main website's search function is powerful, searching both casebook data and the metadata of the considerable apparatus. For those who seek limited, specific information from the casebooks—about a person, a subject (plague, sleep disorders, dreams) or even a year or specific date—the browse and search functions return relevant information and allow users, through a list of facets to the left of the edited text, to narrow and focus a request until they reach what interests them. Each case is numbered, as is each “identified entity” (humans and organizations), as well as any letters and notes included in the casebooks. Clicking on a case, no matter the search route by which the user reached it, thus brings up not only the edited part of the case but also a thumbnail facsimile of the manuscript page where the case is located, and an array of buttons beneath and facets beside the text which offer ways to connect that case to others with various relations to it.

As an example, consider a single search for information about the medical treatment of children in the period. I chose one year, 1601, when both Forman and Napier were practising. A search for 1601 produces 2,533 hits. Clicking on the facet for children under ten reduces that number to 164 records. Clicking on the facet for those cases including treatment yields seventy-eight records. At this point a user could separate the two practices: thirteen cases were Forman's, sixty-five Napier's. Another easy separation of children by gender finds thirty-three females and forty males. Additional narrowing can refine the patients' ages (to those under age two, for example). But a user who wanted to look at all seventy-eight cases which included treatment information could simply click on each case. Most will not include that information in the edited transcription, however, because treatment information is usually presented only in the judgment section of the case (the part of the case write-up where the practitioner may record symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and fees) which this edition does not transcribe. For example, clicking on Forman's CASE9327 Godolphin Casby [Casswell] (PERSON1601) brings up “Goddolphin Casswell of 6 years old 1601 the 22 of may Friday in meridian 20 post xi Diz.” Green buttons at the bottom of the page indicate that treatment, judgment, outcome, an astrological chart, and a recorded death are included in the case. To see these details, a user can enlarge the thumbnail facsimile of the case. Godolphin's symptoms were fever, much pain in his belly, a cough and full of phlegm, unquiet sleep. Forman predicted

he would grow worse and be long sick. He prescribed a dietary drink for four days and then bloodletting. Two months later, he added a note saying that the child died at the latter end of July. In short, the facets allow users to narrow the search, until they reach the case or cases in whose features they are interested.

The edition includes a number of pedagogical features. Its apparatus provides instruction on interpreting dates, on the handwriting in the manuscripts (including links to online tutorials), and a list of symbols used, as well as a glossary, a bibliography, and citation instructions. For users interested in the astrological approach used by Forman and Napier, there is a searchable digitized edition of Forman's "The Astrologically Judgements of physick" and Napier's unfinished "Treatise touching the Defense of Astrologie." Scholars wishing to do in-depth research will be delighted by the flexibility of this edition, which provides ready access to many helpful tools. Gaining mastery of what is offered here will, however, take time and effort.

My chief regret—and I understand why they could not be included—is the absence of full case transcriptions. The five hundred full cases on WordPress give a good sense of what the reader is missing in the cases (over 99 percent) where the judgment is not transcribed. Users can work from the facsimile, as I did for Godolphin Casby's case above. But the unrecorded material is, for the most part, unsearchable. In addition, on several of the facsimile pages I examined, the show-through from the reverse of the leaf makes deciphering the case difficult or impossible (true to a lesser extent when the physical manuscript sits before you).

Overall, however—with the caveat that I know nothing about the raw data contained on the GitHub website—the Casebooks Project offers a deeply thoughtful presentation of this rich and complicated archive. Both the one-time or casual user and the dedicated researcher are well served.

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