An Act of 1563 laid down the death penalty for the "Invocation of evill and wicked spirites, to or for any Intent or Purpose, and for using witchecrafe Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed." The study of witchcraft and associated activities figures prominently in historical research of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alan Macfarlane's recent study of the problem suggests that reasons for increasing fear of witches and persons supposedly possessed of supernatural powers can be associated with the breakdown of traditional structures, such as the manor and the church, and the growth of a pauper-class. He considers that in many instances, the village loathing for an accused individual was an expression of inner-guilt at having previously denied him or her neighborly help in time of need.

A letter from Sir Nicholas Bacon in 1572 to his son Nicholas deals with the question of "one Morris" who was condemned at the County Assize for the "Invocation of Spirits." Sir Nicholas had been informed that the case was not absolutely proven against him and that his subsequent behavior warranted a pardon. His son was chastised presumably for failing to note this and for not attending the Assizes.

A Somne, Sr Ambrose Germyn hath written unto me, for A pardon to be obtained for one Morris, who was at the last Assises condemn'd for Invocation of Spirites as it someth by his Wrighting by somwhath to straught a proceeding in Lawe, And besides he Wrighteth that the prisoner is become A very repentant and sorrowful man for his Offence. Nevertheless I have forborne and meane to forbears to proceed in it, untill I heare agayne from you, whether the Contry thincketh the man worthis death or no, And if you had bene at the Assises as you should have bene, If you had done well, You might have enformed me of this of your owne knowldg. But nowe in default thereof you are to speake with Mr Pooley who is best acquainted in this matter or with Mr Ashefield yf he were at the Asises, or els with them both. And therupon to advertise me imediately Because this matter came Ask no long tyme. I memorie it is so long since I hard from you. In the begynning of the next Termo I loks to as you here for the fynysshing of thinges and to knowe what is done for the leatting of Studdte Comend me to your vif and her Mother God blesse the Children and so fare you well From my house besides Charing Crosse this xvijth of Marche 1572

Your Father
N Bacon C S
Some, as Ambassador Gianni, hath written unto me, for a pardon to be obtained for one Morice, who was at the last Assised in the name of Oliver, as it seems by his writing, and by some other in the stead of a pretended in Law. And he did by constancy, that the person to be commit, by very repentance, and brought man to be, Officio. Nevertheless, I said for some time, to forebear to send in it, but till I have assurance from you, whether the Secretary shall the man worship, death on no. And that you send this at the Apostle, as you could have done, if you had done well, we might have informed you of this of a due course, if that none of us had done that thing, or that the Apostle, you should have at the Apostle, about the man, and the man, and that you do at this matter, and immediately. Because this matter remained so long time, I募资 about it, as long time and some from me. In the beginning of the next Termite, I could not go or stand, and the answering of some, and to know what is done for the death of the Lord. Come and not to go to you, and God make God's bless to his children and be done well. Thus have I signed this in the year of our Lord 1572.