

Hubble-bubble bewitches court

by John Shirley

MR JUSTICE Michael Davies had an invigorating time at Winchester Crown Court last week. He met his first self-confessed sex-change witch and his first round-the-world yachts-woman. He heard testimony spiced with quotations from Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. For good measure, he condemned the British press to be "boiled in oil."



Rosie Swale: vivacious

brunette, swathed in her black cloak and pink headscarf, she is better-looking than the newspaper photographs suggest. She takes an enthusiastic interest in the proceedings, frequently raising her hand to address Mr Justice Davies, and passing notes to her counsel, Patrick Bac, QC.

There is the question of a wreath sent to Stamp in January 1979. The prosecution claims it was ordered by Miss Stamp herself, in Vincent's name, as an attempt to get him jailed for breaching a High Court order.

Mrs Doreen Ralls, a florist's van driver, is called. She rang the Stamp home to get instructions on where to deliver the wreath, and she described the voice she spoke to: "It was, she says, 'a low, deep, rich husky voice.'" She elaborates: "You know, it was like the woman in the play who says 'a handbag!'"

Titheridge: "You mean 'The Importance of Being Earnest?'" Mrs Ralls: "Yes, it was the film version. I think it was Margaret Rutherford."

Titheridge: "No, it was not. It was Edith Evans."

Across the courtroom the press corps is disgruntled: all week, they have been smarting from the rebukes of Mr Justice Davies, who said on Tuesday that we should "be boiled in oil."

As we depart on Friday, Mr Justice Davies warns us about our standards of reporting over the weekend. If we transgress, he'll have us before him first thing on Monday, he says. We hacks must watch our step: in the court don't get us, then magic might.

not enjoying the ordeal. A stooped, pale figure, looking older than her 45 years, she stares blankly into the court. She does not look well. Occasionally she mops her brow and sips a cup of water. At one point she asks to leave the courtroom. Leaning heavily on a stick, she is assisted by a nurse. "I'm so sorry," she says quietly to a court usher as she passes.

Titheridge continues. He says that in November 1977, Stamp and Vincent met Swale and her husband. In August 1978 the Swales' marriage broke up, and two months later Tracey and Rosie went to live together in an isolated National Trust cottage near Guildford, Surrey. Earlier that year, says Titheridge, Vincent suffered stomach pains, vomiting and diarrhoea. A witness testifies that as she stirred the potion, Stamp muttered the witches' chant from Macbeth: "Hubble, bubble, toil and trouble."

If the jury is bemused by this, the defendant Swale is not at all put out. A vivacious, 31-year-old

On his own admission, the judge was dealing with "an exceedingly unusual case." It concerns the alleged attempts by the international sailor Aileen Elizabeth Rose Swale (known as Rosie) and Bernard (otherwise known as Tracey) Stamp to administer cytisine—an obscure poisonous extract of laburnum seed—to Stamp's former boyfriend, Southampton docker Keith Vincent. The couple are also alleged to have committed perjury and attempted to pervert the course of justice. They deny all charges.

Tomorrow the jury of six men and five women retire to consider their verdict. (The twelfth jury member, a man, went sick early in the case.) Last week they heard a bizarre tale of witchcraft curses and superstitious brews.

The first question sets the tone. What is the gender of Tracey Stamp? Prosecuting counsel Roger Titheridge, QC, explains that Stamp was born a man. Twenty years ago, he says, Stamp had a sex change operation: she has since lived as a woman and a witch.

In the dock, Tracey is plainly

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Mr Justice Davies said that the press should be "burnt in oil" for their role in events leading up to the hearing after being told that Mr Vincent had been paid £2,000 by the People newspaper for an interview and a photograph of the two women.

Earlier Mr Vincent, aged 36, had said that Miss Stamp, who claims to be a witch, took a wreath from his grandmother's funeral and nailed it to an old man's door. He said that she claimed to have put a curse on the man.

The judge interrupted and said that this was the sort of thing which "makes reporters' pens wag."

"They are only interested in this and not the facts of the case. I am going to find out before the case is over whether the court is being manipulated by the press or whether the press is being manipulated by the parties. I don't like the flavour of this case at all."

At the end of Mr Vincent's evidence the judge said that he would release him on condition that he did not speak to the press or television during the trial.

"I am not going to have interviews with you splashed all over the papers. In this country we have trial by judge and jury, not trial by the newspapers or television," he said. The case continues.

GUARDIAN Wednesday February 18 1981

The Times 24th Feb.

Rosie Swale is convicted on poisoning charge

From Our Correspondent Winchester

Rosie Swale, the round-the-world sailor, was found guilty at Winchester Crown Court yesterday of poisoning Mr Keith Vincent, a Southampton docker, of perjury, and of attempting to pervert the course of justice.

Her friend, Tracey Stamp, who before a sex-change operation was a merchant seaman, was found guilty of perjury and of attempting to pervert the course of justice. The jury was discharged from giving a verdict on a charge against her of poisoning Mr Vincent, her former lover.

Miss Swale was given a nine-month prison sentence on the poisoning charge, suspended for one year. The two women were conditionally discharged for 12 months on the charges of perjury and attempting to pervert the course of justice.

Miss Swale and Miss Stamp, both of Pen-tfordd, Dyfed, South Wales, had denied all the charges. They had been accused of administering toxic laburnum seeds to Mr Vincent.

Cross-examined by Mr Anthony Palmer, QC, defending Miss Stamp, Mr Vincent said: "I was amazed at the care and consideration both of the defendants always paid me when I was ill. It was for that reason I could not believe that two people who were always so nice, so kindly, could be poisoning me."

He had suspected something might have been put into his food in November, 1974, when Miss Stamp told him she had cast a spell and made him ill. "I don't believe in witchcraft. I assumed what she meant was she had probably given me something."

'Boiling in oil'
When questioned by Mr Justice Davies over a story he told to the SUNDAY PEOPLE, Mr Vincent said: "I have received on one occasion and one occasion only, £2,000 when I sold my story to the PEOPLE. It is rather like in court. They ask questions and then write a completely different angle to it."

Mr Justice Davies said: "I won't say what the Press deserves, except that they deserve boiling in oil."

Earlier the judge had held up a copy of the DAILY MAIL and complained about what he called the inaccurate headline.

After reminding the jury that he had told them at the outset of the trial to avoid reading about the case, or listening to it on television or radio, he declared: "I am very disappointed with the Press. They cannot stick to what is said exactly in court."

"If there are any more inaccuracies then I shall take action. The arm of the law is very long."

The judge added: "I'm going to find out before this case is over whether this court is being manipulated by members of the Press, or the Press by the parties. I don't like the flavour of this case at all."

The trial was adjourned until today.

DAILY TELEGRAPH 18th FEB.

Newspaper 'inaccuracies' under fire in poisoning case

Judge attacks press coverage of Swale trial

By our Correspondent

The judge in the trial of the round-the-world sailor, Rosie Swale, and her sex-change friend, Tracey Stamp, yesterday attacked press coverage of the case and warned a witness not to speak to reporters until it was over.

At the start of the second day's hearing at Winchester Crown Court, Mr Justice Davies held up a copy of the Daily Mail and complained about what he called an inaccurate headline on the paper's report.

After reminding the jury that he had warned them at the outset of the trial to avoid reading about the case or listening to it on television or radio, he said: "I am very disappointed with the press. They cannot stick to what is said exactly in court. If there are any more inaccuracies then I shall take action. The arm of the law is very long."

This was one of several criticisms of the press by the judge over its handling of the case in which the two women deny poisoning Miss Stamp's boyfriend, Mr Keith Vincent.