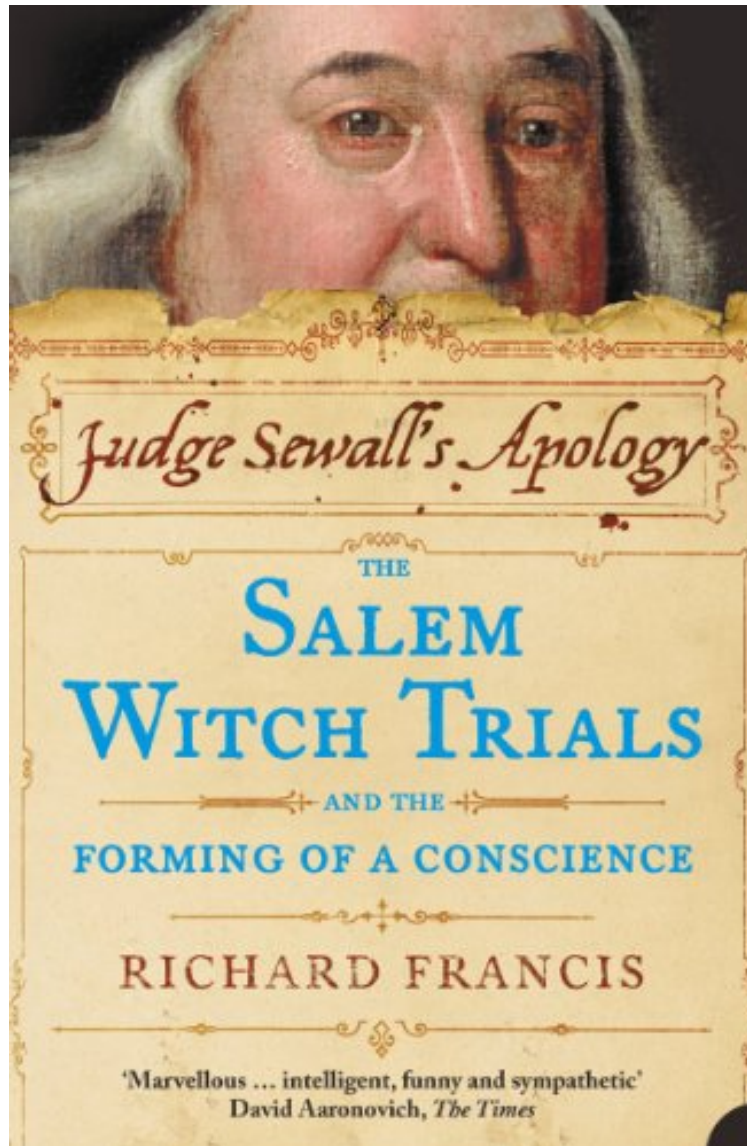


Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of a Conscience

Richard Francis

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Richard Francis : Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of a Conscience before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Judge Sewall's Apology: The Salem Witch Trials and the Forming of a Conscience:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A good read about a very "human" Puritan manBy K. DavidsonI'm a

student of the witch trials, and as Sewall was the only public figure to stand before his fellow congregants and issue an apology for his part, I had to learn more about him. Despite his being a well-connected and well-off Puritan man, I discovered that I sort of like and admire him. In many ways he was ahead of his time (abolitionist, quasi-women's rights supporter, student of nature), but spiritually and morally he could out-Puritan most other Puritans! He was a curious combination of intellect, ambition, industry, mild obsessiveness, and self-doubt. I fully intend to learn more about him in the future, and this book was a great way for me to get started.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. informative and enjoyable with minor issues
By Customer
Interesting view on the witch trials taken from someone who passed judgement on the people that were executed but only two chapters were spent talking about the trials. Perhaps the title is not appropriate in stating it is about the Salem Witch Trials since Sewall waited years until after their conclusion to document them and only two chapters are dedicated to the event. Memories often do not give justice to what happened. Also the experience of one man is not forming the American Conscious especially since he is a wealthy white man with political clout. However, the book was a great read, a history book disguised as a novel and a whole chapter on this man's hatred of wigs, literal wigs that made it quite enjoyable.¹⁹ of 20 people found the following review helpful. Francis brings Massachusetts in the late 17th century to life
By Ellis O. Jones
This is a well-researched and revealing account of the inner experience of a wealthy and powerful member of the Boston community. Largely based on Samuel Sewall's voluminous diaries, it covers his life from birth to death. It goes into detail about all sorts of events in Boston and Newbury. The cover blurb ("The Story of a Good Man and an Evil Event") and the title inflate the importance of the notorious Salem witch trials in the book. The publisher can be forgiven for this exaggeration: scandals grab public attention just as much now as then. If the witchcraft "angle" induces more people to take a look at this interesting book, the exaggeration will prove worthwhile. The witchcraft angle made me pick it up. I live scarcely a mile from the homestead of one of the women accused in that terrible crisis, and I am quite interested in what happened. Sewall was a Puritan magistrate. They sat in a panel over various trials, including the witchcraft trials. The nuances of Sewall's interior experience of those trials are revealing about the late Puritan age's issues of gender, social standing, and economic class that underlay the witchcraft panic: it started among women in run-down rural Salem Village (now Danvers) and was prosecuted by men in wealthy Salem Town. Both Sewall and his biographer convey an understanding of these struggles straightforwardly without polemic. Francis just tells the stories, and resists the temptation to draw simple moral lessons from what happened. By doing this he cuts through the illusion that Puritan culture was morally simple-minded and brings it to life. The people of the Puritan Commonwealth felt the presence of God looming over them with a clarity and intensity that is very difficult for us to understand in the 21st century. Those people thought their culture was destined to be the fulfillment God's divine Providence. Everything that happened, from earthquakes to the birth of infants to the attacks of Native Americans, they understood as expression of God's approval or disapproval of their personal conduct. Sewall was a diligent student of meteorology. He repented and apologized for his role in the witch trials partially because he saw signs of divine disapproval in the elements, and believed that the trials were a sign of collective delusion. Sewall's accounts of trying to persuade his contemporaries of this position are especially revealing about the complexity of the American attitude towards official mistakes and misconduct. He worked hard to declare a day of public fasting and repentance five years after the trials. He tried to get Minister Cotton Mather (that ghoul!) to write a declaration for the fast day specifically acknowledging the collective evils committed during the trials, but Mather would not go beyond broad generalities. Sewall's acceptance of personal responsibility for official misconduct is as American as roast turkey and apple pie. Unfortunately, so is Mather's refusal to accept it. This fine biography presents clearly that contradiction in American character in all its complexity.

The most evocative and richly contextualised account of the Salem Witch trials in print. The Salem witch trials of 1692 have assumed mythical status. Immortalised by Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, the witch-hunt is now part of our vocabulary. Yet the actual events have been overshadowed by the myth. Biographer and novelist Richard Francis brings the reality back into focus with the story of Samuel Sewall, New England Puritan, Salem trial judge, publisher, entrepreneur and writer. Sewall's life encompassed the tensions that faced the second generation colonists, caught between the staunch conservatism of the Founding Fathers and the possibilities their new world offered. Everywhere there was conflict, schism and violence, from the pagan Indians to dissenting settlers. Out of the struggle to maintain cohesion emerged the forces that drove the Salem tragedy. Five years after pronouncing judgment at the trials, Sewall walked into a Boston church and recanted the guilty verdicts, praying for forgiveness. Rarely remarked upon before now, this extraordinary act not only marked a turning point for Sewall, but arguably set the fledgling nation on the path that it has followed to this day. In this intriguing biography, Richard Francis rediscovers a period of great cultural change and historical development, enabling us to see the colonial Puritans not as grim ideologues but as flesh-and-blood people. We witness the comical courtship of Sewall's later years; his attempts to square a prodigious appetite with the scruples of piety, and a disagreement that led him to pen the first anti-slavery tract ever written in America. Through Sewall's life, we gain access to the lost wonders of the New World.

A marvellous book intelligent, funny and sympathetic. The Times A timely and disturbing book. Francis draws no contemporary parallels but it is hard to ignore the implications of the early ingrained vision he explores here with such lucidity: a threat of nameless, invisible, omnipresent terror so menacing that it overrides the rule of law and legitimises extremes of violence or torture in the name of the invincibly righteous, pure, innocent American people. Hilary Spurling, Daily Telegraph Francis's biography offers the most balanced and richly contextualised account of the Salem trials currently in print. And in following so closely the advances and turnings of Sewall's innermost thoughts, he takes us on a real-life pilgrims progress that is both exhilarating and, at times, deeply moving. John Adamson, Sunday Telegraph

About the Author Richard Francis is a visiting lecturer at Bath University. He is a playwright, reviewer, biographer and novelist. Fourth Estate also publish *Ann the Word*, the biography of Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers, and his novels 'Taking Apart the Poco Poco' and 'Fat Hen'.