

THE SCOTTISH WITCH TRIALS: FROM HERESY TO TOURISM

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father.

Del Alan Franks (1966-2012)

ABSTRACT

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This study explores witchcraft and witch-hunts in Scotland from the middle of the sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century. The research follows witchcraft into the present to understand how it was transformed from an act of heresy into a tourist industry for Scotland. The relationship between the church and witchcraft has been thoroughly explored. However, the public's perception of witchcraft has had far less historical consideration. This thesis tracks the Protestant church as well as the Scottish crown's stance on witchcraft throughout the years. A record of events relevant to the evolution of the perception of witchcraft in Scottish society is included.

The historiography of Scottish witchcraft is well established. Many documents exist regarding the church's stance on witchcraft (*Anentis Witchcraftis*, 1563), and the government's stance on witchcraft (The Witchcraft Act of 1604). Additionally, many documents from witch-hunt trials (An Account of the Tryal and Examination of the North Berwick Witches, 1590-91) have been preserved. While documents regarding witchcraft are not in short supply, very few of the extant texts focus on the laypeople's perception. By using surviving church and government documents, newspaper articles, folklore, art, songs, traditions, and written work of the time, this research provides a better understanding of the laypeople's concerns and feelings towards witchcraft. This study also revealed the impact of pre-existing societal norms and beliefs, including the ways in which they played into Scottish policy-making and the public's reactions. The conclusions of this research allow for a greater understanding of the Scottish peasantry's perception of witches, witchcraft, and witch trials. They also provide significant insight

into how the Scottish witch trials were transformed from a dark mark in history into a thriving tourist industry.

KEY WORDS: Scotland, Witch, Witchcraft, Witch trials, Protestant church, Scottish crown, Scottish peasantry, Cunning folk, Folklore, Tourism

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INTRODUCTION

“Scotland was always foremost in superstition. Her wild hills and lonely fells seemed to fit the haunting places for all mysterious powers; and long after the spirits had fled, and ghosts had been laid in the level plains of the South, they were to be found lingering about the glens and glades of Scotland.”

-E. Lynn Linton

Eliza Linton, author of *Witch Stories* was correct in her description of Scotland. It has often been the setting to some of the most haunting stories in European history and for good reason. Scotland has some true horrors in her past, and her reputation for being one of the most haunted countries in Europe still stands today. The witch trials in Scotland consisted of five major panic periods between 1560-1730. For nearly a century and a half, witch-hunting preoccupied all of Scottish society. The belief in witches was not a new concept in Scottish society. In fact, the popular folklore of today can be traced back to the sixth century.

Before delving any deeper into the history of the occult it would be beneficial for the reader to have definitions and a basic understanding of several terms. The term “witch” has been around for quite some time and has developed various meanings throughout the centuries. Therefore, it is crucial to provide the definition of a Scottish witch, which pertains to this study. The definition of a witch changed during the Protestant Reformation. Christina Lerner described post-Reformation witches as “new witch” as “not only the enemy of the individual or even of the locality; she was the enemy of the total society, of the state, and of God.”¹ Lerner recognized this rebranding

¹ Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 98.

as a major contributing factor to the cause of witch-hunting in Scotland. Although in Scotland the overwhelming majority of witches were female, belonging to the female sex was not a requirement. The available sources for the trials suggest that eighty-six percent of accused witches were female.² A witch was someone who had renounced his or her Christian baptism and made a pact with the devil. Through this pact, they could inherit a malicious spirit, the ability to wield the weather, the power to transform their shape, the use of the evil eye or shadow to do their bidding, and the power to cast spells, usually in the form of curses. The witch was a subject of the devil. Ergo, witches were the direct enemy of God.

The ability to practice witchcraft did not apply to one specific gender or socio-economic class. It was simply the production of supernatural power. Witchcraft in Scotland was demonic and malevolent. Sierra Dye described Scottish witchcraft as “characterized by the performative acts of speech, such as cursing, charming, sorcery, spell-craft, incantation, and many others. Indeed, it is spell-casting that exposes the ‘act’ in witchcraft.”³ Other manifestations of witchcraft included the shadow, which was meant to go between the sun and a witch’s victim to cause harm or befall bad luck; the look or evil eye, which was a way to cause harm with a malevolent look; touch, which was a way for a witch to cast a spell or enchant objects; and ritual which could include sabbaths with the devil, magic knots, or carrion.⁴

² Hugh McLachlan and J.K. Swales, “Stereotypes and Scottish Witchcraft,” *The Contemporary Review*, Vol 234, (February, 1979) 88.

³ Sierra Dye, “To Converse with the Devil? Speech, Sexuality, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland,” *International Review of Scottish Studies*, Vol 37, (2012) 16.

⁴ Joseph McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*, (New York: Arno Press, 1977) 191-216.

The term “cunning folk” refers to people also known as folk healers. They were believed to be practitioners of white magic, folk medicine, and divination within the context of the various folklore traditions. The unofficial healing they provided was tolerated in Scottish society until the mid-1500s. After the Protestant Reformation, cunning folk and their use of charms, potions, and prayers were grouped together with witches in the Witchcraft Act of 1563. Folk medicine in this period operated under three major assumptions. These have been documented by Christina Larner and are as follows: “the first is that disease is a foreign presence and this assumption was shared by official healers as well. The second is that religious language possessed a mystical power, which could be deployed for practical purposes. The third was that the working of certain charms and potions owed their efficacy to the healer himself.”⁵ The first two assumptions were rather harmless to the healer. However, the third assumption, which claimed the healer’s ability to affect the charm, would fall under the newly revised definition of witchcraft. The new definition made no distinction between white and black magic. Therefore, the white magic of folk healers, which was not sanctioned by the church, was now considered demonic. That would imply that their power, even their ability to heal, came from the devil, and regardless of its intent, was dangerous.

The term “white magic” refers to magic that was considered to be natural magic. Seelie fairies, cunning folk, and brownies used it in benevolent ways to heal or help others. White magic could heal illness or ailments and when wielded by fairies or brownies supplied food in times of need or help with household chores. Fortune-tellers and their gift of prophecy would have also been included. In Scottish folklore, the belief

⁵ Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 139.

in white magic had existed since Celtic Scotland. The term “black magic” refers to magic that was given to a person or persons from the devil to be used with malicious intent. Unseelie fairies, witches, and warlocks were considered to use black magic to cause harm to others. Black magic was considered a reward, given by the devil in return for allegiance to him.

The historiography of the Scottish witch trials is vast. The primary sources regarding witchcraft can be split up into two groups, those “published during the witch-hunting and the enlightenment reaction, the nineteenth-century romantic, rationalist approaches,” consisting mainly of compiled documents from the trials.⁶ Christina Lerner, who was a professor at the University of Glasgow, conducted the first major study on the subject, which she turned into the book, *Enemies of God*. Her research focused mainly on the Protestant Church of Scotland and its effect on the witch-hunts there. She also explored the involvement of the ruling class during the witch trials. Historian Julian Goodare, whose extensive work has forever changed the field, has continued Lerner’s research on the Scottish witchcraft. Goodare is the director of the online *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft*.⁷ He has written and edited several books including *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, *The European Witch-Hunt*, and *Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters*. He is also the author of several journal articles including, “The Framework for Scottish Witch-Hunting in the 1590s,” “The First Parliament of Mary, Queen of Scots,” “Women and the Witch-Hunt of Scotland,” and “The Scottish Witchcraft Act.” Goodare’s research is extensive, but it mainly focuses on the Scottish Monarchy’s involvement in the witch trials, as his field of

⁶ Lerner, *Enemies of God*, 31.

⁷ Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller, and Louise Miller, “Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database,” <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/> (Accessed, September 2016).

specialization is the Scottish Government from 1500-1800. Dr. Joyce Miller, who is also a research fellow for the *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* database, has written several pieces on the healing aspect of witchcraft in the seventeenth century including, *Magic and Witchcraft in Scotland* and “*Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* database, 1563-1736” Dr. Lauren Martin has added to the field by researching what the witch trials can tell us about the family household in Scotland with her article “Witchcraft and Family: What can Witchcraft Documents Tell Us About Early Modern Scottish Family Life.” She also participated in the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft online database with Joyce Miller and Julian Goodare.

Lastly, Dr. Brian Levack has written and edited extensively on the subject. His books include, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics, and Religion*, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, *The Oxford handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* and *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*. He has written several articles including, “The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-62,” “The Witches of Fife: Witch-hunting in a Scottish Shire,” and “The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representation.” While each of these accounts add something different to our understanding of the Scottish witch trials, there has been a gap in research regarding the peasant perspective of witch-hunting, which consumed Scotland for nearly two hundred years. Edward Cowan said it best in his essay on the survival of Scottish witch beliefs: “The problem has been that studies of witch-hunting in Scotland, as elsewhere, have concentrated on the ideas and opinions of the persecutors rather than the persecuted.”⁸

The concept that the belief in witches and witchcraft died out after the Witchcraft Act of

⁸ Edward Cowan, and Lizanne Henderson, “The Last of Witches? The Survival of Scottish Witch Belief,” *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*. Ed, Julian Goodare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) 201.

1735 is incorrect. A deep-rooted belief in the occult persisted in Scotland long after the witch trials ended, and some would claim it still exists today.

The primary goal of this research was to develop a greater understanding of the peasant perception of the witch trials. By using folklore, art, and extant documents from the time, I have attempted to piece together the peasantry's opinion of the witch and witchcraft. While the intent of the Protestant Church was to root out superstition among the Scottish peasantry rather than witches themselves, it would seem that they failed. Although the Scottish peasants belief in the occult was transformed into a primarily negative one, it still existed. Superstitions and folklore myths were whispered among the peasantry long before the Witchcraft Act of 1562 and long after the Witchcraft Act of 1735. This study also follows witchcraft into present Scottish society and explores the tourist industry that was built around the trials. Today, Scotland embraces its dark past with open arms. Genuine and successful attempts are made by the government to keep the superstition and folklore that is unique to Scotland alive. The path Scotland took from perceiving witchcraft as heresy to embracing its tourism potential was a long and arduous one, which deserves historical consideration.

Chapter one will combine the Scottish crown's and the new Protestant Church of Scotland's activities regarding the witch trials. While they could technically be documented in two separate chapters, I personally found them too intertwined to separate. The constant power struggle for control of the witch trials between the two entities left the Scottish peasantry in constant state of flux for which they ultimately shouldered most of the burden. The Scottish crown's inability to form a strong centralized government paired with the Protestant Church's overzealous fight against superstition, and

subsequently, witchcraft, led Scotland into a period of panic, which resulted in the death of nearly 2,000 people.⁹

Chapter two fills the gap in understanding of the peasant perspective of the Scottish witch trials. The chapter covers the new Protestant Church of Scotland, their push towards a more Godly society, and its effect on the Scottish peasantry. The evolving view of the “good individual” and the idea of personal responsibility in regards to an individual’s faith that arose from Protestantism in Scotland is crucial to understanding the Scottish peasantry’s as well as the church’s awareness of witches and witchcraft. It acquaints the reader with an understanding of the unique social structure that existed in Scotland until 1767, when New Town was built in Edinburgh, and how social structure affected the witch-hunts. Disease, famine, and their relation to witches as well as witch accusations are also discussed. Most importantly, this chapter highlights Scottish folklore and its evolution in regards to Scottish healers, fairies, witches, and witchcraft.

Chapter three transitions the research into the modern day and explores the thriving tourist industry built on the history of the witch trials that exists in Scotland today. This chapter covers tourism in Scotland. It also discusses the “dark tourism,”¹⁰ while unnamed had existed in Scotland since the 1800s but recently has been the recipient of new attention. The marketing of Scotland’s dark history featured on VisitScotland.com

⁹ It is important to note that not everyone accused of witchcraft was convicted. Many people died during their trial. There is debate on how many people actually died during the trials; most historians estimate between two and four thousand. For this study, I am going with a middle estimate of three thousand. Although the number of people who were convicted and burned for witchcraft is significantly lower than three thousand, the death toll includes those who died during examination or trial. For further examination of this, see Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman, *The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/introduction.html>

¹⁰ The term “Dark Tourism” was coined by John Lennon of Glasgow University.

and newly published ebook guide to Scotland's Folklore are discussed at length.¹¹ It also includes seven tourist attractions I personally researched that cover the history of the witch trials. It also covers the country's embracement of its dark history, which propelled the journey of Scottish witchcraft from being a crime of heresy to a thriving tourist industry.

This research combines historical examination and public history experience to provide a clearer picture of the peasant perspective during the Scottish witch trials. Through an in-depth look at trial records, folklore, government and church documents, as well as popular beliefs and writings, this study bridges the gap in knowledge of the peasant experience. The examination of folklore and superstition revealed that, although the Protestant Reformation altered the belief of the occult in Scottish society, it was never destroyed. The perception of magic transformed from one that encompassed both good and bad, to one that equated magic to the devil. The Scots have had a relationship with witches, fairies, seers, sirens, cunning folk, and witchcraft for over a thousand years. That unique history has given Scotland a niche in a rather competitive tourist market. The Scots' connection with their past has stood the test of time and has allowed Scotland to protect her folklore from disappearing over the ages. This preservation has allowed for a resurgence of old Scottish folklore and superstitious beliefs, which are presented and preserved with festivals as well as in World Heritage Sites to share with curious travelers, such as myself.

¹¹ VisitScotland, "Scottish Ghosts, Myths, and Legends," <http://ebooks.visitscotland.com/ghosts-myths-legends/> (Accessed March, 2017).

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CHAPTER I

The Scottish Crown, the Protestant Church, and Scottish Witch Trials

The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint the reader with the period of the witch trials. The newly formed church did not originally intend to pursue witchcraft so vigorously, but did so by default due to the influence of Mary, Queen of Scots, who rejected laws and clauses which contained anti-Catholic rhetoric. The chapter covers the involvement of the reigning monarchs during the five notable witch-hunt waves of panic in Scotland, which include King James VI, King Charles I, and King Charles II. Mary, Queen of Scots, as well as King George II, are also discussed in detail because the Witchcraft Acts were in effect during their reigns.

The Scottish Witch Trials occurred between the years of 1560 and 1730. There were roughly 4,000 witchcraft suspects in Scotland and during these years there were five main witch-hunt panic periods. These panics occurred in 1590-91, 1597, 1628-30, 1649-50, and 1661-62. Roughly 1,100 trials took place, and this accounted for a little over sixty percent of all known Scottish witchcraft trials.¹² While these mass panic periods accounted for most of the 4,000 accused of witchcraft there were still about forty percent of the accused who were tried outside of these five main witch-hunt panics in Scotland. There are a few notable differences in the accusations of witchcraft and the trials of suspected witches during non-panic and panic years. In years of panic, witches were mostly accused of attending meetings with other witches, having sex with as well as worshiping the devil, and renouncing Christ and their relationship to him.¹³ In the non-panic years however, most were accused when harm or strife fell on an individual with

¹² McLachan and Swales, "Stereotypes and Scottish Witchcraft," 90.

¹³ McLachan and Swales, "Stereotypes and Scottish Witchcraft."

whom they had a previous quarrel. During this period in Scotland, the authority of the crown and the Church can be described as rather intertwined. This makes it quite difficult to discuss one without the other. The monarchs and church leaders often worked together in creating laws, especially laws that encompassed the social and moral activities of Scottish society.

In 1534 when King Henry VIII of England broke with the papacy in Rome, James V of Scotland wanted nothing to do with Protestantism. He persecuted outspoken Protestants fervently. His daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots, raised as a staunch Catholic, followed this pattern and reigned over Scotland from 1542 to 1567. However, by 1560, the Protestant Reformation had against the crown's wishes seeped into Scotland through Scottish Reformation leaders such as John Knox, William Kirkcaldy, Archibald Campbell, and William Douglas. After the rise of Presbyterianism with its Calvinist inspiration in Scotland as well as a series of military skirmishes between the crown and the Protestant Church, the Scottish Parliament met in August of 1560 to discuss reforms for Scotland. Three major acts were passed: "under these, all previous acts not in conformity with the Reformed Confession were annulled; the sacraments were reduced to two (baptism and communion) to be performed by reformed preachers alone; the celebration of the Mass was made punishable by a series of penalties and Papal jurisdiction in Scotland was repudiated."¹⁴ While these acts effectively ended the formal role of the Catholic Church as the official Church of Scotland, they did not set up the new organization. They did however, publish the *First Book of Discipline* in 1561, which was designed to be an organizational and disciplinary guide for the Protestant Church until they could hold another parliamentary assembly.

¹⁴ J.D. Mackie, *A History of Scotland* (London: Penguin History, 1978) 153.

In 1563, the Scottish Parliament met again to put in place the organization for the Protestant Church of Scotland. These proceedings were held in the presence of Mary, Queen of Scots. She had been Queen for nearly two years when the Parliament meeting of 1563 took place. Under normal circumstances, she would have held her first parliamentary meeting much earlier, the religious uncertainty in Scotland that the Catholic queen faced in the new Protestant regime most likely caused the delay.¹⁵ The parliamentary assembly was not as successful as zealous leaders like John Knox had hoped it to be, but *Anentis Witchcraftis* passed within a larger set of religious laws on June 4, 1563. According to Julian Goodare, “the result of this was the execution of up to two thousand people over the next century and a half.”¹⁶ Close examination of this act reveals the religious rationale of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. The presence of the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots, during this session contributed immensely to which religious acts passed and which did not. The anti-Catholic rhetoric of several of the proposed acts prompted their removal from the final acts, which after extensive revision were approved. Nevertheless, the Reformation leaders found that “they could link the three subjects of idolatry, magic, and witchcraft, but they could also separate them. The witchcraft act was not the act that the Protestant Church intended to use against idolatry in 1563; the church put forward separate acts against idolatry which were rejected.”¹⁷ The subtle anti-Catholic rhetoric can be seen throughout the witchcraft act. An example of this can be found in the criticism of “credence gevin” to “vane superstition,” which had a direct correlation to the superstition associated with the Catholic Church and the belief of

¹⁵ Julian Goodare, “The First Parliament of Mary, Queen of Scots,” (*Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. XXXVI/1, 2005) 55.

¹⁶ Julian Goodare, “The Scottish Witchcraft Act,” (Cambridge University: *Church History*. Vol. 74 No. 1 March 2005) 40.

¹⁷ Goodare, “The Scottish Witchcraft Act,” 47.

transubstantiation during mass. It is also plausible that the leaders of the Scottish Reformation were not familiar with the magical beliefs that still lingered from the early years in Scotland. The belief in charmers, who could provide good luck or protection charms; cunning folk, who often were believed to know the future; faeries, who dwelled in a separate realm yet often interfered in the lives of people; and healers, who provided folk remedies for everyday ailments, ran deep in the Scottish peasantry. Therefore, the church's insistence on rooting out all superstition and those who believed it may have caught fire quicker than the Scottish reformers anticipated.

In 1590, the first major witch panic arose in Scotland. King James VI, son of Mary, Queen of Scots, sat on the throne. The king believed that a group of witches had raised storms in an attempt to kill him and his new bride, Princess Ann. The trials took place in North Berwick, Scotland. While this initial panic was relatively small in numbers, with only around seventy suspects accused, it sparked the ignition to witch-hunting in Scotland. This event also kindled the interest of King James VI in the occult. The crown was directly involved with the witch trials of 1590-91, viewing them as beginning from an assassination attempt on the king. The accused witches were tortured into confession with sleep deprivation, fingernail extraction, thumbscrew torture, and the boot (which crushed the knee joint and lower leg). In a published woodcut pamphlet from this event, which circulated in Scotland and England, the witches depicted in the forest listened to a sermon preached by the devil. According to the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database, "the author was probably James Carmichael the minister of Haddington, who helped to interrogate the North Berwick witches and later advised King

James on the writing of his book *Daemonologie*.”¹⁸ The publishing of *Daemonologie* in 1597, by King James VI, coincides perfectly with the next major witch-hunt panic period.

The witch trials of 1597, beginning in January and lasting until November, were the least documented witch trials of the panic periods. “Between these two dates there were approximately 400 ‘cases’ – i.e. mentions of individual witches, many of whom were tried but some of whom were not. A little under half of the cases were likely to have resulted in execution.”¹⁹ The difficulty in discussing the trials of 1597 lies in the lack of surviving evidence. Commissions were issued just as they were in the trials of 1590-91. However, due to the lack of standard procedure and organization during the trials records for these commissions were not kept.²⁰ The accused were tried by the Privy Council or at the Justice Court in Edinburgh. King James VI also granted special judicial commissions to try suspects for witchcraft and these commissions tried most of the cases in 1597. As one can imagine, King James VI’s belief in the occult translated into him being rather liberal in dispatching judicial commissions to investigate witchcraft claims. The witch hunters were given full power over the trials and the crown never checked on their evidence or rulings, which resulted in a widespread panic over witches. Another factor relating to the trials of 1597, have been linked to the famine, which swept over Scotland from 1594-99. While the occult was not directly blamed for these events, the rise in social tensions could have raised suspicion about witchcraft and divine intervention for

¹⁸ Goodare, Martin, Miller and Yeoman, 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft,' <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003)

¹⁹ Michael Wasser, “The Privy Council and the Witches: The Curtailment of Witchcraft Prosecutions in Scotland, 1597-1628.” *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol LXXXII, I: No. 213 (April 2003) 22.

²⁰ Julian Goodare, “The Scottish Witchcraft Panic of 1597,” *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*. Ed. Julian Goodare. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) 51.

sins. This, followed directly by an outbreak of the plague, would have stirred social unrest to the breaking point.²¹

The panic slowly started to dissipate after a confessed witch, by the name of Margaret Aitken, managed to keep herself alive by claiming an ability which allowed her to identify witches by looking into their eyes. Aitken, taken from town to town, watched as officials paraded the suspected witches in front of her, after which she would provide their guilty or innocent verdict. After only few months however, the authorities became suspicious and decided to test the witch. “They obtained access to some of the people whom Aitken had accused and re-introduced them the next day in different clothes. This ‘scientific experiment’ was a success, Aitken cleared the same people she had condemned the day before and thus was exposed as a fraud.”²² The mishap with Aitken triggered debate among the authorities on what should be considered evidence of witchcraft as well as if the witch-hunt should be considered at all. In a small attempt to curtail the trials, the Privy Council decided to disbar commissions that allowed one or two men to act as judges alone. Unfortunately, King James VI, still determined to proceed with the hunt, urged those who had their commissions voided to reorganize and come obtain new ones.²³ The fact that little evidence was required to convict someone of witchcraft could have something to do with the book *Daemonologie* being published by King James VI. He was convinced that God would actively intervene in cases involving witchcraft. Thus, his solution for the lack of solid evidence was “to trust in the justice of God, who would ensure that the guilty were convicted and the innocent spared.”²⁴ After

²¹ Goodare, “The Scottish Witchcraft Panic of 1597,” 52-53.

²² Wasser, “The Privy Council and the Witches,” 23.

²³ Wasser, “The Privy Council and the Witches,” 24.

²⁴ Wasser, “The Privy Council and the Witches,” 5.

1597, the Privy Council took steps to embrace a more critical outlook on what constituted evidence for witchcraft.

The Witchcraft Act of 1604 was a revision of the original act in 1563. This revision was made under King James VI and took witchcraft out of the authority of the Protestant Church. Instead, witchcraft was categorized as a felony, thus transferring it to the common courts of law. “The Act of 1604 affirmed many of the dominant codes that were already shared within society. Indeed, it did more than that, in some cases, it approbated codes, which had been more marginal, essentially emergent in nature, and legitimated their role in the discourse of witchcraft.”²⁵ While this act certainly legitimized the existence of witches and witchcraft in the eyes of the court system, it also allowed accused witches access to lawyers and trained judges, and eliminated the sentence of burning at the stake (unless treason was involved). These professional additives to witch trials contributed to the push for hard evidence and a decline of convictions as well as a decrease in executions. During the final years of James VI’s reign, particularly after he became James I of England, Scotland pushed toward a more centralized form of government.

Consequently, the witch-hunt panic of 1628-30, under King Charles I, was quite different from the previous two. After the Witchcraft Act of 1604, the accused had access to lawyers, and since most trials were required to take place in Edinburgh in front of an official court judge, the trials were no longer as cheap and unsupervised as they had once been. When Charles succeeded to the throne in 1625, he required that the men who sat on the Privy Council and on the regular court session could only hold seats on one or the other rather than both. This caused an exodus of session judges who favored caution

²⁵ John Newton and Jo Bath, *The Witchcraft Act of 1604* (Boston: Brill, 2008) 9.

towards witchcraft because they had been present for the witch-hunt of 1597. Also, “it is interesting to note that the witch-hunt of 1628-30 coincides exactly with the crown’s attempt to establish working circuit courts in Scotland. The circuit courts were proclaimed in August of 1628 and were finally abandoned in August of 1630; the witch-hunt occurred over exactly the same dates.”²⁶ There had been a consistent demand for witch trials from the public, which the Privy Council had previously attempted to subdue. While King Charles I and the Privy Council were still technically the centralized agents for major crimes such as witchcraft, they were no longer able to suppress petitions for witch-hunts from the public.

In 1649, Scotland and England fell under the rule of Oliver Cromwell. This period is known as the Second Scottish Reformation. During a series of parliamentary sessions held by the Protestant Church of Scotland, the Witchcraft Act of 1649 was passed. Its passage was the result of a new influx of church leaders pressing the community for a more ‘Godly society,’ similar to the push toward the ‘good individual’ seen in the late sixteenth century. The acts during this time sanctioned the execution of blasphemers, atheists, and those who worshiped false gods. “Witch-hunting in covenanting Scottish society was an important element in the attempted creation of a Godly society... It is clear that individual covenanters and parliamentary members had a proactive role in witch-hunting in Scotland.”²⁷ This revival of panic and renewed fear of witches among the public awoken by the Protestant Church precipitated perhaps the most violent witch-hunt panic in Scotland.

²⁶ Wasser, “The Privy Council and the Witches,” 45.

²⁷ Elizabethanne, Boran and Crawford Gribben, *Enforcing Reformation in Ireland and Scotland, 1550-1700*. (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2006) 150.

King Charles II was originally crowned over Scotland in 1649 but Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth of England deposed him in 1651. During this time of turbulence, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland seized the opportunity of a weak crown to regain some of the powers formally revoked from them in previous years. The Witchcraft Act of 1649 passed by the General Assembly reinstated the original methods of witch hunting and brought control over the trials back under the Protestant Church. Local ministers once again initiated trials and the accused were tortured into confession. Over six hundred records exist of those accused of witchcraft and over three hundred of them represent people who were executed during the one-year period.²⁸ The particular violence and zeal of this panic period occurred most likely because of the English Civil War, the resurgence of church authority, and the destruction of a centralized government in Scotland caused by the execution of Charles I as well as the rocky ascension of Charles II to the throne. The demise of this panic came “after a period of which English military forces had occupied the country and had greatly reduced the intensity of witch-hunting, local elites, eager to reassert their influence in church and state, returned to the mission of hunting witches.”²⁹

According to Dr. Brian Levack, “the restoration of Charles II and the displacement of the covenanters by royalists eager to establish their credentials as religious reformers in 1660 provided the backdrop to the large scale prosecutions of 1661-62.”³⁰ While Charles II himself had little to do with encouraging witch-hunting in Scotland, he also had little to do with monitoring it. This witch-hunt panic could, to some

²⁸ Goodare, Martin, Miller and Yeoman, 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft', <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (Accessed, October 2016).

²⁹ Brian Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics, and Religion*. (New York: Routledge, 2008) 5

³⁰ Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland*,” 6.

extent, be described as a continuation of the panic of 1649-50. When Scotland was under English rule the number of witch trials drastically decreased.

Historically, the Scots have been fiercer in their prosecution of witchcraft crimes than the English. Therefore, the influx of reluctant English judges who sat in Scottish courts from 1651-60 caused a lull in the persecution of witches, and “consequently the number of witches believed to be at liberty had steadily increased. As soon as native Scots regained exclusive control of their judicial system after Restoration, they set out to rid the country of the large backlog of witches that had accumulated.”³¹ The Protestant church again played an active role in the panic of 1661-62. Ministers often conducted examinations of the accused and facilitated torture in order to procure confessions. Once again, the idea that witches were colluding with the devil against the kingdom of God caused a significant source of panic among the common folk. The public may “have been able to cope with a few isolated individuals tampering with the normal process of nature, but large scale apostasy and recruitment by the devil was something of an entirely different order.”³² While the panic of 1661-62 was the last major panic in Scotland, witch-hunting was not spontaneously stomped out. According to the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database, one hundred and fifty-four cases exist on record between 1663-1727.³³

King George II came to power in 1727, and unlike the monarchs previously discussed, he exercised limited control over British domestic policy. Thus, when the British Parliament passed the Witchcraft Act of 1736, King George II had little to do with

³¹ Brian Levack, “The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-62,” *Journal of British Studies*, Vol 20, No. 1 (Autumn 1980) 91.

³² Levack, “The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1662,” 98.

³³ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Miller, “Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database,” <http://webdb.ucl.ac.uk/witches/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.searchtrial> (Accessed, October 2016)

the matter. By the mid-eighteenth century, the common belief in witches and witchcraft had died out. The act of 1736 enforced exactly the opposite of the previous three acts. It was, in short, “an act for punishing such persons as pretend to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment, or conjuration.”³⁴ This act also made it illegal for anyone to accuse someone else of witchcraft. Witchcraft was now considered by legal authorities to be more of an individual’s delusion rather than an actual threat to British society. This switch in policy was most likely put into place in an attempt to root out the ignorance of superstition in British society in the eighteenth century.

In conclusion, both the Protestant Church and Scottish crown simultaneously influenced the progression of the Scottish witch-hunts. The two entities seemed to seamlessly fill power voids if the other fell short. The Protestant Church, driven by the quest for a more Godly society, pushed the panic of witches on the common folk. Despite the fact that witchcraft was perhaps not the intended target of the church, their continuous zeal towards the cause wreaked havoc in Scottish society. The Witchcraft Act of 1604, legitimizing the witch trials within the Scottish crown, further ingrained the belief of witches as well as witchcraft into Scottish society. The crown’s inability to establish a strong and constant central government allowed the witch-hunt panics to spiral out of control. As Julian Goodare discussed in his article on the Scottish state and its involvement with the witch trials:

The local courts of the church, newly created since the Reformation, were very much organs of the government; indeed they were some of the most powerful organs that many people experienced. They also fitted neatly into an existing structure of civil authority. Before a witch was tried in a criminal court, she or he

³⁴ Scotland, *The Public General Statutes Affecting Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1869-1947) 30.

had to be identified by the kirk session, and had often been arrested and interrogated (typically with deprivation of sleep) to obtain a confession.³⁵

The hypothesis that witch-hunting in Scotland began solely from the ground up with the church and peasantry as the main accusers and prosecutors does not hold. The Privy Council was involved equally with the church in the prosecution of witches. The church and state worked as partners with one another throughout the entire process. The church extracted suspects, evidence, and confessions and the Privy Council authorized commissions of judiciary to examine the evidence collected by the church. While “the evidence was produced willingly by the court session, it was ultimately produced because the council demanded it...The Privy Council and church both shared the same general goal: to identify and punish witches in order to purge the land of ungodliness.”³⁶

³⁵ Julian Goodare, “Witch-Hunting and the Scottish State,” *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context*, Ed. Julian Goodare. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) 124.

³⁶ Goodare, “Witch-Hunting and the Scottish State,” 134.

CHAPTER II

The Scottish Peasantry's Perception of the Witch Trials

In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII released the papal bull *Summis Desiderantes* in response to the German inquisitor, Heinrich Kramer's request to prosecute witchcraft in Germany. *Summis Desiderantes* granted authority to Inquisitor Kramer for "correcting, imprisoning, punishing and chastising" such persons "according to their deserts."³⁷ While this did not cause the witch trials to begin Scotland one hundred years later, it is still important to discuss this papal bull. The Catholic Church had certainly acknowledged the existence of witchcraft and witches before. It was however, one of the first times that the church encouraged the persecution of witches. History speaks loudly to the fact that when Rome spoke, Europe listened.

There are a few things to consider when analyzing the Scottish witch trials and their relations to the Scottish peasantry. First, the split with the Roman Catholic Church in 1560 caused extreme social disorder in peasant society in Scotland. This chapter pays close attention to the newly formed Protestant Church of Scotland's perception of witchcraft. The evolving view of the "good individual" and the idea of personal responsibility with regard to an individual's faith that arose from Scottish Protestantism in Scotland is crucial to understanding the Scottish peasantry's, as well as the church's, awareness of witches and witchcraft. Second, the social structure of Scotland was unique. The living situation in Edinburgh was dissimilar from other major European cities. It is important to understand that in Scotland the trials did not start abruptly after the passage of laws against it. In fact, the first actual trial against witchcraft did not take place until

³⁷ Pope Innocent VIII, "Summis Desiderantes Affectibus (Papal Bull of 1484) *Medieval European History*, accessed November 1, 2016 <http://carmichaeldigitalprojects.org/hist447/items/show/67>

1590, twenty-seven years after the passage of the first Witchcraft Act. Third, death on a massive scale was not a new experience for the Scots. Famine and disease effected the peasantry's view of witchcraft, especially as the bubonic plague swept across Europe during this time decimating Scotland's population.

The New Protestant Church of Scotland

After an exhausting stint of religious turmoil and the death of Mary of Guise in 1560, Scotland officially split away from the Roman Catholic Church and converted to Protestantism. While this conversion occurred with some opposition, largely from Catholic leaders, the importance of the church to almost all of society in Scotland cannot be stressed enough. The shift caused the endangerment of their eternal salvation and it was not taken lightly. While Scotland had split from Rome, the Protestant church remained an unconstructed organization without the authority to impose the newly desired Godly society. Leaders of the new Protestant Church of Scotland, determined to build a Godly society and stray away from the impersonal ways of the Catholic faith, had to decide the stances they would take on government and social matters. The authoritative and organizational work was set to be done at the next parliament hearing, over which Mary, Queen of Scots would preside.³⁸

The parliament hearing in 1563 was not as productive as the Protestant leaders would have liked, but the Witchcraft Act of 1563 still passed as a part of a larger set of laws. Sufficient evidence exists to suggest that the Witchcraft Act was not intended to have such an enormous effect in Scotland. As Dr. Julian Goodare's research confirms, "Witchcraft, after all, had been absent from the 'horibill vices' listed in July 1562... The

³⁸ Goodare, "The Scottish Witchcraft Act," 41.

Witchcraft Act was not the act the Protestant Church intended to use against idolatry in 1563; the church put forth separate acts against idolatry, which were rejected.”³⁹ While the act did not explicitly link Catholicism and witchcraft, presumably in an attempt to avoid offending Queen Mary, there seemed to be some anti-Catholic rhetoric referring to vane superstition in the document. This meant that reformation leaders, like John Knox, had to be particularly careful when drafting new laws.

The Protestant Church did not give a clear reason for adding witchcraft to their list of grievances. There are a few possible reasons for this change, one being that England passed a similar act earlier that year after an assassination attempt on Queen Elizabeth I of England from what was recognized to be witchcraft. The Queen of England along with the English courts had no law to charge the perpetrators under. Regardless of why the Witchcraft Act existed, the church planned to enforce it. The church’s mission to transform Scotland’s society into a Godly one was important to how the Scottish peasantry viewed witchcraft. “In pre-Reformation Europe, religious belief and practice were matters for the professionals; lay religion was optional. The idea that individuals were responsible for their own salvation transformed the belief structure.”⁴⁰ The peasants would no longer go to church and have the word of God delivered and interpreted to them by a priest. They would live a Godly lifestyle and have a personal relationship with God without which they could face eternal damnation.

The church’s mission to transform Scotland’s society into a Godly one was important to how the Scottish peasantry viewed witchcraft. The idea of the “good individual” and the increasing importance of possessing personal responsibility for one’s

³⁹ Goodare, “The Scottish Witchcraft Act,” 47.

⁴⁰ Lerner, *Enemies of God*, 25.

own faith, both of which were pushed by the Protestant Church, created, for lack of a better word, nosiness among the Scottish peasants. The new list created by the Protestant Church condemning the “horrible vices” such as adultery, blasphemy, contempt of God (which witchcraft would fall under), and whoring give insight into the Protestant Church’s perception of personal responsibility. “The point is that the church regarded legislation on moral discipline as essential to the full establishment of Protestantism.”⁴¹ It also must be mentioned that belief in the devil was a central part of the Christian faith. Therefore, since “witches were believed to hold meetings called ‘sabbaths,’ which were attended by the devil in the form of a man and other witches,”⁴² witchcraft became the inverse of Christianity. This connection between God, the devil, and witches provides some insight into how the Protestant Church could have formed their perceptions and planned their actions towards witchcraft. While “it might be implausible to say that witchcraft was deliberately fostered because of its imagined social effects: nevertheless, the point remains that beneficial social effects might plausibly have been attributed to belief in witchcraft.”⁴³ The belief in witchcraft and the existence of witches was, by default, a belief in God.

The new concept that each believer should maintain a personal relationship with God gave the peasantry a new outlook on sin. They were not only responsible for their own sin, but they were also responsible for making sure their neighbors kept from sinning. To invite the devil into one’s heart was to invite the devil into the whole town’s heart. E. Lynn Tinton described the trials well when she stated, “we find the witch trials of Scotland conducted with more severity than elsewhere, with a more gloomy and

⁴¹ Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation*, London: Cambridge University Press, 78-79.

⁴² McLachan and Swales, “Tibbet’s Theory of Rationality and Scottish Witchcraft,” 76.

⁴³ McLachan and Swales, “Tibbet’s Theory of Rationality and Scottish Witchcraft,” 78.

savage fanaticism if faith. Those who dared question the truth of even the most unreliable of sources and the most monstrous of statements were accused of atheism or infidelity to Christ.”⁴⁴ The vigor in which the hunts and trials were pursued can be directly tied to the new religious challenges the peasantry experienced.

As always in history, many individuals used the current social situation of the time for their personal benefit. There are countless cases concerning people accused of witchcraft in order to alter inheritance and settle property disputes. Issobel Griersoune, accused in 1607 of having an “evil will” and sending the devil to do her bidding in the form of black cats, according to the “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft” she was most likely accused over old debts and neighborhood disputes.⁴⁵ The case against Annas Erskine in 1614, was believed to be the result of a dynastic struggle.⁴⁶ In 1629, Katharine Oswald’s neighbors accused her of witchcraft over a bad business deal.⁴⁷ These are only a few examples of a very long list of wrongly accused persons for witchcraft. A person could be accused and likely convicted of witchcraft simply because their neighbor did not like them. That was truly a terrifying thought for the Scottish peasantry, considering the witch trials in Scotland lasted almost two hundred years.

Scottish peasants lived in overcrowded, deplorable conditions, and often did not know where their next meal would come from. Once the church authority changed, they had to begin worrying about the welfare of their souls. In the Catholic faith, after you were saved there was no fear and death would mean ascendance into heaven and relief

⁴⁴ E. Lynn, Tinton, *Witch Stories*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 193 Piccadilly, 1861) 5.

⁴⁵ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft,” “Issobel Griersoune, 10/3/1607,” <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed [December, 2016]).

⁴⁶ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft,” “Annas Erskine, 22/6/1614.”

⁴⁷ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft,” “Katharine Oswald, 13/11/1629.”

from the pains of life. In the Protestant faith, one must have a personal relationship with the Holy Trinity and even then, it was up to God to decide who continued into heaven. People who lived miserable lives, surviving on the belief that there would peace in the end, had that promise of serenity ripped from them.

Social Structure

The social situation in major Scottish cities differed from those of other major towns in Europe at the time. The constant threat of invasion from England, Scotland's southern neighbor, spurred the construction of the Flodden Wall around the city of Edinburgh. The wall's construction in 1513 meant that the flourishing city of Edinburgh could not expand past the borders of its protection. They did not begin construction on the section of Edinburgh known as New Town until 1767. This meant that for over two hundred years the population of Edinburgh increased, but the amount of space available for inhabitation did not. Instead, the Scots built upward. The buildings along the Royal Mile reached up to fourteen stories tall and this created a unique experience for the Scottish public. Lords, merchants, and peasants inhabited the same buildings with one another, which was an uncommon situation for this era in Europe. It meant that the rich and poor shared living space, conversations, and everyday life experiences.

While the fear of witches was of concern for the Scottish peasantry, they often were not able to pursue the activity of hunting or punishing witches. Therefore, as Christina Larner describes it, "witch-hunting was a ruling-class activity."⁴⁸ The Scottish peasantry would often rely on folk counter-charms to protect them, as they would not have the means to persecute a witch in the court system. Evidence of this can be seen in

⁴⁸ Larner, *Enemies of God*, 2.

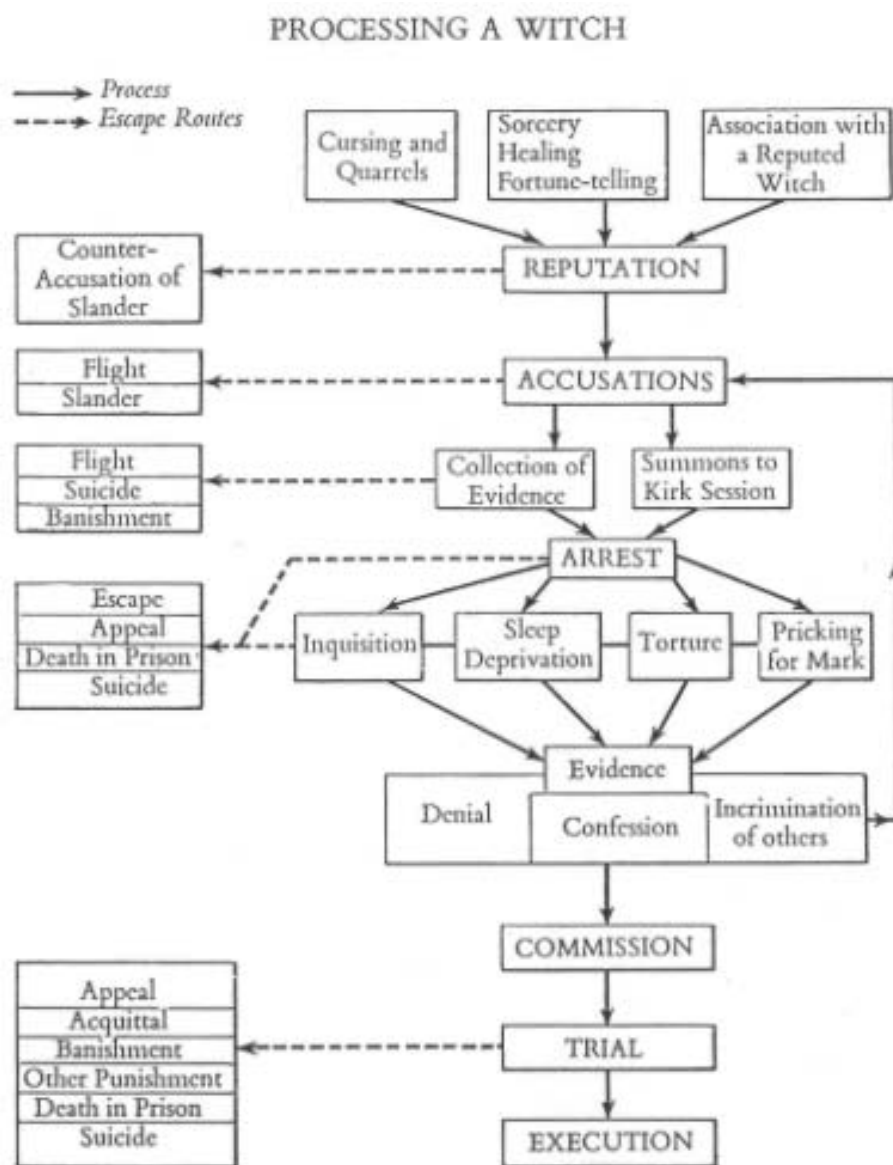
folktales with sayings such as, “a rowan cross in a child’s garments or a red thread tied about its neck was a sure protective.”⁴⁹ The use of this anti-witchcraft measure was advised by King James VI in his published book *Daemonologie*, “rown-trees and red thread, will put the witches to thair speed.”⁵⁰ The inability of the peasantry to actively pursue witches and their common use of anti-witch charms implies that the local ruling class of a community would have felt the panic surrounding witchcraft. “Without the administrative machinery of their rulers, the peasantry would not have been able to execute one witch, let alone multiple witches... However, when encouragement is forthcoming, they can supply an almost unlimited number of suspects.”⁵¹ This was especially true in the years after the Witchcraft Act of 1604 when trials became far more expensive and structured. The social structure of major cities in Scotland also played a major role in the trial of a witch. With most of the population practically living on top of one another, the reputation of an accused witch was of the utmost importance. According to the research of Dr. Christina Larner, “reputation was considered by lawyers and demonologists to be in itself a sign (though not a proof) of witchcraft.”⁵² The table below was taken from the book *Enemies of God* and is meant to show the importance of reputation, accusations, and evidence in the trial process for the crime of witchcraft.

⁴⁹ McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*, 102.

⁵⁰ Thomas Davidson, *Rowan Tree and Red Thread: A Scottish Witchcraft Miscellany of Tales, Legends, and Ballads; Together with a Description of the Witches Rites and Ceremonies*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1949) 77.

⁵¹ Larner, *Enemies of God*, 2.

⁵² Larner, *Enemies of God*, 102.



Adapted from a model in S. Box *Deviance, Reality and Society*, London 1971.

Figure 1: Source: Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) 114.

Disease and Famine

The intense living situation in Scotland presented a few problems for the public. The overcrowded city stayed filthy. Human waste littered the streets daily, rats were rampant, and livestock was kept and butchered within the walls. These conditions created a hotspot for disease and death. The bubonic plague broke out in Scotland three times.⁵³ The plague first broke out in 1348, then again in 1498, and for the last time in 1645. The last outbreak of the plague was by far the most devastating, with around half of the population dying in the epidemic. For those who lived in Scotland, the certainty of death was always present; piles of bodies were commonly waiting to be buried in mass graves just outside the city walls. The plague and other natural disasters, such as floods and famine, were often seen as punishments from God for the behavior of the people, pushing the ideas of the good individual and a Godly society further into the peasants' mind. According to the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database sponsored by the University of Edinburgh, the number of accused witches in 1650 was three hundred and seventy-five, quite a jump from the one hundred witches that were accused in 1640.⁵⁴ The social dislocation, starvation, and chaos that followed plague outbreaks influenced the public's perception of their surroundings. This evidence supports the theory that the seemingly unexplainable devastation caused by events like the bubonic plague played a factor in the witch frenzy that struck Scotland.

⁵³ It should be noted that the plague was not stomped out of Scotland after each epidemic. There were various outbreaks all through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. However, Scotland experienced three major outbreaks that decimated the population. The primary concern of this study is to show how much death the Scottish peasantry experience in their everyday life.

⁵⁴ Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database, The University of Edinburgh. "Number Accused by Year: All Scotland" (Computing Services: January, 2003)
<http://webdb.ucl.ac.uk/witches/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.graph2>

Witches were often accused of starting the epidemic, either through malicious intent to do so or by the devil using them to infect the population. The trial of Jean Ross took place in 1700, and accusations in her trial stemmed from quarrels about the school and children falling ill. She was seen with rats and cats around her, and a rat was supposedly seen on a child who later fell ill.⁵⁵ Rats were often associated with death, illness, and the plague. Lucinda Cole argues, “if sorcerers and witches are not the only cause of the plague, given their allegiance with the devil, they are its first victims and the source of subsequent contamination.”⁵⁶ In Thomas Andy’s *A Candle in the Dark*, he began with attributing facts about witches with the corresponding bible verses:

Where is it written, that witches can hurt corn or cattell, or transport corn by witchcraft, or can fly in the aire, and do many such wonders? It is written because they received not the love of truth, that they might be saved; therefore God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe lies, that they might be damned that believed not the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. Thessalonians 2:2,10,11,12.⁵⁷

The belief that witches could transfer or cause disease, damage crop production, and kill livestock was common in Scottish society. Joseph McPherson discussed the ways in which witches were believed to attack animals and extract milk from cows:

In the witch trials of North Scotland, it appears that even poultry suffered at the hands of the traffickers of the black art. A woman said Maggie Baxter had too many fowls. Ere she left the house, the whole twelve fell dead off the roost at her feet. This would be due to the evil eye...The witch everywhere was noted for her power of abstracting the milk of her neighbor’s cow, even though the byre doors should be locked. There were various modes for accomplishing this. Often the witch changed herself into the form of a hare, and thus milked the cow.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.” “Jean Ross 12/3/1700,” <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed “[November, 2016]”)

⁵⁶ Lucinda Cole, “Of Mice and Moisture: Rats, Witches, Miasma, and Early Modern Theories of Contagion,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol 10, Iss. 2, (October, 2010) 67.

⁵⁷ Thomas Andy, *A Candle in the Dark: Or a Treatise Concerning the Nature of Witches and Witchcraft: Being Advice to Judges, Sherrifes, Justices of the Peace, and Grand Jury-men*. (London: The Newberry at the Three Lions, 1656) 7-8.

⁵⁸ McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*, 180-181.

From 1594-99, Scotland experienced famine years.⁵⁹ While witches were not explicitly blamed for this famine, the social tension it caused could be to blame for some of the witchcraft accusations of 1597. In 1690-1700, Scotland experienced the worst famine in its history. According to Karen Cullen, “when the crisis finally came to an end, the Scottish population was reduced somewhere between five and fifteen percent through a combination of an increased death rate and a reduction in births.”⁶⁰ While the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database has one hundred and thirty-one trials for witchcraft between the years of 1690-1700, there are only four cases dealing with the destruction of food. For example, Jean Woodrow was accused of turning milk into blood, interfering with butter, and damaging a mill because the owner refused her alms.⁶¹ There are over fifty cases regarding the death of children. Witches were accused of strangling children while they slept and causing them to drop dead in their homes. While there is no definitive proof that these children in fact died of starvation and that witches were used as scapegoats, it is a possibility. Emily Oster argues, “in a time period when the reasons for changes in weather were largely a mystery, people would have searched for a scapegoat in the face of deadly changes in weather patterns. “Witches became target for blame because there was an existing cultural framework that both allowed their persecution and suggested that they could control the weather.”⁶² When the witch trials are discussed at length, the idea that the public should not have been able to handle death on such a massive scale is usually addressed. However, when one takes into consideration the amount of death the

⁵⁹ Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Religion, War, Famine, and Death in Reformation Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 235.

⁶⁰ Karen Cullen, *Famine in Scotland: The ‘Ill Years’ of the 1690’s*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) 2.

⁶¹ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.” “Jean Woodrow, 12/3/1700,” <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed '[November, 2016]')

⁶² Emily Oster, “Witchcraft, Weather, and Economic Growth in Renaissance Europe,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol 18 Iss. 1, (Winter, 2004) 216.

peasants had already seen, the combined estimated of three thousand people who in some way died for witchcraft seems in proportion with the death they were used to encountering.

Folklore

Folklore in Scotland has a deep and long history. Oral histories have been passed down through family clans for generations. Folklore can give historians insights into a subject group like the peasantry, which often did not record specific views. As described, the living conditions in Scotland were brutal, especially for the peasantry. In response, they adopted stories to give themselves a sense of control over their surroundings and living conditions. “That is the essence of folklore, by definition, the ‘lore’ or body of traditions and knowledge shared by the ‘folk,’ ordinary people as distinct from educated opinions passed down by those in authority.”⁶³ There are countless stories in which an enchantress or witch caused chaos for all those they met. Two from *The Lore of Scotland: A Guide to Scottish Legends* tell a story said to have taken place in Dunfermline, Fife. A maid claimed that the devil made a kidnap attempt on Charles I, son of King James VI. It was said that he told the maid he wished the devil had taken the boy because he was so sickly. The king was known to believe in witches, and the prince was known to be a frail boy, giving this story some historical reference. There was another story about King James VI in which the North Berwick witches and the king believed the witches had raised a storm to kill him. It was from this altercation in 1590 that the first major witch trial in Scotland occurred. It is important to understand that these stories, to the Scottish peasantry, meant that no one was safe from the wrath of the devil and his servants. If they

⁶³ Jennifer Westwood, and Sophia Kingshill, *The Lore of Scotland: A Guide to Scottish Legends*. (London: Arrow Books, 2011) x.

could attack the king, they could attack anyone they pleased. It also provides evidence to the argument that the belief in witches permeated throughout all socio-economical classes in Scottish society.

Somehow the lines of folklore and reality were blurred for a moment in Scottish history. There is no evidence to be found that witches actually summoned the devil in the forests of Scotland. However, there is evidence that supports the idea that the Scots truly believed witches were invading their society. According to Jennifer Westwood, in *The Lore of Scotland*, “This shameful episode...was perhaps influenced in its turn by longstanding acceptance of the malign supernatural powers of fairies.”⁶⁴ The government, church, and public were seized by fear of the devil and witches. The newly formed Protestant Church of Scotland took a stand against witchcraft with the intentions of protecting people. The church desperately wanted a society of Godly people who had a personal relationship with the God. Witches, witchcraft, and the devil were a direct threat to that desired society. The witch trials arose out of their panicked attempts to rid their society of evil.

The artwork of the time depicts clear pictures of what witches were believed to look like, and their activities with the devil were depicted in paintings all over Europe. The grisly images burned into the minds of panicked Scotsmen and helped fuel accusations of thousands of innocents. In a woodcut from the pamphlet *Newes from Scotland*, concerning the North Berwick witch-hunts of 1590-91, the author, most likely James Carmichael, the minister of Haddington, who assisted in the interrogation of the North Berwick witches and who also counseled King James on the writing of his book

⁶⁴ Westwood, and Kingshill, *The Lore of Scotland: A Guide to Scottish Legends*, 1.

Daemonologie.⁶⁵ The witches were depicted in the forest listening to a sermon preached by the devil. The Devil was depicted as a black rider with talons and horns.



Figure 2: Source: James Carmichael, “Newes from Scotland, declaring the damnable life and death of Doctor Fian,” London: 1592. *Early English Books Online*.

The idea that witches were usually old women, with deformities, cauldrons, and cats was perpetuated through the artwork of the time. Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione painted *Circle Changing Ulysses’s Men into Beasts* in 1650 and it depicts an enchantress who turned men into animals while consulting a spell-book. Filled with greed, which was often depicted as everything wrong with society, the witches longed to be beautiful. The

⁶⁵ Goodare, Martin, Miller and Yeoman, 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft', <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003)

devil allowed them to transform their shape to fool others into thinking their beauty was real, but the witch would be forced to shed her illusion in the presence of the devil. The shame of their true form kept them subservient to the devil, thus not allowing them to forget the source of their powers of transformation.



Figure 3: Source: Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, “Circle Changing Ulysses’s Men into Beasts, 1650,” Featured in, *Witches and Wicked Bodies*, by Deanna Petherbridge, (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2013)

Artwork also perpetuated the belief that witches could fly. There was a fascinating drawing presented in *Witches and Wicked Bodies* of a witch flying on a horse. “Little is known about this fine drawing of a shouting naked figure, bearing a smoking cauldron on a forked kitchen stick as she rides a leaping horse, with hair and mane blowing widely in the direction in which they are traveling.”⁶⁶ The masculine features

⁶⁶ Deanna Petherbridge, *Witches and Wicked Bodies* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2013) 46.

make the horse a representation of the devil. The women pictured, deformed with many breasts and an enlarged neck, shown carrying a smoking cauldron on a kitchen stick was the ideal depiction of a witch.



Figure 4: Source: Unknown Artist, “Fantastic Horse and Rider, 1600,” Featured in, *Witches and Wicked Bodies*, by Deanna Petherbridge, (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2013)

Images depicting all aspects of witches and witchcraft continued to circulate through Europe far into the nineteenth century. While it is unlikely that the peasants of Scotland were up to date with the current popular art and literature, the upper-class Scots most certainly were. That is why it is important to remember the previously mentioned living conditions in Edinburgh. In Scotland, members of society who, in other parts of Europe would not have interacted, instead had daily contact with one another making the spread of this information quick and easy. Ideas ran rapidly through the overcrowded city of Edinburgh. In such close quarters, secrets were never kept for long.

Before the Protestant Reformation and the Witchcraft Act of 1563, the peasantry had two distinct views of witchcraft. There are numerous mentions of cunning folk in Scottish folklore and culture. Witchcraft and other magic had previously been split up into two different categories, white and black. Cunning folk usually practiced white magic to heal others with herbs and other folk remedies, while witches, as well as fairies, used black magic, bestowed by the devil for malice and destruction. White magic had been commonly accepted in peasant society in Scotland for quite a long time before the witch craze. The good fairies' "*Seelie court*"⁶⁷ tended to be aligned with white magic and healers. Joseph McPherson describes a folktale from Buchan where "a fairy borrowed a 'hathish o' meal' from a poor woman who had little to spare. It was duly repaid, and when, owing to a long snowstorm, there was a dearth in the land, the meal in the giral never grew less."⁶⁸ Whereas the evil fairies' "*unseelie court*"⁶⁹ were categorized with the

⁶⁷ The term "Seelie Court" refers to a group of fairies known as good fairies who return human kindness with kindness of their own, warn humans of danger, or seek help from humans. Often having lighthearted playful attitudes.

⁶⁸ McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*, 99.

⁶⁹ The term "Unseelie Court" refers to a group of fairies known as bad fairies, they are known to attack travelers in the night, force humans to do murderous things, and their queen is thought to be a subject of the devil.

devil and the practice of black magic. Joseph McPherson references the popular belief that “the hostile fairies were particularly feared for their habit of carrying off the unstained mother and child. The mother they desired because of their fondness for human milk; the children they carried off to pay ‘the teind of hell’.”⁷⁰ When the new Protestant Church formed their definition of witchcraft, cunning folk along with white magic were combined with black magic and witches. The peasantry, of course, began to reject white magic. The old woman who helped people with ailments became the town witch. The court records of Kathrine Campbell document her as being hired out for a healing spell with the use of animal blood Euphemia Makcalyeen implicated Campbell during her own trial.⁷² Evidence of this can be seen in the story of John Philip, who was accused in 1630, for refusing to stop performing his folk healing remedies. Throughout Scottish folklore there has been intermingling between fairies and witches. However, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “fairies had become part of Satan’s kingdom...witch and fairy are interlocked: Thou affirmis that the *Queen Elphin*,⁷³ has a grip on the craft, but Christ Sondag is the gudeman.”⁷⁴ The previous reference of Queen Elphin having a “grip on the craft” signifies that all witchcraft, white or black, was linked to Satan. The reference to ‘Christ Sondag’ and the ‘gudeman’ linked the church, Christ, and Goodman together against the collective evil.

⁷⁰ The phrase paying “the tiend of hell” is referring to the practice of paying tribute to the devil for the gifts he bestowed upon someone.

⁷¹ McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*, 101.

⁷² Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.” “Kathrine Campbell, 9/6/1591,” <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed '[November, 2016]')

⁷³ Queen Elphin refers to the recognized fairy queen of the Unseelie Court, considered to be a subject of the devil.

⁷⁴ McPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*, 293.

The change in perception is evident in Scottish folklore. Before the Reformation, there are stories of fairies helping travelers and old women healing people. After the Reformation, the stories become increasingly negative. Often there was more than one way folklore stories were told over generations. For instance, there is a story of a young shepherd who lets witches, in the form of cats, warm themselves by his fire. Later in the story, he was sentenced to death for trespassing and used a trick the witches taught him to escape. In another version of the same story however, a hunter reluctantly shelters a witch in the form of a cat by his fire. She tries to trick him but fails and his dogs devour her.⁷⁵ These stories give historians insight to how the peasantry reacted to the social changes happening around them. There are very few known cases of witchcraft accusations involving fairies or cunning folk in the 1500s. One takes place in 1597, however, when Agnes Wobster was accused of killing a woman and drying up a cow's milk. It was said that she vomited fairies after a failed assassination attempt. The 1600's hold a spike of cases involving fairies and cunning folk. There are over forty cases involving fairies and black magic in the late 1600's. For example, the trial of Elizabeth Anderson, who was accused of kidnapping, murdering, and torturing children with the help of other witches and fairies.⁷⁶ Agnes Cairnes, who was implicated by another confessed witch, described going with a group of fairies to meet the devil.⁷⁷ This draws a clear picture of how the church's decision to combine fairies, cunning folk, and witches into one malicious group affected the witch trials.

⁷⁵ Westwood, and Kingshill, *The Lore of Scotland: A Guide to Scottish Legends*, 438-439.

⁷⁶ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft," "Elizabeth Anderson, 19/3/1697," <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed '[November, 2016]').

⁷⁷ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft," "Agnes (Begis) Cairnes, 5/4/1659."

The perception of witchcraft among the Scottish peasantry drastically changed for a few hundred years and then quietly shifted away from panic. The church lost interest after the government tightened restrictions on trials. The changes in the discernment of witches, witchcraft, and fairies stem from three major occurrences. First, the Protestant Reformation and the pressure from the Protestant Church to live a Godly lifestyle changed laypeople's way of life. The new concept of personal responsibility altered their belief structure. I am aware of the argument that the witch trials cannot be blamed on the Protestant Church due to the fact that countries under the Catholic Church also experienced similar bouts of witch trials. However, in Scotland, the evidence provided supports the argument that the Protestant Church was a main instigator of the witch trials. It would be foolish to conclude that all of the witch accusations were made out of fear of the devil. Some of them were simply made because of disagreements or grudges. Nevertheless, it is clear that many people truly believed there was a threat to their soul. Evidence for this is provided in accounts of trials that were "held under responsible, intelligent, and merciful men showing the deep and real belief of satanic forces existing in all areas of the community."⁷⁸ The other compelling evidence for the sincere belief in witches lay in the simple fact that witch trials rarely turned a profit. The survey of Scottish Witchcraft explains the lack of financial gain:

The main people to benefit financially from witch-hunting were low-level official servants—jailers and executioners—plus a few witch-prickers. By contrast, most of the people involved in witch-hunting gave up time and money to do it. They did so because they believed in what they were doing. Witches were hated and feared, and it was important to eliminate them.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Robert Burns, "Tam O' Shanter" Edinburgh: *The Edinburgh Magazine*, (March 1791)

⁷⁹ Goodare, Martin, Miller and Yeoman, 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft', <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed January, 2017)

Second, the living situations in major cities like Edinburgh created interactions that normally would not have occurred. This meant that people from all classes could share ideas with one another. The lords and peasants could talk together about the trials and the accused. Sharing ideas about who would be next or how one could spot a witch constantly changed the perceptions of both the nobles and peasants. It also prevented the stereotype of the “poor old witch” from being completely true in Scotland. While the close examination of high-status witches has been largely ignored, Scotland did exhibit a higher number of “rich witches” than other areas of Europe. The socio-economic classes’ close quarters with one another guaranteed no one safety from a witch-hunter’s accusation. Lastly, the peasantries exposure to death on a mass scale caused desensitization to the mass death the witch trials created. There were two major famines during the trials in 1595-99 and 1690-1700 that caused starvation and panic, this combined with the bubonic plague which struck three times, meant that watching people die in public was not a new occurrence.

CHAPTER III

From Heresy to Tourism

Flash-forward 282 years, Scotland has chosen to embrace their rather dark past. If one were to walk down the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, Scotland today, he or she would see an advertisement on every corner for a ghost tour or history walk. Each of these tours contains excerpts from Scotland's past body snatchers, plagues, murderers, and the most common, witches. The only European country to execute more witches than Scotland was Germany. The numbers are not exact, however it is estimated that 4,000 people were accused of witchcraft in Scotland between 1560-1735. Of those 4,000, approximately 2,000 were banished, executed, or tortured until death. In the German lands of the Holy Roman Empire between 1490-1775, the estimated number of witch trials was 30,000. Of those, approximately 25,000 were convicted and faced punishment. While these numbers appear to be staggeringly different, when put into context, they are not. For some perspective, Germany's population was around seventeen million in 1750. In 1755, Scotland's population was a little over one million. The percentage of the population convicted of witchcraft in Scotland was 0.1538. The percentage of the population convicted of witchcraft in German-speaking lands was 0.1470. This means that Germany actually convicted less of its population of witchcraft in a longer amount of time than Scotland did.⁸⁰

Promptly listed on the first page of things to see and do in Edinburgh on the VisitScotland website is the Mercat, "Doomed, Dead, and Buried Tour" which I participated in October 2016. Similar tours are advertised in other smaller towns. For

⁸⁰ The population and trial estimates in this paragraph were taken from the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Online Database and Tacitus.nu (a Swedish database for European population). <http://www.tacitus.nu/index.html>, <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/introduction.html>.

example, Scot Free Tours in Aberdeen offers a walking tour of the city called “Crime Pays” that details the crime of witchcraft in their city. Mercat also offers a tour in Glasgow, called “Gruesome Glasgow & Ghost and Ghouls,” which documents the witch-hunts that took place there. The “Original St Andrews Witches Tour” documents the dark history of witchcraft in St Andrews. The list goes on and on. Several articles in “Scotland Magazine” feature the history of the Scottish witch-hunts and in 2009, an article was written by Annette Harrower-Gray, titled “Walking With Witches” that documents the history of witches in Fife.⁸¹ James Robertson documents the Scots’ belief in the second sight in his article “What the Seers Saw.”⁸²

Luckily for tourists, Scotland’s witch trials need no embellishment. Many of the tours I went on and have researched were written by historians and have educational and entertaining pamphlets to go along with them. As part of my research for this study, I took five tours and participated in two local events that pertained to the history of witchcraft in Scotland. I have documented my personal experiences in this chapter as a way to present how the tourist industry in Scotland uses the witch trials to entice and dazzle travelers with the dark history of their past. The tours and events have been cataloged in the order that I took them.

1. The Edinburgh Dungeons: October 27, 2016.

The Edinburgh Dungeons are labeled as one of Edinburgh’s must-see attractions. They have a specific tour related to Scotland’s witch trials, entitled “Witch-Hunt.” This tour was on the dramatic side, but nevertheless historically accurate. The mock trial is for

⁸¹ Annette Harrower-Gray, “Walking With Witches,” *Scotland magazine*, Iss. 44, pg. 68 (April, 2009) <http://www.scotlandmag.com/magazine/issue44/12009236.html>

⁸² James Robertson, “What the Seer Saw,” *Scotland Magazine*, Iss. 52, pg 38 (August, 2010) <http://www.scotlandmag.com/magazine/issue52/12009790.html>

Agnes Finnie, who, according to the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, was tried and convicted of witchcraft in 1645.⁸³ The Dungeon's experience recreates a witchcraft trial that features a corrupt judge who will find the accused tourist guilty no matter what, along with an interrogation from a witch pricker. The walkthrough also displays a torture chamber filled with tools once used for procuring confessions. Along with the tools, an actor plays the torturer and explains the use for each device. The "witch bridle," a device put over the head to silence the accused, is prominently featured among these devices. The Edinburgh Dungeons supplies an educational pamphlet as part of the attraction, featuring an "Edinburgh's Fascinating Facts" section that discusses the swimming practices that took place early in the trials. The caption reads, "Princess Street Gardens was once the Nor' Loch, a lake where the city's waste ended up. It was also used during the Edinburgh witch trials and suspects were thrown in to see if they would sink (innocent, but now dead!)"⁸⁴ The pamphlet also features two famous witches who died in Edinburgh under their "Famous Edinburgh Prisoner's" section. The first caption reads, "Dr. John Filan, accused of witchcraft by King James VI of Scotland, he was tortured by having his fingernails removed and nails forcibly inserted into his fingers. He was then burnt at the stake in 1591."⁸⁵ The second entry reads, "Agnes Sampson, accused of witchcraft alongside John Filan, Sampson met her fate in January 1591, when she was hanged on Castle Hill."⁸⁶ Upon searching their names in the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database, I found that the Edinburgh Dungeons were historically accurate in

⁸³ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft." "Agnes Finnie, 1645," <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed '[February, 2017]').

⁸⁴ The Dungeon Keeper, *Fearsome Facts and Torturous Tales*, "Edinburgh's Fascinating Facts, Sink or Swim," 32.

⁸⁵ The Dungeon Keeper, *Fearsome Facts and Torturous Tales*, 23.

⁸⁶ The Dungeon Keeper, *Fearsome Facts and Torturous Tales*, 23.

their claims about Agnes and Dr. Filan. The Edinburgh Dungeons was also awarded “Scotland’s Best Visitor Attraction” in 2014.

2. Murder Mystery Tour: The Cadies and Witchery Tours, October 28, 2016.

Adam Lyal (a dead criminal, who was hung for highway robbery in 1811) guides the Murder Mystery Tour by Cadies and Witchery. While the tour is slightly less dramatic than the Dungeons, it still features people in costumes, who join guests along the way. The tour begins on Castle Hill, where over three hundred witches were burned. The guide spends about five minutes discussing Edinburgh’s history of witchcraft as well as some of the techniques that were used to get confessions. For example, it was common to place the accused inside a barrel and roll them down the Royal Mile and each time they refused to confess spikes would be hammered into the sides of the barrel causing puncture wounds. The guide also carries a thumbscrew to show the group and discusses the swimming test that took place in Nor’ Loch. The tour continues down the royal mile and in the fish market close, where the guest is told the story of Agnes Finnie, who was believed to have quarreled with people all over the city and faced multiple accusations. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database confirms this story with court records. Since the tour is not solely about witchcraft, the guest also learns about body snatchers, the plague, and fires. The guest is given a pamphlet, containing the stories of “The Darker Side of Old Edinburgh.” In this pamphlet there is a chapter on witchcraft with quite a bit of information. All of the accusations of witchcraft can be corroborated with records, though some of the dates are off. For example, “Witchery Tales” states that James Reid, “in 1608, claimed to have met the devil and also tried to destroy the crops of David

Liberton.”⁸⁷ The records in the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft indicate that the trial for James Reid took place in 1603 not 1608, however, the rest of the information is correct.⁸⁸ The pamphlet also argues that belief in witchcraft existed in Scotland long after the trials ended, which this research has revealed is accurate. It discusses the home of Major Weir, a preacher turned wizard, convicted of witchcraft in 1670. “The superstitions must have been very strong because the home of Major Weir laid empty from 1670-1820.”⁸⁹ The Cadies and Witchery Tours won Trip Advisor’s “Certificate of Excellence, 2016” and have a five-star rating from the Scottish Tourist Board.

3. Witches and Wicked Bodies Tour: Peter Potter Gallery, October 29, 2016.

This tour was put on by the Peter Potter Gallery in conjunction with the “Witches and Wicked Bodies” exhibit that was featured at the National Gallery of Modern Art in 2013. The exhibit features mostly British depictions of witches in art throughout the centuries. The tour with the Peter Potter Gallery was a recreation of that exhibit. As read on their website, “This talk aims to discuss this exhibition's presentation of misogyny as it has been revisited, restructured and represented throughout different periods of Western art history, through the persistence of potent and disturbing images of hideous old hags and desirable young sirens.”⁹⁰ While this is not necessarily a tourist attraction, the exhibit has been re-done in Edinburgh three times since its original appearance there. The re-occurrence and relevance made it a must-do event for me.

4. The Underground Tour: Auld Reekie Tours, October 30, 2016,

⁸⁷ Adam Lyal, “Witchery Tales: The Darker Side of Old Edinburgh,” Edinburgh: Moubray House Press, 1988) 42.

⁸⁸ Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.” “James Reid, 21/7/1603,” <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed '[February, 2017]').

⁸⁹ Lyal, “Witchery Tales: The Darker Side of Old Edinburgh,” 46.

⁹⁰ Chaired by Professor Hilary Robinson, Dean of the School of Art and Design, Organized by Create/Feminisms, a research cluster in the School of Art and Design, Middlesex University, 2013.

The Underground Tour by Auld Reekie takes the guest into the South Bridge vaults underneath the city of Edinburgh. The vaults contain a dark part of the city's history, as they were home the poor and the criminals. This tour is seventy-five minutes long and discusses the great fire, witchcraft, and ghosts. While this tour is not specifically about witchcraft, it does offer something unique: an active coven of modern-day witches still uses one of the vaults as their ritual room. The room is not accessible to the public but it is visible. Although the beliefs are quite different from those in the past, this supports the argument that belief in the occult still exists in Scotland today. The picture below is the room included in the tour.



Figure 5: “Witch’s Ritual Room,” South Bridge Vaults, Edinburgh. Personal photograph by author. October 30, 2016.

5. Samhuinn Fire Festival: The Beltane Fire Society,⁹¹ October 31, 2016.

The Beltane Fire Society puts on two fire festivals each year. One happens on April 30th to celebrate the arrival of summer and the other happens on October 31st to celebrate the arrival of winter. I was lucky enough to attend the Samhuinn Fire Festival, which was inspired by the Celtic festival of Beltane. While this festival does not specifically deal with witchcraft, it does have significance because it was common for witches to be accused of meeting on Beltane throughout the witch trials. For example, records indicated that Jonet Watstone was accused of meeting the devil on Beltane night in 1661.⁹² It was also common for witches to be executed on Beltane to reverse their spells. Joseph McPherson describes a tradition, “there is much here that suggest the burning a witch at Halloween or Yule. The witch that did the havoc was destroyed as her image was consumed. Good fortune would ensue.”⁹³ The festivals put on by the Beltane Fire Society are about casting off darkness and celebrating light, just as they would have been in 1600.

6. Ghost and Torture Tour: Auld Reekie Tours, November 1, 2016.

The Ghost and Torture Tour by Auld Reekie is quite similar to the Underground Tour, though it differs in that, it is accompanied by a trip to a recreated torture room. The walls are lined with various instruments used to torture Scottish prisoners of all sorts. Auld Reekie has an impressive collection of torture devices and an entire wall dedicated to witches. The devices included thumbscrews, the witch bridle, the boot, and the heretic’s fork. Unfortunately, no photography was allowed in this room. Church and government officials would have used these instruments to procure confessions from accused witches

⁹¹ The Beltane Fire Society is a community arts performance charity that aims to educate the public on the traditions of Celtic lunar calendar fire festivals.

⁹² Goodare, Martin, Miller, and Yeoman, “The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.” “Jonet Watstone, 18/9/1661,” <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed '[February, 2017]').

⁹³ JMcPherson, *Primitive Beliefs in the North-East of Scotland*, 208-209.

as well as other criminals. Again, this tour is not specifically about the witch trials, it but definitely highlights Scotland's history with witches. Auld Reekie Tours have a four-star rating from the Scottish Tourist Board, won a "Bravo" award from Trip Advisor, and are listed in the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions.

7. Doomed Dead and Buried Tour: Mercat Tours, November 2, 2016.

The Doomed Dead and Buried Tour by Mercat previously mentioned to be on the first page of things to see and do in Edinburgh on the VisitScotland website is described as "Cannibals. Body snatchers. Deals with the Devil and that's before we head underground. Torture. Murder. Hangings. And that's just what went on in the vaults."⁹⁴ Obviously, when they refer to "deals with the devil" they are referencing witchcraft. The tour takes around sixty minutes, of which half of the time is spent in vaults underneath the city and the other half is spent in Canongate Graveyard. The guide tells a variety of stories, but only two include witches. One of these two stories is of Issobel Erskine, who had the unlikely fate of being beheaded in 1614, and the other is of Alexander Hammiltoun, who was strangled and burned at Castle Hill in 1630. I was able to verify both of the stories told by the guide with court records in the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft database.⁹⁵ Mercat Tours have received five stars from the Scottish Tourist Board, won "The Scottish Thistle Award" in 2015 for the best-trained guides, and are rated one of the top 11 attractions in Scotland.

Now that I have established with the reader that there is, in fact, a tourist industry in Scotland devoted to highlighting the horrors of the country's past, I want to discuss

⁹⁴ Mercat Tours, "Doomed Dead and Buried," About this tour, <https://www.mercattours.com/tours/ghost-tours/view-tour/doomed-dead-and-buried>.

⁹⁵ The trials listed above can be found at "The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft." "Issobel Erskine, 22/6/1614," and "Alexander Hammiltoun, 22/1/1630," <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/witches/> (archived January 2003, accessed '[February, 2017]').

possible reasons for why and how this happened. “Dark Tourism,” a term coined by John Lennon, a professor at the University of Glasgow, refers to tourism centered on or around places and subjects that historically were documented with excessive suffering and death. Tourism is crucial to Scotland’s economy. In 2015, the tourist industry employed 217,000 people in Scotland.⁹⁶ The industry generated about £12 billion in economic activity and represented around five percent of the GDP accounting for approximately eight percent of Scottish employment.⁹⁷ In June 2012, Scotland launched the “Tourism Scotland 2020” plan, which was designed to grow visitor spending by £1 billion, from the £4.5 billion in 2014 to £5.5 billion in 2020.⁹⁸ Considering the current numbers for visitor spending in Scotland are £8.9 billion, it is safe to say they succeeded. As a part of the 2020 plan, Scotland listed “history and heritage tourism” as one of the five areas in which they planned to expand upon, and dark tourism falls under this category. While dark tourism was not specifically listed as a category in the “People Make Heritage” plan, it could most certainly be a byproduct of it. The plan listed heritage properties as appealing to a much older crowd, making the main challenge to “enhance the appeal of these attractions and experiences to younger audiences.”⁹⁹ In an effort to accomplish this, the plan lists two of its target audiences as “adventure seekers” and “curious travelers.” The dark tourism in Scotland falls into the category of “lighter dark tourism,” as Philip Stone

⁹⁶ Scotland’s National Tourism Organization, “Tourism Employment in Scotland,” VisitScotland.Org [http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/InsightTopicPaperTourism%20EmploymentFINAL\(2\).pdf](http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/InsightTopicPaperTourism%20EmploymentFINAL(2).pdf) (accessed May, 2017)

⁹⁷ The Scottish Government, “Tourism,” ScottishGovernment.UK, <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Business-Industry/Tourism> (accessed May, 2017)

⁹⁸ The Scottish Tourism Alliance, “Overview, Tourism Scotland, 2020,” ScottishTourismAlliance.UK, <http://www.scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/page/national-strategy/>

⁹⁹ The Scottish Tourism Alliance, “People Make Heritage,” ScottishTourismAlliance.UK, <http://www.scottishtourismalliance.co.uk/uploads/mixture/People%20Make%20Heritage%20-%20Heritage%20Tourism%202020%20Strategy.pdf>

discusses when describing Edinburgh tourism in *The Darker Side of Travel*:

For example, the commodification of the supernatural and its role in constructing tourist landscapes...In particular, how ghosts and other paranormal entities have been interpretatively recreated within a Scottish context and, specifically, they reveal shifting relationships between ghosts/haunted spaces and dark fun factory mechanisms which have been developed to stimulate the wider tourism industry...‘Ghost Walk’ tours in Edinburgh, where history and the supernatural meet and where ‘the threat of the phantom has been turned into a promise, and the fear of the spectral has been transformed into fun... simplistically, how the ostensible notion of fright tourism is a natural extension of risk recreation.’¹⁰⁰

Stone explains that once-taboo subjects such as torture, execution, witchcraft or death, are packaged up in within an attraction environment in the Dungeons through a mixture of creative, tasteless, and playful humor.¹⁰¹ Attractions like the Edinburgh Dungeons and Ghost Tours would most certainly attract the “adventure seekers” and “curious travellers” Scotland sought to entice. Young tourists are also often concerned with having a more authentic experience rather than a cookie cutter visit. They are also more susceptible to beliefs in spiritualism and romanticism. Craig Wight explains that “dark tourism displays some of the traits of the ‘alternative tourist’ particularly because encountering ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ and the search for new or ‘rare’ knowledge and experiences is central to the discursive formation of dark tourism.”¹⁰²

While it is impossible to know exactly how many tourists go to Scotland specifically to experience the darker parts of Scottish history, it is clear that Scotland understands that her dark history can be capitalized upon. Scotland strives to keep her folklore and superstition alive. While I was only able to personally visit one city during

¹⁰⁰ Philip Stone, “It’s a Bloody Guide’: Fun, Fear, and a Lighter Side to Dark Tourism at the Dungeon Visitor Attractions, UK,” *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Ed. Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, (Buffalo: Channel View Publications, 2009) 169.

¹⁰¹ Stone, “It’s a Bloody Guide’: Fun, Fear, and a Lighter Side to Dark Tourism at the Dungeon Visitor Attractions, UK,” *The Darker Side of Travel*, 171.

¹⁰² Craig Wight, “Contested National Tragedies: An Ethical Dimension,” *The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Ed. Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, (Buffalo: Channel View Publications, 2009) 134.

my research for this study, the VisitScotland website has provided a long list of other attractions in Scotland that highlight the country's occult history. For example, in October of 2016 an ebook guide was published titled "Scottish Ghosts, Myths, and Legends" which highlights the Queen of Scottish Witches, Isobel Growdie, the Witches Well outside Edinburgh Castle where over three hundred witches were executed over the course of one hundred years, and Gilmerton Cove which is estimated to be 2,000 years old.¹⁰³ The folklore guide is also listed under the "Uniquely Scottish" section as one of the seven things that makes Scotland unique. In 2014, Scotland hosted their first "Scottish Paranormal Festival" in Stirling. The "Supernatural Map of the Royal Mile" created by VisitScotland in 2014 features a section about the law forbidding pork from being consumed on Halloween. "No porkies here, eating pork or pastries on Halloween was illegal thanks to the Witchcraft Act of 1735. This was only repealed 60 years ago."¹⁰⁴ Also making a debut in 2014 was TradFest, a festival dedicated to traditional folklore and culture. The twelve-day festival is Scotland's "Year of Heritage. History, and Archeology 2017" signature event and features a performance from a few executed witches of Edinburgh on Castle Hill.¹⁰⁵ In July of this year, at Glasgow Caledonian University an academic conference on dark tourism is set to take place. In an article in "The National," Kirsteen Paterson discusses the tourism trends of 2017, stating, "according to VisitScotland, the country's "dark history" is of "huge interest" to travellers from overseas and should be capitalized upon through storytelling and the use of local

¹⁰³ Scotland's National Tourism Organization, "Scottish Ghost, Myths, and Legends," VisitScotland.Org, <http://ebooks.visitscotland.com/ghosts-myths-legends/> (accessed May, 2017)

¹⁰⁴ Scotland's National Tourism Organization, "If You've Got It, Haunt It," VisitScotland.Org, <http://mediacentre.visitscotland.org/pressreleases/if-you-ve-got-it-haunt-it-1073789> (accessed May, 2017)

¹⁰⁵ The Scottish Storytelling Center, "TradFest," TraditionalArtsOfScotland.Org, <http://www.tracscotland.org/festivals/tradfest> (accessed May, 2017)

knowledge.”¹⁰⁶

Scotland seems bound and determined to keep its haunted history and to use it to its advantage. While this may not strike some as odd, for a brief moment in Scottish history the superstition and folklore that so uniquely embodies Scotland was brought under attack. The Protestant Reformation that swept through Scotland in the 1500's caused a disruption in traditional Scottish belief. The Catholic faith was willing to incorporate superstition and Celtic traditions in order to maintain stability in Scottish society. However, the newly formed Protestant church was not as malleable. The staunch, no-nonsense preachers viewed all supernatural power, which was not understood to come from God, to in turn come from the devil. Therefore, the church made it a priority to stamp out the superstitious tendencies of the peasantry that the Catholic Church had tolerated. Their mission failed however, the Protestant Reformation did not stomp out superstition like it intended. Instead the campaign against superstition intensified it. This intensity manifested itself into witch-hunts because the accepted belief in witches, fairies, cunning folk and witchcraft had existed in Scotland for hundreds of years before the Protestant Reformation. The Scots never intended to give up their superstitious beliefs and the Reformation transformed their beliefs rather than extinguishing them.

Even after the church's crusade against Scottish superstition subsided, the Scots faced a new oppressor. The union of the crowns in 1707 played an important role in the suppression of Scottish folklore. The English were more skeptical of witchcraft claims than the Scottish. Brian Levack attributed the lull of witchcraft trials in the 1650's to the

¹⁰⁶ Kirsteen Paterson, "From Mild Camping to Visits to the Dark Side.. Scotland's Tourism Trends of 2017 Forecast," *The National: The Newspaper that Supports an Independent Scotland*, December 12, 2016. http://www.thenational.scot/news/14962067.From_mild_camping_to_visits_to_the_dark_side_Scotland_s_tourism_trends_of_2017_forecast/#articleContinue (accessed May, 2017)

interference of English judges presiding in Scotland. He also noted the objection to the Witchcraft Act of 1736 by Lord Grange, a Scotsman in British Parliament. England was well into the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution. They considered the superstitious belief in witchcraft to be outdated. While, legally, Scotland was shuffled along with the English, their superstition never quite faded away. For example, the legend of Nessie was believed to have begun in the sixth century, when Saint Columba encountered her on his way to Inverness.¹⁰⁷ Nessie is a famous legend from Scotland, but she is an example of the Scots' ability to hold on to their folklore. As the modern world began to abolish the belief in fairies, witches, and witchcraft, a curiosity of dark practices of the Middle Ages arose. Scotland, with her unique past, was there to satisfy the calling of curious and skeptical tourists. Mary Homles argues that Sir Walter Scott influenced the beginnings of dark tourism in Scotland. "Scott was to a very large degree responsible for subsequently highly influential views of Scotland as misty mountained Highland territory, peopled by tartan-wearing noble savages, products of the mythical past and yet still living out its inheritance in the present."¹⁰⁸ The folklore of Scotland became a draw once people no longer believed or feared its implications and the country was all too happy to accept her new role as one of the most haunted places in the world.

¹⁰⁷ Scotland's National Tourist Organization, "The Loch Ness Monster," VisitScotland.Org, <http://ebooks.visitscotland.com/ghosts-myths-legends/loch-ness-monster/> (accessed May, 2017)

¹⁰⁸ Mary Homles and David Inglis, "Highland and Other Haunts: Ghosts in Scottish Tourism," *Annals of Tourist Research*, Vol 30, No 1 (2003) 54.

CONCLUSION

“In no country in Europe did the belief in witches and warlocks flourish more widely, more intensely, and more tenaciously than in Scotland. In contradiction to the essentially demonic and almost scientific nature of the belief in Germany and France, in Scotland it was altogether more exuberant and imaginative.”

-Thomas Davidson

The witch trials in Scotland wreaked havoc in Scottish society. The Protestant Reformation, determined to erase the ‘vane superstitions’ of peasant society, was ultimately unsuccessful. The Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1563, altered the belief systems of the Scottish peasantry but not in the intended fashion. The mystical powers of cunning folk, fairies, and witches were no longer judged on a spectrum of white to black magic. The deeply rooted belief in the occult was transformed into a primarily negative association with the devil. The trials of 1591-92 and 1597, held under King James VI, were wildly uncontrolled. The king’s personal belief in witches, coupled with the famine of 1595-99, allowed the panic to grow out of control. The King’s experiences from these trials prompted him to publish his famous *Daemonologie*. The Witchcraft Act of 1604, another revision under King James VI, legitimized the crime of witchcraft, transferring the jurisdiction to the court systems in Scotland, rather than the church. This act also gave the accused access to lawyers and judges and eliminated the penalty of burning at the stake. Due to this act, the witch panic of 1628-30 went very differently from the others, requiring more evidence and consideration. However, due to Charles I’s, decision to

establish circuit court systems and the removal of several judges who were cautious due to their dealings in the 1597 panic, the trials raged on.

In 1649, Scotland's monarchy faltered and was placed under the rule of Oliver Cromwell. The Protestant Church seized upon this lull in stability and passed the Witchcraft Act of 1649. It reinstated church authority over the trials and reignited the quest for a Godly society. The Witch panics of 1649-50 and 1660-62 were the worst and last outbreaks in Scotland's history. This was partially due to English occupation of Scotland, which caused a curtailing of witch trials and spread fear that the number of witches was steadily increasing without prosecution and led to the church asserting itself back over control of the trials. After the union of the crowns in 1707, witch trials slowly came to a halt. The Witchcraft Act of 1736 was passed in the British Parliament, which reversed all other acts in hopes of despelling the belief in the existence of witches and subsequently witchcraft. While this act went over fine in England, Scotland struggled.

The deep-rooted belief in the occult was not something the Scots were ready to give up. Images of deformed witches dancing with the devil and unseelie fairies plotting their demise were imprinted into their minds. While folklore in Scotland changed into more sinister and negative superstitions, it did not disappear. It was not until after the Enlightenment, however, that Scotland's superstitious beliefs would earn them any credence. Once the Scientific Revolution was in full swing and people no longer openly feared the occult, Scotland's dark past sparked a curiosity in travelers. The dark tourist industry in Scotland, which formed from the writings of Sir Walter Scott, have been intensified today. While dark tourism has existed in Scotland since the 1800's, the Scottish government has only recently started to push the movement. In 2012, the

movement took off with Scotland's national project "Tourism Scotland, 2020." This movement is responsible for all of the tourism improvements Scotland has experienced in recent years. The "History and Heritage Tourism" program, a sub-section of "Scotland Tourism, 2020," has led to the creation of storytelling festivals, Gaelic and Celtic festivals, as well as paranormal festivals all of which have fed the country's dark tourism reputation. These programs have also led to a resurgence of Scottish folklore and superstition. The reader can be assured that modern day witch trials will never occur however, Scottish society has definitely reacquainted itself with the folklore and superstition it fought so desperately to keep.

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