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**The difference of Being in the  
early modern world: a  
relational-material approach to  
life in Scotland in the period of  
the witch trials.**

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MA MLitt

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Archaeology

School of Humanities  
College of Arts  
University of Glasgow

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# Contents

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Acknowledgements .....  | ii   |
| Contents .....  | iii  |
| Figure List .....   | vii  |
| Video List .....  | xi   |
| Additional Materials Supplied .....   | xii  |
| Abstract .....  | xiii |
| Author's Declaration .....  | xv   |
| Chapter 1: Introduction.....  | 1    |
| 1.1 The Context of Scottish Witch Trials .....  | 3    |
| 1.2 The Problem of Missing Things.....  | 6    |
| 1.3 A Situated Response.....  | 7    |
| 1.4 Thesis Structure.....   | 8    |
| 1.5 Maps .....  | 9    |
| Chapter 2: Research Context .....   | 19   |
| 2.1 Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft: Historiography .....  | 21   |
| 2.2 Integrating Religion and Folk Religion: Recent Advances.....  | 26   |
| 2.3 Seeing Fairies and Otherworlds in the Past .....  | 31   |
| 2.4 Bodies and Boundaries: Witchcraft as a Lens.....  | 34   |
| 2.5 Recent Methodologies: The Nascent Archaeology of Witchcraft and Magic in<br>Early Modern Scotland ..... | 42   |
| 2.6 Taking the Research Forward .....   | 49   |
| Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach .....   | 51   |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Belief and Knowing .....                                     | 51  |
| 3.1 Strange Data.....  | 51  |
| 3.2 Beyond Religion, Beyond Folk Belief.....                 | 53  |
| 3.3 Taking Belief Seriously.....                             | 57  |
| 3.4 Knowledge and the Body .....                             | 62  |
| Agencies and Ontologies .....                                | 63  |
| 3.5 Witchcraft and Agency.....                               | 64  |
| 3.6 Towards an Alternative Ontology .....                    | 73  |
| Disruptions .....  | 77  |
| 3.7 Disruptions: Ways into Alternative Ontologies .....      | 77  |
| 3.8 Extending ‘Disruption’ to the Reader.....                | 80  |
| Chapter 4: Methodology & Sources.....                        | 82  |
| Ontology and Taxonomy .....                                  | 83  |
| Critical Discussion of Sources & Materials.....              | 86  |
| 4.1 General Note on Witch Trial Accounts .....               | 86  |
| 4.2 The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.....                   | 87  |
| 4.3 The Kirk Session Records .....                           | 90  |
| 4.4 Contemporary Treatises on Witchcraft.....                | 91  |
| 4.5 Folklorists, Antiquarians and Statistical Accounts ..... | 92  |
| 4.6 Ordnance Survey and the Landscape .....                  | 94  |
| 4.7 Material Sources .....                                   | 96  |
| 4.8 Charms Collections .....                                 | 97  |
| 4.9 Discipline Artefacts.....                                | 101 |
| 4.10 Infant Burial Grounds .....                             | 106 |
| 4.11 Well Sites and Fairy Places .....                       | 108 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Representing the Data .....                          | 110 |
| 4.12 Calculating Case Study Sizes .....              | 112 |
| 4.13 A Note on the Highland/Lowland Divide .....     | 114 |
| Story 1 .....  | 119 |
| Elspet .....   | 119 |
| Tree .....   | 120 |
| Disruption 1: Body Parts .....                       | 121 |
| Chapter 5: Cloth-Body-Tree Collaborations.....       | 123 |
| 5.1 Well Visiting Vignettes .....                    | 124 |
| 5.2 Rags and Garments in Witch Trial Contexts .....  | 128 |
| 5.3 Cloth in Deliberately Concealed Contexts .....   | 131 |
| 5.4 Ontological Inferences: different Cloth(e)s..... | 135 |
| 5.5 Turning to Trees .....                           | 138 |
| 5.6 A Walk in the Woods .....                        | 140 |
| 5.7 Co-fabricating Rag Tree Sites .....              | 146 |
| 5.8 The Fabric of Time .....                         | 156 |
| 5.9 Trees, Disease and Bodies.....                   | 162 |
| 5.10 Discarding and Building.....                    | 165 |
| 5.11 Discussion .....                                | 170 |
| Story 2 .....  | 173 |
| Elspet .....   | 173 |
| Stone .....  | 174 |
| Disruption 2: Blood .....                            | 175 |
| Chapter 6: Fairy-Stone-Water-Body Interstices .....  | 177 |
| 6.1 Elfshot.....                                     | 180 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 6.2 Intersections Between Fairy Flesh & Human Flesh .....      | 190 |
| 6.3 Childbirth and Child Death .....                           | 192 |
| 6.4 Belonging and Being: Personhood in Life and Death .....    | 198 |
| 6.5 Fairies, the Dead and Embodiment .....                     | 215 |
| 6.6 (Re-)turning to Stone .....                                | 217 |
| 6.7 Into the Hills: Boundaries and Life-Force .....            | 227 |
| 6.8 Discussion .....   | 231 |
| Story 3.....   | 235 |
| Cat.....   | 235 |
| Elspet .....   | 236 |
| Disruption 3: Skin .....                                       | 237 |
| Chapter 7: Cat-Woman-Cow: Where Species Meet .....             | 240 |
| 7.1 Introducing Cats in Walls .....                            | 242 |
| 7.2 Animality, Ontology and Taxonomy.....                      | 245 |
| 7.3 Past Animal Beings: Methodology .....                      | 248 |
| 7.4 Finding the Cat in the Wall: Returning to Garments .....   | 252 |
| 7.5 Shapeshifting and Borderline Beings.....                   | 261 |
| 7.6 Cows, Milk and Interspecies Transference .....             | 271 |
| 7.7 The Yoke (Jougs) and the Bridle (Branks).....              | 286 |
| 7.8 Discussion .....   | 294 |
| Chapter 8: Conclusion.....                                     | 298 |
| 8.1 Strange Ontologies and the Dissolution of Boundaries ..... | 299 |
| 8.2 Reflections on ‘Things’ and ‘Disruptions’ .....            | 305 |
| 8.3 Future Thematic Directions for Research .....              | 306 |
| Bibliography .....   | 310 |

# Figure List

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Figure 1: Map of Scotland showing case studies and selected other areas.....   | 10  |
| Figure 2: DUNS case study area, Scottish Borders. ....   | 11  |
| Figure 3: HADDINGTON case study area, East Lothian. ....   | 12  |
| Figure 4: KINTORE case study area, Aberdeenshire .....   | 13  |
| Figure 5: BUITTLE case study area, Kirkcudbrightshire .....  | 14  |
| Figure 6: CAWDOR case study area, Nairnshire. ....   | 15  |
| Figure 7: TAIN case study area, Ross-shire. ....   | 16  |
| Figure 8: FORTINGALL case study area, Perthshire.....  | 17  |
| Figure 9: MUCKHART, Clackmannanshire (formerly Perthshire). ....   | 18  |
| Figure 10: Goose larynx rounded into a child's charm for whooping cough .....  | 97  |
| Figure 11: Fairy stones.....   | 98  |
| Figure 12: A Mary/drift nut charm .....  | 98  |
| Figure 13: Jougs at St Anne's, Dowally (FORTINGALL). ....  | 102 |
| Figure 14: The branks of Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews. ....   | 103 |
| Figure 15: The sackcloth from Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews. ....  | 104 |
| Figure 16: A pair of discipline stools from St Andrews. ....   | 105 |
| Figure 17: Midway: Message from the Gyre © Chris Jordan. ....  | 121 |
| Figure 18: Bent coins and pin cleared from St Queran's Well .....  | 125 |
| Figure 19: St Fillian's Chair, Comrie (FORTINGALL) .....   | 126 |
| Figure 20: Inschadney well finds, Kenmore, FORTINGALL .....  | 127 |
| Figure 21: Replicas of 18th/19th charms made with rowan and knotless red thread<br>and worn on the body.....                             | 131 |
| Figure 22: Two examples of deliberately concealed garments discovered in Scotland<br>© Textile Conservation Centre Foundation, 2010..... | 133 |
| Figure 23: Rothiemurchus - working woodland.....   | 140 |
| Figure 24: Granny pine, Rothiemurchus.....   | 141 |
| Figure 25: Woodlands bright and beautiful .....  | 142 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Figure 26: The birch canopy. ....  | 143 |
| Figure 27: Life from a different perspective: the bending of birch. ....   | 143 |
| Figure 28: Ancient semi-natural woodland of Rothiemurchus. ....  | 144 |
| Figure 29: An old pine stoically suffers the damage of gale force winds. ....                                    | 145 |
| Figure 30: Doon hill, Aberfoyle. ....  | 147 |
| Figure 31: The Minister's Tree (pine).....   | 148 |
| Figure 32: The Minister's Tree site plan. Minister's Tree at point 1. ....                                       | 150 |
| Figure 33: The view from the Minister's Tree deeper into the site. ....  | 151 |
| Figure 34: Site extension. ....  | 151 |
| Figure 35: Many rags take on a greyish-green colour as they deteriorate over time.<br>.....                      | 152 |
| Figure 36: Thickening moss grows over an older rag .....   | 152 |
| Figure 37: A red ribbon high in a holly. ....  | 153 |
| Figure 38: The holly bough has broken, the red ribbon falling with it. ....                                      | 153 |
| Figure 39: Wind and tree growth impact the deposits. ....  | 154 |
| Figure 40: A comparison of the Minister's Tree (Tree 1) deposits.....  | 154 |
| Figure 41: A close up of sackcloth fabric; Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews. ....                                 | 159 |
| Figure 42: The view into the site towards the Minister's Tree on a grey 6th<br>September 2013.....               | 169 |
| Figure 43: A similar perspective, just 4 days later, on a very sunny 10th September<br>2013. ....                | 169 |
| Figure 44: An example of elfshot.....  | 178 |
| Figure 45: A simpler elfshot pendant, mounted in crystal bound with gold. ....                                   | 181 |
| Figure 46: An unmounted fairy arrow butter charm.....  | 184 |
| Figure 47: Schiehallion summit under dark moody clouds © Maria Hampton, 2016.<br>.....                           | 185 |
| Figure 48: A mare stone, hung from the end of an 18th/19thC bed. ....  | 195 |
| Figure 49: A naturally-perforated, waterworn pebble 'mare stone' from a 19thC<br>bed; Stonehaven (H.NO 98). .... | 195 |
| Figure 50: The infant burial ground at South Erradale © Anne MacInnes, 2010. ...                                 | 202 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Figure 51: Infant burials marked at South Erradale with naturally worn stones © Anne MacInnes, 2010. ....  | 203 |
| Figure 52: At Melvaig the last infant burial took place at dusk © Anne MacInnes, 2010. ....  | 204 |
| Figure 53: Four Mary/drift nuts, from two distinct plant species. ....   | 206 |
| Figure 54: At Baleruminmore IBG, infants were buried with a murder victim in the ruins of a pre-Reformation church © J. Malcolm, 2007 .....                                    | 208 |
| Figure 55: The infant burial site at Melvaig © Anne MacInnes, 2010.....  | 209 |
| Figure 56: The Clow chapel and red well, both dedicated to St Mary. ....   | 211 |
| Figure 57: Sithean A' Bhaile-mheadhonaich is an IBG and fairy hill. ....   | 211 |
| Figure 58: Shandwick Stone © Wojsyl, 2006 .....  | 213 |
| Figure 59: The effect of rubbing stone on skin © National Museums Scotland Licensor <a href="http://www.scran.ac.uk">www.scran.ac.uk</a> . ....                                | 219 |
| Figure 60: A set of three stones which belonged to a Bonar Bridge Witch (TAIN) © National Museums Scotland Licensor <a href="http://www.scran.ac.uk">www.scran.ac.uk</a> ..... | 220 |
| Figure 61: A 17th/18thC crystal charm stone silver-mounted for dipping .....   | 222 |
| Figure 62: A small quartz pebble encased in two strips of copper mounted to make a dipping charm.....  | 222 |
| Figure 63: Three very different things, all silver-mounted for dipping.....  | 225 |
| Figure 64: A sample of water-worn pebble charms with holes .....   | 226 |
| Figure 65: Sithean Camaslaidh fairy hill and IBG, .....  | 229 |
| Figure 66: A fairy hill, and site of the Minister's Tree: Doon Hill, Aberfoyle .....   | 229 |
| Figure 67: Inthewrongplaceness, by Kira O'Reilly © Manuel Vason, 2005. ....  | 237 |
| Figure 68: Bull by Day, Man by Night, by Sarah Bliss © Sarah Bliss, 2013. ....   | 238 |
| Figure 69: Profile of the intramural cat recovered from the old hospital, Stirling (MUCKHART). ....  | 242 |
| Figure 70: An intramural cat build into Breck of Rendall Mill, Orkney, c.1803 ....   | 243 |
| Figure 71: The Dalkeith calf's heart .....   | 254 |
| Figure 72: An example of a byre: House 9, Lairg (TAIN) © Scottish Trust for Archaeological Research.....   | 273 |
| Figure 73: An 18th century byre charm from Cumbernauld. ....   | 275 |
| Figure 74: 18th/19th century byre charm, Slains (KINTORE).....   | 276 |



|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure 75: Witch's tether (coarse, horse hair) used to illicitly transfer milk production from one cow to another. ....   | 280 |
| Figure 76: An Ollaberry (Shetland) 'cattle' or 'udder' charm stone for rubbing on cows © National Museums Scotland Licensor <a href="http://www.scran.ac.uk">www.scran.ac.uk</a> . .... | 281 |
| Figure 77: H. NO 91, another example of an udder charm © National Museums Scotland Licensor <a href="http://www.scran.ac.uk">www.scran.ac.uk</a> . ....                                 | 281 |
| Figure 78: A yoke (jougs) for a working bull, Fyvie, Aberdeenshire; 1850-1940. ..   | 286 |
| Figure 79: Examples of joug collars. ....   | 288 |
| Figure 80: Map showing the current landscape and position of the CAWDOR jougs. ....   | 290 |
| Figure 81: CAWDOR Parish Church jougs. ....   | 291 |
| Figure 82: Two sets of branks. ....   | 292 |
| Figure 83: Broken remains of the branks from KINTORE Old Church; H. MR 49. ...  | 293 |

# Video List

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Video 1: Rat vs Cats - A Brave Rat Fights 5 Cats © Kalyan City Life, 2010. ....                             | 244 |
| Video 2: Barn Cat Killing Spree © Animal House for Real, 2012. ....   | 258 |
| Video 3: Mother cat eats her kitten © φρεακς 2014. ....   | 259 |
| Video 4: Badgers - vicious fight © Simon King Wildlife, 2013. ....  | 264 |
| Video 5: Ellie the Miniature Pet Pig © matej&katarina, 2013.....  | 267 |
| Video 6: Mother cow protecting calf © Funny and Crazy Videos, 2016. ....                                    | 277 |
| Video 7: Rescue cat comforts dying cow and loves to hitch a ride on animals ©<br>Inside Edition, 2016. .... | 295 |

## **Additional Materials Supplied**

Item 1: CD with videos links to accompany the print version of Chapter 7 (requires internet connection).

# Abstract

This thesis investigates how ways of being in different ontologies emerge from material and embodied practice. This general concern is explored through the particular case study of Scotland in the period of the witch trials (the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E.). The field of early modern Scottish witchcraft studies has been active and dynamic over the past 15 years but its prioritisation of what people said over what they did leaves a clear gap for a situated and relational approach focusing upon materiality.

Such an approach requires a move away from the Cartesian dichotomies of modern ontology to recognise past beliefs as *real* to those who experienced them, co-constitutive of embodiment and of the material worlds people inhabited. In theory, method and practice, this demands a different way of exploring past worlds to avoid flattening strange data. To this end, the study incorporates narratives and ‘disruptions’ - unique engagements with Contemporary Art which facilitate understanding by enabling the temporary suspension of disbelief.

The methodology is iterative, tacking between material and written sources in order to better understand the heterogeneous assemblages of early modern (counter-) witchcraft. Previously separate areas of discourse are (re-)constituted into alternative ontic categories of newly-parallel materials. New interpretations of things, places, bodies and personhoods emerge, raising questions about early modern experiences of the world. Three thematic chapters explore different sets of collaborative agencies as they entwine into new things, co-fabricating a very different world. Moving between witch trial accounts, healing wells, infant burial grounds, animals, discipline artefacts and charms, the boundaries of all prove highly permeable. People, cloth and place bleed into one another through contact; trees and water emerge as powerful agents of magical-place-making; and people and animals meet to become single, hybrid-persons spread over two bodies. Life and death consistently emerge as protracted processes with the capacity to overlap and occur simultaneously in problematic ways.

The research presented in this thesis establishes a new way of looking at the nature of Being as experienced by early modern Scots. This provides a foundation for further studies, which can draw in other materials not explored here such as communion wares and metal charms. Comparison with other early modern Western societies may also prove fruitful. Furthermore, the methodology may be suitable for application to other interdisciplinary projects incorporating historical and material evidence.

# Author's Declaration

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet...

*I declare that, except where explicit mention is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.*

Signature

Name

Date

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant resurgence in early modern witchcraft studies undertaken by historians in Scotland. This scholarship, albeit dominated by a small number of prolific writers, has varied widely. Some discussions concentrate on a particular witch-hunt (e.g. Maxwell-Stuart 1998; Normand and Roberts 2000; Goodare 2001; Wasser 2013), others on a particular geographical region (e.g. MacDonald 2002a; 2002b). Still others investigate gender (e.g. Martin 2002; Jones and Zell 2005), the significance of class and state building (Levack 1996; Yeoman 2002), and the complimentary (and often contradictory) area of fairy studies (e.g. Henderson and Cowan 2001; Purkiss 2001). Within the same timeframe, major scholarship has also generated the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (Goodare *et al* 2003), a valuable resource which cuts down on duplicated efforts.

This comprehensive backdrop in place, Hutton (2010, 247) has gone as far as claiming that historians now know most of the whos, wheres, whys, whats and whens of European witchcraft. Whilst this may be an overstatement, the flurry of recent publications collectively establish a revised general framework for the topic, resulting in an ongoing move across the field towards 'micro-histories' of witchcraft. These vary in focus significantly, for example: one individual (e.g. Henderson 2009a; Wilby 2011; Carr 2013; Martin 2013); one town (e.g. Cordey 2013); one year (e.g. Hughes 2013); local charmers (e.g. Miller 2002; Davies 2008); or a single motif like the witches' Sabbath (Paterson 2012), or flying (Goodare 2013a).

There are, however, two significant shortcomings evident in existing research. Firstly, the material perspective is consistently overlooked in favour of interiorised ‘beliefs’, ‘ideas’ or ‘thoughts’. In this, the unfamiliar is recast to answer modern questions from a position which assumes an inherently modern ‘subject’. Thus it has never been necessary to ask, for example, what an early modern cat *is* - it need only be a shadow of a cat, a symbol of a human ‘idea’. The result is typically a past distinctly devoid of things, bodies, non-human others and their agencies. The strangeness of the witch trial accounts and the data that they generate is thus consistently ironed out - disappearing into errata and interesting ‘folknotes’. The second major criticism to be levelled at the existing work is that the potential for real ontological alterity is consistently overlooked: it is very difficult to access via the current research paradigm. To date, despite the existence of significant material evidence, there has been no real attempt at an integrated archaeology of early modern Scottish witchcraft/charming practices.

This thesis aims to break down modern ontological assumptions and lay out a theory and method for reforming heterogeneous assemblages of collaborative agencies that together co-created very different persons experiencing a very different world. As a case study, it explores the material world of early modern Scotland, from the Reformation and the commencement of regular witch trials and executions (1560s) until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Although this extends 65 years beyond the second Witchcraft Act, there is strong evidence for continuity of beliefs and practices until at least this point.

Fowler (2011, 137) argues that personhood

*“is shaped in religious practices [and its investigation] must concentrate on how the human body is situated alongside substances and forms (including other ‘bodies’ and body parts) which may convey spiritual qualities important to personhood”.*

To this end, topics typically considered in isolation are unpicked and woven together in new ways: body parts, clothing, trees, unbaptised infants, stones, fairy hills, sackcloths, healing wells, living animals and witch bodies to name but a few.



From this iterative process, ontologically parallel materials emerge, as method, theory and interpretation become intertwined (Fowler 2004, 101-109; 2008a; Dobres and Robb 2005; Henare *et al* 2007b). Extracts from trial accounts are tied together with things and places into *practices* - the material and embodied patterns from which modes of being emerge and through which beings and the material world are mutually co-created, maintained and creative in the world (Walker 2008; Fowler 2010, 366; Morgan 2010a). People, Morgan (2010b, 11) argues, “make belief in the things they do”: belief is not a universal category, and is co-produced by actions. The practices attested to by the witch trial accounts are therefore recognised alongside more orthodox practices as significant, interrelated parts of an alternative ontological framework. People also make *themselves* in the things they do. As ontologically unique collocations of things, places and beings (in life, death and/or intermediate states) emerge from practice, so too do differently experienced personhoods, embodiments and materialities, and a different, multi-species, co-fabricated world.

## 1.1 The Context of Scottish Witch Trials

In 1560 the Scottish Parliament adopted a Reformed faith, but this marked just one (albeit crucial) episode in a ‘long Reformation’ which extended throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and, entailed significant changes to material culture, places of worship and landscapes of belief (Todd 2002; Hazlett 2003). Before the Reformation the experience of salvation was everywhere, engaging all of the senses: a snatch of Latin, a waft of incense, the sharp tang of wine-become-blood (Spicer 2003, 30; Duffy 2005, 91-130). It was built into the stonework of the church, present in relics, paintings, tapestries and stained glass. These were not passive artefacts or illustrative *aide memoires*; theologically they conferred salvation directly. They possessed and transmitted holy substances into the Christian, working with them to affect change (Hahn and Holger 2015). Salvation was as abundant and accessible as access points to the divine: ‘foretastes of heaven’ were everywhere (Fawcett 2002: 321-326; Yates 2008).

The reformers refuted purgatory - an intermediate hell where sins could be expunged. They denounced the saints, who interceded on human behalf, and the sacraments through which a person could affect their own eternal fate. With the Reformation came new anxieties about the eschatological fate of the ordinary person (Tarlow 1999, 186-188). Left with only one human life-time to be redeemed, and no way of influencing the outcome (Tarlow 1999, 187), ordinary people heard repeatedly from the Reformed pulpit that they were living in the time of the Word, and that the apocalypse was nigh (Matheson 1998, 243; Matheson 2000). It is not a coincidence then that in 1563, just a few short years after the Reformation Parliament, the first Witchcraft Act was written into law, condemning practitioners of charming and witchcraft and anyone who consulted with them to death (Goodare 2005a). These changes were interlinked and it has been compellingly argued that John Knox, the foremost Scottish reformer, wrote the Witchcraft Act (Goodare 2005a; 2005b). It should therefore be considered that both the theological reforms themselves and the resultant destabilisation of salvation as it had been experienced by medieval Christians were constitutional parts of the early modern ontology (Tarlow 2011, 2-3).

Neither Reformation nor witchcraft were unique to Scotland in the early modern world, and are undeniably related to wider trends in political, legal and gender issues across Europe (Levack 1996; 2013a; Goodare 2002a; Dillinger 2013; Rowlands 2013). However, experiences varied widely even between neighbouring countries (e.g. Sharpe 2002). Witches may have become newly and dangerously problematic across Europe, but lived worlds were variable and volatile by degrees.

Lived worlds can be elusive. People did not accuse their neighbours of witchcraft for the benefit of future historians interested in social statistics. Judges did not convict witches on the grounds that it would lead to future insights into class differences. However, the data from trial accounts is consistently moulded to fit these types of questions. In Scotland, the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (Goodare *et al* 2003) has identified at least 3837 individuals tried for witchcraft before the Act was repealed in 1736. Approximately two thirds of these people were, most likely, executed (Goodare *et al* 2003), making Scotland one of the worst affected

European nations per head of population (Henderson 2011, 230). The fact that, of those records which remain, 7% of the accused were under 20 and 7% were between 60 and 70 (Goodare *et al* 2003) is certainly interesting, but only if something is done with the information: at the time, for the people concerned, ages were not floating statistics, they were an integral part of bodies and persons. The trial records may come to us through the lens of accuser, minute-taker or law maker; however, at the end of the day their content was widely accepted - enough so to propagate a culture which engaged in sober pursuit of witches for over a century and a half. Witches were accused and executed because they were ontologically real and active in the world.

Nevertheless, in a feat of teleology, many scholars have interpreted the Reformation as the adoption of faith by literary-intellectual processing as opposed to habit (Waite 2003, 58), and the end of exteriorised, material *practices*. Mellor and Shilling (1997, 124) attribute to the Reformation the elevation of intellect and the mind. In this shift, they interpret the relocation of the site of being into the cerebral sphere, Reformation effectively therefore diminishing the body's worth; the intellectual precursor to the Enlightenment, and to the Cartesian duality which persists today. Recent scholarship has begun to question to what extent reformed doctrine truly replaced 'folk belief', noting for example, that fairies were considered real and dangerous (Henderson and Cowan 2001; Goodare 2014). However, in discourse this remains interiorised 'belief', interpreted as 'about' something else such as explaining random child-loss, disease or disaster (Goodare 2014). Even looking across European contexts, the strangeness of witch-related data is only rarely used to ask what the embodiment and daily enactment of the reality of witches and their acts might say about the ontological properties of other things (e.g. van Gent 2009; Crossland 2010).

## 1.2 The Problem of Missing Things

There remains the insidious assumption that early modern witchcraft can be handled as an epistemological aberration as opposed to an ontological truth - perhaps because the word 'belief' itself is one which separates the manifest world from interior thought (Ruel 2008, 108; Pouillon 2008, 94). This reduction of ontology to 'belief' acts as a barrier to understanding the nature of early modern witchcraft as experienced: 'ontology' is not simply a matter of ideas; it is realised in practice, made up of things, bodies and beings interacting in myriad complex ways.

If, as Zedeño (2009; 2013) observes, we fail to break from our scholarly predisposition to categorise things according our own cultural assumptions, we fall at the first hurdle: the things of all worlds may be ordered but the end result is always culturally and temporally specific - there are no general taxa or universal parallel materials upon which we can rely. This holds true even for the biggest of categories: alive, dead and non-living, states which may be complex, protracted and overlapping (e.g. Jones and Cloke 2008; Crossland 2010; Tarlow 2011). Human and non-human, person and non-person all vary (Fowler 2004). Without solid engagement with the material world and the ways in which people inhabited it, the lived world of early modern Scots is strangely devoid of people. There, good Christians, witches and perhaps even good Christian witches and witch Christian 'baddies' lived and died, leaving evidence in their practices. Their complex and cross-cutting lives are almost entirely emptied of the agents (living and otherwise) which collaborated in the shaping of the co-fabrication of the world, for example: trees, stones, rivers, hills, houses, animals, weather, night and day. At best, each is a motif, idea or symbol of something else (e.g. Paterson 2012). However, they each contributed specific agencies, through which they intermingled to form new ontic categories. These categories were not insignificant: through their interrelations the bodies and beings of persons of all kinds, including fairy persons who were mostly invisible, emerged as real. The witch trial accounts offer the possibility of accessing this heterogeneous assemblage and the states, materials and beings existed and crossed over, if we know how and where to look.

### 1.3 A Situated Response

Tarlow (2011, 15) astutely observes that “archaeological evidence, along with historical evidence, does not witness beliefs [as thoughts/ideas/reasoning], but practices”, a perspective shared by Walker (2008) and by Morgan (2010a) and his collaborators. However, this emphasis on practice is yet to see significant discussion in relation to witch trial culture in Scotland (Cowan and Henderson 2002, 201). It is argued here that this is one of the most crucial cornerstones of any ontological approach and necessary to interpret the lived world of early modern Scots. Therefore, a wide net was cast for practices *within early modern Scottish culture*. To this end, the popular trend of adopting anthropological examples into Scottish witchcraft studies (e.g. Hutton 2002; Wilby 2011) is eschewed in favour of consolidating the wealth of Scottish data. This follows van Gent’s (2009, 198) call for the integration of witchcraft study into contemporary piety: thus the study looks for patterns in the constitution and dissolution of boundaries across practices. Those materials most relevant to this type of enquiry were explored by following four basic precepts:

- Starting ‘things’ were identified from which to work outwards towards relational taxonomies (Henare *et al* 2007b; Zedeño 2009; 2013).
- These things were ‘followed’ across contexts to build up layers of ontologically-specific material properties (Groleau 2009; for examples in practice, see Henare *et al* 2007a).
- Contexts which appeared frequently were investigated to find other materials to follow and to explore how new ontic categories emerge from collocations of thing and place (Fowler 2004; Zedeño 2009). Interpretation, theory and method were developed in an iterative manner committed to maintaining engagement with the strangeness of the data (Chapter 3: Disruptions).

The result is not a typical archaeological thesis: the material studies are wide-ranging and discursive. Rather, it is a situated approach which draws from many fields and incorporates many kinds of sources. Story-telling facilitates the suspension of disbelief, whilst ‘Disruptions’ - unique engagements with contemporary art - offer new inspiration in exploring past embodiment. Overall, this combination of research trajectories represents a new contribution to the study of alternative ontologies, presenting a pattern for moving between thing, place and person in a manner which allows for each to rebuild in unique ways that ultimately flex, rather than conform to, the boundaries of traditional disciplinary categories.

In applying a material approach to a subject area previously very little explored in this manner, the thesis also contributes a new perspective on witches and fairies in early modern Scotland. Expanding upon the work of historians to add significant new dimensions to the understanding of personhood and embodiment in Scotland, many of the themes will be of relevance to witchcraft studies in other early modern European contexts.

## 1.4 Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 introduces the relevant literature to an archaeology of witchcraft from across the fields of history and archaeology to position this thesis within its wider context. Chapter 3 then sets out a robust exposition on the theoretical framework for the research, exploring past approaches to the archaeology of alternative ontologies. Chapter 4 continues this discussion with specific focus on methodological concerns and the manner of movement between ‘things’, also setting out in detail the range of sources employed and their manner of use.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present a series of thematic case studies. Each chapter is preceded by a short story in two voices, written to compliment the main discussion in the chapter, and a ‘Disruption’. This is a reflection on a work of contemporary

art designed to stimulate engagements with alterity which may otherwise be lost though extended periods of academic discourse.

Chapter 5 begins the journey towards a relational taxonomy (Chapter 4: Ontology and Taxonomy), working out from the rags tied to trees at healing wells, moving through fabrics, into witch trials and sackcloths. In following the things through contexts and contexts through things, it applies the methodology and thereby presents new insights into the materiality of rag trees in the early modern period.

Chapter 6 begins with fairy arrows (or elfshot) exploring interactions between body, fairy, stone and water as revealed through the materials and witch trials. It also presents a new discussion of infant burials in Scotland which adds to wider scholarship of such sites in neighbouring Ireland. In doing so, it raises questions about the margins between body, personhood and land.

Chapter 7 opens with an intramural cat and investigates the boundaries between humans and the animals, exploring how cats and cows make infractions into the materiality of human flesh. Expanding on previous research (McCabe 2011), it also introduces joughs and branks as materials of discipline, exploring how the ‘things’ of church discipline fit into a shapeshifter ontology.

## 1.5 Maps

The following maps are referred to throughout the thesis and represent the case study areas further explained in Chapter 4. They are presented here for the sake of familiarity with the locations as they come into discussion and are referred to by key place name throughout the thesis; for example, *MUCKHART*. They are not quantitative in nature, nor do they serve to indicate the distribution of practices, rather they are intended to add further context to that provided in the discursive chapters (see Lloyd *et al* 2001, 58). Selected, adjacent case study areas are explored to develop more extended snapshots incorporating wider areas. On the

case study maps (Figures 2-9) case study settlements are shown in black and yellow; surrounding settlements in black; mentioned sites of interest such as fairy hills and wells in red.

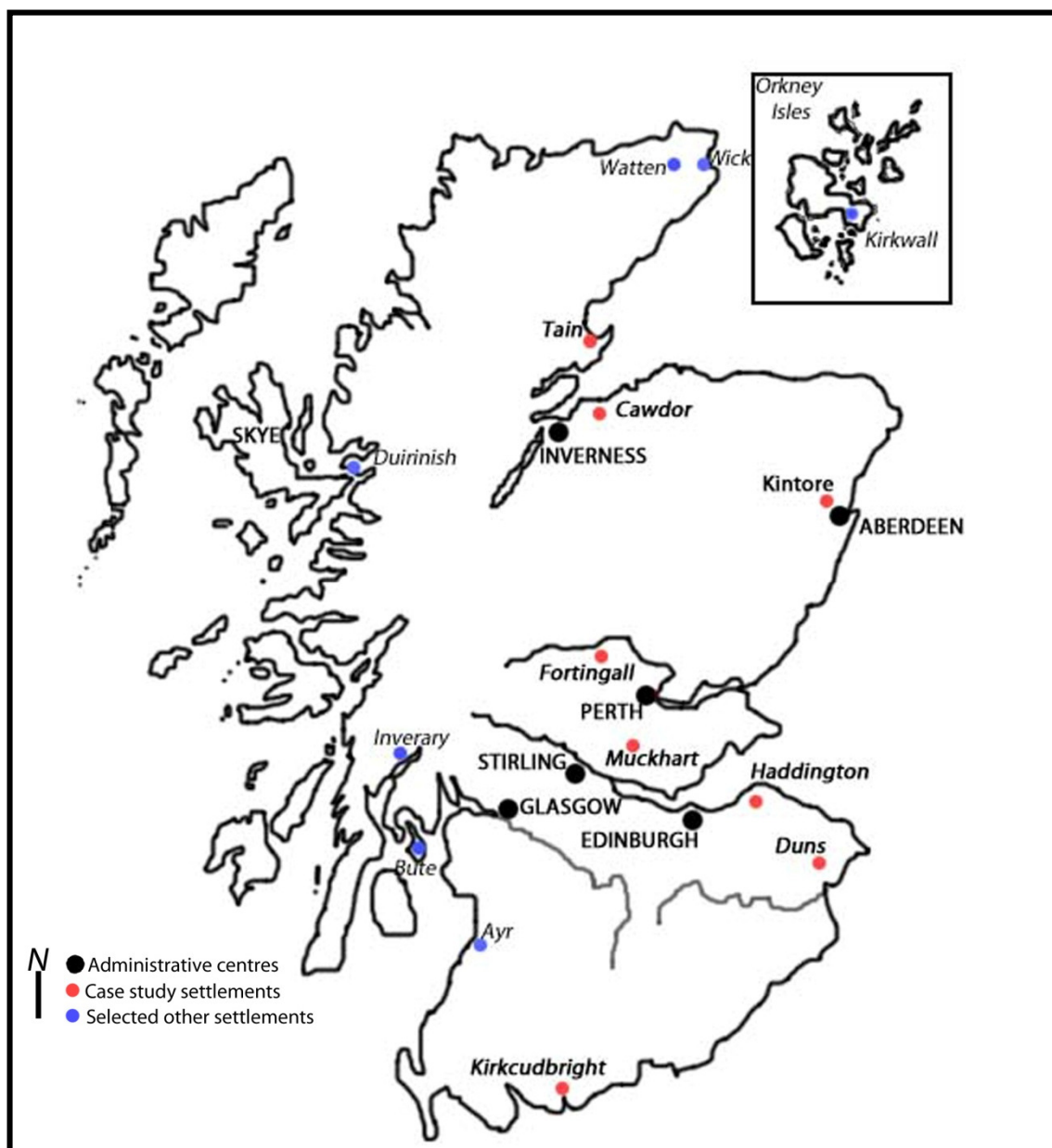


Figure 1: Map of Scotland showing case studies and selected other areas.



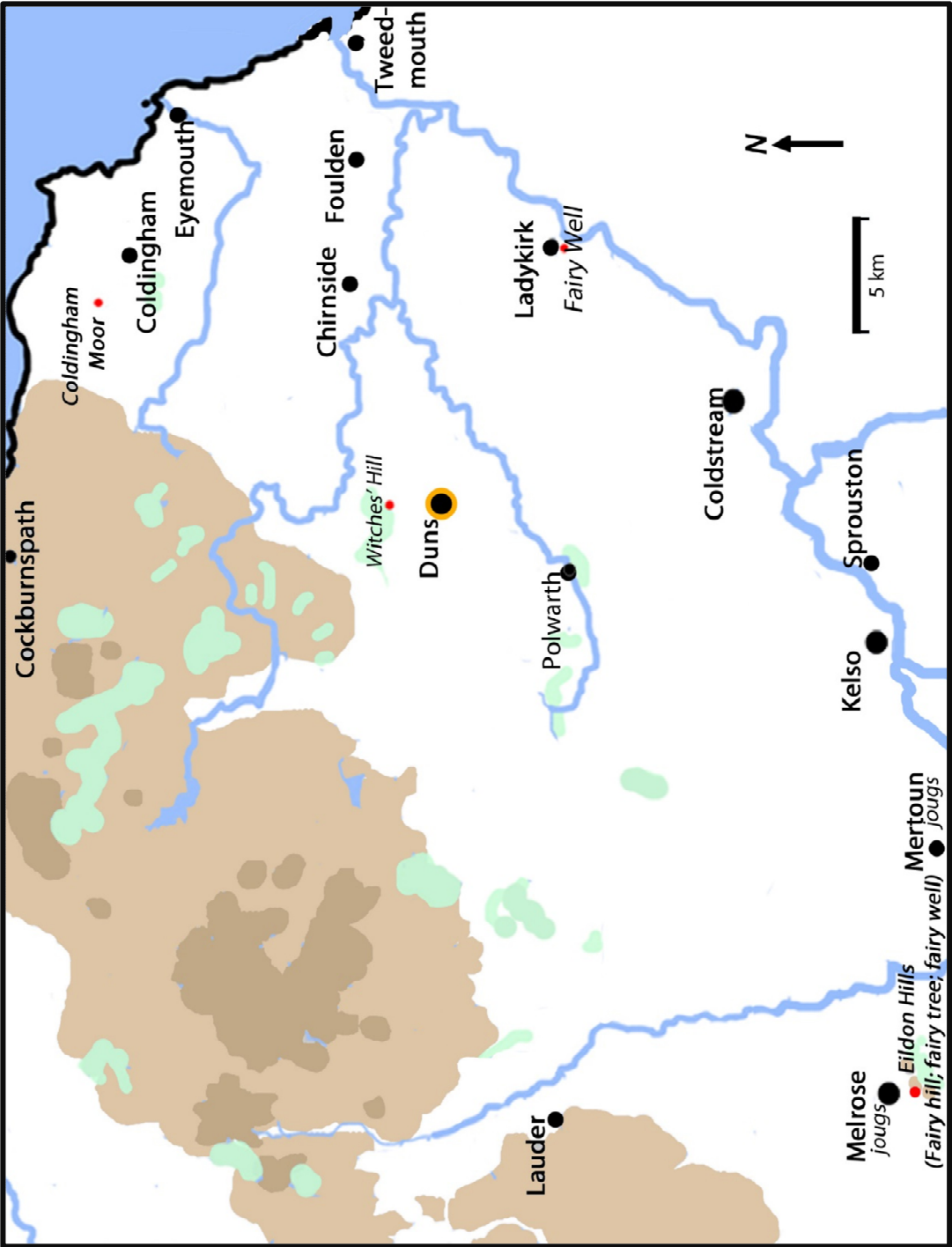


Figure 2: DUNS case study area, Scottish Borders.

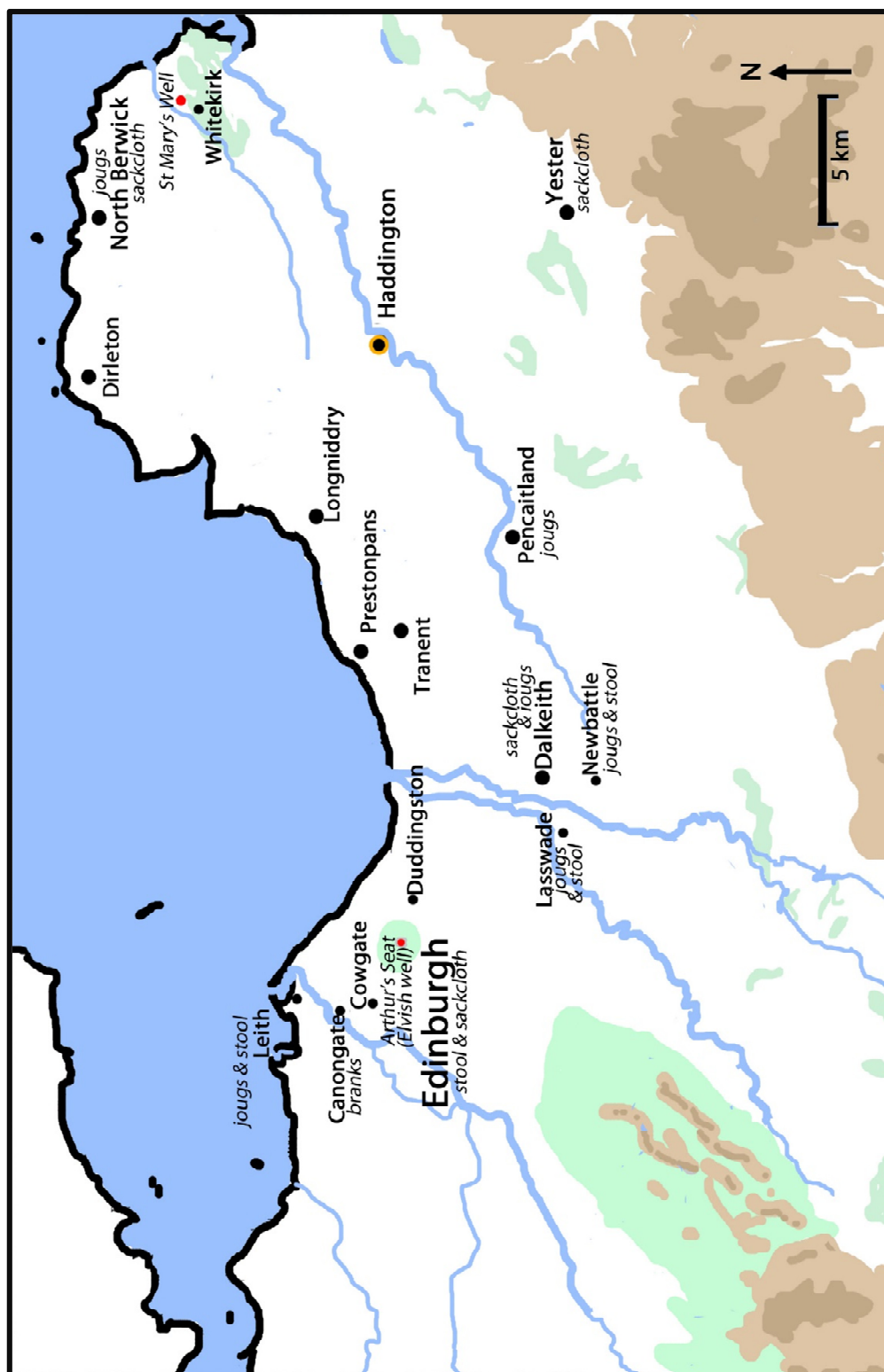


Figure 3: HADDINGTON case study area, East Lothian.

*This area encompasses that of the famous North Berwick trials (1590-1592).*

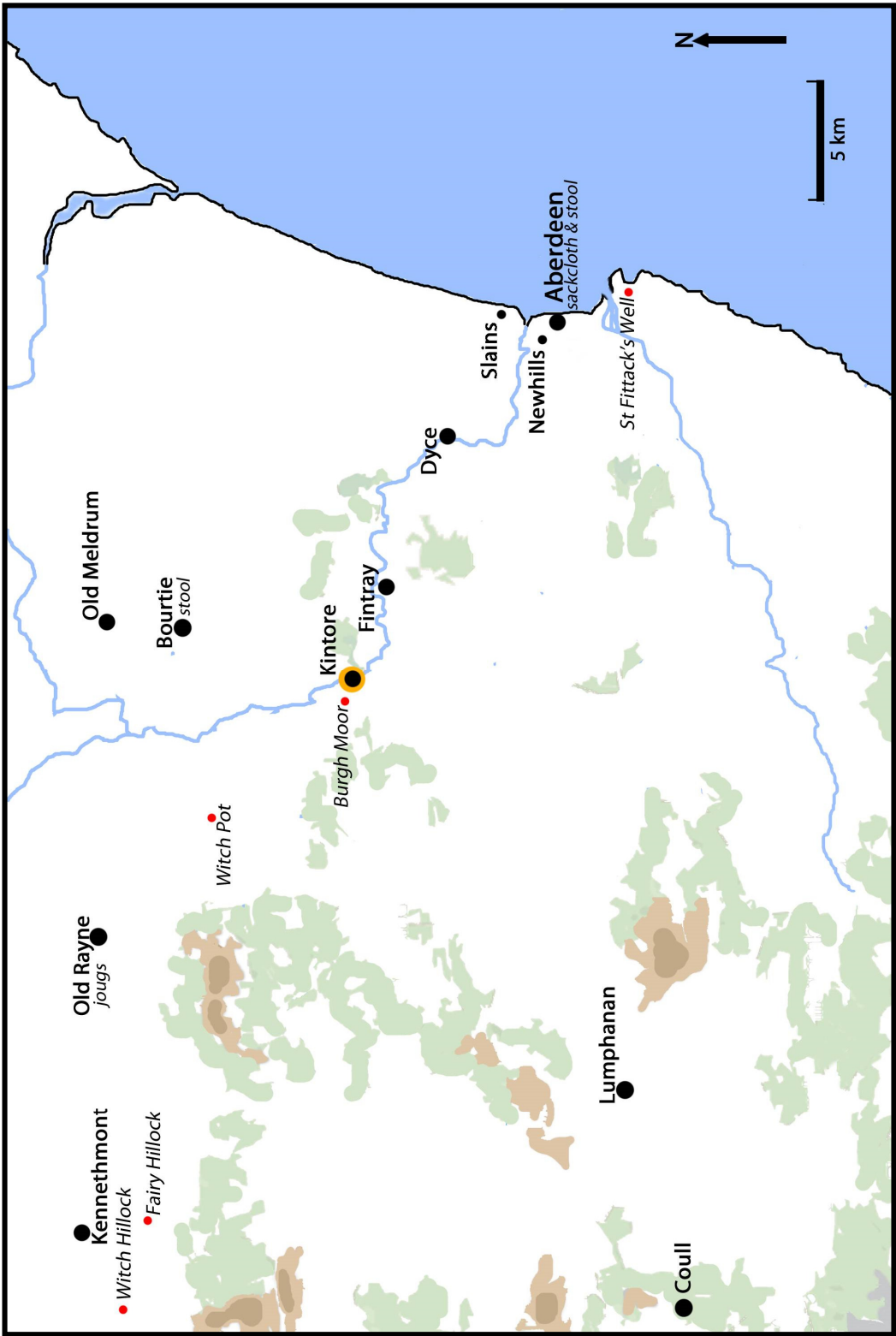


Figure 4: KINTORE case study area, Aberdeenshire

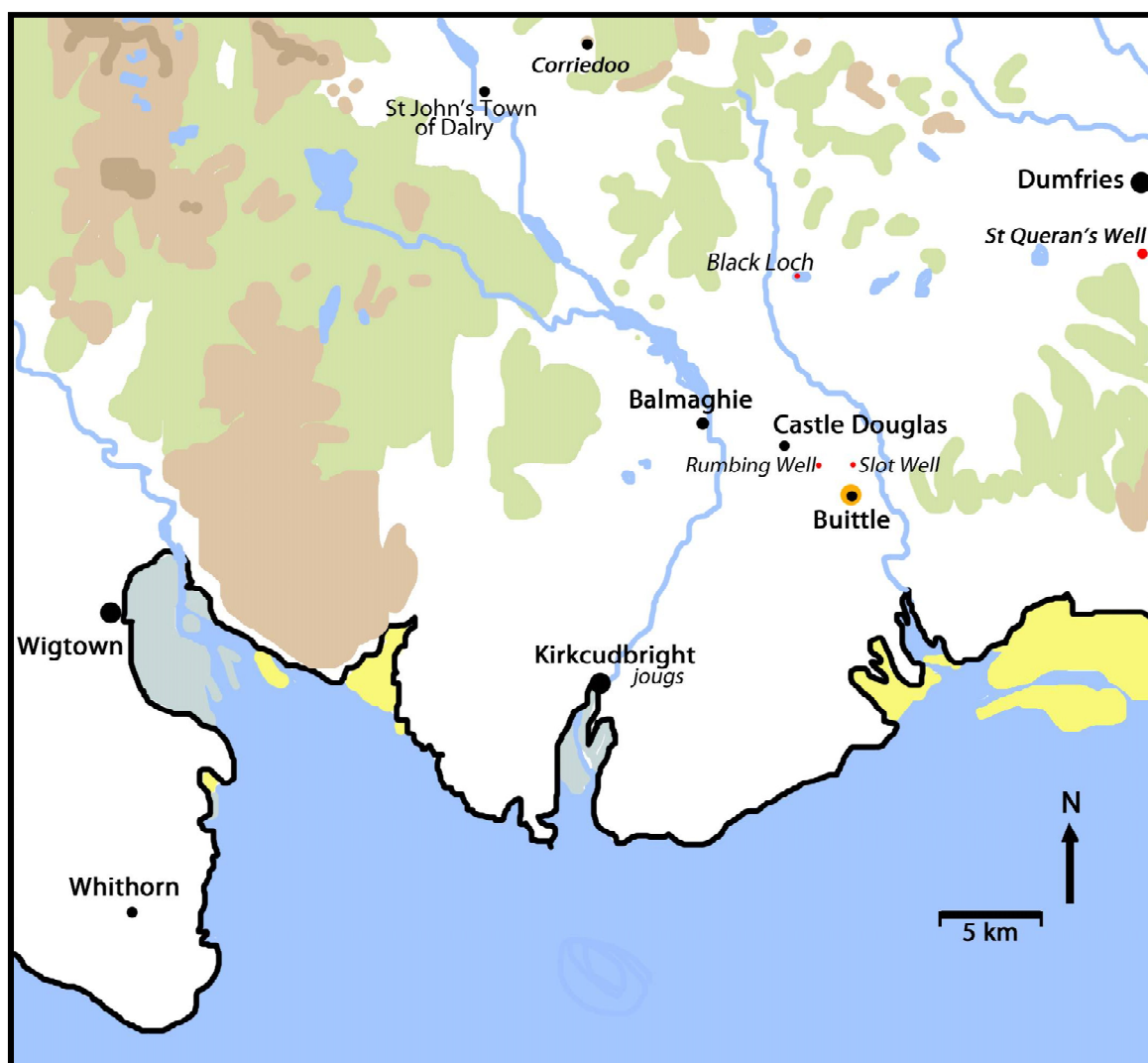


Figure 5: BUITTLE case study area, Kirkcudbrightshire

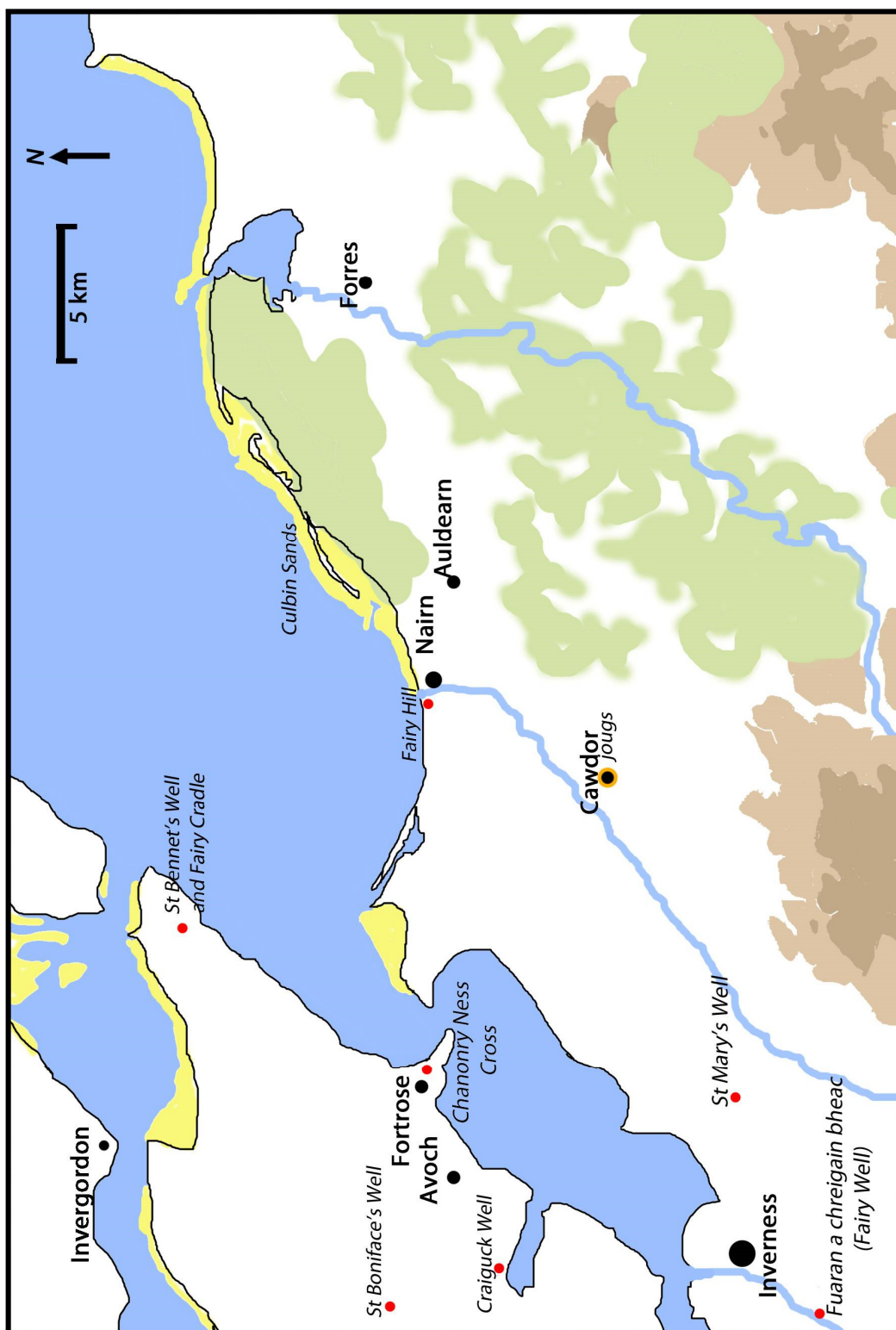


Figure 6: CAWDOR case study area, Nairnshire.

*This area covers Auldearn and Nairn, home of Scotland's most famous witch, Issobell Gowdie (executed 1661).*

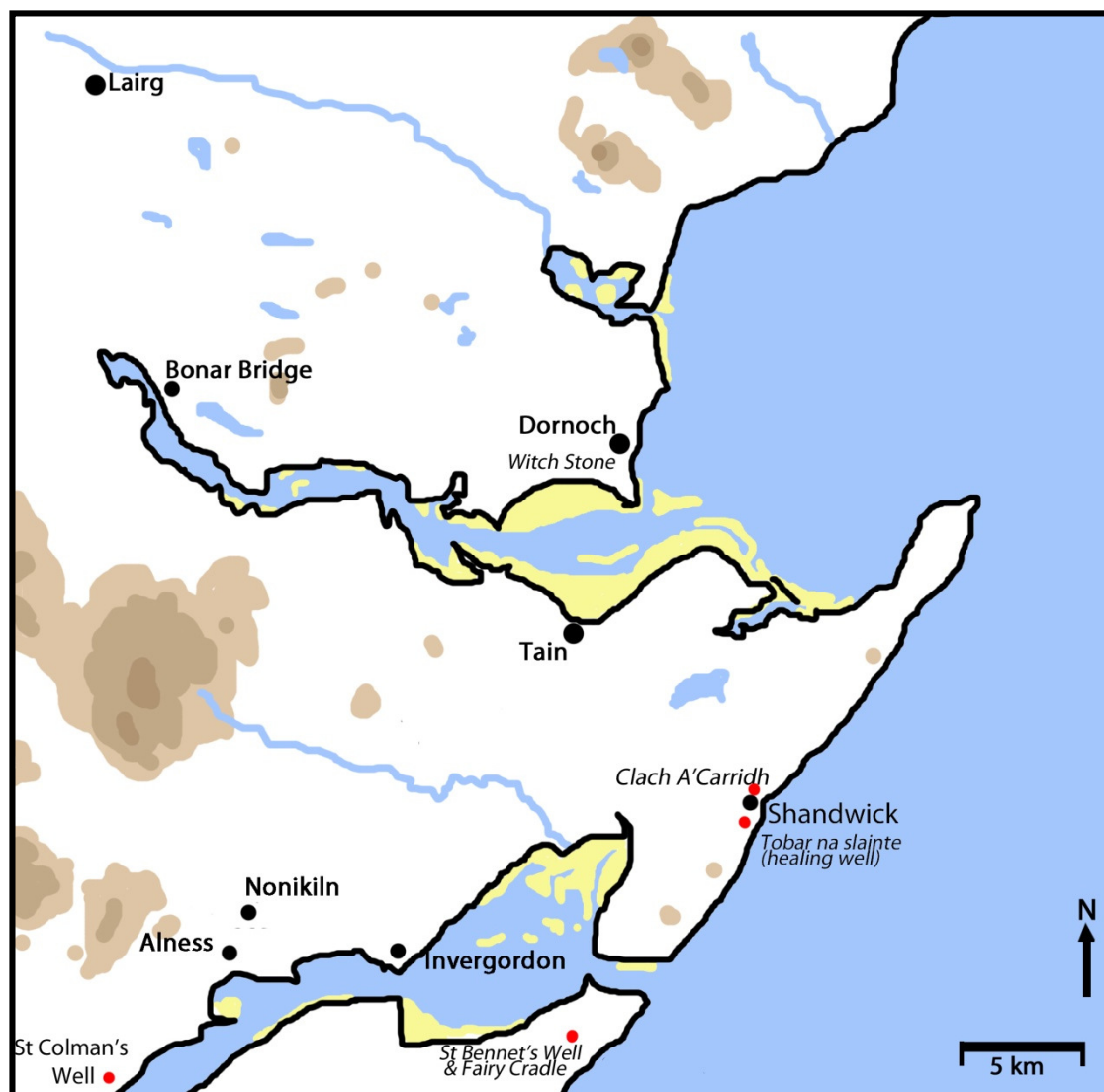


Figure 7: TAIN case study area, Ross-shire. The son of Robert Kirk (of Aberfoyle) was minister of Dornoch from 1713-1758 (Walsh 2002, 22). Within his parish, the last legal execution of a witch took place (Janet Horne, 1727).



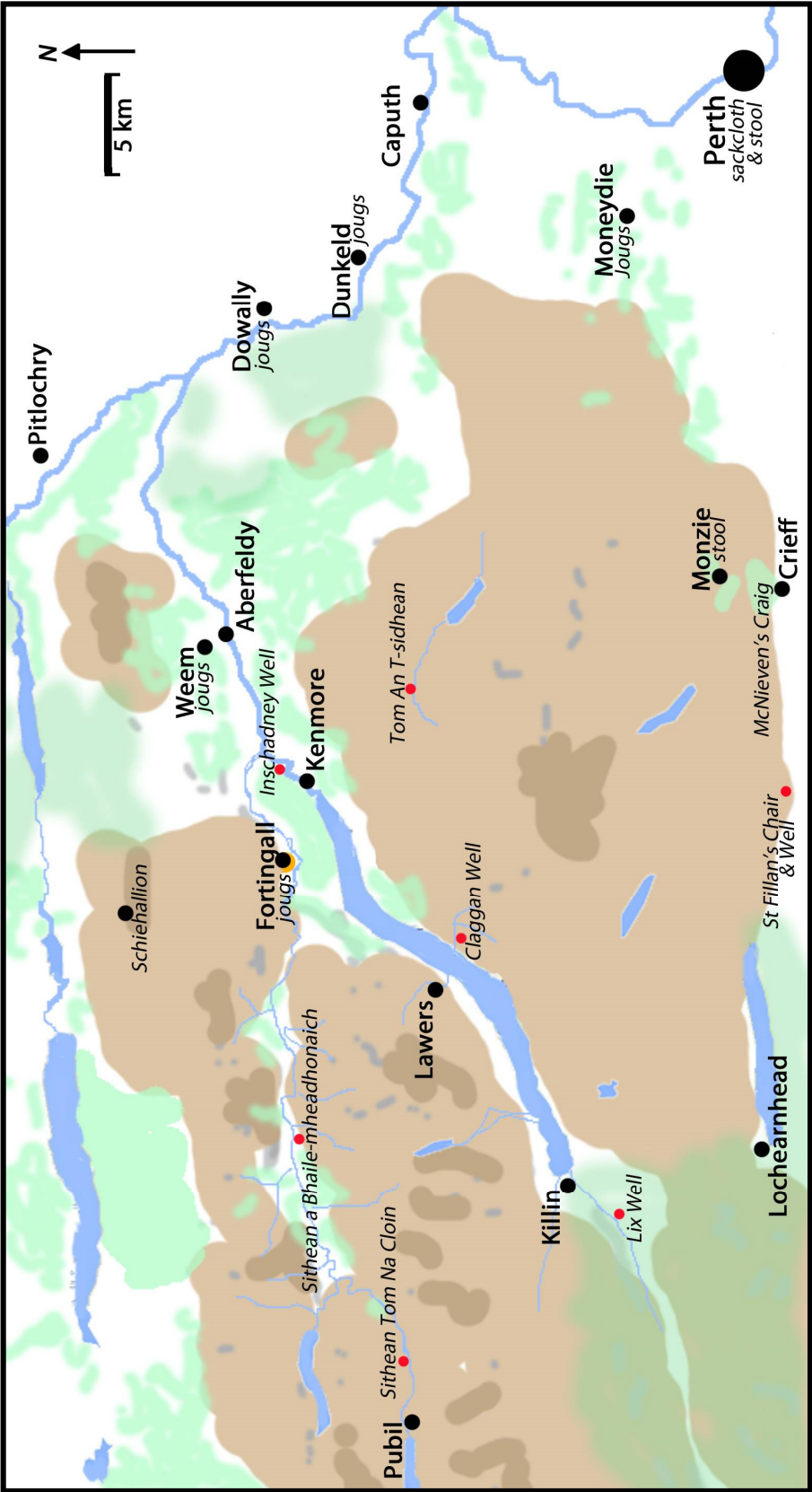


Figure 8: FORTINGALL case study area, Perthshire.

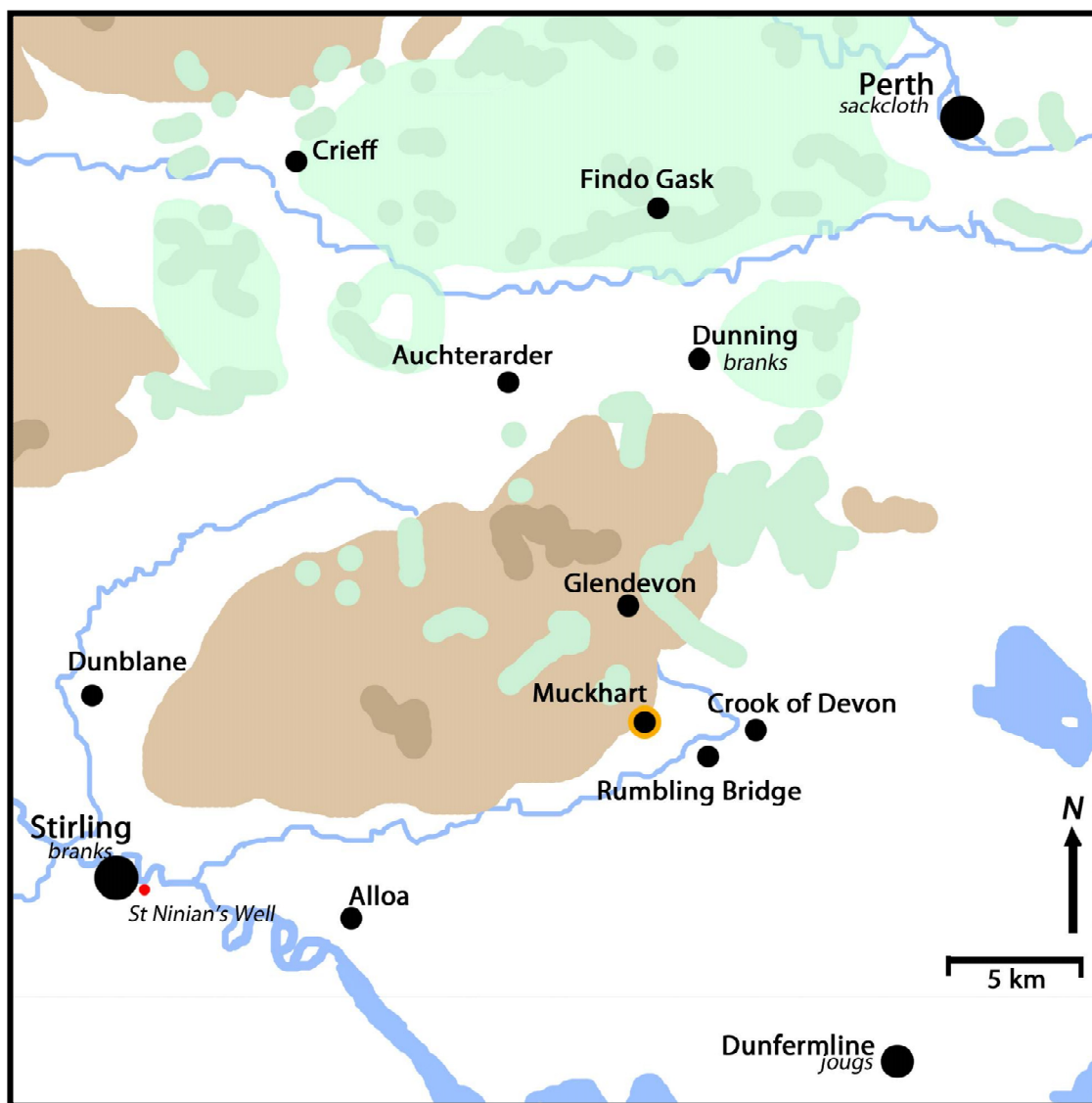


Figure 9: MUCKHART, Clackmannanshire (formerly Perthshire).



## Chapter 2: Research Context

A situated response to any early modern culture in which witchcraft was a serious ontological reality requires an interdisciplinary outlook. In this case, historical and archaeological approaches provide the basic foundation. Within the historical discipline, particularly excellent scholarship has opened up new areas of research to provide a fertile starting point. Henderson and Cowan's (2001) revelation of the need to take folk-belief in fairies seriously, Todd's (2002) discussion of the material culture of early modern discipline, Walsham's (2011) identification of the role of the landscape in Reformation, and van Gent's (2009) exploration of early modern embodiment in Sweden have broken new ground. However, while these works offer useful directions to follow, they all fail to deliver a robust, materially grounded account of early modern experience. They engage primarily with the intellectual world, resulting in works which promise landscapes, bodies and material culture, but do not succeed in getting to the matter at hand because they are not theoretically or methodologically equipped to do so.

Archaeological and material culture-orientated approaches are well positioned to address the missing 'things' of early modern European witchcraft scholarship. However, the archaeology of early modern magic is very much a nascent field, currently populated by very few scholars (e.g. Merrifield 1987; Wallis and Lymer 2001; Hoggard 2004; Herva 2009; 2010). Although none deal specifically with Scotland, their studies provide the groundwork for a situated response to Scottish witchcraft, establishing witchcraft as a credible area of archaeological enquiry. Research into the later Medieval period provides useful theoretical, methodological and interpretative templates, most notably Gilchrist's (2008)

sensitive exploration of amulets. She takes the discussion from how one *might* achieve an archaeology of magic firmly into the realms of how one does so. This is a significant advance on Merrifield's (1987) work, which primarily sets out a list of materials loosely classified as magical, but without the all-important contextual discussion and local-level interpretation offered by Gilchrist's (2008) more tightly defined research period, geographical focus, find contexts and material set. No study to date, however, has produced a convincing exploration of witchcraft that recognises the ontological priorities of early modern Scots and accounts for bodies, people and things in practice, in a world where witchcraft is ontologically *real*.

It is not intended to offer a comprehensive review of all literature on the subject of Scottish witch trials generated within the field of history. References, sufficient that Hutton (2010, 247) claims historians now know most of the whos, wheres, whys, whats and whens of European witchcraft, would quickly run into the hundreds (for a recent review see Gaskill 2008). Rather, the aim is to highlight some of the main themes addressed and current trends, specifically as they relate to Scotland. The existing literature has been evaluated in relation to the aim of this thesis to develop a situated response to early modern Scottish witchcraft and its underlying ontology, and to the wider endeavour of developing an approach suitable for further exploration of similar topics in other contexts.

Whilst anthropology is a standard bedfellow for witchcraft studies, and for archaeology in general and indeed is used alongside folklore by a number of scholars discussed below (e.g. Wilby 2011), it is not drawn upon as a resource here. This is in deference to the argument that witch beliefs are best understood *in their own context* (Clark 1997, 3-10). Clark's is not a new criticism, with similar concerns previously mooted by Hildred Geertz (1975, 88) who more directly questioned the suitability of anthropological parallels as historical tools, highlighting that 'native' comparisons undermined "historical specificity, uniqueness and multiplicity" (cf. Hutton 2004). Keeping the local context foremost in mind, only recent and emergent works relating to witchcraft in international contexts that offer significant advancement in theory or practice relevant to the situated response at hand are reviewed.

## 2.1 Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft: Historiography

Julian Goodare (2008, 27) claims that “When Scotland is placed in its European context it vanishes, becoming indistinguishable from its surroundings”. There is a degree of truth in this statement, both in the similar witch persecutions occurring across Europe at roughly the same times, and in the expression of new academic trends across international scholarship. However, despite these parallels, there remains no scholarly consensus that a single reason (or set of reasons) equally contributes to witch beliefs across contexts (Levack 2016, 1-3). Indeed, even comparisons with Scotland’s closest neighbour, England (also under the same monarch for much of the period of legal trials and executions) prove both fruitful and frustrating. Research indicates the English female-to-male ratio of accused was higher, but accusations per head of population were lower by a factor of at least ten (Sharpe 2002: 182; Goodare *et al* 2003; Levack 2016, 20-21). In Denmark, Hutton (2002, 26-27) describes similar ratios to England, offering Danish-settled Iceland as a contrast, and suggesting merit in an Iceland-Scotland enquiry, but unlike most places, in Iceland the majority of witches were male rather than female. In making the case for comparison, the fact that there is no clear picture of the underlying material contexts somehow goes overlooked.

There may be similar political and economic trends across countries, but there is no universal character to European witchcraft at the local level. When Goodare (2008, 27) goes as far as suggesting that Scotland is an ‘ideal case study’ for European witchcraft for its typicality - “Scotland simply *is* Europe” - he is constructing a straw man. The underlying argument is very much one that suggests more local responses are required, as opposed to grand, overarching syntheses, a strength of his recent edited collections (Goodare *et al* 2008; Goodare 2013b). Goodare (2008, 27) rightly asserts that broad similarities should not be assumed more significant or worthy of study and interpretation than the (usually) more subtle differences. Developing this argument further, this thesis proposes that the act of comparison must post-date investigating local contexts. Only once the

material worlds in question are better understood might they be usefully compared. With this in mind, the historiography of early modern European witchcraft is considered only where relevant to formulating the research approach adopted, and so is not here reviewed in depth nor drawn upon for comparison. Whilst the development of the wider European discussion constitutes the broadest brush strokes of the current research context (for a detailed introduction, see Nenonen and Tiovo 2014a), this study's emphasis on specific Scottish material environments requires a very targeted approach. Of greatest interest are some of the new trajectories of European scholarship: those works heading in new directions and engaging in the act of "challenging of the current cannon" (Nenonen and Tiovo 2014b, 2).

Using Scottish material to challenge existing work is not new: Larner (1973; 1981; 1984; 2005 [1977]) first conclusively marked out Scottish evidence as a separate arena when she engaged in rigorous critique of the intellectual pillars of English witchcraft scholarship, Thomas (1970; 1971) and Macfarlane (1970). Thomas (1971) and MacFarlane (1970) theorised that English witchcraft could be understood through a charity-refused model, focusing on socio-economic aspects of local and interpersonal tensions and drawing heavily upon (mostly Africa-orientated) anthropological parallels. Such interpretations were popular at the time as the study of witchcraft was a current, prominent anthropological concern (e.g. Middleton 1967; Douglas 1970; Marwick 1970). Critiquing their approach, Larner (1981) disputed their anthropological bent for promoting small-scale, socio-economic focus and refuted the local-centric, charity-refused model. Instead she favoured a Trevor-Roper (1967) inspired analysis. Her emphasis on witchcraft as occurring from the top down via elite demonology and the legal system, and within the framework of state formation and the establishment of the post-Reformation Kirk (Larner 1981) has not endured (Holmes 1993; Macdonald 2003; Levack 1996, 103-4; Goodare 2002b). However, her refusal to cast a global net to explain the Scottish context is an invaluable example, and almost certainly the reason her work remained the unparalleled cannon text for almost two decades.

Larner (1981, 82) challenged many assumptions about the rise in witch trials during the early modern period; disputing, for example, that witch panics could be correlated directly with plagues, famines, or other disasters. She also drew attention to gender bias, using witchcraft accusations as a window into male domination over female bodies. Other scholars have since established a more complex picture across European contexts, in which women were both the victims of witch accusations and the accusers (e.g. Sharpe 1991; Roper 1994; Purkiss 1995; 2000; 2001; Briggs 1996a; 1996b). However, even in more recent works the body (female or otherwise) is invariably ‘read’ as a social text and gender considered as a wider intellectual issue: there is little sense of the material being. Even in works attempting to explain witchcraft as something as biologically located as ergot poisoning from imported rye, the question is never asked whether ‘witchcraft’ as an explanation can be fitted into an ontology where the body is experienced as similar to the modern, medicalised body (e.g. Duncan 1993, 30-36; 1994; Whyte 1994, 89-90; Boyd 1995, 77). If it cannot, then not only another explanation, but another ontology must be considered.

Elsewhere, however, interesting questions have been asked. In Germany, the work of Lyndal Roper (1994) in particular, drew attention to the need to remember that bodies are physical as well as social; arguing, for example:

*“[the] concept of the psyche assumes that body and mind, emotion and history are interrelated, and that sexual identities, while they may have a history, are not mere social constructions” (Roper 1994, 48).*

Roper essentially claims that there was something inherent in the bodies of women which made them problematic, stemming from the unique possibilities of female embodiment such as motherhood and menopause (Roper 1994, 208-218; see also: Purkiss 1996). Others have added nuances, drawing similar connections with Bever’s (1982) observations on age between old witch-women and female aging (e.g. Briggs 1996b, 264; Rowlands 2000). Women have come into focus (e.g. Purkiss 1995; 1996; 2001; Clark 1997; Martin 2002; 2013), but their bodies remain static,

tidy: ideas of bodies. The infant, male, and/or animal bodies with which they shared the world receive even less attention.

In the past 15 years the field of Scottish witchcraft studies has gained traction, beginning in earnest with the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (Goodare *et al* 2003 - henceforth SSW). This database and online interface provides access (to varying degrees) to material from all known Scottish trials, and has stimulated the field significantly. A small but growing number of scholars are exploring new niches (e.g. Goodare 2002c; Goodare *et al* 2008; Henderson 2009; Goodare 2013b) and ‘many reasons why’, with several bringing ‘folk belief’ back into the foreground of the discussion (e.g. Miller 2002; Henderson 2007; Goodare and Miller 2008; Cheape 2009). Martin (2002), Miller (2002) and Macdonald (2002a) all, in their own ways, contest the significance of the Devil; a motif from Continental, elite demonologies they argue has been significantly overstated. Even works which seemingly deal with said demonologies, such as Maxwell-Stuart (2001), now give space to popular belief. He argues for the significant shaping role of Scottish traditions in the writing of James VI and I, over that of Continental demonology (Maxwell-Stuart 2001; 2004). Maxwell-Stuart’s work has been heavily critiqued for omitting seminal studies with which he disagreed (Goodare 2003). However, volumes such as Normand and Robert’s (2000) *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland* and papers such as Sharpe’s (2002) add further steps to the incremental process of integrating popular practice into witchcraft discourses.

Whilst this is undoubtedly a positive turn, there continues to be little engagement with materiality - collectively the papers and chapters of recent years are predominantly remote from the physical world. There remains an overall emphasis on social and political changes at scales where the ‘folk’ of ‘folk belief’ - their practices and their bodies - disappear. Such scales are far more conducive to engaging kings (e.g. James VI and I) and the intellectual elite (e.g. Goodare 2002d). No landscapes, no objects, no ordinary people with fleshy, messy bodies emerge from these pages. Even Miller’s (2002) article on charms contains no images and gives no material account of either things or practices.

The fact that scholarship continues to find itself with the same deficit highlights a problem endemic throughout Scottish witchcraft studies. As Clark (1997, vii) says:

*“[it] is simply not the case that witchcraft theory caused ‘witch-hunts’ or rather that its incidence influenced theirs; indeed the reverse is much more likely to be true”.*

The turn towards folk belief has not yet reduced the overall gap in understanding between ‘religious’ beliefs and ‘popular’ ones, nor has it asked (let alone answered) the questions which make Clark’s (1997, vii) assertion possible: what natures of being and lived-in world have to exist for ordinary people to believe in witches enough to want them executed, and for elite communities to likewise hold these beliefs enough to operate the legal machinery which facilitated this?

The temptation of many scholars is to connect this to the process of Reformation (e.g. Larner 1981). Scholarship recognises a golden age and a ‘long Reformation’, beginning with a slow trickle some decades before official Reform in 1560 and extending into the 1720s (Wallace 2012). It cannot be overlooked as coincidence that the witch trials in Scotland fall within the same time frame, with the first trial in 1563, and the last execution in the 1720s. Nevertheless, even a brief review of the literature generated in the past half century establishes that there remains work to be done.

The roles of the Kirk, local nobility and elite demonology set out by Larner have since been revisited (e.g. MacDonald 2002a; 2002b; Martin 2002; Maxwell-Stuart 2001; Wormald 2000). However, in such discussions the schism between scholarship on the Reformation and on witch beliefs remains painfully evident. For example, in 2003 Reformation historian Ian Hazlett (2003, 166-168) attributed witch trials to radical Biblicism resulting in a literal attempt to recreate the Old Testament law. In his argument, the Exodus command ‘thou shalt not suffer a witch to live’ became sufficient justification to hunt witches in itself. However, witchcraft scholarship was already decentralising the role of the Kirk (Goodare 2002a; 2002b; 2002c). That said, Goodare (2005a; 2005b) has since produced a compelling work on the origin and wording of the Witchcraft Act of 1563, suggesting it was authored

by Reformer, John Knox. Knox was out of touch with whether popular opinion differentiated between witches and charmers; he was actually mostly concerned with punishing charmers and their clients (Goodare 2005a). Goodare (2005a) asserts that maleficent ‘witches’ came from popular belief, and that it was those beliefs that then shaped how the Act was used and interpreted in the early days, setting the tone for 170 years of witch trials, until its repeal.

This historiographical divide between those who study witchcraft and those who focus on popular piety is widespread and deep, with very little engagement between the two. Analyses of popular beliefs that incorporate both early modern witchcraft and the Reformation are few and far between, Gilchrist (2008), working on medieval British amulets, providing a rare archaeological exception. Henderson (2011) meanwhile, offers a valuable historical example, weaving together witch trials, ecclesiastical changes and the progression of elite demonology in a short but insightful discussion. Following their examples, it is argued here that we must, as Raudvere (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 870-871) suggests, attempt to reconcile ‘religion’ and ‘folk religion’ into a single but highly heterogeneous framework if we wish to understand how a past people interpreted the world.

## 2.2 Integrating Religion and Folk Religion: Recent Advances

Where popular belief is gaining traction in witchcraft scholarship, popular practices are gaining ground in Reformation studies. Todd (2002) spends a great deal of time discussing popular practices documented (though not necessarily condoned) by the Kirk. Her work opens up new areas of enquiry, making a good case for incorporating the materiality of folk belief into religious narratives. She offers many colourful accounts from early Kirk Session records across Scotland, and advocates that historians “pay attention to [...] the things that contemporaries saw and experienced as well as what they read and heard” (Todd 2002, 21). This is invaluable advice; however, primarily a historian, she struggles as others have before her, to do the material culture justice (e.g. Graham 1996). Selecting a very



partial assemblage (in theory the material culture of church discipline in early modern Scotland, but in practice only the discipline stool and sackcloth are addressed). Her study overlooks many physical aspects that arise from the materiality of the objects and/or bodies of which she hopes to enquire (McCabe 2011). She does not appear to be familiar with Harrison's article on branks. Harrison (1998) draws from Stirling kirk records to usefully demonstrate that, whilst branks were not used on witches, they were used more frequently during times of witch apprehension, more clearly relating kirk discipline to wider witch beliefs than Todd ever does.

Todd (2002) draws upon performance theories, which become both a strength and a weakness in her argument: offering many fascinating ideas and representing a significant shift in thinking on the material culture of discipline when compared to older works (e.g. Graham 1996). Unfortunately, primarily undertaken as an intellectual discussion, this approach ultimately leads to a 'God's eye view' (Inomata and Coben 2006a, 30). The overall effect, when paired with lack of attention to concerns of materiality, is to push the reader back to an interior experience, where the actors are carriers of signification, as opposed to experiencing bodies (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 16; McCabe 2011). They are performing a ritual, as opposed to living a religious reality, a distinction increasingly well recognised by archaeologists (for examples see Insoll 2011). Todd's (2002) study focuses on practices punishable directly by the Kirk. Witchcraft does not feature because it came under secular legal jurisdiction, despite being a contemporary and intimately related phenomenon.

Todd's (2002) study breaks new ground in historical discussion, but in material terms she engages naively with her small assemblage. Alexandra Walsham's (2011) contribution to Reformation scholarship is also pioneering, but it leans the other way, adopting a far greater temporal and geographical scope than could ever be possible: the whole British Isles from prehistory until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Walsham makes an excellent case that the landscape should not be considered a neutral backdrop to religious changes, and attempts, with a very broad brush, to chart how the Reformation materially affected it. She contests, rightly, that landscape history

must be enfolded into understandings of religion, for religious beliefs “must be acknowledged as critical agents in the making of physical environments” (Walsham 2011, 565).

The scope of the volume, diversity of sources and extent of the references are truly impressive. Her attack on conventional wisdom is such that Thomas (2011, 15) accused her of threatening to “throw the baby out with the bath water”; however, Walsham’s execution is variable. She pays great heed to written works and her analysis of landscape is one of deep-rooted ocularcentricity. In her exploration of the *Reformation of the Landscape*, Walsham (2011) devoted extended space for detail discussions of later social phenomena - for example, Antiquarianism, the Renaissance, and medical innovation. However, she ignores the contemporary culture of witch and fairy beliefs almost entirely. Walsham (2011) has great ideas. She attends to religious beliefs as agentive in the production of physical environments. She points out that maps tell only one story: obscuring alternative narratives - different ways of experiencing place and movement through landscapes that accompany oral traditions and different ways of being in the world (Walsham 2011, 14-15). However, her study, like that of so many historians, remains fixed in books and documents, never setting foot out into the spaces it seeks to explore: she leaves the tantalising question of how landscapes are agents in the making of religious beliefs unasked.

Like Todd (2002), Walsham (2011) makes excellent use of Kirk Session records to document cases which illustrate her argument, particularly those relating to their shared interest of well visiting. However, like Todd, she falls into the trap of using archaeology as a handy illustrative device, underestimating the needs of multi-disciplinary scholarship. Her work is similarly unable to stand up to archaeological scrutiny. Todd’s artefacts are strangely immaterial; Walsham’s (2011) landscapes oddly devoid of any physicality of place. Boivin (2008, 20-21) highlights this problem in other contexts: “what is presented is a world of material surfaces, to which concepts emerging from a higher plane are attached”.

Reviewing scholarship relating to the act of rag tying provides a perfect example of the manner in which artefacts are rendered immaterial within the literature as a whole. Rags were tied to trees by those visiting holy wells, an experience Henderson (2007, 10) argues which would have been shared by the majority of early modern Scots, either through their own visits or via contact with well-water treated items or drinks. Despite this apparent ubiquity, the acts associated with well visiting, occurring very much within the post-Reformation period, are interpreted by Walsham (2011, 462) as “a residual notion that symbolic actions and words could channel supernatural power”, an ‘evolution’ of the ecclesiastical into “something that looked remarkably like a charm, wish or spell”. In a single assertion, these acts are demoted from ontologically meaningful enactments of agency, to ‘notions’. Worse, they are “old fashioned practices whose familiarity was a source of psychological comfort, if not real physical belief”, drawing Catholics by ‘instinct’, hinting at the acts of a mindless ‘animal’ (Walsham 2011, 460). Henderson (2007) also inserts her own value-laden judgements: describing variations of some practices as ‘ghoulish’, without pursuing any further interpretative discussion (Henderson 2007, 23).

Walsham’s (2011, 462) assertion echoes Hartland’s (1893, 461) contention more than a century ago, that rags are a ‘degradation’ of an earlier practice where entire garments were left, offering an equally loaded ‘evolution’ as a possible alternative (both hierarchically ranking cultures and practices). Hartland (1893, 463-7), in attempting to find one explanation for all similar rag-tying practices across the world and throughout time (a project of impossible scope), suggests that they are a logical counterpart to witch beliefs. His brief and undeveloped conclusion is that if a witch is believed to harm through clothing that is remote from the owner’s body it makes sense for a rag left at a healing site to affect the body positively (Hartland 1893, 463-7). However, more than a century later, this is yet to be explored in any theoretical depth.

Hartland (1893) and Walsham (2011) look to pre-Reformation and even pre-Christian *ideology* for the origins of rag well sites and practices (see also Miller 2002, 100 for another example). This overextension is also common in witchcraft

scholarship, for example, Henderson (2007, 24) claims fairy beliefs and the practices of charmers were “probably centuries old” and Wilby (2011, 26) declares them “rooted in the animism of the pre-Christian Scots”. Looking at early modern protective/apotropaic burn-marks in churches, Lloyd *et al* (2001, 57, 67) refer to the ‘superstitious origin’ of a ‘superstitious activity’, considering the practice as “part of an extensive vocabulary of protective measures employed by people since Roman times”. Such assertions remove wells, fairies and charmers (and related practices) from their contemporary material contexts: they may have served as a connection to the past, but their role in the heterogeneous assemblage of early modern bodies, beings, materials and ‘things’ is consistently left uninvestigated. They exist only in the scholarship of ideas and ‘notions’.

The common understanding of rag tying at wells as the last remnant of a fading tradition and materially unimportant is potent. None of the scholars above devote any space in their text to considering the potential relationships between witchcraft, charming and healing wells; and places, bodies, stones and/or the materiality of the rag itself. Rattue (1995, 1-2) described these theoretically devoid ‘timeless’ holy wells as “appallingly served by scholarship”, and to a lesser degree this may still be the case. Advances have been made, but considerable work remains to be done in situating healing/holy wells within their early modern ontological context. The one noteworthy exception to this trend concludes that placing stones at Irish wells was a form of anal-erotic protest against Protestantism (Carroll 1999). There are significant issues with this conclusion given the highly critiqued Freudian methodology, and thus it is not further discussed.

To date, these examples remain the very best of historical material studies; many more offer no material world at all. Walsham (2011) and Todd (2002) both set out in new directions for Reformation studies perhaps better suited to a more situated response; investigating human relationships with physical places and things. Raising as many questions as she answers, Walsham’s (2011) work also sets the scene for an implied but overlooked direction of inquiry: she considers how landscapes reveal early modern attitudes towards the land, but not the reciprocal notion - how they reveal attitudes towards early modern bodies and identities. We might ask the

same of Todd's material culture of discipline (McCabe 2011). Taken together, the works of Walsham and Todd provide both a solid base for archaeological approaches to Reformation and ample space for others to contribute to the lines of enquiry they open.

## 2.3 Seeing Fairies and Otherworlds in the Past

Where bodies and other tangible things have been overlooked in much of the literature relating to witchcraft, 'otherworlds' have been virtually avoided (Cowan 2009, 2), and yet this topic is intimately connected to witch trial culture and the experience of living in a world with witches in it. Witches, as they were believed to exist, did not exist in a vacuum: they shared the world with a full spectrum of beings, from ordinary humans upon whom they could act, to unbaptised infants with fairy-like qualities (Purkiss 2000, 60-61), to fairies and other magical beings who all people had the potential to encounter. Interactions across any of these categories were considered real and observable, and resulted in material evidence which is often still extant, including countercharms, infant burial grounds, and witch trial accounts.

However, these invisible beings are not typically treated seriously within the scholarly discourse on Scottish witchcraft (for examples of better handling see Maxwell-Stuart 2001; Macdonald 2002b; Hall 2005; 2006; though none of them firmly grasp fairies as ontologically real). Lerner (1981) did not concern herself with their relevance at all; Thomas (1971) afforded them little more attention, in a shared chapter with ghosts. Their absence, as noted by Newton (2002, 276), extends back into the oldest modern literature on Scottish witchcraft, and has continued to be addressed seriously by too few scholars latterly. Only a notable few have attempted to cross the supernatural line that divided (and also often connected) humans and fairies in early modern experience (e.g. Purkiss 2000; Henderson and Cowan 2001; Wilby 2005; Henderson 2009a; 2011).

In an innovative example of an exception to scholarly fairy-aversion, Purkiss (2000), though dealing with Scotland in only one chapter, has a great deal of relevance to offer in her history of fairies and fairy stories. She actively advocates the use of Scottish witch trial accounts to understand popular fairy belief for their unusual richness (Purkiss 2000, 87). Her approach is literary, with an eye for the psychological, and she accurately states that we need to “recover the fear of fairies in order to understand their importance to pre-industrial people” and invites her readers to forget their preconceived ideas of fairies and embark upon a story with her to achieve the ‘distance and alienation’ (from modern life) necessary to truly appreciate Britain’s native fairies (Purkiss 2000, 11-15). Offering insight into a world where bad fairies lurked in the shadows of liminal spaces and times, her narratives are an extremely effective tool. It is also through her retellings of numerous fairy(like) tales of ancient Mediterranean demons, that she highlights qualities of fairies relevant to a study of Scottish witch beliefs emphasising embodiment (Purkiss 2000, 48):

- They come from outside
- They are in a liminal state of existence, often between life and death
- Their bodies reflect their anomaly, with varying degrees of subtlety
- They cause others to share in their own unfortunate fate (such as premature death or entrapment into a liminal state).

The difficulty, for historians and even more so archaeologists, lies in the fact that such entities and places were experienced as real by early modern people but are not so considered now (Henderson and Cowan 2001). Even Purkiss (2000, 86-88) is quick to point out that she considers, even in the early modern period, fairies hovered “between belief and disbelief”. While she does not dispute that their appearance in trial testimonies shows they were stories people thought plausible, she pictures accused witches “scrabbling” for an explanation under trial and coming up with “stories they had told as pastimes [i.e. oral folklore] not meaning to be believed”. However, as Henderson and Cowan (2001) argue with great

success, they were materially present in the world in a way that indicates that they were considered real. There were places in the known landscape in which they lived. Their effects were felt in daily life and materially present in objects associated with them. There were even numerous ways one might encounter them or their influence (Henderson and Cowan 2001). It is their respect for an emic understanding of fairies in early modern Scotland that makes Henderson and Cowan's work unique, for whilst others have discussed fairies in Scotland, theirs is the first scholarship devoted entirely to the subject; they argue that to early modern people, fairies were real; and they propose an archaeology of magical landscapes informed by folklore and history.

However, despite their own argument that fairy beliefs be taken seriously, Cowan and Henderson (2002, 201) follow Holmes (1984, 86) in their subsequent paper, when they write of excavating "mental structures" - something they see as underlying popular expressions of belief. This is a valuable step away from Roper's (1994, 227, 230-1) 'collaborative fantasies', where confessions are seen as constructions formulated through the interaction between witch and prosecutor. However, the consistency across scholarship with which the mental (albeit in this case of the wider populace) is privileged over the body remains a fundamental limitation to this and every other historical enquiry into the subject to date. For example, Stewart and Strathern (2004, 166) make the physicality of witch beliefs an irrelevancy, superficial narratives of 'strange powers', to be sifted away to reveal the underlying quarrelling neighbours. Martin (2002) discusses the trials in terms of 'conceptual links' between marriage, the domestic sphere and witchcraft. There is little or no place for things or bodies, and even less for imaginary-real things. In fact, despite the overwhelming amount of scholarship exploring witchcraft and gender, bodies are rarely presented in the literature. Crossland (2010, 388) points to a turn in the humanities and social sciences away from naturalised understandings of the body, highlighting a substantial catalogue of work that makes a trans-historical, 'natural' body an untenable assumption when inquiring of the past. The message, however, has not yet percolated into Scottish witchcraft studies.

It is clear that an archaeological enquiry reaching for an understanding of early modern experiences of living with witchcraft, fairies and peripheral religious practices such as well visiting, can contribute to questions of regional variation and similarity. By considering how these and other magical and/or religious beliefs form assemblages which are born out of and inform practices undertaken by past agents, it is hoped to contribute to this debate. For this reason, this thesis adopts a broad spectrum of case studies which span the early modern period and the geographical extent of Scotland, as opposed to focusing on just one or two localities in great depth. MacFarlane (1970, 11) sought to find out not “why people believed in witchcraft” but “how witchcraft functioned, once the basic assumptions about the nature of evil, the types of causation and the origins of supernatural ‘power’ were there”. Almost fifty years later, the question underpinning this has never been meaningfully addressed in a British context: ‘assumptions’ - here understood to mean a widely understood and shared cultural reality - about the nature of evil or supernatural ‘powers’ cannot exist without a set of basic assumptions about the human body that are quite radically different to our own. Many questions remain to be asked of bodies, in their male, female, neonate, witch, animal, fairy and myriad other forms.

## 2.4 Bodies and Boundaries: Witchcraft as a Lens

It is in Scandinavia that some of the most exciting and insightful new trajectories to early modern witchcraft have emerged. Herva and a variety of collaborators working on early modern Scandinavia offer useful ideas for incorporation into a situated response to early modern Scottish witchcraft (Herva 2009; Herva 2010; Herva *et al* 2010; Herva and Nordin 2013). Collectively, their papers propose that early modern magical ontological realities may be revealed through the investigation of certain ‘special finds’ using a combination of relational thinking and contemporary folklore. This argument allows them to move beyond understandings of practices as derived from antiquity or early Christianity and persisting as ‘notions’, opening up the possibility of significant ontological alterity



within the lived experience of early modern people (e.g. Herva 2009; 392-393). They argue that relational thinking persisted well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and that old buildings and landscapes retained important material properties akin to bodies (and perhaps even personhood) as a direct result of collocations between practice and place.

Herva and Nordin (2013, 210) rightly argue that ‘magical thinking’ must be recognised as integral to everyday experience in the undertaking of post-medieval archaeology. However, despite the archaeological rubric, all the articles fall somewhat short on engagement with the material world. Perhaps a necessity when communicating in shorter papers, but the overall emphasis remains detached from the physical world: ‘beliefs’ and ‘magical thinking’ are mentioned over and over; engaged, embodied practice is strangely absent. Their ‘special finds’ are not adequately related to bodies, but they could and should be – body parts and deviant bodies in unusual contexts/treatments are key windows into the overlap between person, animal and thing, revealing aspects of the nature body and being, and of ontological alterity (e.g. Murphy 2008a; 2008b; Rebay-Salisbury *et al* 2010; Croucher 2010; Tarlow 2011). This missed connection leaves Herva *et al*’s past somewhat un-peopled (or peopled by the un-embodied), despite the many possibilities archaeology offers to the reverse (Casella and Fowler 2005; Casella and Croucher 2011).

Also working in a Scandinavian context, van Gent (2009) makes a very different offering. Concentrating on the folklore revealed in post-trial period Swedish witchcraft accounts, van Gent (2009) uses the historical record to analyse the way 18<sup>th</sup> century Swedes understood the human body (and at times animal bodies, to a lesser extent). She argues that ‘relationships between body, self and society’ and the ‘relational self’ ought to be central to future scholarship on early modern witchcraft (van Gent 2009, 3, 59. In post-trial period cases, she sees a calm and syncretic popular culture (combining pre-Reformation and Reformed Christian practices with ‘older local beliefs’), though which she can make such an enquiry (van Gent 2009, 3).

Much of van Gent's (2009) text is devoted to analysing how these beliefs reveal a self at once divisible and socially constituted - not individual. In doing so she highlights one of the least helpful aspects of other historical literature on witchcraft: the dichotomy built into the very field of witchcraft studies between 'good' and 'bad', 'witch' and 'cunning folk' (van Gent 2009, 161-162). Her discussion is insightful; however, it does not delve into the material world: the physical is missing. Without material culture her conclusions about the body lack something fundamental: there is no sense of how engaging with the world creates us, or how we create it. Furthermore, although she embraces the ambiguity of witchcraft as something which can be both good and bad, she does not embrace the pantheon of relevant others that could support or challenge her conclusions: fairies, changelings, devils, animals or the ambiguous dead. Ultimately, humans are the only agents in her study, the permeable boundary under scrutiny primarily that between one human and another. She mentions at some length milk theft and milk hares as a kind of human-animal magical relationship, but there are so many others evident in witchcraft cases that her discussion is undermined by inflating these examples out of context. Witch trials and the lived world they reveal hint at all kinds of volatile, violable margins between humans and the environment around them. A study following van Gent's (2009) lead but taking in a much wider array of magical beings and evidence categories has the potential to illuminate these.

When reviewing van Gent's (2009) work, it is worth questioning whether it is useful to describe such beliefs as 'older', or to exclude cases from the witch-hunts proper, on the basis that some beliefs were somehow more 'authentic' than others (cf. van Gent 2009, 54). At a recent meeting in Harvard (Mitchell *et al* 2010), Hutton revealed an increasing contingent of scholars are interested in archaeology's potential to identify presumed "ancient belief systems" underpinning differences between apparently similar European witch-hunting nations. Reconsidering the work of historian Carlos Ginzburg (1991), meeting attendees asserted that British scholarship has overlooked his contribution to witchcraft studies and invited remedial action. They worked back from the early modern witch trials, discussing the merit of searching out long-distant roots embedded in shared pre-Christian culture (Mitchell *et al* 2010). Hutton (in Mitchell *et al* 2010,

866-868) argued that the fact that countries which were very similar economically and culturally saw very different witch-hunts is good evidence that something older lay behind them.

Overall, most of the participants, though interested in the concept, expressed some degree of discomfort with the conclusion that the witch accusations and trials of each country were determined by pre-existing, pre-Christian elements of practice that had survived unchanged for many hundreds of years (cf. Ginzburg 1991). This is a pervasive misconception which crops up everywhere and demands challenge: for example, Henderson and Cowan (2001, 213) claim that the Christian elements incorporated into witch confessions represent a “mere veneer upon beliefs which in some cases had been in existence for thousands of years”.

Scholarly adhesion to the idea of timeless practices of great antiquity actually obscures the lived experience of early modern people. Even if, against all odds, one single practice endured unchanged (to the untrained observer) for thousands of years, its significance in any given context would always be relative to the heterogeneous assemblage of which it was *currently* part. Interestingly, it is Carver (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 876-877), not Hutton, who reminds us of this fact, referring to Hutton’s (2009) recent work showing that modern paganism is an entirely modern construction, highlighting the possibility that this was also the case with early modern witchcraft practices. Meanwhile, Pluskowski (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 874-876) challenges the paradigm, highlighting how gaps in documentation problematise any interpretation which might seek to link early modern werewolves with older werewolf beliefs.

The meeting’s participants certainly do not run short on expertise and for the most part carefully balance and nuance their approach to Ginzburg’s work, for it is not without flaws. Drawing evidence from around the world and throughout time, Ginzburg (1991) discusses only those cases which he considers support his conclusion that witch beliefs drew on retained cultural elements derived from a single prehistoric origin: a postulated tradition of ecstatic shamanism in the Asiatic Steppes. He openly ignores chronological succession and spatial distribution (Ginzburg, 1991, 12), and admits his inspiration came from the highly discredited

work of Margaret Murray (Murray 1921; Ginzburg 1991, 8). Following his line of enquiry can be a dangerous preoccupation as it encourages scholars to attempt to ford insurmountable research distances. Hutton (2002) for example, draws on studies of over 100 tribal groups conducted between the 1890s and 1990s, hoping no less than to “reunite anthropology and history” as they relate to tribal cosmologies.

Carver (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 877) points out that “people do not go to the stake for their version of prehistory”, suggesting that while there may be “garbled memories of the past” the witch trials should be understood in terms of contemporary culture and materials. Nevertheless, within the Scottish witchcraft context, both Wilby (2011) and Goodare (2012; 2014) have sought to demonstrate a Ginzburg-esque trans-European, shamanic tradition focused on engagement with an ontologically real fairy world. Wilby’s (2011) work explores the case of Issobell Gowdie, seeing in it evidence of a surviving, pre-Christian Scottish dream-cult. Her approach is problematic for a number of reasons, not least of which is lack of engagement with local evidence. Instead of focusing on the immediate context, she draws erratically upon anthropological cases from distant contexts such as Brazil. She paints Gowdie as exceptional; however, whilst her account is truly remarkable, there are very few elements which do not appear in their ones and twos across numerous other trials.

Goodare’s (2012; 2014) smaller scale argument for a ‘sparrow-riding’ shamanic cult and ontologically real fairies shares traits in common with Wilby’s (2011). Both scholars argue that certain elements, especially fairy components, can be treated as direct from the accused and not interjections emerging in confessions via those conducting trials (Wilby 2011, 53-80; Goodare 2014, 146, 163). However, where Wilby (2011) draws freely from globally and temporally remote contexts, Goodare (2014, 141-142, 163) eschews even later 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish folklore and all Scottish literature. He expresses valid concerns in the process, particularly over whether such sources are suitable to reveal the beliefs of self-identified early modern witches (Goodare 2014, 141-142, 163). This caution is commendable, but serves primarily to underscore the lack of material to support an already tenuous

argument for a cult of the ‘wichts’, and it may ultimately be overstated. Cowan and Henderson (2002) and Davies (2008, 185) both advise using such sources with care, highlighting that the witches and fairies of extant witch trials are a far from complete sample, and that their disappearance within community life did not come overnight with the end of the Witchcraft Act. Furthermore, the focus on ‘self-identified’ witches is questionable: many others may have adopted this identity, and those he selects may have taken it up after being habitually attributed it by others. It also assumes a differentiation in practice which may not have been ontologically relevant or observable.

Despite the weak conclusion, Goodare’s (2012) work offers good future directions. Dubbed “an exercise in fairy taxonomy and fairy ontology” that seeks “overlap[ping and] fuzzy definitions”, he advocates engaging with the margins of the fairy world and the points where they cross over with other entities (Goodare 2014, 141). In this he includes overlaps with ghosts, demons and even angels, yet does not consider their boundaries with humans, a significant omission. He also offers valuable nuance to the term ‘cult’, moving it closer to “shared knowledge and practice” and ‘craft’, though he still returns to comparison with the *Benandanti* (Goodare 2012, 14-15; see also Ginzburg 1991). It should be noted, however, that even with his redefinition, adherence to the idea of a ‘cult’ perpetuates the outdated notion of witches as fundamentally *different* and somehow separate from the normal populace and mainstream culture (Nenonen 2014). Gowdie’s exceptionalism, in Goodare’s (2012) argument, is simply extended to a few others (using, by his own admission, exceedingly slim historical data), rather than subjected to vigorous scrutiny.

In a very brief but more inclusive exploration, Purkiss (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 868-869) draws connections easily between two other cases, Andro Man and Marioun Grant. The fact her case is more detailed than most may suggest Gowdie was a particularly great speaker, or that those making records were particularly diligent in her case. It cannot be extrapolated to claim that her account was outwith the normal beliefs that were widely held by her peers or that she was a ‘cult’ member without accounting for material evidence. Indeed, she need not be viewed as

exceptional at all: Henderson (2011) argues cogently that witch trials may be best used to better understand the everyday life and experiences of ordinary people.

Wilby's (2011) expansive volume, despite containing the wonderful contribution of Gowdie's previously unpublished confession transcripts, unfortunately, falls short of its potential. What could have been an invaluable historical-archaeological resource instead yields a limited contribution to the field. It aspires to be an exceptional investigation into the life of a single (ordinary in many respects) individual who experienced witch and fairy belief culture first hand, told using her own (mediated) voice. However, it is hampered by its ungroundedness, seeking as it does to differentiate her testimonies from those of other witchcraft suspects (a position the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft proves inadequate). She overreaches in methodology and conclusion, rather than nesting Gowdie's testimonies within their temporal, geographical and material context.

Dye (2011, 169) goes as far as accusing Wilby of transgressing the line between 'hypothesis-based-on-factual-evidence' and 'conjecture-born-of-fantasy' on more than one occasion, and with good cause. Goodare's (2012) much more concise offering, although suffering from insufficient evidence to support the conclusion, represents a more grounded model for those wishing to debate the argument for an early modern Scottish witchcraft cult. Engagement with the material evidence is an essential starting point for such a task. It offers the possibility of encountering witch beings not as exceptional or different, but as they were situated within the wider populace, participating in the same spectrum of practices and experiencing the same range of embodied possibilities. Such witches may not need a cult to explain their existence.

Upon evaluating the above body of work, it is necessary to return with renewed gravity to Carver's (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 876-877) concerns over undue preoccupation with 'deep roots' and Ginzburg's (1991) thesis as a theoretical foundation for any archaeology of witchcraft or magic. The assumption that magic somehow equates to unfiltered pre-Christian practice is untenable, perhaps best illustrated by Gilchrist (2008) in her discussion of magic in high medieval burial

contexts: the meanings and forms of practices are too fluid and negotiable. Whilst clearly attractive to archaeologists used to working with long time periods, looking for pre-Christian remnants may be a disservice to the post-Reformation subject as it overlooks the importance of magic in the lived past: the microcosmic and personally immediate perspective implied by ‘everyday life’. Magical practices may vary from day to day, village to village, family to family, or even individual to individual. Purkiss (2000, 7), makes a valuable contribution to this discussion, followed throughout this thesis:

*“It is not helpful to argue that fairies used to be pagan gods if that is no longer what they were by the eleventh century, and they were not. To say that fairies were once gods is helpful in the sense that it is helpful to say that cars were once ox-carts; such a statement would be of limited value if what we wanted was to understand why cars were so important to people.”*

The critique repeatedly demonstrates that there is a far stronger (if not exclusive) correlation between witch beliefs and the wider contemporary context than with any remote (or even relatively recent) past. It must also be noted that such practices do not operate in a way which allows for any meaningful extraction from formal religion. Informal and formal religion are neither mutually exclusive nor diametrically opposed, but rather co-exist, are variably co-practiced, and may even be co-creative, in the lives a community (Gilchirst 2008; Todd 2002; Morgan 2010a).

If as Clark (1997, vii) asserts, witch-hunts were co-creative with witch theory, rather than a simple and direct result of the latter, then the study of practice ought to be given equal weight to the study of the elite intellectual background to witch-hunting. It was in the doing and being that witch accusations, trials, counter-spells, benign magic and witch-hunting happened. History may never, therefore, be able to understand how witch-hunting began, because it had to have begun for people to start recording it. The very preoccupation with Briggs’s (1996a) ‘many reasons why’ obscures other research areas: what did it feel like to live with witches in the world? How were magical beings experienced as manifest in the

world? What do witch trials tell us about what it meant to be human? To be alive? To be dead? To occupy a space in between? Failure to acknowledge the powerful creative role of material practice and the need to take seriously the co-created ontological world continues to dog even the most recent scholarship. Goodare's (2014, 166-167) fairies need "several functions in popular culture" to explain their existence, a tragic and inexplicable return to the functionalist 'scapegoat' theory scholarship is trying to leave behind (Nenonen 2014, 23-26). An argument grounded in materiality paves the way for studies focusing not on an explanation of the origins of practices, beliefs or events, but rather one focused on importance within the context of their occurrence. Archaeological enquiry is beginning to offer up answers to these questions.

## 2.5 Recent Methodologies: The Nascent Archaeology of Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Scotland

Traditionally, the study of magic and witchcraft in Britain has been the purview of historians rather than archaeologists. Merrifield (1987, xiii), an exception, speculated that this is because:

*"Ritual and magic were formerly part of everyday life, but by association with fantasy fiction and occultism they have now acquired an aura of sensationalism that has discouraged investigation".*

More recently, Hutton (2010, 248; 2011, 70-71) supposed this to be attributable to fear of association with Margaret Murray's (1921) discredited work on shamanic 'survivals' and its reincarnation in the work of Carlos Ginzburg (1991). Gilchrist (2008, 119-120), meanwhile, concludes that archaeology's failure to engage with magic derives from its 'exotic' or 'primitive' preconceptions, passed on to archaeologists by early anthropologists, and a false assumption that magic and Christianity are mutually exclusive. It may be that each of these factors has discouraged study, and continues to; the list of archaeologists who tackle the



subject still runs short. Undoubtedly blinkered to the more esoteric aspects of life by the consequences of Enlightenment philosophy, most scholars are ignorant of the material traces of magic in the past and what they can tell us (Merrifield 1987, 184).

Merrifield (1987), in a still unparalleled volume, made the initial foray into the field. However, as the first text in a new subject area, he was necessarily preoccupied with staking out intellectual territory and making the case that magical practices were meaningful, materially evident and, crucially, potentially extant (Merrifield 1987). His work provides, in very broad strokes, a sense of magic's place in the proto-historic to historic past and a valuable manual for identifying its traces. Merrifield's work failed, however, to engage with the difficult relationship between magic and religion, and by covering a vast time period and geographical area (Roman to early modern; Western Europe) it did not afford him the opportunity to delve deeply into cultural contexts, potential consequences or interpretations of specific material culture. Thus, whilst Merrifield (1987) captures the general importance of magic in the past, he fails to engage fully with the microcosmic perspective implied by practice in everyday life. Furthermore, by focusing almost exclusively on museum objects, he does not convey successfully the fact that magic is as much, if not more so, in and of the landscape and the body as it is in and of the object. The end result is a very useful if preliminary view of what has since emerged to be a complicated and slow moving, but highly promising area of study.

Merrifield (1987) dipped in and out of different practices, extracting evidence where needed from museum collections with which he was familiar, in order to highlight the relevance of magical material to archaeologists. Hoggard (2004), however, has since taken steps to progress this work further by updating the artefact-related evidence of witchcraft, specifically within the early modern period. Through a correspondence survey he catalogued many hundreds of objects potentially associated with magic held in British museum collections (Hoggard 2004, 169). However, as he himself notes, many museums did not respond, meaning that although more comprehensive than Merrifield's work, the survey is

still incomplete (Hoggard 2004, 169). Furthermore, only the data from England was calculated, limiting its contribution to the understanding of magic in Scotland.

Unfortunately for students of Scottish witchcraft studies, coverage of the archaeological material here remains slim. Other than the occasional small magazine article, it is the dominant trend that literature on the archaeology of British magic covers Scotland only in passing. Given the much greater intensity of the Scottish witch trials than anywhere else in Britain, this seems incongruous. Based on current figures (approximate population/number of witch trials) a person was at least 10 times more likely to be accused in Scotland than in England (Sharpe 2002, 182; Goodare *et al* 2003; Levack 2016, 20-21). There must have been (and still may be) material evidence associated with this difference. Scotland has a long tradition of collected folklore and, thanks to its 'celtic' label, has tended to be viewed through a nostalgic, post-Enlightenment lens as relatively backwards and primitive (Schneider 1990, 24-25). So where is the material evidence, in this last respite of fairies and witches? One possibility is that more recent scholars have shied away from studying the material culture and practices of Scottish magic as a reaction to antiquarian interest in folklore and folk life. This phenomenon was observed widely across the field of history until recent years (Saint-George 2010).

Despite the absence of Scotland and Scottish examples, Merrifield (1987), Hoggard (2004) and Gilchrist (2008) are all relevant in highlighting ways the material evidence of magical practices may be brought to light, investigated and interpreted. The wealth of folklore and contemporary accounts collected by antiquarians represents a potentially valuable additional archaeological resource (Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf 1999; Gazin-Schwartz 2001), if utilised cautiously, keeping in mind ongoing debate. Hoggard (2004, 168) is particularly useful, demonstrating that magic remained widespread and current long after the witch hunts were over. This is significant to this discussion, since it challenges the conventional interpretation of how the body was re-conceptualised in the early modern period (e.g. Mellor and Shilling 1997).

Tarlow (2011) adds significant depth to any discussion of early modern bodies in relation to magic, in her valuable exploration of *Ritual, belief and the dead in early modern Britain and Ireland*. Seeking to reposition the soul as a cornerstone of understanding the early modern person (in relation to body and mind), it touches frequently upon the manner in which body parts, problematic bodies (such as unbaptised infants) and the dead become imbricated in magical practices. She argues that the straightforward but uncritical ‘dead as an evacuated biological body’ (e.g. Sofaer 2006) may do disservice to early modern ‘belief discourses’ in which the body might continue to possess “sentience, agency and power” (Tarlow 2011, 8). Tarlow (2013, 618, 623) identifies four (often cross-cutting and conflicting) belief discourses relating to the corpse: theological, social, scientific and folk belief, using practice as a window to observe the ‘scaffold’ within which they interact. She does not necessarily accept embodiment as a useful term in relation to the dead body/being, rather advocating that we “pay more attention to intersubjectivity and collective understandings than to internalised personal experience” (Tarlow, 2011, 9; see also Hallam *et al* 1999, 19-20).

This directive and the emphasis on practice is a strong foundation for any situated approach which incorporates the dead, as she goes on to demonstrate many ways in which they not only reflect and refract but co-create the living. Her approach engages with practice and the lived world, as opposed to ideas and thoughts, highlighting multiple cases where intellectual spheres (e.g. theology) and practice tell conflicting stories. For example, she sees in the Reformation, not an interiorised religiosity in which the body was ultimately worthless, but “a new geography of sacred space [which] altered the landscape of the dead and the place of the living within it” (Tarlow 2011, 19). She goes on to explore the magical uses of grave soil, hanged men’s hands, coffin fittings and corpse bleeding as they relate to living bodies - certainly not sanctioned, post-Reformation, church-approved practices (Tarlow 2011, 161-167). Focusing on the dead, her study cross-cuts witchcraft, but does not fully explore it. Nor does it incorporate practices exclusive to the living (such as holy wells); however, it sets out a clear platform for any enquiry which aims to engage with ontological differences in the behaviours

and capacities of bodies and body parts, the living and the dead, within the early modern period.

In general, discussion of the material culture of post-Reformation magic has over-emphasised the relatively rare witch bottle. The typical witch bottle is somewhat sensational: a bellarmine filled with assorted items such as human urine; finger or toe nail clippings; nails, needles and pins; human hair; belly button fluff; and occasionally heart-shaped motifs, bits of wood and thorns (Merrifield 1987, 163-175; Hoggard 2004, 170-175; Crossland 2010, 395-401). Finds are, however, so far confined to England and its diaspora; with no British examples from further north than York (Hoggard 2004, 170). Zöe Crossland (2010), however, revisits them to make an excellent contribution to the overall field by using these bottles to ask and answer important new question about embodiment and personhood.

Merrifield (1987) and Hoggard (2004) both discuss the witch bottle phenomenon in terms of historical accounts. Both Merrifield (1978, 163-175) and Hoggard (2004, 170-175) concur, based on these contemporary accounts, that the bottle was a physical representation of the witch's bladder, the creation and possession of which caused the witch physical harm and therefore to reveal her identity. Crossland (2010), however, is much more interpretative, exploring the potential for using witch bottles to understand not what people *said they were doing* in the past, as represented in the historical documents and confirmed by material culture, but what the *doing* can tell us about how they experienced themselves and others around them. In her interpretation witch bottles contradict modern understandings of the body: they do not make sense when we consider the self as indivisible or individual (Crossland 2010, 399-400). Both the witch and the victim are represented though the bottle (witch) and contents (donated by victim) to create the witch bottle-bladder object (witch), working on the assumption that parts of the whole are active - even at a distance - and that one body can act upon another (Crossland 2010, 399-400). Crossland (2010, 400-401) sees this as indicative of changing notions of the body, being and medicine, and the emergence of modern mind-body dualism. She interprets the witch bottle, therefore, as symptomatic of an intermediate stage - one in which the mind and body are

separate but the transgressive medieval body is still present and needs to be contained, physically and metaphorically; seeing in it, for example, awareness of the bodily humours (Crossland 2010, 400-401).

Crossland's (2010) interpretation of witch-bottles demonstrates clearly the contribution an archaeological perspective can lend to the study of an otherwise documented practice. She moves witch bottles beyond objects which represent the body, exploring how they reveal it. However, whilst this interpretation engages meaningfully with both the body and the materiality of the object, pointing the way for future archaeologists, her conclusion may be a stretch too far. She generalises to 'broader anxieties' which extend beyond the quite limited distribution area and contexts of witch bottles, restating the commonly held but ultimately presumptuous and teleological notion that the modern self definitely emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in a rationally incremental and measurable way (Crossland 2010, 401). To analyse only witch bottles without considering other local magical and religious practices, or to extend them to other localities where they are not extant, is to take them out of context. Given their distribution in the south of England, it may be that they represent the ideas of only a small segment of society, or have the potential to serve as distinguishing features of differences between the Scottish witch-belief context and the English. Only further examination of their wider social, magical and medicinal contexts might answer this.

A recurrent problem with the understanding of the wider suite of beliefs in the past and how they worked together, is that people tend to discuss just one aspect in relative isolation, whether that be churches (e.g. Spicer 2003); amulets (e.g. Cheape 2006; 2008a; 2008b; 2009); discipline (e.g. Graham 1996; Todd 2002) or holy wells (e.g. Rattue 1995; Henderson 2007). However, these categorical divisions are modern, and they often obscure the fact that each expression of belief is intricately linked to all of the others. Cross-referencing is essential to explore whether Crossland's (2010) 'intermediate stage' is ontologically consistent across contexts. Without understanding local heterogeneous assemblages, there is the danger that interpretations contingent on a single data type see what they

expect to see. A much wider range of material enquiry is required to challenge understandings of the body and mind in any past environment; furthermore, conclusions cannot be assumed to extend to more general contexts.

Gilchrist (2008), in her study of high- to late-medieval magic, has set by far the leading example in using evidence from practice to reach a context-specific interpretation. Reviewing evidence from over 8000 graves across Britain and spanning primarily the 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Gilchrist's (2008) examination of apotropaic objects in the high-to late-medieval period sheds new light on the intersections between official religion and practices which might constitute magic. In her comparison of hundreds of potentially magical objects and their contexts, she shows great sensitivity to grouping and interpreting them in emically relevant ways, prioritising 'the type of magic possibly intended' (Gilchrist 2008, 123). Key to assessing magical intent in Gilchrist's (2008, 123-4) study were factors such as placement in relation to the body (e.g. inside clothes, inside shroud, inside coffin or inside grave), leading her to identify four possible magical classes:

- healing and/or protective
- objects of natural occult power (e.g. shells)
- antiques (e.g. old coins)
- possible demonic magic, sorcery or divination

Gilchrist (2008) concludes that although amulets were not the norm - appearing in only 2% of graves - they were crucial to Christian belief, and that such amulets were used by females who prepared the dead at home. Attention to detail and the combination of wide period knowledge with a tightly-focused material study allow her to reveal fascinating insights into both the dead in life (i.e. those who were ill, infirm, or vulnerable infants in life were the recipients of amulets in death), and the living: the women history cannot see, whose work may be represented.

Gilchrist's (2008, 153) discussion highlights the value of interdisciplinary sources and the benefit the long temporal perspective archaeology provides, concluding that this allows us to see 'some medieval rites as hybrid forms that drew on earlier beliefs'. She is quick to highlight that they are neither "pagan survivals" nor "syncretism" but something more complex and dynamic, pointing the way to post-colonial and diaspora theory for interpretive models that account for agency and hybridisation (Gilchrist 2008, 120-121; Gosden 2004a; Lilley 2004). Her argument regarding the low incidence of potentially magical grave goods is timely and relevant: many are highly perishable: hair; wood, animal parts, as examples (Gilchrist 2008, 124). In this thesis, limited extant examples survive; however, they persist in the witch trial accounts and may be archaeologically investigated from that context. Just as magical practices are not always identified and recorded by archaeologists (Gilchrist 2008, 124), those making records at trials (and indeed those asking the questions), may not have documented practices interesting to this study simply because they did not seem relevant to the trial's outcome. Furthermore, as Gilchrist (2008, 124) argues, low incidence is important in its own right: these practices were not the norm, they are the exceptions: they are alternative and transgressive (see also Jolly 2002, 3).

## 2.6 Taking the Research Forward

History on the subject of Scottish witchcraft is typically inward looking, working and re-working the same sources and questions, all scholars referencing the same few classic works (and also frequently one another). Scholars from adjacent fields, however, offer new ideas. Van Gent's (2009) work with Swedish witchcraft uses trial accounts to 'read' the body, particularly in relation to cows. Todd (2002) combines discipline artefacts and early modern Kirk Session records. Walsham (2011) brings together landscape history with myriad contemporary documents, and Henderson and Cowan (2001) draw upon early modern sources referencing fairies. Each makes valuable inroads into the undertaking of a material study based primarily on written sources. They highlight relevant written sources and take

different interpretative approaches to them, each with their strengths and weakness. Their works pave the way for this study and leave space for it, for none grasps the material world as an archaeologist, nor do they focus on Scottish witchcraft. Merrifield (1987), followed by Hoggard (2004), sounded the call for such approaches, but it is Crossland (2010) and especially Gilchrist (2008) who have undertaken the material studies that showcase the best of what an embodied, materially aware approach can accomplish.

A situated response, taking an archaeological sensibility to historical records and material evidence of the world which they recollect, has the potential for deeper understandings of how and why witches were experienced as being in the world, and what sustained their presence for more than 170 years. A suitable method could use the evidence in different ways; moving beyond the human/mind-based emphasis of history to one exploring heterogeneous collectives of agencies and their ambiguous relationships and practices (Chapter 3: Agencies and Ontologies). It need not adopt the perspective endemic throughout historical scholarship that witchcraft is always about something else, whether state building, gender, socio-economic status, or even spoiled rye (Chapter 3: Belief and Knowing). Thus, such a perspective could ask new questions, and provide an interpretation that is sensitive to emic social and environmental constructs and categories (Chapter 4: Ontology and Taxonomy), providing nuances to our understanding of bodies (witch, non-witch, infant, animal, or indeed other) and their weaknesses, capacities and boundaries, as they come into being through practice.



## Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach

The following chapter develops the theoretical issues identified within the research context (Chapter 2) in order to set out a framework upon which to build a methodology and interpretations. It is divided into three sections covering the theoretical progression of the thesis. *Belief and Knowing* problematises the language of witchcraft studies and questions the usefulness of applying modern labels to early modern material. *Agencies and Ontologies*, investigates alternative means of exploring the rich data associated with early modern Scottish witchcraft in a way that is sensitive to lived experience. Finally, *Disruptions* discusses the uses of narrative, contemporary arts, and other means of suspending disbelief to open a dialogue with the past that facilitates engagement with different relational connections between seemingly familiar things.

### BELIEF AND KNOWING

#### 3.1 Strange Data

Reviewing his experience of the *Witchcraft and Deep Time* debate at Harvard, Price (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 866) asks:

“[to] what extent should we try to tame the strangeness of this data [i.e. from records of witchcraft trials], risking flattening its complexities under the normal freight of academic discourse?”

This thesis extends this question further, exploring the impact not only of culturally unfamiliar material, but also the way in which this unfamiliarity may be made uncomfortable or ‘strange’ for the researcher. It is all too tempting to quantify, qualify and categorise witch trial materials such as human shape-shifting or magical stones, but in cleaning these categories up and making them presentably coherent to our modern sensibilities, we must ask to what extent we are fundamentally undermining our own understanding in the process. It is the taming of the strangeness, evident in the methodologies of most witchcraft studies to date, which this thesis seeks to address. Whenever we pursue studies which generate certain types of data using witch trial accounts (for example, class, gender, or economics), the fundamental ‘strangeness of the data’ is ironed out; reduced to a titillating curiosity in the wake of wider historical concerns. However, people in the past were not experiencing witchcraft in their daily lives whilst thinking *‘Great! This will be a useful indicator of socio-economic trends in the future’*. They were busy being, living and dying, in a very different ontological world to our own.

The ‘ironing out’ effect is immediately evident when working with the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft online resource (Goodare *et al* 2003; henceforth SSW). In their own words, it:

*“[was] designed to enable the public and academic researchers to examine biographical and social information about accused witches; cultural and sociological patterns of witchcraft belief and accusation; community, ecclesiastical and legal procedures of investigation and trial, national and regional variations; and the chronology and geography of witchcraft accusation and prosecution” (Goodare et al 2003).*

These research questions, though very important, reflect our concerns today, and the things that we can readily comprehend and analyse. The ‘otherness’ of the past becomes the anecdotal ‘Folk Notes’. However, these apparent ‘Notes’ reveal the lived experience and, indeed, the otherness, not only of the witch but the entire

culture behind witchcraft accusations and trials. It is only by ‘flattening the complexities’ (Price in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 886) of this strange data that we can reduce the witch trials to discussion about gender, class or ethnicity, political motives, elite ideologies, nation-building or geography. Suspend disbelief for a moment, put back in human-animal shapeshifters and fairy kidnappers, and the waters become muddier. The once-familiar recent past becomes much stranger.

To understand the culture of early modern Scotland we must not ignore its strangeness, but rather engage with it head on. Van Engel (1986, 544) asserts that we must take religious motives and needs as seriously as political, economic or social needs if we hope to understand the role of religion in structuring past worlds. This should, and indeed must, take on much wider parameters: we must be prepared to take all beliefs seriously, not only prescribed religious beliefs and practices, but also those ‘Folk Notes’ and other expressions of popular unorthodoxy, dissent or ambiguity. Combined, these practices reveal the lived experience of ordinary people in the past, not in terms of wider socio-political movements of which they had limited awareness, but in the context that they themselves understood their lives to be taking place: their fears; their anxieties; their hopes; their bodies. It is the purpose of this chapter to develop a theoretical framework that allows for sensitive and relevant engagement with the strangeness of the Scottish witch trial data that facilitates insight into ordinary lived experiences.

### **3.2 Beyond Religion, Beyond Folk Belief**

Religion is hard to untangle or categorise: it is as mutually dependent on practice, beliefs and embodied states as it is on culture and society, such that any definition is too partial (Kauffman 1961, 103; Lambek 2008, 341). Furthermore, the term sets out from a dichotomy between that which is ‘religious’ and that which is not, between the ‘ritual’ and the ‘mundane’: divisions which cannot be assumed culturally relevant in early modern Scotland (Bell 1992; Insoll 2004, 6; Walker

2008). Similarly, terms like ‘ritual’, ‘magic’, and ‘superstition’ remain, despite Merrifield’s (1987, 6) best attempts, curiously fluid and ill-defined, every one carrying its own baggage. The result is that new scholarship must define each term again for its own purposes (e.g. Levack 2016, 3-11), or work on the dangerous assumption that their meanings are universally understood. However, each is problematic: magic, for example, has borne various sets of negative connotations since the Middle Ages and meant different things to different people within the same society (Fanger 1998, vii; Kieckhefer 2014 [1989], 8-17), as has superstition, in addition to having had multiple contemporary uses in the post-Reformation period (Clark 1997, 476-9).

Despite these problems, terms like magic are still frequently used unquestioningly, such that healing wells and other early modern practices continue to be referred to in relatively offhand ways such as ‘pragmatic Protestant magic’ (Scribner 2001; Walsham 2011, 462) and ‘sympathetic magic’ (Merrifield 1987, 16; Miller 2002, 96; Gilchrist 2008; 127, 137, 152). The collocation of Protestant and magic would almost certainly have been offensive to the early modern Scots, hardly a useful starting place in any attempt to understand their experience. Gilchrist’s (2008, 127) entire explanation of sympathetic magic extends to a principle of similarity “[...] whereby things grown in damp conditions could cure illnesses exacerbated by the damp”. Miller (2002, 96) also resorts to discussing sympathetic magic as a ‘principle’ but offers even less by way of explanation of what that might be, simply claiming that the ‘rationale’ was that charms and cures transferred disease to another object or person without asking further questions.

Sympathetic magic, regardless of how seemingly useful the label might appear, doesn’t actually say anything. In each interpretation it is understood to be the power of metaphor; to hinge on a symbolic connection between ‘like’ things. This denies the potential for true ontological alterity from the outset, by assuming a mind-based ‘rationale’. Such a position, holding that items used for magical ends were fundamentally representational, as opposed to material and agentive, is not a useful starting point if the goal is to understand deeply material practices and their meaningful and significant interactions with human embodiment. Sympathetic

magic is simply a handy moniker that glosses over the fact that we do not have a firm handle on how early modern magic worked because we set out from the assumption that it did not.

The issues with the term magic suggest, as have Jones and Zell (2005, 49) and Purkiss (1995, 410), that it is likewise impossible, and similarly disadvantageous, to attempt to extricate early modern usages of cunning folk, charmer or witch. This is not because dictionaries do not survive, for they do, but because the terms are so multiple, local and loaded with conflicted, cross-cutting meanings, it would be impossible to ensure that their full weight was understood from a simple, clinical definition. There is also the issue of difference between Gaelic, Scots, and English terminology (MacInnes 2009). In any case, elite language formulae as found in a dictionary remain static, frozen in time, and could therefore never reflect the adaptive fluidity of two-way interactions between articulated local definitions and practices. Furthermore, as surviving witch trial accounts reveal, trends changed distinctly over time and varied with place. Over the period of study, the exact boundaries (if they existed at all) between witch and charmer, witchcraft and charming, were in flux (Goodare 2002a, 4-5; cf. Miller 2002).

Very few individuals, if any, self-identified as a witch, though this may or may not be read into their testimonies; for example, Issobell Gowdie (Harte 2004, 150; Wilby 2011, 55) and Isobel Young (Martin 2013). Despite Miller's (2002, 92-93) claim that charmers were distinct from witches as they "didn't cause harm", a significant number appear to have been accused (and indeed convicted and executed) of witchcraft. Rather than indicating tangible division, both points support the argument that whether an action (real or imagined) was experienced as benign, witchcraft, or even benign witchcraft, was not determined with reference to set linguistic definitions, but rather to an internalised, emic rationality. Such determinations are typically made in the moment, based upon embodied, ontologically specific experience, often before articulated thought even occurs (Bloch 1991, 194; Purkiss 1995, 416). There is a strong case for the argument that there was no stereotypical Scottish witch distinct from charmers at all (Henderson 2009a, 166). As witch trial accounts are the documentary source upon which this

discussion is based, the term witch is used throughout: it is used in light of the above discussion, not despite it. Everyone encountered in these pages, whether a working charmer, an irascible old lady, or a self-declared coven member, was accused of *witchcraft*.

Many definitions rely upon modern stereotypes which do not apply, having been influenced by 200 years of literature, almost a century of cinema, and a significant body of anthropological work (Purkiss 1996). Primarily conducted in 20<sup>th</sup> century Africa, the latter is not applicable to early modern Britain (Barry 1996; Sharpe 1999; Sharpe 2002). ‘Magic’, its counterparts and practitioners are non-rational *within the modern ontology* and thus defy closed definition (Pels 2010, 614-615). With this in mind, no attempt is made to differentiate between charms and amulets, frequently divided into a word-based former and material latter, or to classify them as exclusively ‘religious’ or ‘magical’; they are equally entangled and cross-cutting (Cheape 2008a, 105; Kieckhefer 2014 [1989], 69-79). For these many reasons, this thesis strongly disputes Wilby’s (2005, 10) claim that it is useful to divide early modern experience into ‘religious’ beliefs and rituals and ‘magical’ ones.

The alternative presented here is to develop a method which cuts short any attempt to draw lines between religion and magic (witchcraft/charming), or between witches and a variety of magical and non-magical others. Tarlow (2011, 15) observes, “archaeological and historical evidence does not witness beliefs but practices”, a perspective shared by Walker (2008, 140) who emphasises the need for combining a practice approach with a non-anthropocentric perspective to the study of witchcraft. Instead of establishing boundaries between interior spheres of ‘belief’ the focus is on exploring *practices* and the manner of things and beings (human and otherwise) they materially constructed. From this may emerge a broader ontology within which said beings, bodies and things are rationally comprehensible (Henderson 2009b, xvi; Lynch 2010, 50).

It is noted that practices were differentially mobilised by individuals and groups to suit their needs under changing life circumstances (for a range of examples see:

Rattue 1995; Miller 2002; Todd 2002; Walsham 2011; Martin 2013). The witch trials exemplify this quite successfully - both negative and positive expressions regarding witches and magic are interwoven with the ordinary business of families, communities, churches and the state (Goodare 2002c; Goodare 2013b; Goodare *et al* 2008). The question is not whether something was 'religious' or 'magical', but how we explore the full suite of 'beliefs' through practice and understand how they were mutually co-created, maintained and creative in the world. The distinction between 'religion' and 'beliefs about witchcraft' is obsolete; however, there remain serious theoretical questions attached to the word 'belief' itself.

### 3.3 Taking Belief Seriously

Traditionally, scholarship in witchcraft has subconsciously adopted language which fundamentally undermines any supposed acknowledgement of belief as a constitutive factor in past lived experience. Phrases like 'oddities', 'fantasies' and 'superstitions' appeared frequently in the work of even the best scholars (e.g. Lerner 1981, 152; Purkiss 1995, 410; 2003, 143), mixed in with the occasional outright judgemental proclamation such as "little more than sonorous nonsense" (Briggs 1996b, 70). Or worse; presumptive academic sectarianism: "though Protestants naturally viewed it all as a horrifying racket" (in reference to holy well visiting; Rattue 1995, 82). Even those with the best of intentions too frequently let 'superstition' creep into their writing (e.g. Lloyd and Westwood 2001, 57-58). The issue of engagement with belief in the past remains a contentious one. While some call for approaches which take the religious experiences of the historical subject seriously (e.g. van Engel 1986, 544; van Gent 2009, 194), many remain entangled within what are essentially functionalist dialogues that attempt to explain away past acts of belief by casting them in the more familiar and acceptable light of political, economic or social motivation. Patton (in Mitchell *et al* 2010, 869) concludes that this is the result of overcompensation for antiquarian excesses in seeing ritual everywhere, and a scientific bent that encourages reductionism. This remains evident even as the possible problems with 'belief' enter the periphery of

Scottish witchcraft scholarship; an entry which continues to stall, with claims such as “beliefs reflected a combination of Christian and pragmatic survival needs” to which practice is relevant only “to some extent” (Goodare and Miller 2008, 10).

Given that belief continues to be afforded a lesser place as a world-shaping sphere of influence, it is essential to question what belief is. Our definitions of this word and the sub-categories to which it is variably applied, whether religious or magical, or both, do not necessarily translate into another culture - we cannot assume ‘belief’ is a universal experience, any more than we can assume it is a universally unimportant one (Needham 1972, 74, 189; Eller 2007, 2-6, 30-34). Ruel (1997, 50-51; 2008, 107-108) debates whether we can assume that belief is central to religious practice in non-modern and/or non-Christian contexts at all. Working within the context of death (and the dead) in early modern Britain, Tarlow (2011) confirms the distinctiveness of the early modern ontology, emphasising ‘belief discourses’ which incorporate practice, belief, unbelief, and the unreliability of conflicting accounts. Morgan (2010b, 11), in a statement reminiscent of Henderson and Cowan’s (2001) argument, observes that religious belief has a distinctly embodied nature and cannot be understood without integrating ‘imagined and physical universes’. Unfortunately, this returns the argument to the original list of controversial word choices: does ‘imagined’ evoke the same sense of ontological superiority or disapproval as fantasy?

Ruel (2008, 108) goes as far as expressing a similar concern over the word ‘belief’ - that saying people “believe this” or “believe that” creates an artificial separation between their ideas and the world to which they apply. Pouillon (2008) takes this even further, highlighting the fact that the word belief also carries with it the same unhelpful connotations: the ‘believed’ is inherently not otherwise real or verifiable, therefore, belief implies doubt. As Pouillon (2008, 94) puts it: “the unbeliever [...] reduces to believing what, for the believer, is more like knowing”. Henderson (2009b, xvi) independently echoes this point, adroitly observing that it does not matter in the end whether or not accused witches themselves believed their own accounts of practicing witchcraft, what matters is that those accounts and practices were widely accepted as true accounts.



Henderson's (2009b, xvi; see also Henderson and Cowan 2001) assertion that witches and fairies were experienced as real is offered as a 'for all intents and purposes': it is made without theoretical engagement. There remains, therefore, the need to explore what 'real' is and the role(s) of 'real' in the world. Latour (1988, 158-159) proposes that that which is real "resists trials", and that which "modifies a state of affairs by making a difference" can be considered an actor and agent, through its capacity to "authorize, allow, afford, encourage [...] render possible, forbid" (Latour 2005, 71-72). Following Latour, Lynch (2010) argues that sacred entities exert agency, both as sacred objects and sacred subjects, and that it is the materiality of the sacred which determines and mediates the nature of interactions with them. Their arguments are relevant, with provisos discussed below, to all such non-corporeal agents explored in this thesis. Fairies, spirits, witches, ordinary beings and the practices through which they were made real, can be witnessed through material presences in the world. These entities were not simply imagined by individuals, but were made manifest within communities through and between collective layers of encounters (Lynch 2010, 50). By extension, doctrine should also be considered something equally 'real' and potentially manifest in its effects. Witchcraft beliefs and the often resulting accusations were not an alternative sub-culture; they were interwoven into the same ontological fabric as officially recognised religious doctrines and practices (Goodare 2005a).

An awareness of encounters as latticed layers, in which the materialities, states and capacities of participants cross-cut one another in complex and irreducible ways, lends itself to a further argument against adopting a research perspective based on the notion that 'they believed'. Such an assertion suggests an organised uniformity of perception and experience that did not exist. Thanks to the unique manner in which layered encounters build up for any one person, family or community, it was also possible to doubt, disbelieve or know something false (Arnold 2005).

It is a crucial pillar of this thesis that the term 'belief' be understood as potentially hindering our understanding of a culture which earnestly witch-hunted, specifically

because it actively closes methodological and interpretive possibilities for researcher and reader that may be necessary to understanding the early modern world. ‘Belief’ irons out the complexity and otherness of the lived reality of the archaeological subject by placing bodily experience within the realm of epistemology. When we reduce experience in the past to ‘belief’ we risk missing out on understanding our subjects’ ‘real’ world; we adhere instead to a modern and irrelevant version of reality which over-emphasises thought and mind (Insoll 2004, 155; Ruel 2008, 108).

The term ‘belief’ does not do justice to past experiences, portraying a world in which the ‘believed’ is lesser than the ‘known’ and cannot be considered as ‘fact’ (Pouillon 2008; Ruel 2008, 91-4; McCabe 2011). This puts the archaeologist or historian in a difficult position. How do we discuss something which we consider cannot exist, such as witches or fairies, while paying due attention to the fact that our subjects may not only have ‘believed’ they existed, but *known* it, and indeed co-existed with them? The same applies if we attempt to discuss them as imaginary or invisible: to past subjects they were neither, but rather differently-visible and real in their effects, landscapes and artefacts. We cannot unquestioningly employ such language. To this end Morgan (2010b, 3) asserts we need “a term which evinces knowledge, conviction, memory, imagination, sensation, emotion, [and] ritual action”, asking whether ‘belief’ is sufficiently malleable to serve this purpose. Any archaeology of religious/magical/pseudo-religious/folk practices remains an archaeology of belief unless conscious effort is made to address this, and the argument to do so is unequivocal. Such effort must be made. However, it in itself requires definition and parameters: what would such an archaeology look like, and how would one approach it?

The first step might be to simply leave ‘belief’ behind. Even assuming we’ve given the appropriate caveats, and explanations that ‘belief’ and ‘imaginary’ in this case mean ‘knowing’ and ‘experiencing’, this still leaves considerable issues to surmount. There is still the question of what belief might be in any given cultural context, and how we discuss religion and belief in a way that communicates the emic perspective. Even well-known archaeologist of religion, Timothy Insoll (2004,

7), has expressed the opinion that religion is concerned primarily with “thoughts, beliefs, actions and materials”, and that it is “composed of imagination and its material facets” (Insoll 2004, 19; See also 2011a; 2011b). Effectively, he gives the physical world the lowest priority. This definition is not dissimilar to the approach taken by Clifford Geertz (1975) over 40 years ago, and perpetuates the outdated perspective that belief is primarily privatised rather than communal, of the mind, rather than the world, for which he has come under considerable critique (e.g. Asad 1993, 47).

This position does not adequately allow for the fact that the shaping of physical and interior experiences is reciprocal, flowing in both directions. Material culture should not be reduced to mere ‘material facets’ of thoughts: it is an invaluable resource. It gives rise to novel connections, not only allowing us to physically ground thoughts into practice, anchoring intangibles to observable objects and places and making them demonstrably real but also actively facilitating new possibilities (McCabe 2011). Material practice may often precede the thought element of belief. By prioritising practice, studies that foreground materiality and embodiment may similarly access new interpretations (Walker 2008). Material culture and bodies (human or otherwise) *in practice* can actively reveal the underlying ontology of which they are co-creative parts (Henare *et al* 2007a; Walker 2008; Holbraad 2009). The materiality of religion is not just an outward sign of something imagined - it is a constituting factor in the world: “people make belief in the things they do” (Morgan 2010b, 11). It is in the recognition of belief made through practice that archaeology emerges as a most valuable tool for dealing with belief. Archaeology is well positioned for pursuing what Morgan (2010b, 5) calls ‘the deep shape of belief’, as it emerges from embodied, materially rich practices. A situated practice-orientated approach allows us to redress the balance of scholarship between interior and material worlds, and to treat what has previously been discussed through a framework in which thought begets belief, as a materially robust, shared way of living (Morgan 2010a).

### 3.4 Knowledge and the Body

Even ‘knowledge’ is complicated. Modern society privileges the intellectually knowable and linguistically articulable, but neither may have bearing on experience in the past. Indeed, Bloch (1991, 194) argues that knowledge is acquired via the body *before* any linguistic articulation occurs. It has also been noted many times that divisions of the known world into categories such as nature/culture, subject/object and mind/body bear little relevance in an early modern setting (e.g. Herva and Nordin 2013). It is a more useful line of enquiry to pursue embodied experiences and how they allowed past subjects to ‘know’ things which today are not appreciable, such as the reality of witchcraft or fairies, without falling back on such dichotomies (Eller 2007, 30-4).

However, this is a daunting task, for these dichotomies are built into the fabric of scholarship. For example, Mellor and Shilling (1997) readily recognise knowledge through the senses as the predominant way of knowing the medieval world. However, they label this ‘carnal’ knowledge - a language choice which perpetuates the separateness and superiority of the mind. In taking the needs of our past subjects seriously, and with those needs the emotions which co-created them, we must take the role of the body equally seriously. Merleau-Ponty (1962, xi) argued “there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself”, attacking academia’s Cartesian attachment to the notion of separate mind and body. In making this argument, he disputed the very distinction between subject and object. In witchcraft studies, this argument has been somewhat slow in the uptake, with emphasis consistently falling upon interior motives and experiences. Meanwhile, the Reformation continues to be predominantly understood as a dramatic shift towards a religion of ‘seeing and hearing’, privileging the individual and cognitive understanding in favour of the other senses, embodied practice, and community (Mellor and Shilling 1997). While archaeological work is emerging which challenges this, pointing to communal lifeways which persisted far beyond the Reformation (e.g. Barker 2005; Tarlow 2011), the dominant trend remains that the actual, physical body-ness of the body is often missing, even from discussion aimed at understanding it.

In the study of early modern cultures and their witches, there remains a need for a perspective which acknowledges and embraces the fact that while every human experience (emotional, intellectual, or otherwise) takes place within a bio-physical subject living in a physical, material world (Johnson 1999, 100), the latter is not objective but rather produced by, and producing interactions. Just as belief is not a universally given category, neither is the body, nor the material world. It is therefore essential to consider the body not as an objectively quantifiable unit, but as something as sociologically constructed as it is irreducibly material in its lived-in-ness (Mellor and Shilling 1997, 6; Tarlow 2011, 10). Nor can it be considered in isolation: a body is not a singular unit, as *Agencies and Ontologies* goes on to explore; embodied experience is relational within the world.

## **AGENCIES AND ONTOLOGIES**

Witchcraft, as this thesis seeks to investigate it, is messy, difficult to define, unbounded and leaking into all manner of places, things and people - sometimes without their knowledge or complicity. Agency, as studied under a number of guises, could therefore prove a useful theoretical starting point. However, in a scenario where someone is accused of witchcraft by their peer-victims on the basis of material evidence such as magical green threads, unruly cats, and/or their (non-corporal) presence at known fairy sites, without having any sense of committing such an act, where would one even begin with attributing or apportioning agency? The question must also be asked, to what extent such an endeavour might (mis)represent how bodies, beings, things and relationships were understood and experienced in the past.

### 3.5 Witchcraft and Agency

Alfred Gell (1998), a pioneer in theorising non-human agency, usefully shifted the focus from the inherent properties of what an object is, to its contextual properties (i.e. what it does). However, he ultimately adopted a traditional stance: real agents are humans, not objects. Objects are secondary agents from the outset, closing off many possible lines of enquiry and interpretations before investigation has even begun: mind remains firmly dominant over matter (Meskell 2004, 115; Leach 2007). There does exist a line of critique within anthropology arguing the opposite position - that Gell obscures human agency in the production of art by failing to recognise that “What human beings think an object is capable of doing needs to be separated from that which it is actually known that objects can do” (Morphy 2009, 6). However, this position itself originates within the modernist scholarly tradition, limiting understanding to a ‘correct’ version of the possible: *our version*. More typically, Gell (1998) is critiqued for not taking non-human agents seriously enough (e.g. Leach 2007).

Also within agency studies, Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Science, Technology and Society studies (STS), in many ways parallel theories, champion the rejection of the human/non-human divide. They focus on the need to actively critique assumed distinctions between subject and object and the directionality of influences between them (Latour 1993; 1999; 2000; 2005; Callon and Law 1997; Law 2010). ANT has paved the way for myriad explorations of networks incorporating hybrid agency; but arguably perpetuates the very dichotomy it seeks to undermine, by presenting a ‘flat’ ontology in which no distinctions may be made between human and non-human agents (Harman 2009, 207). From this emerges a network that obscures deeply ingrained hierarchical understandings of agency, ultimately continuing to afford a place at the top for humans (in particular ‘the individual’) above animals, above vegetation, above stone (McPhail and Ward 1988, 72; Dobres and Robb 2000, 3).

ANT has also been criticised for perpetuating the idea of bounded entities which come into relationship within the network, in an equivalent way, as opposed to

heterogeneous, fluid entities that make unique, creative contributions (Jones and Cloke 2002, 214-215; Ingold 2011, 89-94;). However, while Ingold (2011, 89-94) dismisses ANT for not being sufficiently relational, Jones and Cloke (2002, 48-49) critique it for being too relational and equalising all agency at the expense of exploring questions about the unique contributions of non-humans such as trees. Crossland (2010, 394) notes that this tension remains insufficiently resolved. As a meta-narrative, ANT retains the capacity to elide object and subject in a way which hybridises agency whilst denying networked agents their unique contributions. ANT is also criticised for its inability to handle the way human/non-human communities persist in form, despite constantly shifting constituents (Harris 2013, 176). In the context of this research, ANT fails to sufficiently account for place or the unique temporality of places and non-human agents.

Tim Ingold's (2006; 2011) 'meshworks' emphasise relations and entanglements, rather than points of agent intersection (ANT emphasising the latter). Similar to the arguments of Callon and Law (1997) and Karen Barad (2007, 140, 151), matter becomes detectable only through emerging relationships - through *doings*. Law (2010, 173) extends this, stating that it is only through a relationship with that which 'does the detecting' that matter becomes relevant. STS and meshwork theory thus offer up a warning: any theory or methodology which hopes to enquire of the material world should be wary of assuming anything is fixed in form, rather than in a state of fluctuation (Law 2010, 174).

In their execution, meshwork theory and STS operate on a similarly theoretical level to ANT. Meshwork theory equally fails to engage with the real 'stuff' of practice or methodology, and thus remains remote from the world it seeks to elucidate (Hicks 2010, 80). Ingold has been accused of not taking material agency far enough (Jones and Boivin 2010, 334), meanwhile he defends his position, and has accused others of taking it too far (Ingold 2007a; Ingold 2007b). Clearly, there remains a great deal of debate on how material agency works. As Watts (2013b, 9) observes, relationality does not amount to equivalence - things and (non-human) beings may appear limited in their capacities if the yard stick is one-to-one equivalency with humans. This is almost certainly why the 'real' agents in any

debate typically emerge, in the end, to be human (Knappett and Malafouris 2008a, x; Harwood and Ruuska 2013, 137); these systems obscure the specificity of other agencies.

Indeed, Alberti and Marshall (2009, 346) argue convincingly that the very notion of ‘object agency’ will always fail. They propose that any system that purports to universally theorise agency reveals:

*“a lack of commitment to other peoples’ worlds and theories, acting as a cognitive trap that prevents archaeologists from launching a fully ontological enquiry” (Alberti and Marshall 2009, 346).*

Such an approach, they argue, converts ontological difference into epistemological difference, down-grading what was real to our subjects to the level of a novel but ultimately mistaken understanding of an objective (read modern) world (Alberti and Marshall 2009, 346).

Hicks (2010, 78-9, 89) makes a related point, critiquing all theories of agency, particularly those which purport to network any kind of self-contained entities, on the grounds that permeabilities are as constitutive as boundaries between material effects (as he glosses material culture). He argues we need only solve the problem of agency if we create it by adhering to one dialectic (Hicks 2010, 78-9). In other words, our own modernist ontology creates these issues. Pointing out that all contexts are both social and material, he advocates an approach which considers “the emergence of the world as an assemblage” (Hicks 2010, 89).

If we take these criticisms and recommendations to heart, any theory which works primarily within the sphere of ‘agency studies’ will be insufficient to address the research aims. It cannot move the discussion to a much needed, more nuanced, exploration of bodies, beings and materials in the past. If we hope to ask, for example, what it was about female bodies that meant so many more of them were entangled in experiences of witchcraft, and how animals, trees and magical things can facilitate that discussion, this type of ‘agency’ is a false friend. As with many of the terms discussed above, agency as understood so far is a term loaded with



presuppositions. It is too individual-centric, too bounded, and too tied into the modern human actor (Callon and Law 1995). It does not afford the widest possible range of engagements with the heterogeneous others revealed in witch trial accounts.

## COLLABORATIVE AGENCIES

There is, however, an alternative approach to agency which lends itself more readily to this type of enquiry. In the context of landscapes, Plumwood (2006, 125) proposes that we remain open to the specificity of the contributions of non-human agents by considering them true collaborators in the making of place. Landscapes, as she sees them, are both “interactive” and “collaborative” - the product of a multitude of heterogeneous, co-fabricating agencies (Plumwood 2006, 125). This echoes older calls for the dissolution of ‘Nature’ and recognition of the vast variety of actors (variably categorised by other cultures) of which ‘Nature’ is comprised (e.g. Harvey, D. 1996, 183; Wolch and Emel 1998, xv).

Practices, people, things and places, as they emerge from the Scottish witch trial accounts, may be seen in very much this collaborative light. Older, slower-moving agencies such as the earth, trees, stones and water, need not be relegated to symbolic roles in an anthropocentric cultural monologue (Plumwood 2006, 125). Rather, they should be engaged with in a way that recognises that cohabitation is constitutive: we are just one type of agent within a composite, co-fabricated world (Bennett 2004, 365; Whatmore and Hinchcliffe 2010, 452). Whitt and Slack (1994, 22) propose that:

*“[...] for both theoretical and practical purposes, communities be approached as conjoined to and interpenetrated by particular environments which they transform and partially construct and which in turn transform and partially construct them. Far from being mere passive props in an essentially (or exclusively) human play, environments so conceived are the embodiment or material extensions of communities”.*

It is this articulation of agency, in which landscapes (Plumwood 2006), communities (De Landa 2006) and even bodies (Deleuze and Guattari 2008 [1987]) are seen as heterogeneous assemblages, to which this thesis most closely adheres, inspiring the theoretical and practical methodologies adopted. By casting the environment as a multi-species embodiment, and investigating body and world as assembled out of 'parallel materials' with a shared ontological 'rule book', it can encompass all manner of relevant things (Fowler 2004, 101-109; Fowler 2008a). Objects, places, weather, hours, fairies, bodies (living, dead and unborn), beings (human and non-human) and all other strange data can be rendered as co-creative and constitutive in the early modern world of which they were part, in a manner that gives due consideration to their unique contributions (Deleuze and Guattari 2008 [1987]; Bennett 2010). Many might even be re-categorised, as Harwood and Ruuska (2012, 138-9) suggest, perhaps from inanimate to animate, or object to subject (or perhaps even shifting in the opposite direction), problematising, by doing so, apparently inviolable states such as organic and inorganic.

Personhood and embodiment, explored not as objective and bounded categories, but instead as heterogeneous assemblages, are particularly fruitful theoretical arenas for this project. It has been argued many times in recent years, and across many disciplines, that there is no trans-historical, one-size-fits-all body or embodiment (e.g. Strathern 1988; Butler 1993; Bynum 1995; Hayles 1999), and specifically within archaeology (e.g. Meskell 1996; 1999; 2000; Hamilakis *et al* 2002; Fowler 2004; 2008b).

Several ideas contributed to the argument of this thesis in relation to the investigation of how personhood, embodiment and world are revealed through the witch trials and related material culture. Amongst them is the idea of affordances: that from every relationship we experience, emerge unique affordances that are dependent on the properties of each interacting agent (Gibson 1986). For example, a small cave affords me entry that it would not afford an elephant; a leaf affords a caterpillar a veritable feast and a home, but does not necessarily afford me even a snack. However, for this to inform us about the body it is with the proviso that material properties are not universal, they are both contextually and culturally

variable (Fowler 2010, 365) - the cave does not afford me entry if it is full of lions, nor does it do so if there is a cultural taboo against women entering it. Ingold (2000, 153) expresses a useful extension of this idea in noting that as the configurations of constituent world-parts are continually shifting in their patterns, meanings (and affordances) are not necessarily fixed. Juhan (1987, 34) argues that it is through the many affordances experienced within the environment of which a person is a part, that all humans come to an understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Together, these arguments propose that there is no objective subject or object, nor is there a mind/body duality (Johnson 2007, 46); being is a dialectic process, built upon and changing through time (Harrington 2010, 108).

This perspective is a useful one in repopulating the past with diverse persons: women, children, the differently-abled and potentially non-human persons (anyone who is not the default: a white, heterosexual, adult man of about average height and capacity; Meskell 1999, 9-11, 51-52 and *passim*). This can be done by starting with a thing and/or place and a practice revealed in the witch trials and working backwards through a dialectic process towards the body/person. This approach encourages relational enquiries, rather than pre-supposed 'universal' ones (Robb 2010, 501-504).

This allows for ontological alterity to emerge; for example, 'uncoupling' birth and death from biological moments, opens enquiries into each (individually and in their overlapping interstices) as socially recognised and ontologically specific (Tarlow 2011, 8-10), making space in the world for intermediate states and beings (e.g. Losey *et al* 2013). Alive, dead, both, or somewhere between, a body may be explored as an assemblage of prostheses, of which the flesh form is the first acquired but only one of many (Hayles 1999, 2-3). The boundaries and surfaces of these bodies may be lightly sketched out, not as rigid, but as malleable, permeable, and prone to intermingling (Meskell 2004; Joyce 2005; Haraway 2008). The form may be found to be temporary - fluctuating and "becoming" something different entirely, through new possibilities presented as they enter into relations with diverse others (Deleuze and Guattari 2008 [1987], 291-293). All manner of

substances may infiltrate, change, violate, problematise or become otherwise implicated in the constitution of the body (e.g. Fowler 2008b; 2011).

Fowler (2010, 379) states: “[...] *distinct concepts of the person (and modes of personhood) go hand in hand with specific concepts of materiality (and distinct materialities).*” Following this, this thesis uses materials and places as they emerge through practice to engage with specific concepts of materiality. These concepts become tools to investigate the way persons, bodies and things are permeable or durable in their environments; their constitution through place-making (e.g. Crossland 2010); their specific material capacities and limitations; their boundaries and their regulation, as conceived of within early modern Scottish culture. Things are included because personhood is not a universally applicable ‘natural’ set of qualities, but an ontologically specific one that is bound up with the material world (Fowler 2004, 155; Fowler 2010, 365). Just as an individual human body and a ‘person’ are not necessarily one and the same (e.g. Strathern 1988), an individual human body and (for example) Crossland’s witch-bottles (2010), need not be ontologically different. Any archaeology of personhood, it can be argued, must therefore also be an archaeology of the material world, including but not limited to, the materiality of human flesh (Fowler 2011). Flesh embodiments and environmental embodiments may be explored in a way that is sensitive to both their relationality within an assemblage, and need to be emplaced (see also Jones and Cloke 2002, 8, 143). The enquiries set out above rigorously engage with personhoods that construct and are constructed by the reality and materiality of witchcraft. Such an approach moves, as Robb (2010, 515) observes, *beyond* agency.

### **(RE-)CONSTITUTING THE ASSEMBLAGE**

Whether in the context of community, environment, or personhood, an assemblage is heterogeneous (De Landa 2006, 11). Its heterogeneity may also vary, perhaps through time, with geography, and/or in other ‘dimensions’ that may be applicable such as gender (De Landa 2006, 12). For example, men and women often interact

with and temporarily “become” something different in relation to the same assemblage of heterogeneous others. Roles within the assemblage are always relational, unique affordances emerging dependent on the properties of each agent (Gibson 1986; Ingold 2000, 153).

In recognising that the relationships within an assemblage are not immutable and universal there must, therefore, be an acknowledgement that what constitutes an assemblage is an interpretive choice. An assemblage is not a natural category - how one goes about theorising what makes up an assemblage should always be a ‘show your working’ scenario, in which form and consistency emerge from the archaeologist’s engagement with the material past (Harris 2013, 178). There is no objective assemblage, because even the act of observing is a subjective one that produces its own reality (Maturana and Varela 1980, 121). Harris (2013, 178) argues, however, that employing a Deleuzian notion of assemblages problematises the emic/etic dichotomy, as the resultant ‘assemblage’ is neither solely defined by the archaeologist’s subjective intervention, nor by subjects in the past; the assemblage comes into being in the discursive space between the two. This is, perhaps, a third subjective reality.

Emphasising fluidity, many scholars argue that in (re-)assembling alternative world-assemblages, it is essential to tackle the polarisation of the human/nature dichotomy, for rigid and uncritical adherence may occlude ontological alterity entirely. Stressing that we are part of nature, Plumwood (2006, 128-129) argues for a view on agency that admits difference without conceding to hierarchy, highlighting that any theory of agency which does not accommodate difference (as, for example, ANT has been criticised), does not facilitate reflexive dialogue on human/non-human, nature/culture or self/other. The process of recognising, problematising and actively re-conceptualising these boundaries is important (Plumwood 1993, 5; 2006, 246), and does not require the ontological reduction of all things to a point where equality connotes sameness (Harris 2013, 177-178).

Donna Haraway (2003, 2008) extends this argument, working through human/non-human intermingling in order to more sensitively pick up on ontic categories. In

doing so, she allows for humans, dogs, and their collaborative relationship, to fall within one, rather than across several, categories. She calls this concept ‘lively knotting’ (Haraway 2008, vii). In a complementary discussion, Henare *et al* (2007b, 14-16) highlight the fact that if things and concepts are mutually creative, and indeed cannot be separated, that if how we conceive of things is part of what we are and what things are, then we need to be sensitive to new ontic categories. In their example, we will never understand ‘powder is power’ by explaining what powder is and what power is, based on our reference to existing concepts with provisos; it requires us to *conceive* of a different powder, not a hybrid, but a new concept (Henare *et al* 2007b, 10-20). With it we must conceive of a different world (not a worldview, not a belief system, but a *reality*), in which such a powder can exist (Henare *et al* 2007b, 10-20).

Alberti and Marshall (2009, 351-352) pose a similar scenario, in which an ontological category, not a pot, body, or agentive ‘hybrid’, but a literal pot-body, exists. Such a category problematises not only pots and bodies, but gender, sex, and what is considered ‘alive’ (Alberti and Marshall 2009, 351-352). As the past assemblage is re-constituted we must, therefore, be sensitive to the likelihood that new ontic categories are more relevant than those we already have and that these ‘things’ emerge from engagements which occur *before* associated ideas or symbolism come into being (Renfrew 2004, 23-25).

In keeping with the philosophical priorities of this thesis, the word ‘thing’ is thus employed in favour of ‘object’, ‘artefact’ or ‘material culture’. Following Henare *et al* (2007b, 5) ‘things’ are preferred because they are more open to bending with the strangeness of the data and revealing new ontological categories, rather than working to constrain it. ‘Artefact’, ‘object’ and ‘material culture’ come with a set of analytical presumptions; they are all very much of an oeuvre, emerging from the same Westernised gaze. ‘Artefact’ evokes theoretical and methodological practices such as collecting, privileging human intervention as ‘makers’ (Malafouris and Renfrew 2010a, 4). The ‘object’ is bounded, self-contained and quantifiable, and located on one side of an object/subject divide (Knappett 2010, 82). ‘Material culture’ prioritises the cultural over the material (Boivin 2008, 21-26). It cannot be

denied that ‘thing’ is also picking up theoretical baggage (Gosden 2004b, 38-9; Henare *et al* 2007b, 5; Hodder 2012, 7); however, it retains flexibility in that it is typically undefined and therefore a more theoretically hollow vessel: anything can be a ‘thing’.

### 3.6 Towards an Alternative Ontology

In working out the theoretical priorities of a situated approach to a culture actively engaged in witch-hunting, stripped as it now is of many of the familiar terms one might be tempted to fall back on (such as belief, witch, charmer or even religion), new interpretative possibilities may be opened up. Adopting a relational and co-constitutive, assemblage-orientated approach to this newly denuded research area, there is the potential for new focus upon how people in early modern Scotland viewed themselves and their world. Though the issues are not entirely unfamiliar (e.g. Hicks 2005; Hicks and Horning 2006; Herva 2009; Herva *et al* 2010; Herva and Nordin 2013; Hardwood and Ruuska 2012), the explicit emphases on personhood and ontology remains an unusual approach to historical archaeology of the West, and has not previously been applied to the study of early modern Scotland. It can, however, facilitate engagement with living, experiencing, embodied beings in a world populated by diverse agents, as opposed to exclusively engaging with the nuanced, documented opinions and beliefs held by a small sample of the community, as has defined the limits of much historical witchcraft scholarship so far.

To summarise the theoretical issues involved in proposing a situated approach to Scottish witch trial material, it is clear that problems of definition are in actuality problems of ontological difference. Modernist, Western ontological frameworks (of which it must be recognised there are multiple; Henare *et al* 2007b, 4) cannot conceive of suitable terms for the ambiguous ambivalences of witchcraft. This is because modern ontologies come pre-packaged (in variable ways) with all manner of potentially hindering dichotomies (van Gent 2009, 161-2; Herva and Nordin 2013,

212). This problem is not one of a past, faulty epistemology (as is implied in all studies that attribute witchcraft to anything other than witchcraft; whether that be economics, politics, religion, or even rye). Rather it is our problem of understanding, our inability to conceive of their world (Henare *et al* 2007b, 12, 16; Holbraad 2009, 433). A modern position enacts a fundamentally different reality in which so many of the early modern terms that defy definition do so precisely because all definitions eventually deny them the privilege of being real. Autonomous, self-contained individuals and inert artefacts cannot interact with the world the way that early modern witch trial accounts bear witness to (Ingold 2006, 11). Nor can they easily describe it without ‘flattening the differences’. In a system of analysis contingent upon ‘they believe...’ and ‘we know...’ many possible interpretations are precluded from the outset, before investigation has even begun (Henare *et al* 2007b, 5).

Whilst it may never be possible to operate completely outside of Cartesian dualisms, many scholars are moving in directions which attempt to harness, conflate, problematise or otherwise work around these dichotomies (e.g. Henare *et al* 2007a; Alberti and Bray 2009; Watts 2013a; Malafouris and Renfrew 2010b). By means of a methodology, Henare *et al* (2007b, 4) propose a viable approach to the past, rather than attempting to classify and define everything, “[refuses] to apportion meanings and things separately”, instead investigating them as one. Leach (2007, 167) elaborates upon this by drawing attention to the fact that the materiality of a thing is not actually a pre-analytical quality. Rather, materiality is highly variable: we cannot simply colour in the past by filling it with objects as they exist within our own particular object-researcher relational paradigm (Leach 2007, 167).

For this reason, the materials, places, and magical accounts such as fairy meetings discussed throughout this thesis are approached through a theoretical lens which aims to focus upon culturally shared embodied knowledge and its contemporary ‘strange’ world. What is still too commonly referred to as a ‘belief system’ (Daniels 2010, 153), is here explored as an alternative, equally valid ontology. It is not the case, as in the works of Carlos Ginzburg (1999), Emma Wilby (2011) or Julian



Goodare (2014) that the argument purports to prove witches ‘real’ by equating them to persons more familiar to modern sensibilities, such as shamans. Rather, the aim is to investigate, in a culturally sensitive way, what it was like to live in a world in which witches, fairies and magical calamity were ontologically real, and to use this as a basis for exploring the community and world of which they were part.

Adopting this type of ontological approach requires informed disregard for artificial boundaries such as might normally be erected by scholars (intentionally or otherwise); for example, between Christian and witch, fairy and stone, or cloth and body. This is done for two reasons. Firstly, to allow for possible alterity in ontic categories. Secondly, with a view to using the extraordinary data from Scottish witchcraft trial accounts and related practices “to reconceptualise ordinary assumptions in extraordinary ways” (Holbraad 2009, 435), rather than ironing out everything that is extraordinary about it, in order to explain it in ordinary ways. Watts (2013b, 1) proposed the blueprint for this methodological choice in his argument:

*“By tracing the contextual and contingent paths along which such [relational] forms come into being, as opposed to populating the categorical spaces of assorted dualist narratives, relational thinking shifts our analytical focus to the ways in which entities, thought of as processes rather than existents, become entwined”.*

This is an essential step in investigating what Henare *et al* (2007b, 14-16) refer to as ‘different worlds’. For if things and concepts are reciprocal in how they come into being, one cannot hope to understand a ‘different’ thing such as a shape-shifting cat, without disentangling the assumptions which come from placing magic and shape-shifting into one set of modern, western, dualist categories and cat into a completely different one. Only by uncoupling the materials under study, to the extent that it may be possible, from their modern categorisations, can it be hoped to shift our own thinking away from rationalising how early modern Scots thought about their world, towards an appreciation of their alterity and an understanding of their world as they conceived and experienced it (Henare *et al* 2007b, 13-16).

It is important, however, not to take this too far. A number of scholars have explored the utility of animacy in archaeology as an alternative ontological perspective (for a good selection see the 2009 *Special Issue of Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 19 (3), and Watts's 2013a). Others have applied an animist framework directly to the Scottish witch trial material through the manipulation of ethnographic parallels (Wilby 2005; 2011). However, if we simply replace the Cartesian duality with some form of distilled-for-generalisation animistic plurality at the outset of study, we risk taking on a similar set of pre-analytical misunderstandings. Ingold (2006, 10) makes a valuable point:

*“The animacy of the lifeworld, in short, is not the result of an infusion of spirit into substance, or of agency into materiality, but rather is ontologically prior to their differentiation”.*

It is on these grounds that the possibility of animacy - variously considered the possession by non-human agents of spirit or personhood, or the ability to interact reciprocally with other persons (Descola 1992, 114-115; Harvey G. 2006; xvii; Brown and Walker 2008), is not assumed. Neither is it discounted. Rather, it is expected that through the materials themselves, and in the unfolding of the underlying ontology, that any potential animacy in early modern Scotland will reveal itself. Following VanPool and Newsome (2012, 77, 245), no hard line is drawn in advance denoting exactly where agency might become animism (or which definition of animism might be favoured): on this, the materials and case studies guide interpretation. As Dobres and Robb (2005) and Henare *et al* (2007b) argue, agency and ontological alterity require an approach in which theory and methodology are both ongoing and simultaneous.

For very similar reasons, the language of distributed personhood, with its dividuality and partibility (Strathern 1988), and permeability (Busby 1997), is not adopted. This is not to argue that there is no relevance in these concepts, but rather that they bring with them bundles of pre-set ideas which do not necessarily map onto an early modern Scottish context. Constructed lenses, loaded with ethnographic baggage, particularly from Melanesia and India, they cannot be

considered generally applicable (Robb 2010, 502). Fowler claims that we can expect to find dividuality in the past (Fowler 2004, 156); however, his work strongly favours the prehistoric, where it is very difficult to test how well dividuality fits. Equally, the idea of the indivisible individual more commonly assumed for the post-medieval period cannot be uncritically assumed relevant: the modern individual was only emerging in this period (Fowler 2002; Thomas 2002; Tarlow 2011, 10). As Fowler (2004, 161) puts it “Humanizing the past does not simply mean ‘add individuals [‘or dividuals’] and stir’”. Finally, things cannot be presumed excluded from personhood. As Fowler (2004, 128) observes:

*“Non-human bodies like houses or pots may not be representations of human bodies, but may instead be the fractal bodies of non-human persons at different scales. This can apply equally to animals, monuments, and even entire landscapes.”*

For the purposes of this study, therefore, simple language is adopted. Human beings are ‘people’ (Fowler 2004, 157) and artefacts/objects are ‘things’ (Henare *et al* 2007b), and neither is considered a bounded category or mutually exclusive, nor presumed to have (or not to have) personhood. Whatever modality of personhood, fractal or otherwise, that unfolds from within them is allowed to do so as the research and interpretation progress hand-in-hand.

## **DISRUPTIONS**

### **3.7 Disruptions: Ways into Alternative Ontologies**

Ontological approaches, pioneered by anthropologists, are slowly being taken up by archaeologists, normally with continued substantial appeal to ethnography (Holbraad 2009, 437-438; Watts 2013b). Indeed, Henare *et al* (2007b, 1) place a great deal of emphasis on moments of unexpected ‘revelation’ in the ethnographic field. Archaeologists are utilising this in novel ways. For example, Herva (2009),

one of the very few working on alternative ontologies in the recent past, uses folklore as ethnography to inform and stimulate discussion.

However, even more excitingly, studies are emerging which clearly demonstrate that archaeology can make a contribution to this field distinct from that of anthropology (e.g. Haber 2009). Haber's (2009) paper highlights the usefulness of 'disrupting' one's line of thought in order to allow for novel connections. In his case, this disruption comes from conversations with local people; however, his method and conclusions are uniquely archaeological. It is argued here that this inspiration to think outside of the box or seek 'disruption' could equally legitimately come from art, storytelling, or indeed any other source.

In any ontological project, it will never be possible to arrive at an understanding of past worlds via emic routes (Henare *et al* 2007b). Ethnography, folklore and the historical record all offer up potential avenues into past ontologies; however, informants are not always able to articulate (or even be conscious of) how they construct their personhood or their ontology. To those born into a world, the questions they ask of their reality will invariably be very different to those we ask as scholars of the past. If that were not the case, this thesis would be irrelevant, as would all historical archaeology. However, even within the discipline, it is too easy to overlook alterity and fall into the presumption of homogeneity in the face of temporal and spatial proximity (Tarlow 1999; Hicks 2010, 85; Tarlow 2011, 12).

Testing ideas from outside a different ontological framework presents its own challenges (Chapter 4: Ontology and Taxonomy); however, a situated approach is well positioned to undertake this. Indeed, failure to do so would be tantamount to writing fairy tales, for the point is to move away from casting the thoughts of others as little more than 'fantasy', explicable with broad, meaningless brush strokes like 'sympathetic magic', and to robustly and reflexively explore their alternative past world (Viveiros de Castro 2003). In order to do this, we need to find ways to shift our own embodied experience and form of thought in unexpected ways; to experience alternative realities.

The contemporary arts are an appropriate entry point for a new perspective on the past, as archaeology and art are often sympathetic. In practice both seek to reveal hidden truth about what it means to be (or have been) human, landscape and/or material culture (Renfrew 2003; Schofield 2008, 192). Renfrew (2003, 8) goes as far as suggesting that contemporary artists may be more effective in their understanding and communication of the human condition, as artists can undertake their explorations in more innovative ways. Art can be emotive, evocative, and even provocative, in a way that academic discourse would struggle.

In a wonderful paper, Kramer (2012) explores how her pursuit of outdoor dance (in all manner of environments and weather conditions), alters her embodied experience of place in a Deleuzian assemblage (Kramer 2012, 85). She experiences herself as part of a multi-agental 'swarm' of materialities, engaging in the '*speed*' of stone and landscape (Kramer 2012, 87-88; see also: Bennett 2010, 96). This is a parallel, but completely different and embodied articulation of Ingold's (1993) observations on the temporality of landscape.

Kramer's (2012) work is ardently not phenomenological, rather favouring a post-humanist approach to landscape reminiscent of Plumwood (2006). She concludes with the suggestion that dance is not simply a means to re-enact philosophical concepts, but presents a means of entering into a different 'scale' or 'regime of perception', bringing non-human agents to the fore (Kramer 2012, 84). Inspired by this paper, I engaged with contemporary dance, theatre, art and narrative, as means of bringing previously impossible juxtapositions into being. Such moments can be opened up and rifled through to engage new lines of enquiry and interpretation. They also facilitate the willing suspension of disbelief; a change in 'regime of perception'. These temporary shifts in consciousness give expression to alternative realities; for example, an artist can create a temporary real world in which animals can become people. These engagements cannot feed directly into interpretations of the past: they are 'disruptions'; opportunities which raise new questions and attendant possibilities for exploration.

### 3.8 Extending ‘Disruption’ to the Reader

The ‘disruption’ experiences critical to the unfolding of the thesis are not discussed here. This decision was taken in favour of presenting them alongside the research material where they are presented as breaks in the conventional discussion. It was taken for three reasons: to allow for methodology and theory to remain parallel, to presence the strangeness of the data, and to facilitate similar ‘disruptions’ for the reader. Indeed, a necessary part of the theoretical framework of this thesis involved the consideration of how best to create ‘disruptions’ for the reader and encourage ongoing engagement with ontological alterity and move away from the easily adopted state of disbelief. As Henare *et al* (2007b, 14) observe, “different worlds [...] require us to conceive a different mode of disclosure”. These worlds are not self-apparent within our ontological framework: they are not situated within it. To understand a culture with ontologically real witches, cleansed of their ‘strangeness’ by academic tradition, from the comfort of an armchair, is an almost impossible feat (Purkiss 2000, 11-12). Archaeological discourse does not readily reshape to this end: everything from how it is written to how it is read comes from the modern world in which witches are an impossibility.

This is not the case, however, for all interpretive and creative genres. Fiction audiences (whether of film or book) suspend their disbelief every day. For the creative arts it is not only possible, but often essential, to foster the suspension of disbelief. For that reason, throughout this thesis there are interludes, explorations in narrative, accounts of my own engagements with the world, discussions of contemporary arts and, in Chapter 7, video clips made by others.

The narrative incorporated into this thesis has been written with careful consideration of ongoing debate within the discipline regarding the potential role(s) of storytelling in archaeological discourse. Narrative is not used as a way of exploring or generating hypotheses (Gibb 2000). Rather, it is explored for its capacity to move beyond the normative quality of academic writing which risks ‘flattening the strangeness’: it provides emphasis (Hamilakis 2002, 103). This is to assist the reader in shifting into a strange place, where the uncomfortable, at

times frightening otherness of the past is more accessible (Purkiss 2000, 1-2), and to facilitate an understanding of a past human condition (Little 2000; Fagan 2006).

As Joyce observes (2006, 65) “the assemblage of real and imagined facts takes place in the present, but the relationship constructed to the past is by no means automatic.” Narrative allows for a multiplicity of voices and for reader/listener-led interpretation. It can achieve authenticity, not by recounting real lives, but by aiding readers in the process of synthesising and interpreting data into characters resembling past people as they emerge from documents and the material past (Little 2000, 11; Joyce 2006, 55-7; McCabe 2011). To this end, openly fictional characters are created rather than attempting to write semi-historical dialogues between real figures (Joyce 2006, 57, 64). The intended outcome is that the narrative elements and other media stimulate the body and imagination to better address one of the most difficult ontological obstacles distancing the audience from early modern subjects: the question of whether or not magic is real.

We return, thus, to the issue of belief. Understanding is not belief: the goal is not that the reader believes in fairies or witches (for example), or consider that the archaeologist does so. Rather, it is hoped that they can, at least for a moment, suspend their disbelief: that they can share, through the stimulation of their embodied imagination, in a feeling of how fairies and witches were real for the archaeological subject. This extends to the academic discussion itself - throughout the thematic chapters, witches and fairies are not something to be ‘believed’ or ‘disbelieved’. They are material; they are ontologically real. Of the reader, it is asked that they allow themselves to be physically drawn into the narratives and “disruption” encounters, rather than simply skimming past them as an intellectual exercise. In the words of Pels (1998, 102) “move in, rather than escape, the sensuous border zone between mind and matter”.

## Chapter 4: Methodology & Sources

This chapter presents the general methodological framework used in the research, building upon Chapter 3 (Agencies and Ontologies) to critique ‘categories’ or material and proposing a methodology for exploring relational ontologies. Commitment to parallel practice of theory, method and interpretation led to the specifics of the methodologies conjoining interpretation in ways that cannot be undone. For this reason, many important methodological details are explored within Chapters 5, 6, and 7. After consideration of Warnier’s (2001, 10) concern that study of the body and material culture are artificially (and unhelpfully) separated, and with reference to the discussion of the usefulness of modern ontic categories (Chapter 3: Agencies and Ontologies), bodies, things, persons and places are not theorised separately throughout this thesis. They are, instead, intermingled, as in the experiential world of being in place (Giddens 1984; Bourdieu 1990; Ingold 2000; Gosden 2004c; Morgan 2010b). Since it is the coming together of different collaborative agents and their relational ‘becomings’ within the assemblage that is of interest, separating them by modern type into distinct research areas would be an artificial activity.

However, for clarity in outlining the methodology and critically evaluating the sources, materials drawn together in the thematic chapters are explored here in terms which more closely reflect modern epistemological categories. For example, all wells are discussed together here because they were investigated through similar means, despite the fact that throughout the thesis they are ultimately dissociated, in favour of discussion in groupings with heterogeneous materials that prioritise different ontological connections. Likewise, the charms from the National Museum of Scotland (henceforth NMS) are discussed here as a collection, but are similarly scattered throughout the following chapters. In the context of a thesis



drawing on so many types of material, a methodological discussion working within modern taxonomies is unavoidable: some shorthand must be established for the general way materials, places and documents were approached for the thesis to progress with any cohesion. However, it should be noted that in practice, all of the areas of study outlined below were pursued simultaneously in a process which flowed back and forwards, moving constantly between material types, places, theories, and bodies.

The following chapter is divided into three sections. *Ontology and Taxonomy* discusses the methodology for teasing modern material ‘types’ apart and reworking them into new categories. The second section introduces and critically reviews sources, integrating within this, discussion of how they complement one another. Finally, *Representing the data* outlines how data is handled and presented. The thematic chapters comprising the remainder of the thesis then each illustrate and develop the methodology and materials to (re-)form different ontological categories.

## **ONTOLOGY AND TAXONOMY**

Fowler (2004, 6) proposes that any archaeology of personhood must

*“[...] investigate how past people were generated alongside their social worlds, through social technologies, and look for key metaphors and principles that structured daily lives”.*

This definition has a somewhat structural-functionalist ring to it, and this thesis seeks to investigate relative materialities rather than ‘metaphors’. However, it is useful to explore the things which emerge from witch trial accounts and other contemporary practices (such as holy well visiting) as social technologies, situating them in relation to the rhythmic practices of daily life (Harris 2013, 173).

Following Henare *et al* (2007b, 2-3), this study started with a number of specific, potentially related ‘things’: rags (at rag wells/rag trees); ‘elfshot’ charms/amulets; and intramural cat deposits. Zedeño (2009; 2013, 118-9) confirms that any hope of understanding ontological alterity requires a methodology that does not impose modern ontological categories from the outset. She argues if alterity is lost in the initial stages, for example, with first classifications of materials, it is not possible to restore it in the final stages of interpretation (Zedeño 2013, 118-9). In effect, the strangeness will already have been flattened out. Zedeño (2009; 2013) proposes that, rather than arbitrarily assume, for example, that all charms belong in one taxonomical category and rag wells in another, we need to be open to relational taxonomies incorporating the intangible properties of materials relevant to the reality of the people we study. To this end, material practices and historical sources were used to explore possible ontological correlations, with a view to expanding the list of ‘things’, whilst simultaneously developing flexible and heterogeneous taxonomies.

A process of following alternative taxonomical connections was undertaken, which involved moving backwards and forwards between materials, bodies and beings, working around absences and “attending to things in an intimate way” (Pearson and Shanks 2001, 60). ‘Things’ were approached from two directions. The first involved seeking the same material, such as the rag, across different contexts (see also Groleau 2009). The second was to observe one context and explore how different materials were used there (see also Zedeño 2009). In each case, the properties of a specific material were investigated in relation to the context and the properties of parallel materials were brought into dialogue to elucidate ontological materiality (Ingold 2007b; Fowler 2010, 375-376;).

Combining these approaches allowed ‘things’ to stay at the centre of the project, and for the strongest ontological connections to be made. It addressed the tendency to fall back on the assumption that in the case of two seemingly different things, scientific difference (such as the use of two very different materials) equates to ontological difference (Zedeño 2013, 119). It was also very useful in dealing with the theoretical problems which arise from ‘special’ contexts and ‘special’ things; specialness typically arising from the archaeologist’s unquestioned

“assumptions about oddness, function, and meaning” (Gazin-Schwartz 2001, 266). Working and reworking materials and contexts to explore different layers of practice requires a critical approach to each, allowing them to challenge and support one another. Whilst it is impossible to truly avoid the criticism of privileging “moments at which particular meanings can be identified” (Hicks 2010, 81-2), this method also allows for glimpses of items at other potential points in their biography (where they may or may not be problematic) and in their other uses.

Exploring related materials does not mean equating them as like for like, but rather that in constituting assemblages of ontological alterity, we take the heterogeneity of those assemblages seriously, making it part of the theoretical and practical engagement (De Landa 2006, 12). This practice involved a move away from ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ as taxonomic categories, instead working with patterns and configurations of places, bodies and things, and allowing trends in early modern personhood opportunities to emerge from the interstices (Fowler 2004, 60; 2010, 353, 377; Borić 2013, 49).

As theory and method progressed together, archaeological engagements with one material inevitably led to another, negotiated through a sensitivity to ‘what things do’, other than simply acting as metaphors (Joerges 1988, 224; Olsen 2006, 97). Fed by a combination of theoretical and physical interactions with the material world, moments of ‘disruption’ and documentary mentions of possible ontological correlates, modern categories did indeed begin to break down. For example, as research moved back and forwards between source types, rag wells, initially seen as ‘one thing’ became multiple: the rags alone finding ontological connections with the charmed shirts of witch trial accounts, the practice of hiding garments in house walls, social skins and human body parts.

## **CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF SOURCES & MATERIALS**

In his *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, Ralph Merrifield (1987, 7) intimated that the study of magic in the historical period would be best facilitated by engaging the substantial body of contemporary thought preserved in written sources. However, despite the many advantages he identified in these sources, they must be grasped carefully. There are specific difficulties when working with such materials, as there are with all archaeological resources, each presenting its own challenges.

### **4.1 General Note on Witch Trial Accounts**

Witch trial records are a past presented through many filters. We must recognise their constructedness: extant documents are not verbal confessions; they are *transcripts* of interrogations. There are myriad voices: accused; accusers; kirk officials; practitioners of law. These pass through multiple prisms, not the least of which may include elite demonological interests and torture (Goodare 2001, 32). However, a developing body of literature suggests that, nevertheless, the real world of ordinary people played a significant role in shaping these accounts (e.g. Martin 2002, 77; Sharpe 2002, Wilby 2005, 123; Cowan 2008). Increasingly scholars propose methodologies for glimpsing the often elusive accused. They argue that the inherent biases do not make these records useless - they are no longer deemed the ramblings of those tortured-to-madness; however, they do need careful handling (e.g. Gibson 1999; Purkiss 2000; L. Henderson 2008; 2009a; Wilby 2011; Goodare 2014).

Wilby (2011, 58, 75-80) proposes a methodology for extracting the voice of Issobell Gowdie from her trial documents, identifying sharp changes and extrapolating from them which question-types may have been asked. Her volume reproduces Gowdie's dittays (documents pertaining to her indictment; in this case legal records of her confessions), unedited and in Scots, in full - an extremely valuable resource. This thesis draws on Wilby's (2011) print of Gowdie's dittays, however, it does not see them as exceptional, other than in their detail. By comparing her dittay with other

records, practices and materials, she can be allowed to fit (or not) within emerging patterns of embodiment and personhood. Wilby's (2011) conclusion casts Gowdie as a dark shaman, a member of a shamanic cult, but she uses ethnographic parallels rather than contemporary Scottish trials to arrive there. This highlights the care with which we must handle any account: methodology and theory introduce their own significant biases. This includes the tendency to see the witch as victim; from the emic perspective they may be ambiguous, an aggressor or even, unexpectedly, the self (Arnold 2005, 4-5).

Throughout the thesis, a preference is shown for cases of career charmers and those with a long history of witchcraft accusations, as both scenarios testify to wide acceptance of a person's practices as real and efficacious. Themes which emerge are then explored across other documented trials to investigate both materially consistent (or related variant) responses. These can thus be drawn into the wider discussion of practices which the majority of parties accepted as witchcraft/charming and as ontologically real (Holmes 1993; Miller 2002, 104).

In evaluating whether an account record represented commonly accepted practice or a unique feature, the following questions were asked:

- 1) Does the material evidence support the assertion that a practice testified to in trial was widely accepted by ordinary people?
- 2) Do the written records suggest other practices or materials which may have been widely accepted by ordinary people?

## 4.2 The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft

This thesis relied upon the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (Goodare *et al* 2003; henceforth SSW), an online database summarising a wealth of data derived from thousands of witch trial documents, in order to identify potentially interesting witchcraft cases. Throughout this thesis, accused witches are referred to by name, as they appear in the SSW, and presented alongside findings extracted from the

SSW, unless otherwise stated. The given name of the accused and their case end date (shown as the court verdict or manner of execution where known) serve as the SSW reference ID as the numbering system it employs is convoluted and not intuitive to follow. Further information for each case may be followed up using these details.

There are also other inherent deficits within the Survey which must be addressed. The first kind of issues represent unavoidable source issues. The SSW represents an unknown sample of the sum total of all witchcraft cases in Scotland because it contains only those cases which were both initially recorded, for which records have survived, and which met the research criteria (for example, cases where animals were accused of witchcraft are not mentioned in the study). Furthermore, a number of cases are included in the SSW which can no longer be corroborated, where extant primary records can no longer be found but previous recording was made in secondary sources deemed reliable (such as Lerner 2005 [1977]).

Even where records do exist they are not always easy to decipher, as the quality of handwriting, spelling and language varies substantially. Furthermore, legible cases have survived to varying degrees: perhaps some key information was never recorded at all. For example, of the 3,212 named individuals included in the survey the outcome of the trials of only 305 cases are known (Goodare *et al* 2003). With less than one tenth of the final outcomes known - one of the most important aspects of any trial document - it must be accepted that all other details pertinent to this study will be equally or even more poorly represented in the existing records. For this reason, some material appears in perhaps only 20 or 30 cases. However, when evaluated alongside other sources on a case by case basis it becomes clear that many of these patterns are indicative of far more widely held practices.

The SSW is an excellent resource; however, it unavoidably perpetuates the above biases, and introduces those of the historians who created it. From an archaeological perspective, it thus requires a great deal of effort to identify potentially interesting cases. It is, as Miller (2003) herself attests, suited to investigations of a biographical, sociological, chronological and/or legal persuasion. This is best witnessed in the fact that data of historical interest such as the names,

ages and relationships of accused individuals are rigorously recorded, as are any potentially demonological aspects, whilst the particulars of material and place elements are patchy at best, and do not fit into the standard fields of the database. The issue is compounded by the fact that the database was compiled over a long period with a number of different participants, resulting in a variety of recording conventions.

One result is that terminology varies slightly throughout the database, as does spelling, meaning that it is not intuitively or readily searchable. While seven entries for one keyword might appear in the online search, it is often the case that there are many more embedded within the database. Furthermore, where one contributor (Goodare *et al* 2003) records certain elements in detail, another might brush past these, or even overlook them entirely, in favour of a different aspect of the case. A search through the entire database for 'elfshot' demonstrates the issues described: the case of Issobell Gowdie gives detailed information on elfshot, whilst that of Marion Neyne McAlester says simply 'Elf/Fairy elements: Elfshot'. However, when searching online for elfshot six results are returned, none of which refer to Issobell Gowdie.

Despite these limitations, the SSW does provide more than sufficient information to begin to decipher the reality of which the witch trials were part. It allows us to explore different understandings of body, being and place that they reveal, pointing the direction to the material which will allow this study in depth. Its deficits are the strengths of an historical archaeological approach. Historical archaeology has developed as a field with a strong interest in exploring the subaltern, accessing those alternative histories which were never written down but which in many cases represent the experiences of the majority, as opposed to the written histories of the privileged few (Funari, Hall and Jones 1999; Hicks and Beaudry 2006). It is the contention of this thesis that it is the material details most often overlooked in the Survey which reveal the complexities of the culture which supported witch trials. Only by drawing connections between documentary sources and the lived-in world of ordinary people may the archaeologist achieve this end (Andrén 1998; Moreland 2001; Carver 2002).

### 4.3 The Kirk Session Records

Many of the problems noted in working with witch trial accounts also apply to Kirk Session Records. Records which have survived the vicissitudes of time are a similar reflection of:

- 1) The biases of those who decided which events were considered worthy to be recorded and any spin that they might introduce due to gender, class or other variables. Invariably male, they were literate ministers and elders with a desire to shape their community to a particular religious ideal.
- 2) The quality of the actual recording (e.g. legibility).
- 3) As Margo Todd (2002, 14) notes, there is also a geographical bias built into the material which needs to be acknowledged. Most surviving material comes from towns and the more densely populated areas of south east Scotland, reflecting the epicentre of the Scottish Reformation and the more established nature of the Kirk in areas of heavier population and elite interest (Todd 2002, 14). With that in mind, an occasional rural mention of a practice may be worth more than several mentions in an urban setting; the former should not be unduly discounted for lack of documents. Archaeological material was often available where records were not, further supporting this assertion.

For the purposes of this study it was not considered necessary to undertake extensive research into kirk session records, as the aim was not to produce a definitive collection of all references to a particular practice, but rather to bring an archaeological perspective to material previously attended to primarily by historians. For this reason, the works of Alexandra Walsham (2011) and Margo Todd (2002) were used for their significant samples of minute extract references to holy wells and church discipline respectively, to put together a picture of these practices as they emerge from the documents. It is possible, that in making their arguments, each introduces their own biases - perhaps in selecting an unrepresentative sample. However, given the wide geographical and temporal span



of each study and the fact they so readily provide examples covering their ranges suggests otherwise, as do other authors (e.g. Rattue 1995; Graham 1996).

#### 4.4 Contemporary Treatises on Witchcraft

Whilst it would be impossible to ignore contemporary discussions of witchcraft such as James VI's *Daemonology* (e.g. Larner 1973; Clark 1977; Normand and Roberts 2000, 327-352; Wormald 2000; Goodare 2002e; Henderson 2011), these documents require the greatest care of all. Many of them were not widely distributed at their time of publication and even those that were would not have been direct sources of knowledge for many people in Scotland. A number of scholars have noted that demonological sources had a limited impact on local communities, and seem to have been introduced to trial accounts by arguing that the influence of demonological writings in Scotland has been significantly overstated (e.g. Levack 1980, 100; Goodare 2014). The aim of the thesis is to explore the implicit embodied ontology; the witch trials offering insight into the variable impacts of demonology in *practice*. It was therefore decided, after much consideration, that such documents would not be incorporated into the study, with the exception of limited and careful use of James VI's assertions regarding what he commonly heard confessed as practice (as opposed to his interpretations thereof). To this end, Normand and Robert's (2000, 353-426) commentated reprint of the original was used. Their volume very helpfully accompanies the *Daemonology* with annotated transcriptions of a number of the North Berwick trial documents which inspired it.

An exception was made to the exclusion of contemporary treatises for Robert Kirk's (2001 [1690-91]) 'Secret Commonwealth'. This was done on the grounds that, unlike elite demonologies, in many respects it is closely related to the dittays of Issobell Gowdie and other charmers. Unlike writers philosophising on demonology, Kirk was an insider, a seventh son of a seventh son, writing about a world to which he felt intimately connected and within which he had access to informants such as charmers who could have been (and possibly even were) considered witches by

their contemporaries. Hunter (2001) provides a detailed discussion of Kirk's background and works in addition to reproducing his treatise. Henderson and Cowan (2001, 184-5) favour the argument that there are strong correlations between his work and witch trial evidence, a number of which are identified and explored throughout the thesis.

Kirk, a Gaelic-English bilingual, grew up in Aberfoyle, before studying at Edinburgh and St Andrews Universities. He was responsible for bringing the Gaelic Psalms and Gaelic Bible to Scotland in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (MacInnes 2009, 186), and yet his *Commonwealth* is essentially an elaboration of second-sight, specifically the role of fairies, written to prove their reality. This can be seen in the light of popular scholarly argument for the continued need for the church (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 176-181; Henderson 2006, 53; 2009b, xv). His background is reflected in the work, which blends fairy elements that would have been widely comprehensible to his congregation (MacInnes 2009, 186), with an academic gloss and complex theology not even widely adopted in elite or ecclesiastical circles. Kirk's interpretations are not straightforwardly representative of widely held experience (Hunter 2001; Goodare 2014, 163). However, the same may be true of any single person's witchcraft confession. Therefore, following Goodare's (2014, 163) advice, use is made of his accounts of materials, practices and experiences (his own and informants); his elucidations, on the other hand, are treated as demonological treatise. It should be noted here that second-sight is not discussed within the thesis. It is an intimately related phenomenon; however, it is not readily evident in either the witch trial source material or the contemporary physical evidence (for recent discussion see Cowan 2009).

## 4.5 Folklorists, Antiquarians and Statistical Accounts

Martin Martin (1999) and others collecting folklore towards the end of the early modern period provide valuable insight into how witches and fairies fit into the contemporary world. However, as with the work of all folklorists and antiquarians, there are issues to be taken into account. Firstly, a tendency was already emerging

within scholarly circles for evoking nostalgia over a theoretical lost ‘innocence’ by conflating ‘rural’ and ‘folk’ with backwardness (Schneider 1990, 24). Other slightly more recent sources, such as those from the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* (1791-99 and 1834-45), reveal the same trend, making all such material problematic to work with. Every writer had an agenda, perhaps most evident in the work of early folklorists who felt compelled to chase what they saw as fading remnants in order to document a folk-world almost extinct (Rattue 1995, 2).

Too many antiquarian studies ‘universalise’ their conclusions across space and time (Walsham 2011, 16). Hartland (1893), for example, did so in his attempt to explain all rag tree practices globally, and throughout history, based on a small number of examples. They are also often condescending and judgemental in their treatment of ‘pagan survivals’ and ‘popish ways’ (Walsham 2011, 70-71, 367). Walsham (2011, 16) calls the works of folklorists “a methodological minefield” and yet scholars still fail to negotiate their difficulties. For example, Wilby (2011, 120) recently stated that oral traditions recorded by 19<sup>th</sup>C folklorists, despite the 150-year time difference “can be seen as generally reflective of early modern traditions”, as they can remain ‘unchanged’ over generations. This position is, however, somewhat uncritical. Stories can and do change rapidly. They are not straightforward retellings of the past. Stories are both actively involved in the continual constitution and reconstitution of the world (Wallis and Lymer 2001), and critically reflective upon that world in their own right; prismic, rather than simply reflective (Salter 2001, 5).

The approach here is to work with explicit reference to source limitations. For example, explanations of material practices are not drawn wholesale from antiquarian and folklorist writings where they are not contemporary sources. They are used minimally, critically, and for specific purposes, within a framework that prioritised material practice and begins and ends with ‘things’. Moving back and forwards between a range of physical sources, where folklore is introduced as a supplement or for comparison, the methodology can better reflect the fact that “human beings do not translate everything significant or compelling into words or engage in a public or private discourse on the matter” (Morgan 2010b, xiii; see also: Gazin-Schwartz and Holtorf 1999; Gazin-Schwartz 2001).

Just like folklore, archaeological sources are often collected only once and extended out into time. Temporal resolution is difficult with material sources: we do not often know exactly how old items are, or the exact timeframes sites were in use. Bringing together antiquarian writings and sources such as the Statistical Accounts (1791-99 and 1834-45) with archaeological material to explore the temporality and localities of practices can be very useful, with two provisos. The first is that care must be taken to evaluate the likelihood that the timeframe is meaningful. For example, ‘an old woman tells me she remembers the well being resorted to 50 years ago’ is more useful than ‘one account relates that an old man claimed it was within living memory 70 years ago’. The second is that geographies must be handled with care: otherwise one account given undue weight might completely change the country wide picture. For example, the New Statistical Account for Inverary mentions six infant burial grounds in close proximity (MacFarlan 1834-45, 25-26). This cannot be taken to mean that Inverary had a much higher ratio of infant burial grounds than parts of the country where none are known. However, it cannot be completely discounted that it did not either. All it tells us for certain is that the person writing about the area was a) interested in these sites; b) trusted enough within the local community to be told about them and c) thought them relevant to record. Just as with witch trial documents, it again comes down to what questions were being asked, by whom, and to what end. With this in mind, these sources should not be universalised to refer to the entire time period or across the country. However, when brought together with trial accounts and material evidence, they can be useful in building a more complete picture.

## 4.6 Ordnance Survey and the Landscape

This research also made extensive use of historical maps, particularly the First Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, 1843-1882. Whilst earlier maps such as Timothy Pont’s (1583-1614) cartographic drawings and Roy’s Military Survey (1747-55) were useful for a general understanding of the landscape, such as whether an area was wooded, their resolution meant that it was not possible to identify

specific sites. The First Edition OS maps often represented the only way of locating specific sites such as infant burial grounds and fairy mounds in the landscape, either because they appear directly on the maps, or because it is possible to tie notes from the Object Name Books to physical sites. However, it must be remembered that both the OS maps themselves and the notebooks which accompany them were also created with specific agendas in mind. Their origins are seen to lie with Roy's Military Survey, a tool of domination and control (Fleet *et al* 2011, 73-97). In other early maps, the interests of the elite, especially those preoccupied with Improvement, are also clearly in evidence (Smith 1998; Given 2002; 2004, 70-72). The land was not mapped for those who inhabited it, but those who owned or coveted it (Fleet and Withers n.d.). Political and ideological agendas and the methodologies which they spawned continue to affect data gathered in a number of ways.

Firstly, the first Ordnance Survey of Scotland was not a simple affair, but rather stopped and started over 50 years while individuals argued over scale and which areas to map first, resulting in an erratic work pattern involving many more decision makers than if the work had been done swiftly and consecutively (Fleet and Withers n.d.). The resulting maps are therefore inconsistent in their interpretation of the landscape: like all maps the creation of each was a subjective process, compounded by the multitude of persons involved and the protracted work period. The maps refract, rather than reflect past landscapes, obscuring even as they reveal, particularly when it comes to alterity in use or conceptualisation (Walsham 2011, 14). They are each representations of the impression one or more cartographers (and their employers) sought to create of the landscape: whilst they may mark locations such as 'fairy hill' or 'infant burial ground', removed from the context of local knowledge of the landscape, the strangeness of these places is again flattened, this time literally, into a single, permanent form on paper.

It should be noted, however, that cartographers were not the only influence on the maps which would ultimately be produced. At Applecross two infant burial grounds are marked on the First Edition OS, although numerous other contemporary infant burial grounds have been located using documents available at the time of mapping, the others are not shown. This likely indicates that locals did not wish to

reveal certain sites. The people making the maps were interlopers, to the point where interpreters were required in the Outer Hebrides to authorise place-name spellings (Withers 2000). As Withers observes there were no standardised spellings - mapping the landscape meant fixing one version of a name to a place, though others had equal currency and may have been more meaningful locally (Withers 2000). The act of labelling and quantifying the landscape was one of control and authority (Harley 1988a; 1988b; Smith 1998). Choosing not to reveal sites such as infant burial grounds may have been an act of resistance on the part of local communities, protecting aspects of the landscape from intervention, just as they kept secret their whisky distilleries (Given 2004, 151-161), or authorities suppressing knowledge of an unapproved practice (Harley 1988b, 66-68). However, as with sites and practices known through other sources, alternative factors may account for the mapping of two Applecross sites; for example, a special interest on the part of one cartographer, insider knowledge or the influence of a local informant. Investigating the nature of the sites themselves could provide further insight into this variance.

## 4.7 Material Sources

A number of extant materials were studied with a view to including them in the thesis, along with a long list of materials not extant but which are discussed in documentary sources. The scale of the project was such that it was not possible to cover everything. Although initially studied at length, communion wares, communion tokens and baptismal basins do not appear in the thesis. This is not because they are irrelevant, or represent a conflicting narrative, but rather because including them would have unnecessarily broadened the discussion at the expense of losing definition in other areas emerging with higher priority through the unfolding process of 'following things'. These other materials represent useful directions for future research, for example, participation in communion (granted by earning a communion token) is related to discipline and social embodiment within the communal body of Christ (McCabe 2011), to fairy food, and to witch accounts of feasting with the devil.

## 4.8 Charms Collections

The ‘things’ known collectively in modern museum studies as ‘charms and amulets’, including coins and pins recovered from historical well sites, were explored using a set of broadly similar methodologies. Although examples are abundant, charms/amulets are a problematic resource for the archaeologist as they come into our awareness fully formed, as ready-made ‘collections’, despite including material as diverse as goose thrapples (figure 10), stones (figure 11), and drift nuts (figure 12). Furthermore, the term ‘charm’ itself is a modern construct which does not necessarily map out early modern relationships with this diverse material. Nevertheless, the NMS possesses one such ‘charms’ collection, numbering well over 100 objects (numbered as a series prefixed with H. NO), and for the remainder of this section, they will be discussed collectively as ‘charms’.



*Figure 10: Goose larynx rounded into a child's charm for whooping cough (18th/19thC); H. NO 87; Balmaghie (BUITTLE).*

*Another very similar example is filled with duck shot (H. NO 36; Balmaghie).*



*Figure 11: Fairy stones.*

*Unusually-shaped natural concretions used as protective counter-charms in the 18th and possibly 17th centuries; H.NO 13. They were found at Fairy Dean, Melrose, DUNS. Naturally occurring.*



*Figure 12: A Mary/drift nut charm. (H. NO 112). These exotic seeds occasionally drift to Scottish shores from the Caribbean or West Africa. Employed as healing and/or childbirth charms or to make tonics to be drunk (Martin 1999 [1703], 164).*



It has been noted that very little advance has been made in the study of charms since 1893, perhaps in no small part due to the manner of collection (Black 1893; Cheape 2006; 2008a; 2008b). Charms typically came into a museum's possession via antiquaries (often from their own collections) in ones and twos, with very little relevant information accompanying them. As Cheape (2008a, 106) observes, one result has been that sparse, incidental or anecdotal accounts have frequently become the accepted narratives of these museum 'objects' as a group. Collecting has ironed out the peculiarities that made one stone a charm and the next (almost identical) one just a stone: i.e. the story (Stahl 2010). Biography is displaced by display; itself a rhetoric of superiority which puts collector's culture hierarchically above collected culture (Snickare 2011, 128).

Another difficulty with museum charm collections is that these items have come to be understood as they relate to the others around them, as opposed to the broad suite of practices of which they were once part (Cheape 2008a, 105-6; 117). They are first and foremost a collection of like objects, as opposed to an assemblage of contemporary things. This is, in part, the legacy of Frazer's (1994 [1890]) *The Golden Bough*, which encouraged generations of scholars to see these charms in comparative anthropological terms (Cheape 2008a). However, they were once part of the same culture which tried witches, relied on holy wells and punished wilful penitents: they must be reunited with contemporary material, rather than related to physically similar items from other continents. Cheape (2008a) alludes to this gap in scholarship; however, he does not propose to traverse it. By exploring their materiality and reframing charms within contemporary practice and accounts this study seeks a more nuanced understanding of their role in early modern Scottish culture.

While the biography of charms may never be recovered, bringing together materials and folklore may allow each to shed a little light on the other. The authenticity of charms is hard to verify - without context there is no way to look at a stone and determine whether it was a regular stone or a charm. However, at the time charms were coming into collections they were still well within living memory and often in regular contemporary use. This is well documented, for example, in early issues of the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*. It is therefore

considered that, through local memory assisted by extant examples, sufficient knowledge survived of typical charms that most of the examples can be considered representative of witch trial period charms, though they themselves may not date so far back. Relative consistency of style and location is further supported by artefacts of known date and provenance held in museum collections, and the few charms for which there is good documentation. More recent charms (c.1800s) are therefore included on occasion, where there is clear evidence that they refer to the same suite of practices and ontological possibilities as earlier charms and witch trial evidence.

Initially charms were explored using traditional archaeological methodologies such as weighing and measuring them. However, it soon became apparent that the range of types is too broad and that the variables measured (for example, weight) were almost certainly not those which afforded a charm its ontologically specific properties. What proved much more interesting is how they fit into the hand. Many of the stones would fit perfectly into *someone's* hand, though not necessarily anyone or everyone's. Their colour, texture, contours and immeasurable qualities such as how light reflects off of them were also explored. However, other than the fact that many of them are 'holed' stones, there were no real patterns in the collection. Almost certainly, part of what made one stone a charm over another is intangible - a specific story of encounter at just the right time, a notable origin such as a fairy hill, or an otherwise fortuitous finding. This can never be directly recovered. However, it does indicate that material origins and patterns are an important variable in singling out a thing as a charm. Whether a charm was a stone collected from the bed of a healing stream or a nut floated ashore from distant lands mattered and their differences and similarities emerged from the same ontological framework. This suggested the focus which was adopted in the discussion of charms; one which prioritises 'becomings', encounters and parallel materialities.

## 4.9 Discipline Artefacts

Many of the above issues with ‘charms’ also apply to the material culture of church discipline: sackcloth, joughs, branks and stool. This is another assemblage to have received very little scholarly attention to the particulars of material forms, though the history of their use is better studied (e.g. Graham 1996; Harrison 1998; Todd 2002; for an archaeological approach see McCabe 2011). Both the charms collection and the discipline collection of the NMS share another problem in common: that of establishing authenticity. It is apparent throughout Canmore, the online database of the National Monuments Record of Scotland (henceforth NMRS), that joughs have often been moved from old to new churches, with some even entirely replaced after prolonged absence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other discipline museum ‘objects’, like charms, have typically made their way into the museum via an intermediary. To establish whether extant examples could be meaningfully related to the early modern period, artefact biographies were considered in depth as part of a previous study (McCabe 2011).



*Figure 13: Jougs at St Anne's, Dowally (FORTINGALL). These remain in situ, attached to the church wall. They are immediately visible from the road, and easily accommodate a height range of 5'2" - 6".*

There are numerous accounts of community members remembering their use in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and of old jougs surviving in the Statistical Accounts (1791-99 and 1834-45). Not long after the New Accounts were written many reportedly “old jougs” were being rediscovered by antiquarians and hung back up. For example, the NMRS cites from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century rediscovery of the jougs of Applegarth, (Dumfries-shire). The Gorget Tree (NMRS No: NY18SW 68), a veteran ash, is reported to have lost a large limb to windy weather, revealing within the trunk the embedded jougs, which were then taken into private ownership.

The possibility that some examples are reproductions cannot be discounted; however, there is good evidence that the antique form of joughs was still well enough known. Thus, even if some of the joughs are not authentic early modern examples, their status as ‘recently contemporary’, the role of living memory, and their similarity of style across all of the extant examples is such that it can be concluded that any reproductions were accurate replicas of older styles and not innovations (McCabe 2011).

A similar argument about branks can likewise be made, based on comparison with definite early modern originals, such as those of Holy Trinity church in St Andrew’s (figure 14; McCabe 2011).



*Figure 14: The branks of Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews.*



Holy Trinity church in St Andrew's still has its early modern communion wares, sackcloth (figure 15), and discipline stools (figure 16), all, like the branks, in the church's continual possession since their commission. A second extant sackcloth was identified (NMS H. MR 11), for which there is a detailed biography concluding with its donation to the NMS by West Calder Parish, not long after it went out of use (Johnston 1999).



*Figure 15: The sackcloth from Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews.*



Figure 16: A pair of discipline stools from St Andrews.

Discipline stools typically have similar stories; St Andrews, Cumbernauld and Duirinish all retain theirs. Authenticity, in these cases, is easier to ascertain. Although there are very few extant examples, the works of Graham (1996) and Todd (2002) illustrate at great length their wide distribution across the country and the high frequency with which they were employed as measures of discipline. The primary purpose of the stool was simply to make the use of discipline - including the use of sackcloth, joughs and branks - a more public affair (Graham 1996; Todd 2002, 318-319; McCabe 2011). The mandate for public discipline came directly from Matthew 18, where it is stated that, if private rebuke fails:

*‘<sup>17</sup>and if hee shall neglect to heare them, tell it vnto the Church: But if he neglect to heare the Church, let him be vnto thee as a heathen man, and a Publicane’*

Penitents disciplined for straying into inappropriate behaviour invariably found themselves perched there, a reminder to the rest of the congregation (McCabe 2011). As with charms, there is nothing to indicate that these stools were other-than-ordinary - it is the stories and bodies into which they were materially woven which set them apart. Their mention is to highlight their role within post-Reformation discipline culture, a defining common factor that brings them into a

category with sackcloth, joughs and bridles when museums put together their 'collections'. However, they are not further explored throughout: as alternative material relationships emerged during research and categories changed, the platform of the stool did not return to focus.

Given the excellent and well-studied documentation of their forms and uses, for the purposes of this thesis, it is not important to have a large number of extant examples of the discipline materials. What is important is that a clear sense of their materiality in the early modern period can be pieced together and understood in terms of the wider cultural margins and treatments of the body, person and community. The exploration of their materiality was achieved during a previous study where extant examples of joughs and branks from around Scotland were weighed, measured, the former subjected to experimental wear (McCabe 2011). The sackcloth from St Andrews was also worn in order to better understand its weight and feel. For this project, experiences of their materiality were then brought together with the extensive documentary sources attesting to their use, covered by Todd (2002), Graham (1996) and Harrison (1998) and incorporated into the emerging picture of early modern Scottish embodiment and personhood. Records c.1560-1640 extend the distribution of these things as far as Kirkwall (Todd 2002), and a selection of relevant sites are marked on case study maps for reference. It should be noted that later in the early modern period, they were even more widespread.

## 4.10 Infant Burial Grounds

Infant burial grounds (hence forth IBGs) are often extant but very difficult to identify. They are secrets: very little is known about the practices involved and, since there have been few excavations, there remain significant questions about them. Their presence in Scotland is little known, though increasing numbers are coming to light, making them the subject of a recent exhibition in Gairloch *Glimpses of the Past*, Gairloch Heritage Museum (autumn 2013) and of conference discussion (e.g. McCabe 2010). The principal research aim for this section of the



thesis was, therefore, to establish the character of Scottish IBGs from their earliest mentions after the Reformation to c.1800, and to interpret the significance of that character. Given the time constraints and uniquely ephemeral nature of the sites, research was not undertaken in order to fully catalogue all Scottish IBGs, but to identify a sufficiently significant sample to give a meaningful indication of their nature.

The *Statistical Accounts* (1791-99 and 1834-45) and *Ordnance Survey Name Books* (1845-80) were used to identify potential sites. The *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland* (Groome 1894-95) was then used to trace alternative place names and place name spellings to ensure that all sites could be identified on 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey maps. During research, additional sites were occasionally encountered on the maps themselves.

This initial stage was instrumental in following up each lead as the next step was to use the NMRS online database Canmore. Not only did this provide data about the sites identified, it provided a useful way of casting a wider net and finding additional sites using search terms such as infant, burial ground, cemetery, church and/or chapel. Secondary literature also suggested further sites to follow up (e.g. Gordon 1984, 144; Reeves 1857, 419), which were included if their existence and location was corroborated by the NMRS and/or on OS maps.

Once a stage was reached where over 30 sites were established each was subjected to detailed map study in order to interpret the surrounding landscape with sensitivity to alterity in the layering and categorisation of place (for example, ontologically real fairy places are not ‘human’ or ‘nature’). This was undertaken using Roy’s maps and modern OS maps for topography, and 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS maps and other historical maps (where available) for features in the landscape that were contemporary to the IBGs or living memory of them.

A number of sites were then chosen for field study, including The Clow (Watten), Inverary, and *FORTINGALL* areas. The selection process took the following into account:

- 1) Likelihood that the site may still exist
- 2) Accessibility
- 3) Proximity to case study areas

Fieldwalking was primarily undertaken in winter to avoid dense vegetation. This proved a very useful tool for expanding on the character of the sites and landscapes of Scottish IBGs. The main findings from this stage of the research are discussed in Chapter 6.4. Throughout the thesis these and other place names (including Gaelic) are spelled in accordance with NMRS spellings.

## 4.11 Well Sites and Fairy Places

Unlike IBGs, which are often extant but very difficult to identify, wells are abundantly documented but rarely extant. What we know of them is accidental - odd snippets from kirk sessions (Rattue 1995, 6; Todd 2002; Walsham 2011) and mentions from antiquarians, Name Books and the Statistical Accounts. Normally well visiting is mentioned in the context of church discipline or as a quaint and seemingly extinguished practice. For example, in the 1790s, one Scottish minister claimed that the reasoning behind leaving rags and animal harnesses was long gone, and that they remained only as habit: meaningless gestures (Donaldson 1791-99, 76).

As with all sources, known wells represent only a fraction. Many may have been in use for short periods of time and/or were simply never mentioned in passing in any surviving documents. For only 110 of the 166 examples identified as of potential interest to this study was it possible to find information beyond a name and general location.

Of the wells where details were available, practices such as perambulations appear varied (these may have been more frequent than record suggests, but simply not note-worthy in contexts such as kirk session minutes). However, across all contexts, deposits (where mentioned) almost always fell into two categories: rags

tied to trees (Chapter 5), and pins and/or coins, often dropped into the water or placed in spaces between stones (see Chapter 8 for directions of future study). There are also occasional mentions of white pebbles, animal harnesses and other items.

Working through a long list of historical wells on the NMRS Canmore database, it soon became evident that exploration of the physical sites would not be possible in most cases, as very few remain extant. Maps were used to gather as much information about the setting of the well as possible, with the hope of identifying some key trends. In an attempt to include more extant sites, every well in the NMRS Canmore database was then looked at. However, the information collected through this exercise was somewhat limited: the exact location of very few healing and/or rag wells is both known and extant.

The NMRS search did suggest, however, that wells could be in all manner of places; from caves by the sea, to deep in the woods; from high on a remote slope, to the centre of town (town, quite possibly emerging because of well). Presenting this data would be a thesis in itself, and as it is not explored in the discussion, it was decided not to include it. Instead, Chapter 5 presents the methodology which developed out of the theoretical discussion (Chapter 3) and material engagements, now intimately entwined in the interpretation of these sites.

After Henderson and Cowan (2001) fairy places were also incorporated into the study as ontologically real places. Given the number around Scotland, fairy sites are here only discussed within the case study areas. However, the range of fairy sites across Scotland is such that they include special trees, infant burial grounds, places associated with witches and wells, alongside other features ranging from roads and bridges to castles, to the many hills known as fairy knowes. Any aspects of their handling which differed from the above sites are included in the thematic chapters.

## **REPRESENTING THE DATA**

The structure of discussion throughout the remainder of the thesis reflects the commitment to engage in theory, methodology and interpretation and to ‘follow the things’. Therefore, aspects of a material or place which seemed at the first encounter to be ‘one thing’ have often become spread across the thematic chapters. For example, the rags and trees of rag tree/well sites are explored in Chapter 5, the water Chapter 6, and their role in treating animals in Chapter 7. This emerges from the same rationale which lies behind breaking up ‘collections’ such as charms and the material culture of discipline. Interpretatively, they make a different kind of sense when related to other contemporary practices than they do when only viewed within their own modern-imposed relationships. Each chapter therefore, cross-cuts that spectrum, exploring particular experiences of the margins between persons, places and things, as opposed to reproducing modern classifications unquestioningly.

Bringing material culture and landscape into a dialogue with historical sources from which beings of different types may emerge (including human) and through which they were constituted and controlled is a challenging task. Archaeology is an interpretative process, an enactment of knowledge which Hicks (2010, 89; 95) depicts as punctuated by “moments of permeability between fieldworker, place, things and people”. Allowing ontological alterity to emerge from our research is not a simple matter, it demands ‘eclecticism’ in theory, methodology and a corraling of our ‘representational impulses’, containing them within the matter at hand, rather than over-extending into ‘universalising’ theories (Hicks 2010, 95-96).

The theoretical, methodological and structural decisions taken throughout the thesis had significant consequences for handling the data: once modern categories are deconstructed, presenting results becomes problematic. It is tempting to map everything and generate graphs, tables and statistical analyses, but an ontological approach generates data sets unsuitable for such handling. Different-ness cannot be explored within the confines of such representation without ‘flattening’ it. There is no merit in pulling apart charms to theorise them across a number of states of bodily crises, only to bring them back into a table, once again a

‘collection’ of charms. Furthermore, any statistical analysis would be virtually meaningless, given the wide range of materials and relatively small sample sizes.

The data throughout this thesis is, therefore, primarily presented through photos and as a series of vignettes which highlight certain facets of a particular site or practice and facilitate contextual interpretation (Lloyd *et al* 2001, 58). As the thesis progresses, ideas are built up by referring the vignettes back to the series of maps in Chapter 1. However, these are not precise maps, distributions or quantitative representations; they are included only to allow the reader to situate the pieces in an ontologically sensitive geography, adding layers of reality to specific places (Lloyd *et al* 2001, 58).

The photographs are used out of necessity, to present otherwise unfamiliar material. However, Howes’ (2006, 169) assertion that it is those qualities of materials which cannot be photographed that are the most important is recognised, with non-visual aspects thus presented throughout the discussion. A slight variation on the method of illustration is adopted throughout Chapter 7 to accompany the discussion of live animals, where videos are also used (for relevant discussion see: Dicks *et al* 2005; Dicks and Mason 2008; Dicks and Hurdley 2009). Sections of prose and Disruptions comprise the final communicative device, with the aim of facilitating the suspension of disbelief and encouraging engagement with the strangeness of the data (Chapter 3.1). The former also conveys elements of materiality and practice not readily compatible with photos and maps, such as weather changes and haptic feedback.

The aim in combining these media is to allow for ongoing connectivity with as many facets as possible of the materials underlying the qualitative research (McCabe 2011). Contextual interpretation is also built up by returning at times to the same wells, trials and other sources across chapters, adding new information, and referring back to the case study maps in Chapter 1. For example, shirt washing is discussed in Chapter 5, and in Chapter 6 some of the same cases are brought back to add in the element of south running water. This is to encourage familiarity with the emplaced-ness of material practices and to allow embodiment and personhood to emerge not as universal theories at the end of the thesis, but throughout, as materially complex, layered, situated experiences.

## 4.12 Calculating Case Study Sizes

Within the field of Scottish witchcraft studies, a number of scholars call for regional studies and cross comparison between England and Scotland (e.g. Goodare 2002a, 14; 2013c, 314- 315; Sharpe 2002, 193-197). Others undertake close small-scale studies of individual witches (Henderson 2009a; Wilby 2011) or a specific community or region (Macdonald 2002a; 2002b; L. Henderson 2006; 2008; Cowan 2008). However, in taking a ‘thing’ led approach, the case studies for this thesis were created to emphasise practices within ordinary lives, looking across Scotland, but at very local scales. Two methods were used simultaneously to generate and populate case study areas. The first was to calculate a useful geographical size for a case study. This was done by taking historical references such as the following:

### **Isobel Cockie, resident of *KINTORE***

Cockie was accused by others of attending witch gatherings at midnight at various markets in Aberdeen, including one at the market cross.

### **Jon Neill, Tweedmouth (*DUNS*)**

Neill worked as a healer all over Berwickshire, Foulden, Chirnside and other nearby areas.

### **Alexander Hammiltoun, *DUNS***

Hammiltoun gave depositions against others from as far away as *HADDINGTON*. He reportedly attended a meeting at Coldingham Law.

Whether, for example, Isobel Cockie did in fact go to these places, the important thing is that this 20km journey was considered a believable distance for her to traverse. Note that unlike continental witches, Scottish witches were always thought to operate (by themselves and by others) within their real known environment, and not to fly hundreds of miles (Paterson 2012, 387-393). There are many dozens of mentions throughout the witch trials that do one or more of the following:

- Name real, known persons from other nearby settlements

- Reveal genuine collaboration between persons from different settlements
- Show that charmers and healers were being hired by people from different settlements
- Show that accused witches were being held in multiple locations

There are also a significant number of mentions of well visiting in kirk session records which suggest that people also travelled some distances for well visiting.

When taken together and mapped out, these accounts consistently suggested that 20km in one or more directions from the home settlement is a conservative range estimate for a reasonably ordinary practitioner of charming. In the case of some, they may have covered the entire range, and in others, even more. For example, Agnes Sampson, of Nether Keith (North Berwick trials, 1591; *HADDINGTON*) was known in North Berwick, Dirleton, Preston Pans and Dalkeith. Johnne Brughe (*MUCKHART*) implicated others in his confession (and was implicated in turn) across a geographical range which included Auchterarder, Crieff, Dunfermline, Kinglassie and Culross. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century people from as far as 50km away visited Strathfillan well, attracting rebuke by their kirks (Morris and Morris 1982, 188; Walsham 2011, 171). Other skilled, non-elite people, alongside those with tradable goods, would almost certainly have had similar geographical reaches. This size also fits well within Paterson's (2012, 391-2) finding that nine accused witches, confessing to meetings at 17 named locations, all of which fitted within a 15 mile (approx. 25km) radius. Paterson's (2012, 391-2) argument is that these were places which were genuinely familiar to the accused and most likely visited in the course of ordinary life.

Whilst the range of the ordinary person cannot be easily assessed, these case study sizes are important because they give a tangible sense of the area over which information about witch practices and the actual practices of the charmers themselves were readily flowing. If we have a rag well at one site, and we know a contemporary healer was operating in the area for 30 years and undertaking charms involving clothing, it is safe to say that both would have been known practices within the extended radius because news travels at least as far as people.

Indeed, Goodare (1998, 301) indicates that news of witchcraft was long-lived and well-travelled, with upwards of 100 people personally involved in accusations including the accused, victims, lawyers, juries and the church, typically over 10-40 years (Hutton 2009, 364). Witches were part of the extended community and environment.

Beyond this limit, a number of points of interest are included on every map because it is important to recognise that nothing is in isolation: there are an almost infinite number of overlapping ranges, with people meeting and exchanging gossip, news, ailments and remedies at numerous points of intersection. A place which is 30 km from the epicentre of a case study is, therefore, only 15 km from a potential half-way point such as grazing land for cattle, a market place, a wood full of resources, a smith or a healing well, where people could exchange advice and gossip (such as healing remedies or the latest witch scandal). In the case of particularly infamous witches, such as Helen Young, the range of their case (including sites of confession, of accusations made against them and of trials) could be considerably greater. Young's trial ranged from across the Borders to Edinburgh and gossip about her devil's mark travelled at least as far as she did (Martin 2013, 71-72).

### **4.13 A Note on the Highland/Lowland Divide**

There exists a definite division of scholarship over whether witches were a more Lowland/Scot's issue and fairies a predominantly Highland/Gaelic one (Henderson 2012, 152-3; Goodare 2013c, 311-312). For example, MacInnes (2009, 192-3) highlights an 'alternative tradition' in the Highlands, where the Witch of Endor (1 Samuel 28:6) is translated as a woman with a 'fairy lover', not a 'familiar spirit'. Drawing upon anthropological sources, Hutton (2011) attempts to make the case that the north did not have witches, but rather two different categories of others: accidental wielders of the evil eye and *sìthean* (uniquely Highland fairies). The often literary approaches of Briggs (1959) and Harte (2004, esp. 39-44) make claims for more vicious fairies in the north. Goodare and Miller (2008, 9-10) make claims



for two distinct cultures (Gaelic and Lowland) at persistent odds. However, when comparing physical evidence with witch trial accounts, there are so many shared, cross-cutting ties between fairy, witch and ordinary bodies that maintaining any kind of hard line between fairy and witch and/or Highland and Lowland experience is not a useful exercise. There are a number of occasions in trial accounts where Lowland witches were claimed to have fairy lovers, problematising the idea of an exclusively Highland notion; just as there are Highland cases of shape-changing witches (Chapter 7.5).

Even MacInnes (2009, 188-189) posits that the trial accounts themselves significant under-represent witch accusations in northern parts of the country, implicating local vigilantes in lieu of kirk involvement. Henderson and Cowan (2001, 121) and Henderson (2006), on the same topic, suggest a higher tolerance for occult practices, and do not see lower incidences of witch trials to mean fewer witches. Hall's (2004, 91-92, 162-165; 2006, 10; 2008) argument is also compelling, that fairies are no more Celtic than they are English or Germanic, and that strong similarities between trial account evidence and fairy beliefs (as collected by folklorists) indicate far more intimately shared experiences of culture than the notion of a Highland-Lowland divide allows for. Indeed, Henderson (2006; 2009a) and Macdonald (2002b) find fairies ontologically alive and well in non-Highland regions.

A further caution against arguing for a divide is over its location: Lianne Henderson (2008) and Lauren Martin (2008) argue for a 'Highland' Moray Coast (*CAWDOR/TAIN*), where Ronald Hutton (2011, 46-47) includes it as a 'mainstream Scots' cultural area. This is a questionable label in its own right as it automatically assumes minority status for Highland culture, despite the very different population distribution of the period. This assumption riddles his chapter; for example, polarising statements pit Gaelic social mores against those of 'most early modern Scots', rather than viewing them inclusively.

Basing a divided study on whether or not witch trial accounts exist in great numbers (as an indicator of deep-rooted ontological difference) is further compounded by the fact that there were both Lowland counties with late, few or no trials, and Highland regions with significant numbers (e.g. see MacDonald 2002b,

22-23; Henderson 2006, 55). In an academic sleight of hand, Hutton (2011, 60-62) writes off Caithness, Orkney and Shetland as 'Scandinavian', and thus not part of the Highland region when it comes to counting up witches. Goodare (1998, 293), in comparison, accounts for differences across the entirety of Scotland as they relate to state and church infrastructure: the further a community was situated from their central control, the fewer witches were likely to be prosecuted. Lynch (2000) and Wasser (2003) confirm that throughout the early modern period, even the Hebrides and Western Islands were not culturally isolated from that controlling centre, with Todd (2002, 14-15) affirming that Reformation there was established more rapidly and successfully than earlier scholarship had supposed. Despite research to the contrary, including Rattue's (1995, 18-19) and Todd's (2002) ample examples from driving force regions within the Reformation of Scotland (in the east/Scots regions), Walsham (2011, 456-45), persists in attributing holy/healing well visiting to the 'Highlands and Islands'. The issue over one culture or two, or many variations, remains hotly contested.

The very notion of a Highland/Lowland divide in the early modern period is an extremely problematic one: the 'otherness' of Highlanders is itself a social construction much of which post-dates the early modern period (Trevor-Roper 1983; 2008; Withers 1992). Antiquarians and folklorists were instrumental in this process - finding in the Gàidhealtachd exactly the cultural differences they were looking for (Maxwell-Stuart 2004, 91), and the tendency to perpetuate this trend without question is untenable. Upon weighing the sum total of these arguments (all based in trial account evidence) with the material evidence, distinguishing between Highland and Lowland traditions is not pursued here. The case studies set out in this thesis emphasise that differences cannot be assumed and must be explored, and emerge only in relation to the more general picture. This thesis focuses upon building that picture. To this end, no Highland/Lowland division is marked on any of the maps, nor is it taken into account in the discussions.

## CHOOSING THE SITES

As mentioned above, the case studies were chosen on the basis of showcasing the range of material evidence and how, through practice firmly rooted in the material world, beings, things and places emerge with ontologically unique properties. The sources outlined above were explored across Scotland, and the materials determined whether a location would ultimately become a case study. They are therefore biased towards places where primary sources and secondary discussions were available that covered more of the range of materials and practices under study. However, this is not considered a problem because whilst these sites are perhaps more data-rich than other places, everything discussed is distributed to some degree around the country. They are not alone in the diversity of practice they offer - it actually became necessary to reduce the number of areas to a manageable sample. Each case study area selected, therefore, offers a representative but unique cross-section of practices, places and things, which will include some but not necessarily all of the following:

- Accused witches/known charmers
- Healing wells/rag trees
- Extant material culture of discipline or recorded use c.1560- c.1640 (based on Todd 2002)
- Extant charms
- Infant burial grounds
- Fairy places
- Witch sites (e.g. burial sites)

The case study areas are not presented in their entirety as collated representations. Rather, examples of each practice discussed are drawn throughout the thesis from multiple case study areas. This practice of travelling back and

forwards across Scotland throughout the discussion is to allow the ‘things’ in question to remain central, rather than subjugating them to the priorities of a geographical format. It is up to the reader to layer the references to place, as they emerge from the research. To set them down permanently into a represented relationship would be to flatten their strangeness. The case studies are thus woven into the following three thematic chapters, each of which is preceded by a narrative section and a ‘disruption’ which foreground the potential for ontological alterity which emerges from the chapter to follow.

# Story 1

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## ELSPET

*Warm air smelling of the first rush of wild garlic and deep bluebells and sank from leafy hills down through the settlement. Bairns and cats and dogs had formed a wild band, capering from home to home, and the calves were going to grass. Spring had arrived, and with it came the hope of a child to be conceived. Tomorrow, before dawn, Elspet would make the two hour trip up to St Mary's well.*

*She set off in lamplight, to the rustle of sleeping bodies turning over. The May moon was still high and her spirits rose to meet it. The well was known for healing all kinds of women's problems. Surely it would heal her.*

*Meadow turned to glimmering broadleaf woods, skirting the edge of the deeper forest. Jewel-like, their emerald leaves already formed a thickening roof overhead. Walking was a long time, filled with uncertainty. What if she got lost?*

*Suddenly, announced only by the quiet rush of water swollen with melting snow and the last of April's rain, she found her path. The woods opened up. Just like that, she was there.*

*Careful not to touch the remains of the little rags left by so many others before her, she studied them. Some were old, almost gone. Others must have been left by girls arrived earlier this same spring, perhaps from closer settlements. She bathed, and drank from the water, pushing her pin into the stony body of the well as her mother had told her. Then she tore a small strip from her underskirt, tying it to the birch that called out to her "I will wait with you. We will change together".*

*Just as she set off, a sad and beautiful girl arrived. They exchanged a quiet, sisterly nod. Elspet left knowing that she, like others before her, was leaving behind part of herself to be healed. Joyful and renewed, she took time now to revel in the wood's glorious offerings, golden shafts of light finally cutting through to her feet. There was no hurrying back to the church and its punishment.*

## TREE

*Sun had returned. Fresh mountain waters. Leaves unrolled, lazily at first, and then in bursting crescendos. Little friends returned to make their homes. All kinds of songs came back: feather songs; water songs; buzzing songs; leaf songs; girl songs. They left behind their little things, and Tree cared for them. Some were lifted up, high into the sky. Others fell with lost tree limbs, to the forest floor. Some became nests and other little homes. Tree cared for them. Until, in time, they stopped being girl and became entirely Tree. Disappeared from that world, rotted and taken up through roots, and made into Tree. Girls came and went, and Tree endured. Generations of those others came and went. Tree stood sentinel, making a place. The little rags of girls became Tree's green cloak, only to fall again and again as autumn's leaves each year. They became Tree's place.*

## Disruption 1: Body Parts

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*Figure 17: Midway: Message from the Gyre © Chris Jordan.*

*This image (one of many) shows an albatross chick, gorged to death on plastic.*

*I wonder, looking at the remains of this infant; if it lived on plastic, then surely plastic is become bird? Bird is a cyborg, made of organic and inorganic components, an unintended consequence of human deposition. We are become accidental bird killers; we are gyre-makers. As its remains rot, and bone, feather and flesh cease to exist, this plastic assemblage will be its enduring remains. These plastic-become bodies, each a tragic testimony to a mother's best attempts to save her infants, will be all that endures, if they become extinct.*

*This image startled me. It is uncomfortable to look at, and to think about, however, it also provided a rich opportunity to consider new questions. For example, to question what we can make bodies from, and what might constitute human remains/animal/being remains. Before encountering this image, I had not considered the possibilities that arise from clothing as body parts.*



## Chapter 5: Cloth-Body-Tree Collaborations

The development of this chapter began with states which problematise ordinary bodies: disease and bewitchment, and questioning how practices related to these bodies-in-flux reveal personhood (Chapter 3.5). Viewing bodies in such states is often very difficult for the archaeologist: past people are typically encountered either in death, or as theoretically well, fully-functioning members of society (Meskell 1999, 9-11, 50-52 and *passim*). In the context of early modern Scotland, the practice of visiting rag wells presents an ideal opportunity to encounter experiences of the otherwise ordinary body in a state of crisis. A situated approach has the potential to investigate this strange data robustly, and to critically relate it to Hartland's (1893, 463-7) supposition that witches and rags 'make sense together'. Here, this practice is seen as both ontologically meaningful and material: explored both to better understand well visiting, and to better understand personhood, embodiment and things in early modern Scotland.

This study is not interested in tenuously attributing well visiting to pre-Christian, (Counter-) Catholic or Protestant origins. However, it must be taken into account that the post-Reformation church was against the practice and regularly punished people around the country for well visiting - typically assigning them the sackcloth (see Miller 2002, 99; Todd 2002; Henderson 2007, 177; Walsham 2011, 106 for examples and legislative measures). Here, the focus is on the *practice* as it was experienced, and on investigating how rag well visits and interactions with sackcloth punishments express understandings of the body as part of a wider, early modern Scottish ontology.

The structure of this chapter will at first appear unusual. One core theoretical pillar of this thesis is to follow the connections ‘things’ themselves suggest to allow for potential alterity in the formulation of ontic categories and their constituent parallel materials (Chapter 4: Ontology and Taxonomy). Another is to practice theory, methodology and interpretation in parallel. Thus, each thematic chapter weaves together seemingly disparate strands, at times moving backwards and forwards between materials. In the case of this chapter, those strands began with healing wells - specifically their rag trees. Following the rags lead to clothing in other contexts, including hidden garments. A turn to the trees themselves and their relationship with the newly theorised rags allowed ‘things’ to develop the discussion of embodiment further, suggesting a final example of a cloth ‘thing’: the sackcloth - a garment of repentance shared by the community. Throughout the chapter evidence is drawn from witch trial accounts and other sources in order to unfold the heterogeneous assemblage of ontologically related materials.

## 5.1 Well Visiting Vignettes

### St Queran's/Querdon's Well, Troqueer (*BUITTLE*)

*NMRS No: NX97SE 12*

Women and children tied rags and left coins, pins and ribbons on the 1<sup>st</sup> (Sunday) of May as recently as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Coin finds were recovered, the earliest dating to c.1560 along with hundreds of other coins dating from Elizabeth I to George III and at least one medal dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Dudgeon 1891-92, 63).



*Figure 18: Bent coins and pin cleared from St Queran's Well*

*(H. NO 59). This type of damage or 'killing' is commonly found in charms.*

### **St Fittack's Well, Bay of Nigg (*KINTORE*)**

Morris and Morris (1982, 38-38) report that people bathed and took water home on the first Sunday of the year, for their general health, leaving a rag from their clothing and that in 1630 the Aberdeen kirk session promised penance equal to that of fornicators (typically sackcloth) for those undertaking this 'superstitious' activity.

### **Fuaran a chreigain bheac (*CAWDOR*)**

Morris and Morris (1982, 116) record this healing/fairy well, where mothers left white pebbles, shells, milk, pins and tied rags to the trees, leaving their changeling child overnight in the hope of their own child's safe return in the morning. It is not entirely clear when this well was in use, but the type of use confirms its relevance to the study.

**St Fillian's Chair and Well, Comrie (FORTINGALL)***NMRS No: NN72SW 6*

Visitors on the 1st of May or 1st of August bathed for barrenness, rheumatism, eye problems or their general ill health. The practice involved three sunwise circumambulations. Visitors then threw a white stone into the water and left behind their rag of wool or linen (Baxter 1791-99, 181). St Fillian's (figure 19) is one of only two sites identified where rags are mentioned but not specifically in the context of tying them to trees. Currently the site sits on a bare hill, the 'chair' of which is a natural feature, though it may have supported briar bushes or similar in the past. At another nearby site (figure 20), visitors left coins, pins and beads.



*Figure 19: St Fillian's Chair, Comrie (FORTINGALL). The hill upon which it sits shares many properties in common with fairy hills; including size, its distinctiveness within the landscape, and its proximity to a church (see Chapter 6 for comparison).*



*Figure 20: Inschadney well finds, Kenmore, FORTINGALL; (NMRS No: NN74NE 11; NMS H. NO 62). The drinking cup is heavy, rough and unfinished stone. The deposited items, comprise three coins (two c.1630s, one dating 1806), three buttons, a small glass bead and five (originally six) pins (Gillies 1924-25, 77).*

### **St Bennet's Well (TAIN/CAWDOR)**

*NMRS No: NH76NE 1*

Situated by St Bennet's chapel were a rag well and a stone trough known as 'the fairy cradle' used to treat changlings. The trough was destroyed c. 1745, though rags were reputedly being left on the thorn-bushes until at least 1800 (Miller 1994 [1835], 101). A number of other rag wells are also indicated on the *TAIN* and *CAWDOR* maps.

### **Holy Well, Kennethmont (KINTORE)**

*NMRS No: NJ52NW 5*

The Holy Well was reputed to heal animals and children. Visitors left a rag from the clothing of their sick child or their animal's harness, according to the minister (Donaldson 1791-99, 76) suggesting possibility that the harness and clothing and/or bodies are correlate in some way.

## RAISING INITIAL QUESTIONS

Certain patterns emerge which may be of ontological significance. We might ask, what made things suitable to deposit? What was the nature of their deposition? Beyond this, there is the consistent worry over women, children and animals - there are no special 'men's health' wells. Todd (2002, 206) observes that kirk session records more frequently rebuking women (often groups of women) for well visiting, further attesting to this difference. What, if anything, was special about the bodies of women, children and animals? Did they share ontological properties or have different ones? What was the role of other collaborative agents such as trees?

## 5.2 Rags and Garments in Witch Trial Contexts

Cloth, in the context of Scottish healing wells, is typically seen as an incidental indicator of a social practice - the well visiting (e.g. Todd 2002; Walsham 2011). However, as has been argued before (Keane 2005), social practices exist only in relation to their own materiality. Hermken (2010, 232) points out "cloth not only signifies or communicates cosmologies [here taken as ontologies], but actually embodies belief [...]". Mitchell (2006, 342) and Boivin (2008, 168-9) call for recognition that how we use and manipulate cloth is world-shaping, moulding us and our world as much as it moulds to us; our relationship with cloth (for example, as clothing or shelter) grants us capacities we do not otherwise possess. Technologies, including cloth, form and are formed by, our perception of the world; they become part of us and are constitutive to our humanity (Boivin 2008, 169). Cloth has agency (Miller 2005). Cloth then, is the base category for this first exploration into early modern Scottish ontology.

It is to the clothing as which rags began their journeys, that the discussion first turns. Clothing and cloth is one of the most commonly identified powerful things across Scottish witch trial records, second only to water. In fact, as at rag wells, the two appear together with great frequency. There are three main uses of

clothing mentioned in trial records: healing (including unwitching), harming, and transference (healing one person or animal by transferring disease to another, thus harming them).

The examples of practices described below are primarily selected from the trial accounts of professional charmers/healers accused of witchcraft. With careers amounting to decades, descriptions are considered most likely to represent practices which a) were commonly undertaken; and b) were widely understood to be efficacious. They highlight three distinct types of practice: healing, harming and the transference of disease from one being to another via cloth.

**Isobel Haldane, Perth (*FORTINGALL*)**

*Strangled and burnt, 18/7/1623*

Thomson *et al* (1834-45, 38-41) discuss Haldane's trial accounts as available in their own time, including her date of execution. She was a known charmer and confessed to healing with water, casting the shirt of a sick child into a burn in the names of the Holy Trinity. She reported failure due to spilling some of the water.

**Alexander Drummond, Auchterarder (*MUCKHART*)**

*Strangled and burnt, c. 11/2/1629*

Drummond (with a 50-year reputation as a healer), confessed to using a man's shirt to diagnose bewitchment, to using water crossed by a Christian king (implication of horseback) to wash a shirt for healing purposes, and to other related uses of shirts.

**Janet Boyman, Cowgate (*HADDINGTON*)**

*Sentenced to execution 29/12/1572*

A practising healer, Boyman diagnosed illness using a shirt, which she washed in an elvish well on the south side of Arthur's Seat. The treatment failed because it was after Halloween (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 127-129; Henderson 2011, 245).

**John Smith, *DUNS***

*Outcome unknown, 1631*

Smith's case starts almost a decade before his trial in 1623. Analysis of the SSW confirms that men were not typically spontaneously accused of witchcraft - those accused tended to be charmers/healers. These two facts strongly suggest this was

Smith's profession. One of the accusations against him is consulting with the devil, who told him to place his own wetted shirt in the doorway of his bewitcher.

**Christian Stewart (vagabond)**

Confessed at Perth, Linlithgow and Edinburgh (*FORTINGALL; HADDINGTON*)

*Burnt 27/11/1596*

Stewart was accused of causing harm by leaving a black clout [cloth/clothing] by a gate the target of her malefice often walked through.

**Isobel Cockie, KINTORE**

*Burnt, 19/2/1597*

Cockie had a significant career as a healer. She was accused of leaving coloured cloths in the home of a neighbour, who found, upon burning them, the fire raged such that it was feared the house would burn down.

**Janet McGown, Dumfries (BUITTLE)**

*Strangled and burnt, c.5/4/1659*

McGown left a black cleise [cloth/clothing] and three blue yarns under a milking cow for harmful ends.

**Bessie Stevenson, Stirling (MUCKHART)**

*Guilty, outcome unknown, 1659*

Stevenson confessed to having learned healing from another woman 24 years prior to her trial. She washed the clothing of bewitched individuals in St Ninian's Well to "end them or mend them", transferring the disease to the first person she encountered on the way home.

In addition to many further cases referring to clothing and cloth there are also, throughout the witch trial accounts (see SSW), numerous examples in which thread or yarn is used for healing, harm or transference - such as was related in the Janet McGown case and is found on rowan charms (figure 21). These are considered to be closely related to clothing and rags, given that they are the constituent parts out of which clothes are made, but cannot be assumed to be ontologically identical. Schneider (1989) does, however, connect them directly to fairy/demonic/magical beings and their presence in the lived world. Threads are not widely explored



within the thesis, but are mentioned in the contexts in which they most frequently appear (see fairy encounters in Chapter 6, and transferring disease to animals in Chapter 7.6).



*Figure 21: Replicas of 18th/19th charms made with rowan and knotless red thread and worn on the body (H. NO 51 & 86). Rowan was renowned for its potency against witchcraft (Miles 1999, 215), and both James VI (Normand and Roberts 2000, 366) and the New Statistical Account describes the use of such charms to this end (Bryden 1834-45, 142). Isobel Watsonne of Glendevon (MUCKHART) made a cure for worms using rowan and a corpse's finger.*

### 5.3 Cloth in Deliberately Concealed Contexts

Zedeño (2009) suggests that ontologically relevant interpretations of things begin by looking for our chosen material of interest in closely related contexts. As hanging rags is an intentional deposition practice of old cloth, the deliberate concealment of worn clothing in buildings (as revealed in the trial accounts) may

be part of the same relational taxonomy. A database of such items exists: the Deliberately Concealed Garments Project, henceforth DCGP (Textile Conservation Centre Foundation 2010). It records reported finds of deliberately concealed garments, primarily from England, but does contain two Scottish examples. This low number is not necessarily related to the comparative prevalence of the practice. The recording of these finds is all too often haphazard as they are typically encountered by renovators and homeowners, not archaeologists, and at best disappear into grey literature (Steane and Bloxham 1987-88; Eastop 2007, 66). Accurate assessment of known concealed garments is further hindered by museum apathy. Even where garments have made it into museum collections (as opposed to being thrown out or walled back up), curators have been shown not to reply to surveys, or if they do reply, to be uncertain exactly what is in their collection and how it got there (Hoggard 2004, 169-170). These factors, plus the smaller historical population of Scotland, suggest reasons why few extant examples are recorded.

DCGP founder, Dinah Eastop (2007, 66) laments the lack of contemporary documentation and how it affects interpretation, overlooking the fact that concealing garments is relatively well testified to in Scottish witch trial evidence. Working with concealed garments, Swann (1996), Merrifield (1987) and Eastop (2001; 2006; 2007) variably incorporate great geographical and temporal scope into their data: Europe, North America and Australia, at times going back as far as ancient Rome. This creates large sample sizes; Swann (1996) for example, bases her interpretations on a figure of 1550 known deliberately concealed shoes and garments. However, relating practices from many parts of the world and across millennia, in the context of ontological enquiry, is less meaningful than using a small sample as part of a tightly-knitted relational taxonomy. This is especially true when it is taken into account that in these larger studies, the caches each count as the total number of items of which they are comprised; thus 100 of Swann's (1996) 1550 finds come from a single context.

Grounding a discussion of deliberately concealed garments in the Scottish evidence presents new possibilities, allowing Scottish examples to be meaningfully incorporated into a relational taxonomy of cloths and clothing. The accounts of long career charmers and others accused of witchcraft (which greatly outnumber

English equivalents) confirms that cloth and clothing were commonly concealed in buildings for ontologically specific purposes, and provide greater insight into the practice. As demonstrated above, these accounts testify to both harmful and helpful motives. Evidence from the witch trial accounts of the early modern practice also suggests that, at least in Scotland, finds of individual or small numbers of items are significantly more likely than large caches.



*Figure 22: Two examples of deliberately concealed garments discovered in Scotland © Textile Conservation Centre Foundation, 2010. The glove in particular has seen extremely hard use.*

In 1993 a collar (left above) was discovered during the renovation of a rural, pre-1850s farmhouse in Caputh (*FORTINGALL*), concealed beneath the window in a south-facing wall (Textile Conservation Centre Foundation 2010). The practice evidently continued into the modern period: in 2001 a hat and a well-worn man's leather glove (for manual labour) were uncovered during renovations in the first floor floorboards, directly above the entrance to a former farm cottage. These were dated to the later nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, based on style and a local maker's mark on the glove (Textile Conservation Centre Foundation 2010).

The probability of small caches hints at another reason so few surviving examples are known: individual finds are more likely to be destroyed or overlooked (in practice, recording or interpretation) than substantial caches. Both the archaeological examples and the trial accounts do uphold the general consensus

that deliberately concealing garments was directly related to thresholds and other morally/spiritually vulnerable spots; for example, windows, chimneys and entryways (Swann 1996, 61; Eastop 2006, 247; see also Purkiss 1996, 97-98). Eastop (2006, 245, 251) calls them “material memories”, reading into them the memorialisation their concealer and the generic ‘apotropaic function’ scholarship all too often falls back on.

When evaluating the Scottish material, the work of Harvey Molotch (2003) may shed new light on this practice. Molotch’s (2003) work suggests that clothing is intimately connected with the wearer, who participates in the garments’ accumulated odours, re-shaping, damage and repair, perhaps making the memorialisation of the wearer more likely. Associations between garment and wearer are deeply entwined within the witch trial accounts and deposition of rags (also a form of damaged clothing), both in the contexts of healing at wells and in acts of malefice: that a connection endured between early modern concealed garments and their wearer is highly probable. It has been noted that concealed garments have typically seen heavy use and may have been deliberately damaged/’killed’ (Swann 1996, 64). This is true of the Scottish examples; ‘killing’ them may be related to their own ontological status, to that of their previous wearer, or potentially to their role in a new ontic category - a house-plus-killed-garment material/being.

Merrifield’s (1987, 132) interpretation of hidden garments is that their inclusion into the fabric of the home was a male practice; a builders’ superstition to protect the new structure. He posits that this may have originated from incorporating human sacrifices (Merrifield 1987, 132). The Scottish witch trial evidence brings this into question, suggesting that the relationship between clothing and wearer was at least as important and that women were also involved in concealment.

Eastop’s (2006, 245) assertion that “[...] it is impossible [due to lack of contemporary accounts] to give definitive answers to the question: why did people hide things within buildings?” may be too timid, a side-effect of sacrificing the exploration of local contemporary correlates in favour of a larger number of international samples. Her need for an articulated contemporary reason ‘why’ is essentially the equivalent of favouring ethnographic explanations of material

practices. It does not take into account the fact that articulated ‘understanding’ might hinder efficacy, and is certainly not a prerequisite for a practice to be experienced as working (Daniels 2010, 154). In Eastop’s (2001) research scenario, people explain material. By allowing stories to emerge from the materials and practices to explain the people, new interpretations become possible. This is why Eastop (2001, 79) fails when she sets out to explore the “person/object boundary” she seeks to elucidate: the person/object boundary is rarely explicitly articulated – it is implicit, experiential and intimately material.

Combining concealed garments with other intentionally deposited cloth (rags) and accounts from contemporary charmers suggests that, in the end, Merrifield (1987, 132) and Swann (1996) were correct in connecting deliberately concealed garments with the human body. Where this argument goes wrong is in attempting to relate this to the idea of theoretical, sacrificial bodies somewhere in the long-forgotten past. Rather they might be seen as ‘things’ which extend the bodies with which they had relationships, both during their useful lives, and at the point of intentional damage and deposit (perhaps, but not necessarily) by a third party. This act may be ontologically similar to maiming or killing, performed to limit or activate the agency of the ‘thing’.

## 5.4 Ontological Inferences: different Cloth(e)s

The questions of whether and how charmers’ healing practices and deliberately concealed garments are related ontologically to tying a rag to a tree at a well requires some potential differences be addressed. Firstly, it should be noted that healing or concealing practices typically (though not exclusively) describe the washing or placing of whole garments. Although this appears to be a variance at first glance, this is in keeping with rag well practice. Two possible scenarios exist. The first is that individuals arrived wearing or bearing (on behalf of those too sick to visit) whole garments, leaving only a rag behind. Those cases where any origin for the rag is mentioned indicate that the fabric was taken from the area of the garment which covered the affected body part. The second scenario is that rags

were taken to wash the sick person with the water, and then left behind. In either case, deposited rags almost certainly came from the inflicted person's or healer's clothing at some point.

It may be tempting to suggest that in practice the rag was an ontologically-empty vehicle for getting special water onto the sick person, left behind as a simple thank you (e.g. Walhouse 1880; Walsham 2011, 459). However, when evaluated as a whole, there is clearly a significant entanglement between body and cloth. Even putting aside the likely origin of the washing rag from the part of clothing associated with the body part afflicted, the crucial point remains: it was subjected to potential transference contact with the person during washing. It was typically left behind in the understanding that as the rag rots, the illness or injury will get better (Cowan and Henderson 2001, 98; Henderson 2007, 19); and under a taboo that specified that touching another person's rag would transfer their affliction to you (Hartland 1893, 460; Henderson 2007, 15). Concerns over transference and witchcraft confirm the likelihood that people would use a rag from their own clothing - to take someone else's (unless on their behalf, and possibly even then) could be a potentially problematic behaviour.

Taken together with supporting evidence from witch trial accounts, the rag-rotting practice and associated taboo reveal a deeper ontological role for cloth and clothing, and for the rag tree/well site than Hartland (1893), Todd (2002) or Walsham (2011) suppose, particularly when the issue of malefice is factored in. Harming practices frequently incorporated rags and clothing - typically by placing them surreptitiously under or over a threshold, or in a wall. Witches were accused of placing cloth in these places, or of taking the clothing of others for magical purposes. Leaving behind a rag just anywhere could, therefore, be potentially dangerous: the wrong rag in the wrong place could invite a witch to take it and use it against you, or even leave you open to being named a witch. Interestingly, this does not seem to have been a major concern: rag wells were widely resorted to. The safety of rags (from witches) may be related to the power of the site itself; however, the simpler explanation is that it is in keeping with the idea of disease transference. The safety of rags at rag sites is the ontologically logical extension of

three pre-conditions suggested by charmers' accounts, and they effectively create a fourth condition:

- 1) Healing can be affected by treating the garments of an afflicted person, whether on or off the body, particularly by washing in special water. This includes unwitching.
- 2) Harm can be effected by contact with contaminated garments or portions of garments.
- 3) Healing can be affected by allowing contamination to pass out of one and into another (human or animal) through garments or portions of garments (transference via medium of cloth).
- 4) Rags are safe from witches because they are both anonymous and yet simultaneously capable of transferring disease from a specific, connected person. To the perspective of anyone interested in using them for malefice, a rag presents the risk of an unknown affliction of unknown severity.

The four conditions drawn out of the discussion above are a strong argument for an ongoing connection between human and clothing/rag that endures in a meaningful and reciprocal way, even when remote from one another and anonymised. The incorporation of garments (whether temporarily, or longer term; for malefice, or apotropaic ends) into buildings also presents a further possibility:

- 5) Clothing possesses or retains qualities which may be transferred to or incorporated into place. Whether cached in a house or hung on rag trees, lively knotting into new ontic categories may be occurring between fabric, human body, tree and/or house and other constituents of the co-fabricated world.

It is to this point that the discussion now turns, returning to rag tree sites to explore how these places are made, what they say about bodies, and what they can add to the discussion of cloth and clothing as ontologically different 'things'. This

firstly requires a full exploration of trees, for in the context of rag well sites, trees are not merely handy rag receptacles. They are co-fabricators: their materiality matters.

## 5.5 Turning to Trees

Trees are not un-theorised, but they are difficult to untangle. There has been a tendency to rely on their folkloric properties, at the expense of their materiality (e.g. Rival 1998a). In the context of healing wells in Scotland, Rattue (1995, 73) draws attention to the possible role of trees, but neglects to discuss it further on the grounds that differential ‘folkloric properties’ of each species (and not knowing which species was at which well) mean that the “fragments are difficult to assemble”. We know in only one case which kind of tree was at a rag well site, and there only because it was still in use in 1885. The antiquity of Craiguck Well (*TAIN/CAWDOR*) is hard to verify, but it was sought out for protection against witches and fairies, which certainly suggests that, whenever it came into use, witches and fairies were still of concern in the area. Visitors drank the water and tied a rag to briar bushes on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May for protection.

The SSW is similarly under-populated with references to specific trees, with just seven to thorn trees (hawthorn or blackthorn), two rowans, and one to oak. It is not possible, therefore, to discuss the materiality of rag trees in terms of individual species. Scholars who have tried such approaches in other contexts, for example’s Hooke’s (2011) work on trees in Anglo-Saxon England, have been criticised because where there is, inevitably, a lack of native evidence, the tendency is again to cast the ethnographic and historical nets too wide (Hutton 2012). However, there is a balance to be found: specialists in historical tree environments consider one mention of a relatively worthless tree (to the wealthy, learned men making documents), such as a rowan or thorn, worth many mentions of oak (Smout *et al* 2005, 75; Rackham 2012, 153). That these less ‘worthy’ trees appear in the trial accounts at all attests to their importance in the practices of ordinary people.

Dealing with trees presents other problems. Beginning in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, their ongoing romanticisation shifts trees from constitutive to the world into



scenery (Thomas 1983) and, eventually, into ‘mindscape’ (Muir 2005, 229). The ‘literary-trees’ and ‘fine-art-trees’ of elite discourse are a hindrance to this discussion (Rackham 2012, 185). The way they stand in for real trees dictates (and emerges from) *looking upon* or *reading* trees for meaning, rather than interacting with them; a persistent issue in history (e.g. Thomas 1983; Hayman 2003; Cusack 2011), and in anthropology (e.g. Bloch 1993; Rival 1998a). Trees are much more than a backdrop or prop. Taking its lead from Jones and Cloke (2002; 2008) this chapter deals instead not with the unknowns of missing folklore, but with the knowns of real trees.

A general discussion of trees and woods is, therefore, an important part of understanding any tree place. It need not, and indeed should not be assumed that all rag trees were located in woodland: romanticisation has seen the extent of forest cover in early modern Scotland significantly inflated by many accounts (Smout 2003; Smout *et al* 2005). However, rag trees were common and would certainly have been landmark and/or veteran trees (Muir 2005, 12-13). Trees also had many other uses, both in treating disease and in charming. They were a familiar and utilised part of the world which held a very different position in the early modern ontology than they do in the modern.

Trees, in any time period, have materiality: they are here, in the present, co-fabricating the world with us (Plumwood 2006). One tree can be all it takes to make a tree place. Pakenham (1998, 9-10) describes:

*“A big oak or beech can weigh 30 tonnes, cover 2000sq yards, include ten miles of twigs and branches. Each year the tree pumps several tonnes of water about 100 feet up into the air, produces a new crop of 100,000 leaves and covers half an acre of trunk and branches with a new pelt of bark.”*

When dealt with in this manner, new questions into the relationships between trees and place-making open up.

## 5.6 A Walk in the Woods

Inspired by the work of Sarah Maitland (2012), who rewrites classic fairy tales by pairing them with the specific materiality of an individual wood or forest, for this project I walked in woods (McCabe 2013). I got lost in woods. I slept in woods. I ate the foods of woods. By day and night, I explored trees around me, and through all seasons. I got to know trees, most especially those of the ancient semi-natural forest of Rothiemurchus, where Scots pine, birch and rowan thrive above a bed of heathers.



*Figure 23: Rothiemurchus - working woodland.*

*I chose this particular forest for its enduring biodiversity and status as a working forest; for example, cattle graze here today, as did early modern cattle (though the species cannot be considered the same, and other uses such as community foraging no longer persist; Stewart 2003). This type of use highlights the manner in which forests were familiar and not unknown places to early modern communities: most of Scotland was rural and had some access to woodland until well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Smout 2003b, 2). Woods were not ‘landscapes’ but experienced as emplaced collectives of collaborative agencies. Pigs were taken there to forage, peat was cut and wood collected, trees managed, cattle herded, medicines and foods gathered and tree and animal lives lived (Hayman 2003, 147-160; Smout 2003b, 2; Rackham 2012, 298).*

*Trees and their companion plant species place-make in myriad ways: in the moving of water; production of oxygen; use of soil; and impact of canopy to name but a few, but they also engage the senses more directly and in ways which vary from visit to visit. They are not a ‘backdrop’, part of a static ‘landscape’; they are continuously active in collaborative place-making through their contributions to light, colour, sound and smell.*



Figure 24: Granny pine, Rothiemurchus.



*At Rothiemurchus, I listened to granny Scots pines creak eerily in the gentle morning breeze of summer days, their long shadows and dark silhouettes gradually transitioning from foreboding to comfortingly familiar. Over time, I discovered for myself how sound attenuates in unexpected ways with weather changes (Maitland 2012, 263).*



*Figure 25: Woodlands bright and beautiful*

*I engaged with the ‘acoustic and visual performances’ of trees (Jones and Cloke 2002, 91). Rowans flare with autumn gold and ruby, coppery pine bark catches low winter sun, and bluebells race through the shade of deep broadleaf woods in May, the thickening canopy gently ‘swoosh-swoosh-swooshing’ overhead.*





*Figure 26: The birch canopy.*

*Resting under a birch canopy, perfect, arrowhead-shaped leaves never sit still, fluttering like butterflies, dappling the light and whispering their secrets. Their tiny bright leaves and silver bark makes them almost jewellery like: they seem delicate somehow.*



*Figure 27: Life from a different perspective: the bending of birch.*

*They are, however, uncanny competitors in the forest, capable of living horizontal lives impossible for most tree species (figure 27): like all species they have unique capacities. Furthermore, as Maitland (2012, 42-43) notes, the utility of birch is almost unparalleled: early modern Scots turned the supple birch into everything from furniture and wickerwork to dishware and dyes, firewood, switches and even medicines such as wintergreen. Tree materialities matter.*



*Figure 28: Ancient semi-natural woodland of Rothiemurchus. Unlike contemporary forestry, many species thrive together.*

*I soon came to realise how close these companions are, pine, birch and rowan, so often found together. They seamlessly weave seeming immortality with birth-and-rebirth; the very cycles of deciduous and evergreen lives. Looking for other cohorts, I noticed whilst exploring Taynish for the first time, how oak, holly and rowan flourish in one another's company (Rackham 2012, 299). Evergreens and deciduous trees are not mutually exclusive: they are natural counterparts, their lifeways intertwined.*





*Figure 29: An old pine stoically suffers the damage of gale force winds.*

*I communed with their time: a slow dance of weeks, and months and seasons, compared to our rushed lives of minutes and hours. I watched trees live, and over the duration of several years I watched them almost die. Fall, certainly. Break under the strain of their own weight, or wind, or lightening. But never really die. Somehow, they hold on, continuing to proliferate life (Rival 1998b, 23). In its post-gale state, this pine now sits between worlds, its living trunk endures but remains conjoined with a very substantial, arguably dead part of itself.*

*Even when appearing almost completely dead, sometimes for decades (or longer), they can remain between life and death (Pakenham 2003, 74-76); there is no clear moment of transition, no flat-lining (Rival 1998b, 22). Such trees, in the twilight of their lives, exist almost in limbo. Autumn is often said to ‘signify’ birth and rebirth, but there is a great deal more to the nature of how trees live and die than metaphor.*

Trees are not just ‘signifiers’. Like a gun or a car, there are specific things that trees do (Olsen 2006, 99). It’s not a coincidence that rag wells are more efficacious in May or fail after Halloween; these are the time when trees move in and out of activities. This doesn’t just inform human practice (although it undoubtedly did do that), it may also have been crucial, in its own right, to the fabrication of rag sites.

## 5.7 Co-fabricating Rag Tree Sites

The fieldwork conducted to understand rag sites was undertaken at the Minister’s Tree in Aberfoyle. This site has its own history, entwined with the work of Robert Kirk (2001 [1690-91]). However, for current purposes, it is the proliferation of the existing physical site which is significant. The Minister’s tree is a rag site without water; however, it has the benefit of being one of the very few which is currently in use, making it ideal to study. It receives many visitors, allowing observations of the site’s development over time.



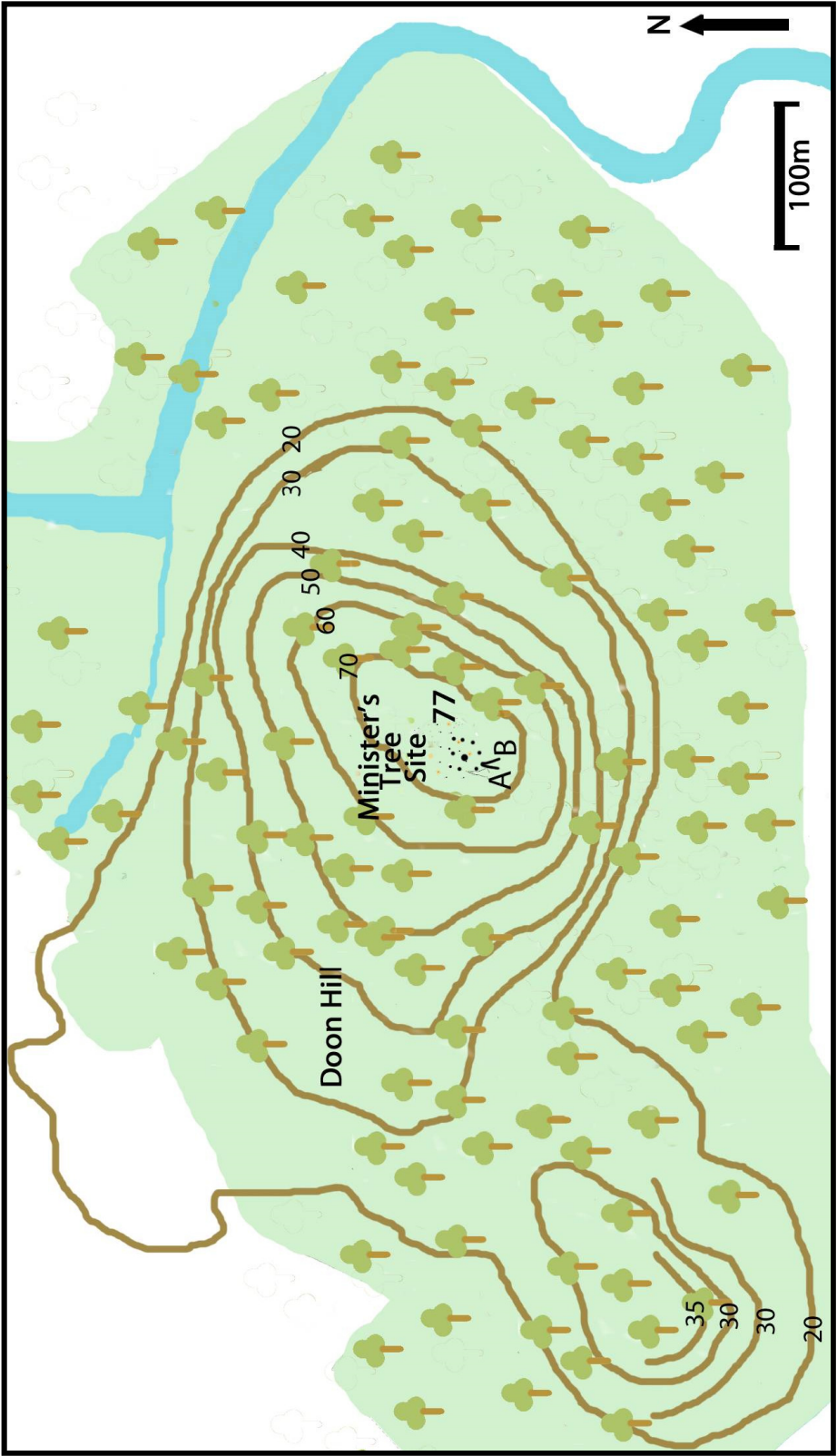


Figure 30: Doon hill, Aberfoyle.

The Minister’s Tree located at centre of site.



*Figure 31: The Minister's Tree (pine).*

*In local history, the tree is Rev. Robert Kirk transformed, a punishment inflicted by the fairies for sharing their secrets in his *Secret Commonwealth* (Kirk 2001 [1690-91]), written shortly before his death in 1692. A fairy replica, or stock (discussed below), was left in his place, to be buried in the nearby cemetery of his parish church.*

When I first visited the site, I photographed the trees and rags extensively, but as Rackham (2012, 192) critiques, like all amateur photographers, my lack of skill meant this was little more than a cataloguing exercise. I could not capture the changes in light or mood, or the unique features of the trees. Early on, I also

roughly planned the site, placing the Minister's tree in the centre, and plotting surrounding trees with rags on them (a mix of hollies, rowans, and other deciduous trees). However, I discovered upon my first return to the site that this was a problematic exercise. On subsequent visits the site was always different: just one visitor placing their rag on a rogue outlier changes the boundary of the entire place. The site is fluid, changing shape, expanding and contracting over time.

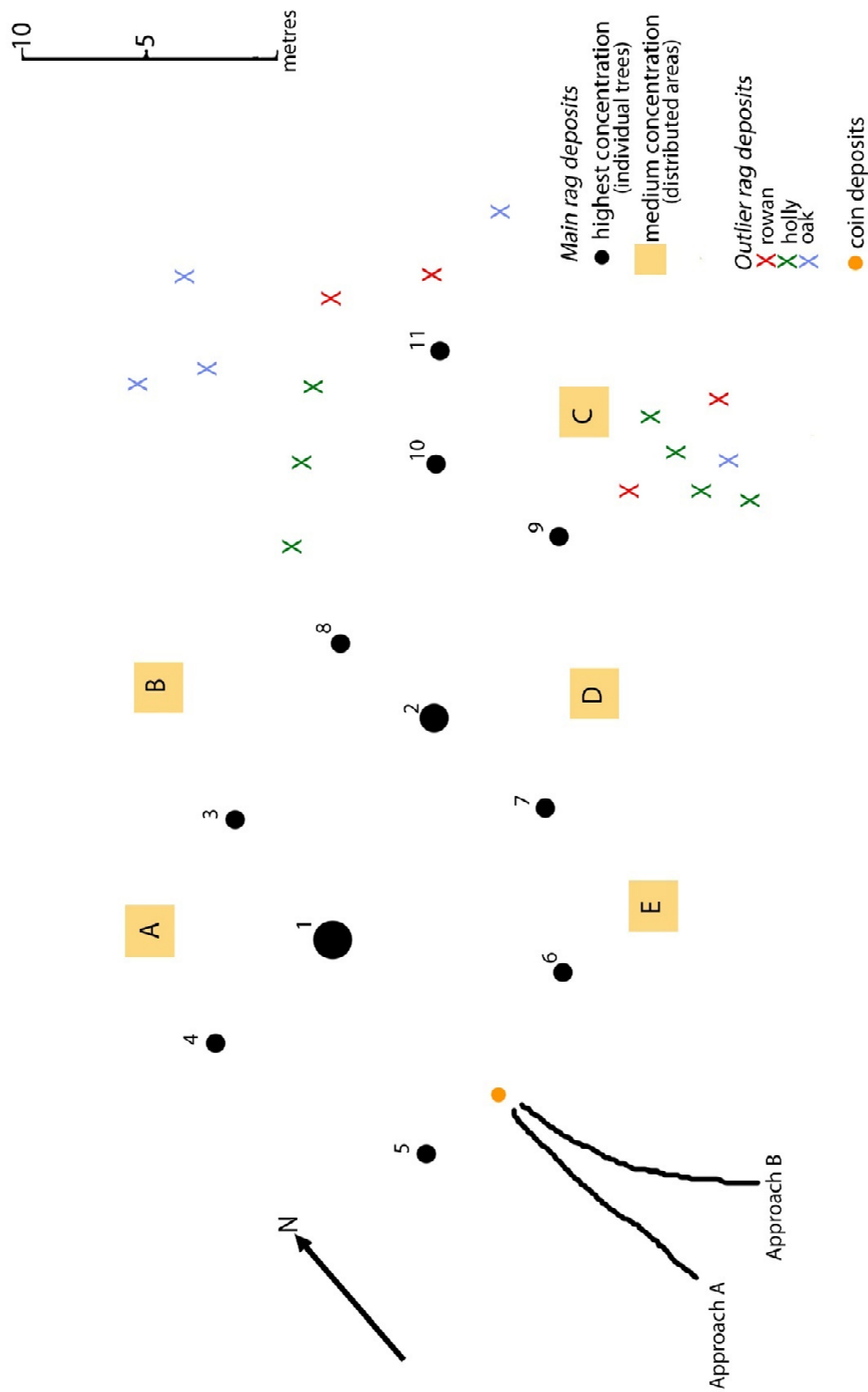


Figure 32: The Minister's Tree site plan. Minister's Tree at point 1. Note that the outliers marked by X represent expansion to the site occurring between autumn 2011 and 2013.





*Figure 33: The view from the Minister's Tree deeper into the site. Tree 1 towards Tree 2 (centre right). September 2013.*



*Figure 34: Site extension.*

*The exploitation of an outlier as host to a few red ribbons significantly extends the boundary of the Minister's Tree site in one direction. Area F, September 2013.*



Whilst it is tempting to see humans as the primary creators of the site, the trees are always busy. Spending a day at a time, I have only met another pair of human visitors to the site. The trees are always there.



*Figure 35: Many rags take on a greyish-green colour as they deteriorate over time.*

*This is a combination of natural sun-bleaching, wind, rain and organic staining.*

*Area A, September 2011.*



*Figure 36: Thickening moss grows over an older rag. This slowly assists its transformation to green and eventual decay. Tree 3. Area D, September 2013.*





*Figure 37: A red ribbon high in a holly.*

*Area A, September 2011.*



*Figure 38: The holly bough has broken, the red ribbon falling with it.*

*Area A, September, 2013.*





*Figure 39: Wind and tree growth impact the deposits. Here they bring numerous ribbons into relationships with one another, knotting them together in unanticipated ways.  
Area E, September 2013.*



*Figure 40: A comparison of the Minister's Tree (Tree 1) deposits.*

*September 2011 and September 2013.*



Experimental archaeology could determine how natural fibres would stand the test of time. Modern fabric is long lasting, but the linens and wools of early modern rags would not have been so enduring, it is likely that they rarely accumulated to this extent. The site endures, but each person's contribution was a short-lived intervention into place-making.

Even small trees are busy being alive, and any rag we might tie to them becomes part of their life too. With time, as linens and wools decayed, rags would have become part of the soil just as fallen leaves do, nourishing the tree and feeding this process. And so it would begin again. How exactly trees do this, in terms of colour, scale, light and speed varies to an extent by species, but all tree places are *changing* places. Rag sites existed only in motion, each exact articulation of place fleetingly momentary.

This is especially the case once non-sessile agents are added to the equation. Insects buzz busily, making their homes from the materials around them: bark, soil, leaves, fabric; birds come and go with the seasons, building their nests, opportunistically pulling free loose rags to line them (Gould and Gould 2007), and undoubtedly ingesting bits, like the albatross (Disruption 1). Larger animals - rabbits, hedgehogs, deer, foxes and others - contribute to the shaping of these sites too: trampling paths, gnawing growth, perhaps taking rags for their own beds. Finally, weather must not be overlooked, as it may have the greatest impact of all, including hard frosts and high winds (Mukerji 2010, 551), but also the daily impact of normal weather -the sun and rain as they fuel life (Strauss and Orlove 2003). Weather is, as Ingold (2005, 103) points out “[...] dynamic, always unfolding, ever changing in its moods, currents, qualities of light and shade, and colours, alternately damp or dry [...]”. Rag tree sites are a fine example of Plumwood's (2006) collaborative agency and co-fabricated place-making.

Tree places are increasingly recognised as important. Muir (2005, 7) argues that trees are “important components of scenery in their own right”. As we see from the number of sites which are no longer extant, and from the behaviour of the site at Aberfoyle, rag sites require [human] maintenance if they are to continue to exist (Curry 1999, 10). However, they are also far more than mere ‘locations’ or

backdrops to human agency. Curry (1999, 101) usefully employs the term place, seeing it not as a mappable geographical unit but as a kind of conversation. Meanwhile, Amin and Thrift (2002, 30) describe places:

*“[...] not so much as enduring sites but as moments of encounter, not so much as ‘presents’ fixed in space and time but as variable events; twists and fluxes of interrelation”.*

Clifford (1996, 4) argues that place is formed out of ‘local distinction’. In this case, the trees, plants, stones, and water both constitute the building materials of a rag tree site as a place and act as builders: much more than ‘components of scenery’.

Ultimately it is the argument of Jones and Cloke (2002) that may be the most useful to this discussion. They argue that trees are not components, or scenery, or part of place: they are place (Jones and Cloke 2002, 83). Place, in their articulation, is made entirely of dynamism, of persistent currents or eddies in the material that makes up the world; repeating patterns. They turn their conversation to one of performance, but there are other ways that this can be usefully applied to a theorised discussion of place. When humans visit rag tree sites to ‘converse’ only a day or two a year, what kind of place is being made? The next logical question is, in addition to the ecological role, is there an ontological role for trees in place-making?

## 5.8 The Fabric of Time

### TREES

A tree is a marker of time (Ingold 1993, 167; Jones and Cloke 2008, 93). They mark seasons, which are not objective givens but are both site specific and cultural interpretations (Orlove 2003; Lucas 2005), years, and lifetimes (Hayman 2003, 2). However, a tree is also a *maker* of time, not only marking seasons, but co-creating them. Does autumn exist in abstract terms? Or does autumn come into being with the changing of the leaves and quietening of the birds? And so, with spring - does

spring come into being before new leaves, first lambs and early flowers? In Scotland the saying “*Ne’er cast a clout ‘til May is oot*” (never take off a layer of clothing until May is out) is well known, and refers to the opening of the flowers of the May (Hawthorn) tree - not the calendar month.

Rag well sites are visited at special times of the day (dawn/noon/midnight) and year (e.g. May Day and Halloween) and are involved in the transition between illness and life or death: their liminality is very clear. Boyman’s treatment did not work because it was attempted *after Halloween*. An ontology where trees are agents in bringing about both seasonal and state changes (i.e. from sickness to full health) is one in which they might have other capacities. For example, with their great longevity, trees may also give the past a contemporary presence, allowing different temporalities to connect (Hayman 2003, 2; Massey 2005, 139). The Forge Tree (NMRS No: NX76SE 1; *BUITTLE*) is one such tree. A veteran plane tree over 4.6m in circumference at a height of 1 m by the 1960s, tradition has it that it was fully grown during the reign of William III and its name comes from a forge erected to shoe his cavalry there on the way to Ireland.

The work of Henderson and Cowan (2001) on fairy geographies suggests trees might also serve as points of intersection with ontologically concentric worlds. For example, the Minister’s Tree (both pine and fairy-altered body of Rev. Robert Kirk) presents a connection with Elfhame. Other cases support this:

**Jonet Miller, Kirkcudbright (*BUITTLE*)**

*Strangled and Burnt, May 1658*

A well-travelled healer of reputation, Miller claimed a man’s illness was the result of digging up a thorn tree. Associated with fairies and particularly with entry into the fairy realm, the assertion that a man became sick after interfering with a thorn tree almost certainly infers that the thorn tree was an intersection between human and fairy worlds.

**Beigis Tod, Longniddry (*HADDINGTON*)**

*Strangled and burnt, 1608*

Tod’s reputation extended to almost two decades. She and accomplices met with the devil in the thorns by Seton gate, where they performed a ritual with a cat.

## THE SACKCLOTH AND THE LIVING WORD

The role of trees in giving other worlds, such as Elfame, a physical interface in the early modern landscape should not be underestimated, nor should the ability of trees to transcend ordinary human time. Furthermore, certain clothing - specifically the sackcloth - can be argued to have had very similar properties.

The concept of the Living Word, introduced into Reformation theology by Luther, communicated two main ideas - the primacy of the Bible in divine communication and concurrency with Biblical (i.e. Old Testament) time (Matheson 1998, 243; Hazlett 2003, 165). This contemporaneity was not simply an idea to be preached or represented in woodcuts (Matheson 1998, 243): in early modern Scotland it was lived. Sackcloth was the traditional penitential outfit in Old Testament times and is mentioned frequently in the Bible (Smith 1966). It had fallen into occasional use by the medieval church (Arnold 2005, 172), but was very much revitalised in post-Reformation Scotland (Todd 2002). In many, if not most parishes, it was used almost every Sunday to discipline all manner of sinners, including well visitors and charmers (Smith 1966; Graham 1996; Miller 2002, 92; Todd 2002). Hazlett (2003, 166) interprets the severity of the Scottish witch hunts when compared to other Calvinist states as 'radical Biblicism' or 'biblical totalitarianism'. He attributes these to a very literal interpretation of the Bible and the blurring of the covenants of the Old and New Testaments (Hazlett 2003, 166-7). Ultimately, this leads him to conclude that the witch trials relate to an attempt to realise a Scottish 'New Jerusalem', reinstating the societal norms of biblical times (Hazlett 2003, 166-7). However, this interpretation remains ungrounded until the materiality of this potential New Jerusalem is explored.

Across Scotland, throughout the year, and in all weathers, penitents were commanded to wear sackcloth in order to mend their ways; itching in it, sweating in it, shivering in it, perhaps soiling it, shamed in it, even on occasion being pelted with rotten eggs, mud or filth, or ducked in foul water in it: in any case, they suffered in it (Graham 1996, 49, 138, 213; Todd 2002; McCabe 2011). Todd argues that wearing the sackcloth was akin to a rebirth: an experience of liminality and

the sacred (Todd 2002, 173). There are two extant examples, from West Calder and St Andrews (McCabe 2011), and many more are known from session records (for examples see Todd 2002).



*Figure 41: A close up of sackcloth fabric; Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews.*

*The garment is not heavy, though it is rough and unfinished. Its ability to absorb, carry and later release substances (e.g. by wringing out) may have played a significant role in shaping its power to connect past and present penitents.*

Both the Old and New Testaments refer to the stench and uncleanness of sin: literal and biblical stench may in fact have been co-creative concepts (McCabe 2011). Visual, haptic and olfactory information from the sackcloth could easily have reinforced the reality of contemporary Biblical time, compelling an eschatological relationship not only with fellow parishioners but with Christians throughout time. As the minister preached from the pulpit, parishioners would have been

simultaneously familiarising themselves with their parish's own history of past sackcloth owners and the litany of biblical past owners, blurring the boundary between times and fostering the ontologically significant experience of a third, new timeframe which conflated the two - the early modern Scottish 'New Jerusalem' (McCabe 2011). This is particularly true if the sackcloth is viewed as a protestant relic, not merely a symbol or representation, but the physical embodiment of past wearers, linking temporalities (Walsham 2010, 12-13; Pels 1998, 104). As Hodder argues (2012, 98) "Material things play a large part in the unravelling of linear time".

Returning to the wider context of the early modern ontological potential of cloth, sackcloth may also have possessed other capacities. Walsham (2010, 12) observes:

*"A relic is ontologically different from a representation or image: it is not a mere symbol or indicator of divine presence it is an actual physical embodiment of it, each particle encapsulating the essence of the departed person, pars pro toto, in its entirety".*

In my previous research, a fellow archaeologist turned down the opportunity to wear an early modern sackcloth on the grounds that it still carried the negative essence of its previous use (McCabe 2011). The argument that cloth could retain non-physical pollutants is supported by Walsham's (2010, 12) interpretation, and can be usefully extended through Schneider's (2006, 204-205) discussion of the spirituality of cloth. She demonstrates how cloth negotiates changes in status and relationships, often enduring many 'ownerships'; for example, a baptismal gown or a wedding dress (Schneider 2006, 204-205). Lurie (1981, 218, 232) argues that fabric represents the skin of the person wearing it: that we attribute the characteristics of the fabric (e.g. silky and sophisticated or rough and abrasive) to the character of the wearer. Cavallaro and Warwick (1998, 116) extend this, arguing that we do not only wear clothes, but assimilate them: "we make them our flesh". Shared clothing like the sackcloth, might thus draw communities into a problematic, shared, cloth-flesh embodiment that extended back into biblical time, a multi-authored relic-work in progress. The sackcloth (or relic) may do more than 'encapsulate the essence' of its wearers. In a real and eschatologically

dangerous way it might be a conglomeration of *parts of* wearers, weaving them together like the weave of the cloth itself.

Did my fellow researcher's discomfort come from the qualities this second skin might lend him? Or that he might assimilate? Did it extract some permanent part of a person, to be retained forever? Did connection between person and part endure? Did early modern Scots also see it in these ways? Wearing it was shameful, but was this simply because of the public and performative nature of church discipline (e.g. Todd 2002), or was sin and/or shame, and perhaps even a part of self, like sickness, able to reside in cloth, becoming part of a shared cloth-skin that transferred contaminants both to and from the body?

It can certainly be concluded that parishioners would have known the history of their kirk's sackcloth: these histories are often still accessible. For example, session records from Calder, West Lothian, reveal that in 1644 it was used, in conjunction with sleep deprivation, in the first stages of a witchcraft case (Johnston 1999, 92). Later, it saw almost weekly use throughout six months of 1677, by one Jonet Gothskirk, during her pregnancy (Johnston 1999, 92-4). Her co-adulterer, William Murdoch, does not appear to have been disciplined (Johnston 1999, 92-4). This is interesting: there is great concern over the capacities and constraints of the body of the pregnant woman and of children revealed through witch trial accounts and in the many rag tree and well sites that manage female and childhood issues, and again the male does not appear. Sackcloth may not have had properties identified by any contingent of the early modern population as 'magical' (or otherwise potent), but it was certainly central to the transition from the problematic state of sinfulness to an acceptably godly one. Todd (2002) argues that the sackcloth marks time in a liminal state. Lack of punishment for the male adulterer suggests, again, that male bodies were less problematic in their nature, from an early modern ontological perspective.

## 5.9 Trees, Disease and Bodies

In ritual transformations such as the transubstantiation of the Eucharist (denounced by the Reformers), Bloch (1998) theorises that there is an empirical connection between transposing materials e.g. red blood becomes red wine (both red, both fluid). Post-Reformation, the enduring transformation, where the past is made contemporary, bringing biblical time into the present, remained culturally current. Sackcloth, as the early modern garment of return to a socially acceptable state, acted upon time in a similar way, and is similarly an agent in the transformation from sinner to saint.

As sickness becomes health at rag sites, and rags on trees rot and become part of place, a transformation occurs: human into tree. The ‘empirical’, perhaps better labelled ‘ontological’, connection between materials is not immediately apparent. However, the Minister’s Tree offers a potential insight. Although almost certainly a tale which originates sometime after the death of Robert Kirk in 1692 (Graham 1812, 253-5; Walsh 2002, 24), human becomes tree, thanks to the capricious agency of fairies. A relational approach stipulates that before dismissing this, it should be compared to other sources to determine whether there are ontological relatives that might usefully be explored. As it turns out, this story is not without precedent:

**Issobell Gowdie, Auldearn (CAWDOR)**

*Unknown, 1662*

Gowdie claimed that when she and others attended their meetings, they left their brooms, enchanted in their beds, to conceal their absence from their husbands.

Wilby (2011, 293, 296-7; 2013, 142) and Paterson (2012, 399) connect this with the idea of ‘fairy stocks’ - a wooden or wood-like body left in place of a person or animal when fairies abducted them. Martin Martin’s (1999 [1703]) account suggests that this is effective both ways: he describes a method of consulting the ‘little people’ that requires one man emulate “a log of birchwood” and be carried as such by his accomplices. In Marwick’s (2000 [1975], 36) analysis of Orkney and Shetland examples, stock replicas were distinguishable from the original only in the



application of fire. The changeling is also a stock - a replacement body that is almost human, but not quite, and is well attested (Chapter 6.2). Changelings frequently emerge to have wooden properties and were also subjected to trial by fire:

**Margaret Dickson, Pencaitland (*HADDINGTON*)**

*Unknown, 1643*

Dickson attempted the treatment of a changeling using south running water and its shirt. When this failed, she recommended throwing it into the fire, claiming it to be 100 years old (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 96-97).

**Isobel Haldane, Perth (*FORTINGALL*)**

Thomson *et al* (1834-45, 38-41) refer to an instance where she consulted another local healer on behalf of a man whose son was diagnosed as a changeling and described as 'stiff as an oak and unable to move'. Fire was again utilised in its cure (for a review of fire use in protection, healing and harming see Stewart 1889-90).

A number of scholars note a similarity between humans and trees, in their upright stature and limbed-ness; connecting flesh and wood, sap and blood, skin and bark (e.g. Mauzé 1998, 239; Rival 1998b, 9-10; Aldhouse-Green 2000, 22; Cusack 2011, xiv). Thomas (1983, 219) notes that anthropomorphic terminology was ubiquitous in early modern Britain: wives (fruitful crossbreeds), maidens and widows (fruitless crossbreeds), imps (first shoots of felled coppice), dotards (old, decayed tree), kings (veteran oaks), queens (veteran beech) and grannies (veteran pines) are amongst some of these many terms (see also Maitland 2012, 36). The Minister's Tree may be a uniquely developed fairy-tale example, but it is far from the only case of anthropomorphism/dendromorphism interplay in early modern human-tree collaborations. In rowan cross charms, it is only from the combination of wood, thread and body that efficacy emerges. Together they form an entity that only in its collective is protected from witchcraft, confounding the modern boundaries of the body as the protected body is necessarily formed not only of flesh, but of thread and wood. The idea of further mutability and a fluid boundary between humans and special trees may then be ontologically sound. If disease disappears when a rag finally rots, then it is almost certainly passing into a tree body, just as it would into a human or animal body during transference. The lack of articulation

of this as ‘transference’ may relate more to elite recording or interpretative biases than to ontology as revealed through practice. There are certainly witch trial accounts which hint at this.

**Margaret Reid, Carnwath**

*Outcome unknown, 1644*

Reid appears to have been a midwife or a charmer specialising in infancy. Amongst her practices was the use of green linen thread at childbirth. She also passed a sick child three times around an oak tree for healing. This is very reminiscent of transference to animals, where there is often a prescribed number of passes (Chapter 7.6). Bessie Stevenson (above; *MUCKHART*) used the same technique for maw.

Drawing together the evidence from rag trees, it is evident that even in the early modern period, clothing is a powerful tool for investigating ontological alterity (Pedersen 2007, 142). Transference, unwitching, healing and harming through clothes all suggest that clothing remained, in a very real and tangible way, connected to the body, even when remote. Rix (1907, 53) suggested this briefly in the context of rag-tying in Palestine, claiming that, in rag-tying “offering his clothes it is as if a man offered part of himself”. However, if “offering” were the case, this would almost certainly have survived as an explanation, rather than the mystified accounts which claim that the reasoning for the practice is long lost. There is another possibility that bypasses any explicit “offering”.

Swann (1996, 56) argues that worn garments “deform to accommodate the body” and that this allows clothing to “stand in for the person”. Eastop (2006, 247), similarly, sees clothing as potent material metaphors, allowing hidden garments to clothe and therefore protect the home. After Gell (1998), Eastop (2006, 249-251) *attributes* concealed garments agency. However, clothing and cloth at rag sites may be doing more than simply “standing in”, physically or metaphorically, for something or someone else. As these fabrics make the transition from an agentive role in everyday human life to become increasingly incorporated into a rag tree site, observation shows that they very clearly deform to accommodate their new tree body. The trees, in effect, wear the rags, and in doing so this changes both the agentive capacities of cloth and tree. The new ontic categories Henare *et al*

(2007b) and Haraway (2003; 2008) propose we look for, and the evidence of ‘lively knotting’ (Haraway 2008, vii), may lie in the spaces between human and tree bodies, and the cloths they share. In ontological terms, this raises new theoretical possibilities which have significant interpretive consequences for the understanding of place.

## 5.10 Discarding and Building

It might be debated whether the deposition of rags was an act of discarding or one of caching. They are certainly ‘placed’ deposits (Lucero 2003, 526). Walker (1995) identifies caches by the following criteria 1) non-burial related context; 2) intentional placing; 3) treatment as special/other than refuse. As early modern Scots selectively placed their rags, they engaged in a depositional practice. Rags were drawn into a multi-authored process, alongside human and other non-human collaborators, to influence the boundaries of personhood and place (Pollard 2008, 45-46). These depositions had effects which both communicated widely recognised messages to human visitors, and were agentive in shaping human experiences of the site (Meskell 2005, 4). Just as Bailey and McFadyen (2010, 575) insightfully note regarding digging Neolithic pit dwellings, transforming a site into a rag tree site was “a physically intimate collaborative effort” with significant temporal as well as spatial dimensions.

Like past well visitors, at the Minister’s Tree today people have choices to make - where to place one’s rag is complicated. At the centre? Near the periphery? Or even to extend the site? At eye level, or higher, or lower? If visiting in a group, a possibility in the past since many session records show that large groups were chastised for well visiting on the same day (for examples see Todd 2002, 204-206), did they place their rags together? Or did each search out a little privacy? It is inaccessible, but also worth considering that there may have been a narrative of colour. In Gilchrist’s (2012, 68-113) discussion of the medieval life course, she illustrates the ways in which life and its transitions were colour coded; for example, white for babies; blue/grey for slightly older children; the brightest

colours such as green for adolescents and young adults. Without extant materials we can only speculate, but to the early modern visitor, it is possible that some similar form of colour messages were incorporated into the site, either in a parallel age-determined manner, or in one which reflects the colour concerns of the witch trials; for example, red for unwitching (like the rowan charms) and green for transference (for example, the case of Bessie Dunlop, Chapter 6.3). They may also have had some sense of whether rags came from common or special clothing, or from the garments of men, women or children.

Rags, once placed, were anonymous (though possibly relaying some basic information). However, through their contagious, transferring nature, they maintained a remote connection with the specific person of whom they were a material extension (Hayles 1999). Simultaneously, they could establish connections with other bodies, potentially becoming imbricated in multiple, multi-species beings. In an ontology where disease passes through a rag into another being, arguing for individual embodiment or personhood is problematic; there is significant potential for overlap.

While rag well deposits are clearly not domestic refuse, their placement specifically to decay may be ontologically closer to rubbish deposition than ‘cache’ implies. On the other hand, as extra-human parts of sick or problematic bodies, left behind to rot away and transfer into place, their deposition may be more akin to a burial practice. Perhaps in this iteration they may come closer to the modern category of ecofacts. These possibilities need not be mutually exclusive. However, following the lead of ‘things’ as Henare *et al* (2007b) suggest, another interpretation (which may incorporate elements of the others suggested) also presents itself: one not of deposition at all, but of building.

Bailey and McFadyen (2010, 575) liken pit digging to ‘quick architecture’; however, they also draw our attention to the fact that the end product (the pit), whether in its first use or in a reiteration (perhaps as a midden), may not have been as significant as the “act of intervention into the ground” (Bailey and McFadyen 2010, 571). They argue that this changes the line of questioning, from a typical ‘what does this assemblage/stratigraphy tell us about activities here?’ to something which recognises that there are unintended consequences that come from being

pit-working, pit-reworking, pit-using, pit-re-using or even pit-forgetting people. They highlight the need to see long gaps and disjunctions between these ‘interventions’ as *part of the architecture* (Bailey and McFadyen 2010, 578). These are both very useful trajectories for the discussion of rags, prompting us to ask what may be the unintended consequences of being rag-tying, rag-leaving, rag-remembering (or forgetting) people. They also demand recognition that the long periods between human visits are an integral part of the rag-site building process.

A rag tree site as an architectural form and building process is not like a church. There structure is the vision of an architect, realised in material form through the actions of those with authority, still too often theorised as ‘one thing’ by archaeologists, the plan read like a blueprint (Bailey and McFadyen 2010, 563-4). Flexing and impermanent, rag tree sites perhaps miss out on being theorised as architecture because they appear to be individual actions, not an articulated whole idea or collective form; read as an assemblage or collection of discrete “objects”. This may be because they emerge, first and foremost, not in the architectural tradition with which we are familiar, but as social spaces, shaping and shaped by the collaborative interactions of human and non-human agents (Saint-George 2006, 221). However, fabric is one of our oldest building materials, the base of everything from nomadic tents to middle-eastern bazaars (Klassen 2006, 259). Schneider (2006, 204) notes how frequently cloth serves to mark out the ‘sacred’; from the robes of a priest to the drapes of temples. Mitchell (2006, 343) also remarks upon the power of textiles to give material form and structure place as “unformed architecture”, commenting that the boundary between textiles and architecture as disciplines is itself more like fabric than stone.

At rag sites, we must, like Bailey and McFadyen (2010), see temporal rhythms as part of the architecture. If visiting is done on the same few days every year, the site will renew and decay in a semi-predictable, seasonal way, always existing in a liminal state between becoming and disappearing (see also Boivin 2008, 5). Rags are not, however, the only constitutive material. Trees (and others, such as water) were integral parts of the site. Parallels between groves and ecclesiastical architecture have been made frequently, with gothic architecture, attempting to reproduce the forest’s columns and canopies, and enjoying a popular revival in the

1700s (Thomas 1983, 216; Hayman 2003, 6). However, we should not pay heed to this idea over the actual presences and roles of collaborative others.

Zipes (2002) argues excellently, that fairy stories are ‘site specific’, emerging from the materiality of woods: a dense and dark forest giving rise to very different stories than a light and airy one. This complements Ingold’s (2005) argument that weather is not something we see or even perceive, but rather the multi-sensory medium that we perceive in. Referring in particular to the quality of light, Ingold (2005, 102) claims: “as the weather changes we do not see different things, but we do see the same things differently”. This argument may be usefully extended to rag tree places.

A canopy of oak differs greatly to the light flutter of birch or the foreboding shadow of a towering pine. Each affects the quality of light in substantial and unique ways, simultaneously making its own sounds and smells. When we perceive in forests, or in the presence of trees, it is through the medium of tree light; each with its own mood and seasonal patterns. This argument does not require a forest – a single veteran tree or a small clump of trees can also create their own atmosphere and play an important role in co-constitutive place-making (Jones and Cloke 2002, 11-12). Such tree places can give rise to their own tales, their interaction with light varying the mood of place significantly (figures below). Rag trees then, need not be derived from any articulated parallel with ecclesiastical architecture (gothic revival or otherwise). Rather, both forms might be seen as divergent innovations developing from the properties of tree places, just as Zipes (2002) and Maitland (2012) see different fairy tales emerge.





*Figure 42: The view into the site towards the Minister's Tree on a grey 6th September 2013.*



*Figure 43: A similar perspective, just 4 days later, on a very sunny 10th September 2013.*

Equally importantly, we must be attentive to the different paces of the site: in any moment there is water, gradually wearing at stone and soil; trees as they gently move and grow; the short lifecycles of busy insects; and perhaps, human time. Human time, in this context, is not the minutes and hours of modern watches, but a unique ontic category, specific to a living architecture. This incorporates set visiting times (e.g. dawn on May 1<sup>st</sup>) within the extended time of years and generations, as people leave their rags and converge into a communal architectural ‘body’ made and remade out of little rag pieces of person, tree bodies and their co-fabricating, heterogeneous collaborators.

## 5.11 Discussion

While it is widely recognised that clothing and cosmologies are interwoven, clothing off the body is generally under-theorized: the anthropological or historical garment is too often assumed to be in production or being worn (e.g. Schneider 1987; Schneider 2006; Hansen 2004; Hermkens 2010). However, it is in its after-life, the stages beyond wearing, that early modern clothing reveals different ontological possibilities. The rag tree continually changes to reflect a multitude of human and non-human collaborators. Tree bodies are clothed by human visitors; perhaps not unlike homes are clothed with hidden garments. Over many iterations this results in a fluid architectural form, co-fabricated by multi-agental contributors, and existing in a perpetual state of creation and decay. Fowler (2010, 377) notes that buildings and bodies may be “composed of parallel materials” and that “communities reflect upon personhood as they manipulate the materials and forms of their world” (see also Fowler and Cummings 2003; Fowler 2004, 101-129). In an ontology which gives rise to rag tree sites, incorporates clothing into buildings, and facilitates interactions between persons, rags and trees, personhood definitely differs from that of the modern individual. These rag-tree-bodies and garment-house-bodies need not be symbolic or metaphorical, but may be ontologically significant categories in their own right, separate entities that are more than the sum of their parts, “fractal bodies of non-human persons at different scales” (Fowler 2004, 128; 2008b).



The sackcloth presents a number of foils for the rags of rag wells. Rags rot away, but the sackcloth endures. Rags are anonymous remnants of pain transference, sackcloths carry extended biographies of temporary ‘ownerships’, including potentially ‘owners’ from biblical times, accumulating the ‘stench of sin’ in a process which may be similar to transference. Schneider (1987, 414) argues (using the example of the shroud of Jesus) that cloth may also transmit “the aura of authoritative persons or sacred events”. That the sackcloth may transfer qualities imbued within it by past owners in a relic-like way is perfectly in keeping with the ontological properties of rags: they too transmit, transfer and accrue, passing on the ailment carried by their past owner. Rags are parts of persons, individual but anonymous, assembled collectively into place, becoming parts of tree. Sackcloths, on the other hand, incorporate parts of named and known persons (past and present) who, stripped of their own clothes, become layered collectively into one garment, one list of past owners, connected by their shared experiences and exchanges of sinfulness and repentance.

Herva (2009, 394) argues that caching (such as hidden garments) “would have served to infuse whatever (relationally constituted) special properties the hidden things were considered to have *into buildings* [my italics]”, comparing the practice to animating (in some way) medieval churches through the presence of holy relics. Something different happens when things are not hidden. A matrix of pain and suffering (of ailments), fear (for children, and of fairies), and hopes for healing and resolution, incorporating entire communities and even visitors from far afield, is imprinted and reprinted onto physical place, becoming both landscape and landmark. To visitors witnessing this expression of emotion, the presence of rags at rag sites is, in itself, sufficient to maintain the efficacy of the practice. Earlier scholars saw the continuation of rag leaving as a remnant of some past reasoning, long lost, or turned to ‘something resembling a charm’ (Walsham 2011 462). It can instead be seen as self-perpetuating: it makes its own potency. Wherever it originated from, the interaction of cloth-body-tree, within the wider early modern ontology, both creates and is created by the capacity for the place to be efficacious. Everything that happens between visits is instrumental, not only in the physical properties of the site, but in imbuing it with the power to be a healing place.

Collectively the evidence presented has significant consequences for embodiment in early modern Scotland. It appears that within the early modern ontology clothing was sensing - detecting both action upon it and contact with someone to be acted upon. Hayles (1999, 2-3) presents the post-human self as an assemblage of prostheses, beginning with the flesh and added to throughout life. Clothing may be such a prosthetic; it affords people the capacity to live in inhospitable environments, and it should be theorized as a pre-industrial technology (Boivin 2008, 179). However, like the deeply embodied being of Hayles' (1999) developed argument, the clothed being is much more than a simple assemblage of prostheses: clothing becomes integrated into self, forming a new ontic category. Early modern clothing was a removable part of self which extended the limits of the living body to remote places. Clothing and rags were permeable entry points for witchcraft and healing into the body; they were malleable surfaces, and their capacity for transference shows that they were prone to intermingling with heterogeneous others (Haraway 2008; Meskell 2004; Joyce 2005). Miller (2005, 15) argues that the materiality of a person is fundamentally entwined with the materiality of cloth; that "there is no simple boundary between persons and their environment". Rag wells and their rag-body-tree living architectures, and the acts of witches and charmers including healing and harming garments represent an excellent way to probe this boundary in the early modern Scotland.

## Story 2

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### ELSPET

She was sick. Maybe dying. The child in her belly was killing her from the inside out, ripping her apart. Everything ached. Everything burned. It wasn't supposed to feel like this so few weeks in. She was only beginning to know this child, feeling his first, tentative flutters. He had to live. They had buried too many. She'd heard once of a woman who was the only surviving child of 22 pregnancies, though she didn't know how many of those children had lived to baptism. Was she to be that ruined mother?

Breaths did not come easily in her grief. Shallow, half-forgotten, they stabbed at her side, where something was broken. Her wild, green eyes turned back to the cunning woman. Elspet had forgotten she was even there, but now the wizened face spoke again, and she plummeted back into herself, falling through her body, landing as a deep, dark, knot in her gut.

"Elspet, listen to me. Carefully. We offer only once. Only ever once" The face said.

If her voice was kindly, it didn't register. Elspet struggled to recognise even her own name. It seemed already as if, between heartbeats, she had become someone else entirely. "I don't understand. What are you telling me? I don't understand" Even her own voice felt unfamiliar.

"I have come from her Lady of Elfhome. The child is her child, and she will claim him, one way or the other. But if you accept her offer, you can still be with him. You can learn secret ways to heal and harm, and our door will always be open to you. Elfhome is never but a stone's throw away. Come with me to Fairy Hill. My good Lady will make you whole, and when the child comes you keep him. All she asks is that you give yourself in his stead. I will return at midnight."

Twelve hours. Just twelve hours.

## STONE

Johnne-flesh watched his soft wife writhe, and stone stayed still in his hand, passing over her skin, feeling heat radiate from burning woman flesh-body, her incoherent mumbles a groaning river-rumble, vibrating quartz flecks. This Man-Thing Johnne would take her hand and tell her everything would be ok, but stone did not let him summon hope to his lips: stone slowed time. Cunning woman. Unceremoniously bundled husband and dog bodies out. Stone worked.

A brief twitch of time and hunched-crone-thing emerged. “Elspet is very sick. She is not in her right mind. You must watch her carefully. Rub the stone on her belly”.

Man-thing watched. All day, and into the evening. He watched with great sadness, as she packed a few small bits and snuck out into the night, stone tucked in her pocket. Man-thing followed them, his footsteps pounding a dull rhythm into earth, knowing all too well to which hill her erratic waltz of stumbles led her foolish body.

When stone and soft woman came back her fever had broken. Maybe the cool night air, or..? Stone knew the shadow of a doubt would not be shaken from that volatile husband’s flesh-body. These things lived too fast to make sense.

## Disruption 2: Blood

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### Untitled (Syncope) by Kira O'Reilly.

*National Review of Live Art, 17th-23rd March 2010, The Arches, Glasgow.*

*I attend an unnamed performance. Naked but for cherry high heels, Keira O'Reilly moves gracefully at the centre of a voracious audience, all pressing in from behind. Without warning, she takes a razor and cuts at the backs of her strong, well-formed calf muscles. Blood flows, a trickle at first. Soon it erupts freely. Rivulets become cascades, and the blood chases down, overflowing from those so admired heels, until she casts them aside, all the while making bloody patterns on the floor. Casually she sweeps it in circles with her feet, as though oblivious, art in blood. Looking around me I see nothing but horror. Inside they are screaming. They strain to press back. Their faces are gaunt; some are not breathing. As she moves blood flicks and splashes at their shoes. Panicked and trapped, they are not the audience: they are the performance. And the subject is contagion.*

This performance inspired me to think about the true boundaries of our bodies: not the skin surface, but the point at which we feel violated and vulnerable to contagion. It also raised questions about what exactly blood is: Kira's lost blood remained Kira in essence, extending her body, it's accretion on the floor mapping out new territory occupied by her being, into which the audience dared not move for fear of contamination.

Nobody who attended the performance could forget it, for them, part of her remains in that place. She relates that after a similarly bloody performance the janitor cleaning told her that she was forever 'damaged goods', his revulsion not just at her let out blood, which will of course replace itself, but at her cast off boundaries, at her willingness to betray her skin and bleed into place and into the margins of others. The contamination that the audience feared was not medical, for they were clothed and shod, it was far more insidious - an accidental cross-over of beings that could not be undone, pollutant and dangerous.

## Chapter 6: Fairy-Stone-Water-Body Interstices

Like the Chapter 5, this chapter also uses material evidence and accounts from the witch trials extracted from the SSW This time the exploration is of fairy attack, birth and death, as they situate ordinary bodies alongside invisible fairy bodies. Again, the focus is on personhood as it is shaped through practice (following Fowler 2011, 137). As Robb (2013, 441) points out, the archaeology of any death is invariably the archaeology of something else: class, economy, gender or even foodways; it is rarely about the process of death itself. There is, as he attests:

*“a connection between one's underlying ontological beliefs about the nature of dying and the dead body, and the ways in which the physical remains of the body are handled, processed, and treated” (Robb 2013, 442).*

Deviant deaths are invariably challenging to engage (Murphy 2008a); however, as a window into what happened when things went wrong, they offer the opportunity of investigating the process of death, and to pair it with the material evidence of the even more ephemeral birth (Finlay 2013), and even fairy attack.

Where Chapter 5 began with rags and worked outwards, Chapter 6 begins with the most tangible physical evidence of the ontological reality of early modern fairy attacks - the elfshot (also known as the fairy arrow).



*Figure 44: An example of elfshot. (H. NO 76). The reverse reads 'Saighead Shith' (fairy arrow). This pendant mounting is a unique embellishment thought to have been made for 19thC collector, Lady John Scott - other pendant fittings are much simpler. However, the arrowhead itself is a fine example of a fairy arrow - delicate, Neolithic grey quartz with a lustrous shine (Black 1892-3, 462-68).*

'Following the things' again determines the chapter structure, moving between arrowheads and fairy hills; protective charms, birth and changelings; the unbaptised infant dead, and their resting places. The discussion continues to explore parallel materials (including beings) which 'make sense together', and the 'lively knotting' through which they form new ontic categories as they participate in heterogeneous assemblages of collaborative, co-fabricating agencies. Incorporating materials (and/or properties) which many researchers may consider not to exist, this chapter follows Henderson and Cowan (2001) in arguing that fairies and the problems they posed were a real and present danger to early modern Scots. They not only arose from, but created the strange data instrumental to this thesis. Whilst for the most part they were an invisible threat, this property was disconcerting and demanded the regulation of behaviour and boundaries. Potentially always watching from the shadows, they were 'the good neighbours',



‘guid wichts’ and ‘honest folk’, to be respected at all times (Foucault 1997 [1975]; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 14; Kirk 2001 [1690-91]). They must, therefore, be taken seriously in the study of early modern Scotland.

Following Purkiss (2000, 5-10), this chapter dissociates from Briggs’ (1977) well-known fairy taxonomies (for example, solitary and trooping) and the popular loose geographical attributions; e.g. Northern Isle trows and Highland sìthean (cf. Hall 2005, 20; cf. Hutton 2011, 52). Indeed, Marwick’s (2000 [1975]) analysis of trows reveal that their proclivities and interactions with humans were remarkably similar to fairies throughout the mainland. Therefore, this chapter adopts the argument that fairies may be more ontologically potent tools when investigated by social relationship; a fairy host or guest, queen or beggar, lover or changeling child, may reveal much about ways of being in the world (Purkiss 2000, 9-10; see also L. Henderson 2008).

Henderson and Cowan (2001) invite scholarship that recognises that ‘magical’ places both coexisted and intersected with the world as we might recognise it. They see in fairy hills and wishing wells (amongst other sites), places where the early modern inhabitants of Scotland could physically engage with and experience entities such as fairies (Henderson and Cowan 2001). However, they fall short of fully engaging with the co-creative process through which both fairy and human bodies were culturally constituted as part of the same physical world. The narrative driven approach adopted widely in the field (e.g. Purkiss 2000; 2001; Henderson and Cowan 2001), continues to privilege ‘belief’ (as thoughts) and ‘social discourse’. Places, things and bodies are mentioned only in passing, rather than enquired of, explored, or experienced: crucial dimensions of the embodied past are omitted.

People do not exist in a vacuum into which they project their thoughts, but rather live in relation to the world around them, embodied experience occurs before articulated thought (Bloch 1991, 194). Stories (narratives) therefore come after practice, and may be a step removed from the material world with which they interact (Salter 2001). This study therefore diverges from traditional approaches on fairies (which typically incorporate ballads and folk tales, i.e. articulated thoughts) in favour of a situated response incorporating previously un-discussed aspects of

the physical world. The aim is to build on the strengths of the existing scholarship by moving beyond socio-literary comparison and grounding the reality of fairy experiences into the specific materialities of places, things and bodies (Chapter 3: Agencies and Ontologies).

As noted in Chapter 5, fairy encounters employed a common figurative language that incorporated distinct connotative meanings for things such as rowan berries and the colour green (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 35; Stewart and Strathern 2004, 148). These may go back to far earlier fairy stories (Hall 2006); however, this chapter does not explore these in depth. Instead broader themes are revealed through practices and the narratives of the body they accumulate. Whether the accused themselves believed their fairy-tale-like accounts to be true or drew inspiration from familiar oral tradition is not considered here for several reasons:

- 1) Even if they knowingly fabricated their own account, they considered stories of this type to have truth. They told these stories as first-hand memorates (i.e. things which happened to themselves; Purkiss 2000, 88; L. Henderson 2008).
- 2) Many of the details, such as the locations and dates of fairy encounters, were unlikely to have been driven by interrogators, and rather came from the accused's knowledge of popular understandings of liminality throughout the life course, otherworldly geographies and alternative temporalities of their local landscape (Paterson 2012, 382-387).
- 3) Others considered their accounts to be plausible/true. Ordinary households took precautions against fairies and witches, and many individuals were convicted and executed on these testimonies.

## 6.1 Elfshot

Elfshot/fairy arrows are mentioned multiple times throughout the witch trial documents. They are the only extant, common things that early modern Scots

accounted for as crafted and used by fairies. They were not ‘prehistoric arrowheads’, not past tools, not today’s museum artefacts, but extraordinary things, deeply embedded in the reality of witchcraft and fairies. When Robert Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 83) wrote of them, it was to say that the fairies made their weapons of “stone like to soft yellow flint, shaped like a barbed arrow head but flung as a dart with great force”. Elfshot are not synonymous with prehistoric artefacts. Nor are they passive, collected objects. We must, therefore, be critical of how they come into our awareness; museum labels fix them as static ‘charms’ but their becomings matter (Stahl 2010).



*Figure 45: A simpler elfshot pendant, mounted in crystal bound with gold. 18th/early 19thC (H. NO 75). The arrowhead is small, squat, white flint, and could be immediately eye-catching when found in a field or on a hill.*

Elfshot has received some academic attention, for example, the various names are well discussed (e.g. Hall 2005; Wilby 2013). However, their material significance has been overlooked as scholars do not recognise their ontological status as fairy-made material culture. They are always something to be otherwise explained, interiorised into an expression of human motive or desire until the thing itself could be anything and has become irrelevant (e.g. Wilby 2013).

Hall (2005, 19), for example, critiques at length current definitions and distinctions between arrowheads shot by fairies and those acquired and shot by witches. Despite a useful discussion, his conclusion of difference is unconvincing: they do not emerge as sufficiently heterogeneous to warrant any separate treatment here (cf. Bonser 1963; 159-60; Jolly 1996, 134;). As Wilby (2011, 75-6) points out, even within the confessions of one person, elements often oscillate freely between fairy lore and demonology, occupying myriad grey spaces in-between. Through documentary analysis the meanings and consequences of these fairy-made things as they were encountered in the early modern period cannot be unfolded, especially as many elfshot are first (and only ever) encountered already invisibly embedded in human or animal flesh; ‘subtilly and mortally wounding the vitall parts *without breaking the skin* [my italics]’ (Kirk 2001 [1690-91], 83). The arrow wounds attested to in the witch trial accounts matter: the wound of a weapon reflects and refracts the materiality of the weapon itself.

Nevertheless, Hall (2005, 21-22), argues that ‘elf-’ should not be implied where documents refer to ‘schot’ e.g. ‘schot to deid’. He critiques Henderson and Cowan (2001, 78) for including such cases on the grounds that it simply refers to a sharp pain, not necessarily attributable to an arrowhead. However, he himself undermines this by going on to argue that elfshot in many cases refers to a sharp pain, not a perceived or physical arrowhead (Hall 2005, 24). His argument is semantic alone and, therefore, unconvincing: the absence in some cases of the word elf or fairy in trial documents does not mean that they were not inferred prefixes. Elfshot is thus here understood as comprised of two forms: material arrowheads, and the sickness/pain of an invisible arrowhead wound. These should not be theorised independently, thus a strict definition of elfshot/fairy arrows is eschewed in favour of exploring their materiality in relation to their roles as powerful charms and as penetrative projectiles. Continuing after Henare *et al* (2007b), this chapter explores the assemblages and connections that elfshot ‘things’ suggest, beginning with how they come into being in the modern world.

## ENCOUNTERING ARROWHEADS

*A warm October morning, and I participate in barefoot outdoor dance on the island of Tiree. Stones, worn smooth and flat by a vast ocean, suggest themselves. On any given day, one stone may catch the light differently than the others; another may be more appealing when wet. Above the shoreline, yet another may randomly surface, emerging gloriously from earth in which it has long lain concealed. Weather, season, animal movements, farming practices, water courses, tide, landslides: all manner of factors affect which stones are visible at a particular site at any given time. Just like two dancers, two walkers will not see the same stones - height, focal point, vision quality in varying conditions of light and shade, even pattern of footfall and choice of path shape our encounters with stones in specific, embodied ways.*

*We move slowly around the beach, allowing our bodies to synchronise with the pace of the ocean: the steady heartbeat of the shoreline, marking moments in a scale of time so long and slow it is beyond our comprehension. Yes, these stones are on the move. Our presence among them is a conjunction of temporalities; forms with very different materialities and trajectories momentarily coinciding in a co-created space (Massey 2005, 139). Their 'rhythms and velocities', both familiar and foreign to us, are those of lunar gravity; volcanic activity; planetary cycles; ice ages (Jones and Cloke 2002, 87).*

*Their sizes, shapes, colours, shades, patterns, and textures all call us. Should we stop to pick an interesting specimen up, smoothness, inclusions, weight and temperature stimulate our senses. It is not a coincidence that there is an entire area of alternative medicine and religion devoted to stones: the way that their unique properties engage us at times feels energetic - not unlike a spark of attraction. As a lifelong collector of stones of all kinds, I recognise that as much as I choose one from the others, it also feels like, somehow, each stone chooses me. A well collected and beloved stone can take me deep into the half-buried past, a material song. Like a song, these stones tell stories that matter. They are part of place.*

*At the end of our stay, I take a handful of special stones home to Fife. They remain Tíree. They connect me to the sea.*



*Figure 46: An unmounted fairy arrow butter charm. 18th/early 19th century (H. NO 101). A family from Banffshire used it to protect their butter from witches and fairies. Most elfshot charms were likely unmounted. This example is dark brown flint with a highly polished finish. With its dramatic, sharp point, and light-catching qualities, it would have been instantly recognisable as a fairy prize to an early modern finder.*

### **Schiehallion (FORTINGALL)**

NMRS No: NN75SW 8

Circa 1750 a leaf-shaped arrowhead was discovered on the lower slopes of the mountain. Morris and Morris (1982, 162) describe a fairy well on Schiehallion visited by girls at Beltane and believed to be inhabited by fairies who might grant wishes. The schie (or shee) of Schiehallion names it a fairy place (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 9).





*Figure 47: Schiehallion summit under dark moody clouds © Maria Hampton, 2016. The view is from the Eastern Ridge, where patches of scree are interspersed with grass. An arrowhead could go unnoticed by 100 walkers, to be found thanks only to a random shift of stones, a ray of sunlight and a lucky glance in the right direction.*

### **White Cairn, Corriedoo (*BUITTLE*)**

**NMRS No: NX68SE 2**

A red flint arrowhead was found near this substantial prehistoric cairn sometime before 1867-68, when it was shown to the Dumfries and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society.

**Coldingham Moor, *DUNS***

*NMRS No: NT86NE 21*

A barbed and tanged arrowhead found on Coldingham Moor was donated to the NMS in 1920.

**Burgh Muir (Moor), *KINTORE***

*NMRS No: NJ71NE 23*

A leaf arrowhead and a barbed and tanged arrowhead were both found on Burgh Moor, Hall Forest, *KINTORE*.

A search of the NMRS confirms that arrowheads are occasional finds in all of the case study areas, and a great many other parts of the country. Though in their modern findings they are not ‘fairy’ but ‘prehistoric’, they highlight the potential frequency of finds, their physical variety and the extent of places from which fairy arrowheads might have come. Documentary evidence develops this, for example, the Statistical Account of Lauder, *DUNS* (Ford 1791-99, 73) described fairy arrowheads as being ‘washed out of their beds’ after heavy rain. An arrowhead from Boleskin was turned up by a mole; another from Ballachulish was unearthed by a crofter digging turf and retained as a lucky fairy dart (late 19thC; Christison 1888-89). In each case, prehistoric arrowheads come into being whole and formed into the modern world. Unlike at the pre-historic time of their making, there is no visible process; they simply emerge from otherwise familiar soil - a chance find of a made thing with no apparent maker.

Their appearances in witch trials range throughout the duration of the period during which such trials were being conducted. Beyond that, they appear, still in current use, in the Statistical Accounts, for example, in Shetland (Bryden 1834-45, 142) and Wick (Sutherland 1791-99, 15). Trial accounts and folklore place fairy arrows from Orkney and Shetland to the Borders (Marwick 2000 [1975], 42-43; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 77; Hall 2005, 32). A shared understanding of their dangers and efficacies was widespread. However, their emergence is as important to understanding their agency and ontologically specific properties as any historical mention. Cheape (2008a, 109) claims



*“Arrowheads, fossils, spindlewhorls etc. defied explanation - they would randomly emerge from the ground, explained only as the material culture of an ‘otherworld’ of the supernatural”.*

However, adding the prefix ‘elf-’ or ‘fairy’ is not simply a handy explanation for an otherwise mysterious thing: by being ‘elf-shot’ (that is, shot by elves) or ‘fairy’ arrowheads make elf and fairy potent; they are a unique ontic category, distinct from the modern ‘arrowhead’ (Haraway 2003; 2008; Henare *et al* 2007b). In emerging from the ground, they give presence to fairies; they confirm their reality in a specific place (underground inside fairy hills), within a specific landscape and time; they are fairy-place-making. They are integral in the construction of fairy encounters, and “choose” who is protected against such an encounter: their finders; their keepers; their witch shooters; their healing users and their patients. In exploring human embodiments and their fairy counterparts through elfshot, witch trial accounts extracted from the SSW represent a rich resource, presenting many facets of these engagements, including the diagnosis and treatment of fairy arrow wounds and the use of the arrows for malefice.

**Bartie (Barbara?) Patersoune, Dalkeith (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and burnt, c. 18/12/1607*

Cowan and Henderson (2001, 77-8) highlight Patersoune’s claim to distinguish between a range of specific types of shot, prefixed as follows: arrow-shot (cattle); door-; window-; eye-; tongue-; liver- and heart-. They note the emphasis on thresholds and portals, and it could meaningfully be added that the eye and mouth are also thresholds of the body. Patersoune is also one of the few recorded using rowan berries. The SSW records the same person as male, highlighting the interpretative nature of working with trial accounts.

**Anges Sampsoune, Nether Keith (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and burnt, 28/1/1591*

Folk healer to high status patients, Sampsoune claimed that a patient was elfshot after carefully examining his shirt (Pitcairn 1833, 231; Normand and Roberts 2000, 232).

The sources do not agree on whether elfshot was a curable affliction. This may represent regional variation, or perhaps it one of the many features of fairy and witch encounters which developed and changed over time and myriad reiterations. It is also possible that opinions varied from healer to healer.

**Jonet Morisone, Bute**

*Unknown, 1662*

By Morisone's account, the difference between elfshot and being 'blasted' by the fairies was that there was no cure for the former. The latter, a dangerous fairy whirlwind, could be treated with charms and herbs.

Thirty years after Morisone, Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 84) claimed that curing elfshot simply required the identification of the arrowhead entry point: 'as if the spirits flowing from a mans warme hand were antidote sufficient against their poyson'd darts'. Farquhar Ferguson of Kilmory, Arran, was reportedly treating elfshot victims in just such a manner in 1716 after seeing others use the technique to diagnose and treat elfshot cattle elsewhere in Scotland (Gilmore 1948, 110; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 79; Hall 2005, 27).

**Issobell Gowdie, Auldearn (CAWDOR)**

*Unknown, 1662*

Gowdie was a practitioner of such note Wilby (2011) identifies her as a shaman. She gave detailed accounts of elfshot manufacture inside the fairy hill. She could identify elfshot victims and used elfshot to kill by flicking the arrowheads off her thumbnail (confessions published in full: Wilby 2011, 37-54). Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 83) similarly claimed elfshot were 'flung', rather than shot with a bow.

**Christiane Ross, Canorth (TAIN)**

*Burnt, 1577*

An accomplice of Katherine Ross (fled trial to the Caithness in 1590), and Marion Neyne McAlester (accused 1590, *TAIN*), Cristiane Ross was convicted and executed for her role in their conspiracy to murder by elfshot. At midsummer, 1576, Katherine was advised by Marion that she should "gang [go] in Hillis to speik the elf folk" (Pitcairn 1833, 196). Katherine was accused of buying elfshot numerous

times which the women shot at clay figures of their victims (Pitcairn 1833, 192-201).

The snapshots above show an ontology in which humans and fairies were able to interact in similar ways with the same material - in this case a fairy-made material. The common interpretation of this fairy origin is that it provided a useful explanation for otherwise unexplained artefacts and/or for otherwise unexplained illnesses and deaths: one in which no human necessarily had to take the blame (e.g. Hall 2005, 33; Cheape 2008a, 109; Goodare 2014, 166-167). Such conclusions remain firmly embedded in Cartesian duality: the idea is given weight and the 'thing' is little more than a side note.

The material properties which emerge from arrowhead encounters do matter: they reveal ontologically significant aspects of both human and fairy bodies. Henderson and Cowan (2001) place great emphasis on fairy places, but the elfshot is an equally direct interaction with fairy materiality. Its existence gives their bodies the solidity and ability to craft; the wit to do so; and the will to harm or heal. Witches and fairies are frequently encountered as parallel entities (for example, weakness to the same protective measures): fairy bodies are refracted through these interactions, as are human ones. It must be remembered that witch bodies are ultimately human bodies, their 'difference' an outdated presumption (Nenonen 2014, 19). Anyone could, in theory, be or become a witch. The witch body, and the parallel fairy body, are therefore the ontological margins of the human body.

For this reason, for those like the Banffshire family lucky enough to own one, a fairy arrowhead represented a powerful protective charm. Even water into which a fairy arrow had been dipped had many curative properties derived from the fairy association, including powers to protect against or correct fairy interference (Campbell 1902, 92; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 77-9, 90-94). Just like the shirts and rags of Chapter 5, they remained connected to their past users - in this case fairies - even when remote from them.

## 6.2 Intersections Between Fairy Flesh & Human Flesh

The similarities between human and fairy bodies did not end with their shared ability to employ elf arrows, nor was piercing with such an arrow the only way for fairies to insert themselves into human embodiment. A significant number of witch trials attest to far more complicated and intertwined human-fairy body intersections. The same Janet Boyman (*HADDINGTON*) who washed a shirt in an elvish well claimed a client's ailing infant was a fairy changeling (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 128; Henderson 2011, 245).

Lizanne Henderson (2008, 152) interprets such cases as a way for healers and bereaved mothers to explain the sickness and death of a child; and perhaps also as means of empowerment by legitimising a connection with the fairies to their accusers. Purkiss (2000, 196) proposes it may have been a semi-acceptable justification for child abuse, illegitimacy or even infanticide (see also Henderson and Cowan 2001, 98, 211). However, Kilday (2013, 18-19) highlights the seriousness with which even the suspected intent to commit infanticide was taken in 17th century Scottish law. When all possible human-fairy connections are explored, the materiality of both bodies becomes significantly more problematic than the neat package of an 'explanation' (as a mind-based thought, idea or belief) conveys.

### Isobel Watsonne, Glendevon (*MUCKHART*)

*Unknown, 1590*

The fairies replaced Watsonne's baby with a changeling after she slighted them. Rather than feed the infant, she threw it in the fire; a clear indication she believed it to be a fairy stock. This is confirmed in the end, as she promised her service to the fairies in exchange for her own child's return. Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 81) also described fairy stocks as: "[...] a lingering and voracious image of their being left in their place".

### Janet Drever, Westray, Orkney

*Banished, 6/6/1615*

Drever confessed to ongoing dealings with the fairies over a period of 26 years. She also claimed to have spent time wet nursing fairy offspring in a nearby fairy hill.

Purkiss (2003, 155) hypothesises that this is a veiled account of her abandoning a child, alluding to assumed fairy paternity (Drever confessed to a fairy lover) and infanticide.

**Barbria Parish, Livingston**

*Execution, c. 1647*

When the fairies asked her for a nurse for a fairy baby, Parish recommended a breast feeding neighbour. When the woman refused, the fairies killed her infant in retribution.

**Andro Man, Tarbruith (KINTORE)**

*Guilty, 20/1/1598*

By his account, Man's relationship with the fairy queen went back more than six decades, during which time he said they had produced multiple human-fairy progeny.

**Christian Lewinstoun, Leith (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and burnt, c. 12/11/1597*

Lewinstoun claimed that her daughter, after abduction by the fairies, was able to teach her witchcraft. Lewinstoun found and subsequently burned a collection of bewitched things hidden in their wall.

**Isobell Strauthaquin, Dyce/Fintry, KINTORE**

*Executed, c 21/3/1597*

Like Lewinstoun, Strauthaquin also acquired her skills from a family member who engaged with the fairies. However, she claimed to have learned them from her mother's elf lover, suggesting the possibility that she was confessing to being a changeling.

These accounts demonstrate that the physical exchanges possible between early modern Scots and their fairy neighbours go far beyond child abduction. Fairy-human relationships emerge as intimate and co-productive: sex, procreation and breastfeeding. Some scholars interpret these accounts as post-experience explanatory tools, coming from the imagination and the need to rationalise unexplained events (e.g. Purkiss 2000; 2001; Henderson and Cowan 2001;

Henderson 2009a). Alternatively, there is another way of interpreting these accounts. Wilby (2011) interprets them as evidence of shamanic visions. However, these are not simply 'rationalisations', nor are they the public, performative acts typical of shamanic ritual (Price 2001; Hutton 2006; 2011; Pederson 2007). These stories are of incredibly private moments. A situated approach investigating embodiment allows us to look not for 'reasons' behind fairy accounts but for the ontological-materialities they make possible and are made possible by.

### 6.3 Childbirth and Child Death

Childbirth was a dangerous event, where women and infants were especially susceptible to abduction (as wet-nurses or in exchange for a changeling) by the fairies (Purkiss 2003, 151). However, even deal-making to acquire powers was often described by the accused as occurring specifically at this time:

**Bessie Dunlop, Lynne, Ayr**

*Execution, 8/11/1576*

Likely a charmer, Dunlop first met her fairy contact (discussed further below) after giving birth. He normally appeared at 12 o'clock. He gave her a green thread to use when assisting in childbirths, though she later lost it.

Purkiss (1995, 419) relates the fairy-birth anxiety complex to the loss of control over her body and household that a woman experienced whilst lying-in. It was a time of weakened and porous boundaries; perhaps one reason deals with the fairies to acquire additional power seemed likely at this time. Henderson and Cowan (2001, 94-5) attribute the same anxiety to women interiorising the realities of high infant mortality (exceeding 25%) and the risks associated with delayed motherhood (typically late-twenties; see also Anderson 1996; Scott 1999, 90; Lewis 2007, 82). Looking at Swedish witch trials, van Gent (2009, 109-110) sees fairy-birth anxieties as arising from fluctuating and undefined identities. Each of these interpretations suggests different directions for situated response.

That material measures were taken during childbirth is well documented: Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 81), Martin (1999 [1703]), and several witch trials describe practices to ensure the protection of mother and child, variably involving a bible, bread, an iron item or manipulating rags/clothing in or around the bed. The same Margaret Reid who used an oak tree for healing was involved in a number of childbed practices including withershins circumambulations around the bed with candles.

**Beatrix Leslie, Dalkeith (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and burnt, 3/8/1661*

Like many others involved in midwifery, Leslie recited special words. She also sprinkled salt around the birthing bed and stuck a knife between the straw mattress and the frame.

There are diverse practices mentioned across trial accounts and later folklore relating to the birth-bed, such that it is not possible to discuss every version. Rather, the ontological approach adopted here suggests new perspectives may lie in following the bed as a material and context common across different problematic encounters (Groleau 2009; Zedeño 2009). Beds appear frequently in trial accounts:

**Geilles Burnett, Aberdeen (KINTORE)**

*Not Guilty, 1671*

Burnett was accused of murdering two husbands, in both cases by placing something under their bed: enchanted raw flesh then enchanted powder.

**Barbara Napier, Edinburgh (HADDINGTON)**

*Guilty, 1591*

Accomplice of Agnes Sampson (below, this section) in the North Berwick plot against King James VI, she confessed to meeting at Halloween. They supposedly procured the king's bed linen to use in conjunction with potions. The king ordered the assize to execute Napier. The jurors were prosecuted when they refused on the grounds that she was pregnant, suggesting some level of investment on their part in the life of the unborn child. In terms of more general trends, the number of wells relating to female reproduction and childhood health support this.

**Jean Craig, Tranent (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and Burnt 1/5/1649*

Craig was accused of invoking evil spirits which rode out from under a victim's bed.

That the bed is a recurring motif supports Purkiss's (1995) interpretation of child-birth anxiety relating to the boundaries of mother and home. Thresholds within the home are well recognised as liminal points of weakness (e.g. Purkiss 1996, 98-99; Pócs 1999, 80; Wilby 2011, 82-83; Paterson 2012, 404). Purkiss (1996, 99) observes similar anxieties in reference to beds and thresholds, but discounts the bed as a boundary, simply commenting that: "bedstraw is a good example of a natural material reordered and domesticated". The above examples show that even outside of childbirth, the bed remained a most intimate and insecure site, vulnerable to malevolent influence. That the bed itself is not typically considered a boundary or threshold is an artefact of the modern ontology: it need not be the case for the early modern bed. Not only is it the point where infants enter into the human world, it is the place of conception; it is where many receive their last rites and pass on; it is the gateway to the realm of sleep and dreams. Bed is a place where bodies are volatile, penetrable, and permeable: a boundary between worlds (Pócs 1999, 80). As with other thresholds, beds could be protected from malevolent influence.





*Figure 48: A mare stone, hung from the end of an 18th/19thC bed. St John's Town of Dalry, BUITTLE (H. NO 37). This foot-like natural concretion is naturally perforated (as are many charms). Mare stones were used to protect the sleeper from nightmares and from being hag-ridden - being ridden or otherwise attacked during sleep by a witch (Ross 1980, 183).*



*Figure 49: A naturally-perforated, waterworn pebble 'mare stone' from a 19thC bed; Stonehaven (H.NO 98).*

Purkiss (2000, 86) argues that throughout the Early Modern period fairies always hovered somewhere in the space between belief and disbelief. However, upon closer inspection Henderson and Cowan's (2001) argument is far more compelling. The difference is one of nuance; rather than seeing them as between belief and disbelief, Henderson and Cowan (2001) cast them repeatedly as being between present and not present. An analysis of the witch trial accounts supports this: there are definite times at which fairy encounters were of more immediate concern. Cases refer to liminal times of day: midday and midnight being the most common, and sunrise also frequent. Similarly, the quarter days, Halloween, Candlemas, Beltane, and Lammas and a few other holidays like Easter make repeat appearances across the trial accounts (Paterson 2012, 380-383).

Henderson and Cowan (2001, 82) and Paterson (2012, 382-3) argue compellingly that the times and dates confessed to were not elite interjections, but came from the accused, references to a popularly understood calendar. This is likely: wells were considered most/only effective on exactly the same special days (Chapter 5.1; 5.8; Paterson 2012, 384). Furthermore, a number of wells also specified that visitors should arrive, visit or leave at certain times, e.g. sunrise. There are also a number of fairy wells and witch trial references to fairy encounters at wells: they share not only space but temporality.

Likewise, the SSW collects data which shows that witch gatherings were also often confessed to have occurred at 12 o'clock and on the same special days. Robert Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 80) reported that the best church turnouts were always around the Quarter Days - times and places not specific to the fairies, but rather relevant across the entire early modern ontology. All of this suggests that, rather than balancing between real and fantasy, for early modern Scots fairies existed, like rag tree sites, in process; becoming and decaying, their presence waxing and waning with a liminal other-world that intersected the early modern landscape most potently at particular times and places. As Lucas (2005) argues, the archaeology of time is an integral part of the archaeology of any alternative ontology - experience

of time is one of the pillars upon which people understand what they are in relation to collaborative others and the world which they co-fabricate.

The trial accounts demonstrate that fairies were not limited to a liminal calendar: their appearances also coincided with liminal points in the human life course, for example, child birth and entry into motherhood. Many trial accounts and the writings of Robert Kirk (2001 [1690-91]), also highlight their association with death. Fairies not only invisibly (except to those with second sight) attended human funerals, but helped to carry coffins, wore funeral outfits and shared funeral food (Kirk 2001 [1690-91], 80). Social understandings of birth and death (as opposed to measureable biological moments) and the practices through which they are negotiated are also intimately connected to the experience of time.

Before the Reformation, immediate entry into heaven was rare: it was widely held that outstanding penance would be spent in purgatory (an intermediate hell). Time owed in purgatory could be reduced through practice, by undertaking good works, confessing, praying and/or observing the sacraments. It was also possible to earn or purchase papal indulgences, specific remissions or time in purgatory, issued by the Church (Shinners 1997, 380-385). Works, prayers and purchases could be made on another's behalf, making it possible to improve the waiting time of the deceased. By the 15th century, indulgences valuing thousands of years were available: Judgment Day was of little concern for most late medieval Scottish worshippers (Shinners 1997, 380-385, Arnold 2005, 168).

After the Reformation, left with no way to affect one's (or another's) fate, being born, living and dying a Christian became a significantly less secure proposition (Matheson 1998; 2000). Childbirth presented a high chance of infant and/or mother mortality, opened vulnerable female boundaries, and allow an (as yet) unbaptised infant into the world. Each alone was a dangerous proposition. Childbirth, particularly in association with unbaptised infant death, therefore offers a fascinating opportunity for engaging with margins between life and death.

The regulation of permeable boundaries during birth, both temporal and physical, was a significant early modern concern. However, of the three suggested possible motives behind the deep apprehension associated with childbirth, it is the third -

the dangers of fluid and undefined identities - which is the most materially attestable. Even after the Reformation, baptism, comprising of naming and purification by water, remained the moment of social birth: receipt of membership into the community. Despite the refutation of the sacraments associated with Reformed doctrine (e.g. Knox 1972 [1559]), the early modern period saw increasingly severe penalties and criminal punishment for parents or ministers who not take seriously their obligation to baptise infants as early as possible (Colville 1834-45, 600). Todd (2002, 119-123) also notes that session records contain multiple examples, particularly in cases where the infant was sickly, where parents approached the session for an emergency baptism instead of waiting until the next preaching day. Clearly, the soul and its fate were ontologically significant throughout the period; the modern mind/body dichotomy does not hold up (Tarlow 1999; 2011, 7, 12). The following section explores how experiences and understandings of unbaptised infants complicate and reveal early modern modes of being in life, death and between.

## 6.4 Belonging and Being: Personhood in Life and Death

The Nordic and Celtic pre-Christian worlds both valued the act of naming as the main rite of initiation into the world of the living (Pentikäinen 1968; 1990; O'Connor 1991, 33; Livingston 1996, 2). This name giving was more than one of superficial identity: in Medieval Nordic Europe a child was not fully alive before they had been named; until naming occurred, infant abandonment was permissible (Pentikäinen 1968). Even in post-Reformation Scotland, naming remained so important that a father did not share his child's name (even with its mother) until he publicly revealed it during baptism (Gregor 1881, 11; Smith 1998-99).

It is unclear to what extent exposure remained relevant in early modern Scotland; the often alluded to connection between fairy anxieties and infanticide is difficult to confirm. There are few extant infanticide prosecution records in Scotland dating before 1700 (Goodare 1998, 294; Kilday 2013), and it is unknown how frequently infants died due to attempts to cure changelings (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 97).

However, Martin Martin (1999 [1703], 80) describes changelings being left out overnight in an open grave at Quarter Day, in the hope that the real child might be recovered in the morning. Miller's (1994 [1835], 101) description of the Fairy Cradle (*CAWDOR/TAIN*) involved similar exposure, and the local Stewart (1834-45, 21-22) suggests it was done late at night. Isobell Watsonne (*MUCKHART*) reportedly threw her changeling in the fire. Undoubtedly, some infants died during their diagnosis and treatment for changeling affliction. A liminal being, the newborn, closed into the home with its mother until the first church visit, had unknown potential (Livingston 1996, 12). In death, neonatal (especially unbaptised) flesh continued to harbour potent properties, constituting its own ontic category of material: not only fairies, but witches were after them.

**John Fean, *HADDINGTON***

*Guilty, 26/12/1590*

Amongst the accusations against Fean was that he dismembered unbaptised babies. At Nairn (*CAWDOR*) in 1662, Isobell Gowdie also confessed to disinterring an unbaptised child; chopping it to pieces, and using those with other ingredients to make a harmful potion (Wilby 2011, 82-83).

**Helen Guthrie, *Forfar***

*Unknown, 1661*

Guthrie claimed that she could enchant a broom to fly by smearing unbaptised baby flesh on the handle. She and her accomplices also confessed to baking and eating a pie of the same (Scharleau 1995, 48).

Looking beyond the flesh, the neonatal soul also conflicts with the modern ontological framework. Intrinsic to the ontological alterity of the neonate in early modern Scotland is their ability to defy definition: their position between womb and world, life and death, makes them a different category of being (Morgan 1996; 2009; Kaufman and Morgan 2005). We can infer sub-human and/or liminal status from the widespread accounts of violence towards them in life (Finlay 2013), gaining clarity by incorporating evidence of deviant burial rites - a form of violence in death (Murphy 2008a). In a project following the 'things', queries over the personhood and material nature of the unbaptised infant dead leads to the burial grounds in which they were interred.

## INFANT BURIAL GROUNDS

The archaeology of the infant dead is a notoriously difficult and understudied area (Scott 1990; Lewis 2007). However, since the early 2000s, infant burial grounds (henceforth IBGs) in Ireland have seen increasing academic interest, incorporating both the ideology behind them and site evidence which highlights trends governing location choices (e.g. Finlay 2000, Donnelly and Murphy 2008). One of the principle features noted is that IBGs frequently incorporate adults whose death made them dangerous or placed them outside of the living and/or dead community: for example, suicides, murder victims, and shipwrecks (Pollard 1999, 37; Finlay 2000, 408). Jonet Boyman (Chapter 5.2) mentioned the practice of separating the ambiguous dead: a Newbattle suicide (*HADDINGTON*), forbidden burial in the churchyard, was instead buried in ‘ane little chapel’ nearby (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 128; Henderson 2011, 246). The woman was said to have suffered fairy blast. Henderson (2011, 246) considers that “her precise meaning is unclear”. However, the Irish name for infant burial grounds *cíllín* means ‘little chapel/church’ (Wileman 2005, 75), and it is here considered highly probable that it was to an infant burial site that Boyman referred, based on the evidence presented below.

Unbaptised infants were almost certainly the most common class of ambiguous dead; however, it is hard to say how common. As late as the 1800s, it was standard practice in Scotland not to record the birth or death of any infant who died unbaptised; the death of an unbaptised child did not carry equal weight to a baptised one. Although there are very few excavated sites, early modern infant burial grounds are increasingly coming to light across Scotland, with a significant number of sites now known (McCabe 2010). As Sofaer (2011) asserts, the habitual exclusion of newborns from communal burial space is significant, revealing a sub-human or alternative personhood. Examining burial site choices renders all too often invisible infant personhood within the material world (Chamberlain 1997, 248), providing insight into wider experiences of embodiment.

## **INCHMARNOCK: AN EXCAVATED IBG SITE**

Inchmarnock, a small island situated in the firth of Clyde off the west coast of Bute, has an ecclesiastical pedigree going back to the introduction of Christianity to Scotland (Lowe 2008). However, for the purposes of this discussion it is important to note that it had fallen into disuse in the early modern period, excavation revealing bird bone assemblages consistent with heavy raptor activity and/or nesting which would not occur at a frequently used site (Conolly 2008, 94). During the 17th and 18th centuries it continued to be used almost exclusively for infant burials, leading to the interpretation that burial was reserved for unbaptised infants (Conolly 2008, 95). The authors of the excavation monograph make this interpretation based on the fact that the stratigraphy is “dominated by young children”, at least 7 buried inside the church ruins, and 7 or more outside it. This thesis proposes further means to support their interpretation by relating their finds to a number of trends indicated at unexcavated sites and through historical records.

## **ESTABLISHING TRENDS**

Infant burial grounds identified through the NMRS Canmore database and local knowledge retained in some remote areas were compared to examine any trends that might suggest why particular sites were chosen. The features being compared were not prepared in advance, but rather were drawn directly from map and documentary analyses of the sites. This allowed the research to remain open to places suggesting their own patterns. A number of sites hinted at potential correlations with Irish IBGs, such as the inclusion of suicides and murder victims, the use of fairy sites, and reuse of historic/prehistoric monuments. However, by far the most commonly identified and significant features were invisibility, proximity to water and the reuse of abandoned church sites, as at Inchmarnock.

## INVISIBILITY

Making use of remote spots and ruinous structures, these sites are ephemeral. Typically located outside the community and barely mentioned in historical texts, upon visitation they are most elusive, graves and sites marked in limited ways, if at all. This invisibility may be as important to their materiality as visibility is to monuments such as Stonehenge (Tilley 1994, 172-196).



*Figure 50: The infant burial ground at South Erradale © Anne MacInnes, 2010. Torridon (NG 75107 71404). It rests in a grassy, natural terrace (MacInnes 2010a). To an outsider, there is nothing about it that suggests its use.*





*Figure 51: Infant burials marked at South Erradale with naturally worn stones © Anne MacInnes, 2010. To intruders, such as the Ordnance Survey staff, these stones would have no significance. Those that remain are disappearing under the grass (MacInnes 2010a).*

Lack of site marking (on maps and within the landscape) and subtle grave markers suggest that secrecy and forgetting were integral parts of infant burial. In Ireland, where infant burial grounds are far more extensively known, this was compounded by the burial taking place after dark, meaning the exact burial location would not be readily identifiable by day (Radford and Radford 1975 [1961], 246; O'Connor 1991, 37, 69; O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996, 323). Whilst it is uncertain whether this was the case in Scotland, the above discussed pattern of liminal times and anxieties about infant vulnerability suggest that unbaptised infant burials would have utilised the same time windows. Only excavation could confirm whether the infants were buried haphazardly and/or overlapped in a manner suggesting night burial, and even then the endeavour would face myriad taphonomic and interpretative hurdles (Cocks 1921, 150; Lewis 2007). At Inchmarnock, SK96 (perinatal) and SK99 (3 years old) were both found buried prone. It is interpreted that this must have been by accident, because the little 'shrouded bundles' would be easy to get upside down. An alternative interpretation is that this could indicate burial in the dark.



*Figure 52: At Melvaig the last infant burial took place at dusk © Anne MacInnes, 2010. The stone is silent, by day speaking only to those with insider knowledge, by night, entirely invisible. Infant burials were within the living memory of the man whose little sister's tiny coffin was the last internment there, late in the 1940s (MacInnes 2010b). The coffin is not a modern innovation: of the 13 infant burials confirmed 17th/18th century at Inchmarnock, 7 of them were coffin burials (Conolly 2008, 95). At Crathie, MacDonald (1907, 85) noted that unbaptised infants had, within living memory, been buried after sundown.*

Intentional burial in remote or abandoned areas would have perpetuated the anonymous and liminal quality of these unbaptised children, disconnecting them from gender identity, kinship, lineage or status, and emphasising silence (after Turner 1969, 102-3; Scott 1999, 126). However, it should be noted that apparently anonymous burial is not the same as burial without care. Indeed, analysis of the sites chosen suggests that parents invested effort in the fate of their infants.

## REUSE OF CONSECRATED GROUND

Before the Reformation, the unbaptised infant was condemned to the lesser suffering of limbo, essentially a purgatory where good works, intercession by the Saints, indulgences and prayers from the living could improve the terms of their time there (Shahar 1990, 45; Bossy 1995, 12). When the Reformers refuted purgatory and all means by which people could affect the eternal fates of themselves and others, parents were left unable to assist their infants (Marshall 2002). This left Infants condemned to hell, in common understanding and practice, though not perhaps in doctrine (Todd 2002, 119-125; Arnold 2005, 163-169; Tarlow 2011, 21-24). However, patterns in IBG sites suggest that it was not readily accepted that the gates to eternal life were closed to these children (see Tarlow 2011, 177-179 for a similar argument about the persistence of the Lyke Wake). Many Scottish IBGs were located within ruined chapel sites, the most common dedication being to St Mary, the Virgin Mother. Examples include St Mary's Chapel, Sliddery, Arran (NMRS No: NR92SW 10); Cill Mhoire, Upper Kilchattan, Colonsay (NMRS No: NR39NE 6) and Clow Chapel (St Mary's), Watten (NMRS No: ND25SW 3). Henderson (2007, 17) notes that wells and springs bearing her name were considered particularly potent in treating women and children, including infertility, a connection to the death of unbaptised infants, if we conclude that they are not ontologically fully alive. The social person entered the world through the church; not as we would argue today, through the birth canal, or perhaps even through conception (Duffy 2005, 181; Finlay 2013, 207). An individual's first act of faith - the act that made them human - was participation in baptism.

Rattue (1995, 72-73), notes that Mary had power as a protectress in the night - the time at which these infants may well have been buried. However, the Marian connection to womb, birth and world lends itself to the deeper interpretation of church site reuse: specifically to the possibility of post-Reformation, posthumous intercession for unbaptised infants. Mary was not the only saint who protected infants and mothers: there were also St Margaret and others (Duffy 2005, 180-181); however, she was the most potent. A font, made at the request of John Macleod of Minginish in 1530, is one of the few which survives from the immediate pre-Reformation period (NMS: GA.1998.5.18). It bears the symbol of Mary holding the



infant Jesus - immediately evoking the idea of motherhood and the protective relationship between mother and infant. Despite doctrine to the contrary (Knox 1972 [1559]), this relationship continued into the post-Reformation period. Healers and midwives assisted births using Mary nuts (Martin 1999 [1703], 35). These exotic seeds occasionally wash up on Scottish shores, emergent in a way very similar to elfshot, and were considered to be powerful as birthing charms for protecting children from witchcraft and the evil eye, particularly those which were white in colour (Martin 1999 [1703], 35). Such a nut was mentioned in one trial:

**Katherine Jones Dochter, Shetland**

*Strangled and Burnt, 1616*

Jones Dochter reported a forty year association with the devil and mentioned possession and use of a sea nut. Mary was also associated with almonds, suggesting that the ontologically specific properties of Mary nuts may also derive from their shared materiality as nuts (for almonds, see Cusack 2011, 84-85).



*Figure 53: Four Mary/drift nuts, from two distinct plant species. From the top left clockwise: K2000\_551; H NO 116; H NO 100; H NO 99. H NO 116 has been fitted to be worn as a pendant and lacquered to enhance its deep red tone. The smaller examples each have a pale coloured seam. They have a lustrous vitality and organic warmth to them that would set them apart from the sand and pebbles of most beaches.*

In the immediate pre-Reformation period, Mary was revered across Europe as the most powerful saviour of lost souls, evident in Scotland in both Scots and Gaelic poetry collected from 1512-1542 by the Dean of Lismore, buried at Inschadney (*FORTINGALL*; Gillies 1924-25, 76). In a recent volume exploring these poems and other medieval documents (Boardman and Williamson 2010), Mary emerges with three unique intercessory powers:

1. She can temper Christ's judgmental side with her motherly love
2. She can reproach God directly in her wrath, inciting him to accept an individual otherwise damned to hell
3. She can enter hell itself and extract an individual for salvation

Mary is frequently attributed miracles of salvation of the most unlikely sort, such as saving thieves, murderers and even women who commit infanticide (Innes 2010). There are stories of her going enraged into Hell to recover people and deliver them to heaven. Fitch (2010, 175) takes this exploration further, citing material examples such as a bas-relief from Roslin Chapel in which Mary defends a layman from the onslaught of a horned devil, in the same discussion highlighting that burial near a Marian altar or artwork heightened her powers of intercession. Hall (2010) demonstrates the same motifs in Perth, arguing it is an example typical of Scotland. It is significant to note that scholarship is emerging which clearly demonstrates the continued significance of Mary in post-Reformation Scotland (e.g. Fitch 2011). Furthermore, it is known from both documents and excavation that several IBGs also include examples of the exact same types of characters that Mary saves in the stories: the shipwreck victims, suicides, murder victims and murderers.

Four such individuals were excavated at Inchmarnock. As the cemetery was going out of use and moving towards predominantly infant graves (16th/17th century), three individuals were interred worthy of mention. One was a young woman (SK85), her full-term infant in utero (SK88). Eberly (1988, 61) notes the pollutant power of the placenta and the historical exclusion of mother and child from normal burial in

the event of death during pregnancy. The other skeletons indicated they were victims of extreme violence. The more recent of the two, a boy about 14 years old (SK91), buried by the south wall of the church, had sustained massive injuries. Three strikes with a significant blade sliced open his skull and chopped him bodily in half (D. Henderson 2008, 217-218). Most interestingly, the boy was buried almost exactly atop the grave of the first victim of violence - a middle-aged woman who had received five edged-weapon strikes to the head (D. Henderson 2008, 218). Christopher Lowe (2008, 93-94) and David Henderson (2008, 217-8), assume this positioning to be coincidence, as there is at least ten years between the burials. However, they were buried at the point where the nave and chancel meet, on the south exterior of the church. It is far more likely that this was done intentionally, either with recognition of the site of the first burial, or out of common understanding of the best position to place such ambiguous dead.



*Figure 54: At Baleruminmore IBG, infants were buried with a murder victim in the ruins of a pre-Reformation church © J. Malcolm, 2007. Likewise, the infant burial ground situated between Cill Ma Neachdain and Cill Ma Ghobhannain on Iona included both murder victims and unbaptised infants (Martin 1999 [1703], 157), Gordon (1984, 144) identifying the associated church as St. Mary's.*

The fourth member of the non-infant ambiguous dead buried at Inchmarnock was interred during the otherwise exclusively infant/young child phase of use in the 17th/18th century. A young male (SK5), was buried supine, but his knees were up at his shoulders and his hand clasping the back of his thigh. Two lace tags were recovered with the skeleton. Conolly (2008, 95-96) suggests that he was buried bound, and D. Henderson (2008, 213) concludes that the lack of ceremony associated with the burial might indicate a ‘washed-up drowning victim’.



*Figure 55: The infant burial site at Melvaig © Anne MacInnes, 2010. Torridon (NG 75107 71404). The site sits high on a SW facing slope, nestled at the meeting point of the Minch to the west and a river to the south. The graves are subtly marked (small stony humps). A local old man remembered that two washed-up sailors were buried there around the 1940s (MacInnes 2010b). Cladh Mhic Iain, Jura (NMRS No: NR57SE 6) is also said to be the resting place of infants and shipwrecks.*



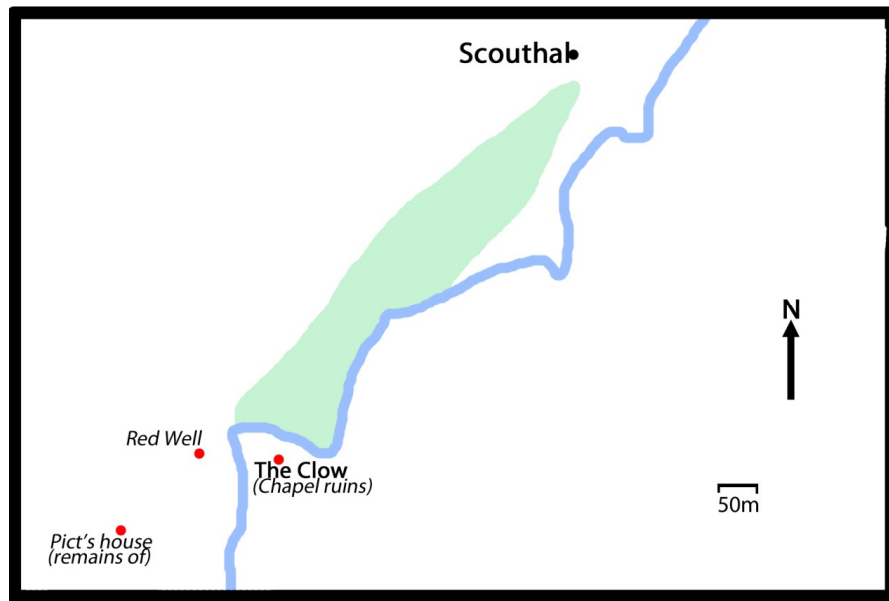
If, as Kay suggests (2001), the Virgin's remit is predominantly lost souls, then infant burial grounds represent an ontic category which far exceeds the capacities implied in 'place to bury infants'. Murphy (2011) suggests that Irish IBG sites were chosen for their capacity to meet or express parental emotion and investment. This was undoubtedly the case, however, the patterns in church reuse and the repeating Marian connection favour the conclusion that the need that was expressed and met, was to protect and save lost souls (McCabe 2010; see also Crombie 1987-88; O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996; Finlay 2000 for similar discussions on Irish material).

### **PROXIMITY TO WATER SOURCES**

Outnumbering examples where IBGs were incorporated into church sites are those where the principle observable feature of the location is the proximity of water. Indeed, the two are far from mutually exclusive. Crawford's (1993) interpretation of the role of water at IBGs, a correlation shared with Irish examples, is that contact with the church roof may have given the water holy (baptising) properties. Others suggest that, even without church ruins, the abundance of water imagery in baptism and the correlation between IBGs and water sources indicates reference to alternative traditions such as river baptism (Crombie 1987-88; O'Connor 1991; O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996).

Whilst a compelling explanation, posthumous baptism is not the only (nor an exclusive) possibility. Losey *et al* (2013, 93) describe exactly the same kinds of sites being used for burial in Middle Holocene cis-Baikal, identifying places such as shorelines, water views and river confluences as "landscape juncture points, either between land and water or two flows of water". In an ontology where souls move between different realms (such as earth, purgatory, fairyland and heaven), Losey *et al* (2013, 93) argues that these boundaries also represent points of conjunction between worlds, just as it is argued here that beds do.





*Figure 56: The Clow chapel and red well, both dedicated to St Mary. The church was ruinous before 1726 and in use as a burial ground for unbaptised infants and strangers. As at Melvaig (above), water also surrounds much of the site. Henderson and Cowan (2001) argue that Pict's Houses were fairy sites.*



*Figure 57: Sithean A' Bhaile-mheadhonaich is an IBG and fairy hill. FORTINGALL (NN 6108 4736). It is a distinctive natural mound situated within a river confluence, drawing attention to the fact that ontological 'rules' are neither straight-forward nor inflexible: water could be either baptising or charming, or even both simultaneously.*

Rattue (1995, 10) argues water's source of 'magic' has its origins in 'otherness'. Like weather and trees, water has personality and properties; it has moods,

including those expressed with its ‘voice’ - a babbling brook one moment, might roar with the tumbling of mountain rocks the next (Ingold 2005; Oestegaard 2011, 44-45). Rattue (1995, 11) describes it as “neither living nor inanimate; it possesses life, yet it is not alive, and unlike fire, it can never fully be domesticated”. He also says “water comes from below, from darkness, from the place where the dead [...] are buried”. Isobel Strauthaquin (above) is said to have washed the bones of corpses in water, using the corpse water as a healing potion. Upon these bones being thrown into the River Don, the river was said to become tumultuous - supporting the interpretation of ontological alterity in the interactions between water and the remains of the dead.

Water is cleansing, reflective and yet also distorting. Like stone, it emerges from the ground. While east flowing or ‘sunrising’ water (towards Jerusalem) was preferable for holy springs (Rattue 1995, 76), it is south running water which repeatedly appears across Scottish trial accounts, suggesting that its properties were not limited to those drawn from Christian sources. Although significantly later than the witch trials, Gregor (1881, 85) recounts the use of south running water to summon the apparition of one’s future husband at Halloween by washing the sleeve of a shirt in south running water ‘where the dead and living crossed’. It is interesting to note that just as south running water was preferable, so too was south-facing infant burial. Miller (2002, 99) interprets south-running water’s significance as connected to positive associations with the right (when facing east). This may or may not contribute to its potency as a positive site for infant burial.

Finlay (2000) describes Irish infant burial grounds (*cillíní*) as appearing in many of the same contexts as Scottish examples here discussed, particularly disused church sites and fairy sites. It could be tempting to make much of the historical connections between infant burial sites like Inchmarnock and Ireland (Lowe 2008, 272-273), and to conclude that they are part of a shared tradition. However, accounts like that of Janet Boyd (*HADDINGTON* area) and the presence of sites elsewhere in Scotland such as Watten (figure 56) and Shandwick (figure 58) suggests that we should see infant burial grounds in Scotland as part of wider Scottish practice, as opposed to treating them as an isolated Irish import, and investigate within the context of contemporary Scottish culture.



*Figure 58: Shandwick Stone © Wojsyl, 2006. Gordon (1984, 144) claims Clach A' Carridh, Shandwick (TAIN) was the burial site of infants and suicides. The site commands an ocean view. Archaeological survey and sampling in recent years has confirmed a known burial ground to the east and also confirmed 18th C human remains buried on the south side of the site (Noble 2013).*

In a study of the Stirling and *HADDINGTON* charming cases, Miller (2002, 99) found water constituted 44% of witch-utilised substances: 18% well water; 10% south running water; 15% unspecified; and 1% sea water. Witch trial evidence overlaps spatially and temporally with many infant burial sites, supporting the interpretation that water played a significant role in determining the properties of the infant burial ground, including those emergent from its capacity to move between realms. Water is the single most common material encountered and/or used across all the extant trial records, and the common factor across witch trials, well visiting and infant burial ground sites.

**John Philip, Aberdeen (*KINTORE*)**  
*Strangled and burnt, 1631*

A known and often rebuked folk healer, Philip used water from a south running well for one of his treatments. When it was poured outside a cat who ran over it went mad, attacking an onlooker. He also used the remains of a dead infant - in this case to make a cure for a cow.

**Janet Clark, Cromarty (CAWDOR/TAIN)**

*Strangled and burnt, 1590*

Like Philip, Clark used water specifically from a south running well.

**Jonet Stewart, HADDINGTON**

*Strangled and burnt, 12/11/1597*

Stewart used south running water to wash a patient's shirt, using a smith's hot iron in the water. Her fellow healer, Christian Saidler (executed on the same day) dipped a shirt in a well for healing.

**Jonet Tailzour, Cambus (MUCKHART)**

*Burned 3/4/1633*

Tailzour had a reputation as a healer for over 30 years and described complicated treatments involving the use of clothing, south running water and the transference of disease between people and animals. Her account also mentions a thorn bush.

Undoubtedly, in most cases, a variety of factors including invisibility, prospects for salvation and the range of ontologically specific properties of water (and likely other factors), were taken into account in the selection and community adoption of any given infant burial ground. In sum, however, they all demonstrate a deep need to exert some form of control over infant remains and their eternal fates. They suggest the possibility that limbo endured after the Reformation and that infants were not beyond the point of intercession or the benefits of parental investment. Gilchrist's (2008, 147-148) observation that a disproportionately high percentage of medieval graves exhibiting 'magical practices' were of infants and very young children shows that early modern Scots taking measures to protect their lost infants was not an innovation. Indeed, she also posits that some of the charms excavated, such as a pebble placed in the mouth of a TB victim, were intended to heal the deceased, further support to the idea that the dead may not be beyond reach (Gilchrist 2008, 149).

This indicates an ontology in which life transitions are not instantaneous, but rather are ongoing. We typically understand both birth and death as referring to definite moments in time (each recorded in hospitals down to the minute). However, Tarlow (2011) and Losey *et al* (2013, 88) make excellent arguments that with ontological alterity comes the possibility of death as a long-term process. Birth could also be argued to be such a process; indeed, they may not be mutually exclusive. In the case of the unbaptised neonate or ailing changeling infant, a long birth extending out until restoration by baptism or fairy-expelling violence might legitimately be occurring simultaneously with a long death, culminating only should these measures fail. In the event of the latter, the continued attempts to influence the fate of the infant dead suggests that even after death, some form of life may have remained ongoing.

## 6.5 Fairies, the Dead and Embodiment

Living adults occasionally reported visiting the fairy realm and it is well documented that the threat of fairies seeking human infants was an ontological reality. There is, however, a further interaction, to which the argument now turns: the occupation of a shared liminal space by fairies and the dead. There is more than circumstantial evidence to suggest that the unbaptised infant dead and fairies coexisted within the same realm. In addition to the points discussed above, the unbaptised infant dead are described by Pennant in 1772 (1998: 159) as fairylike in their qualities:

“...little spectres, called Tarans, or the souls of unbaptised infants, were often seen flitting among the woods and secret places, bewailing in their soft voices their hard fate”.

This account suggests that we must see these dead, therefore, not as objects or in terms of their lost capacities, but rather in terms of the ontologically specific affordances of protracted, overlapping birth and death. They are active agents which continue to play important roles in the co-fabrication of the world and may yet be initiated into the Christian dead (Ingold 2000; Marwick 2000 [1975], 94-95; Robb 2010; Robb 2013).

Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 94) expressed that fairies were distraught by their own perpetual limbo, also reporting that seers frequently encountered in the fairy world, those who “[die] before the natural period of their lyf expyr’ and that their “souls goe to the sith [fairies] when dislodged”. Briggs (1970, 96) characterises these dead as “[those] who have no right to be dead at all”. A number of witch trial accounts testify to this: Elspeth Reoch (as above) encountered her dead kinsman (killed at sunset), as a fairy man trapped forever between life and death (SSW; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 60). Bessie Dunlop’s (as above) fairy contact had once been human; a soldier fallen at the Battle of Pinkie who she first met soon after childbirth.

### **Alesoun Pierson, Byrehill, Fife**

*Unknown, 1588*

Pierson confessed to a 16 year relationship with the fairies, though she did not know how long she had spent in their realm. She claimed to have a number of dead kinsmen in their world, including her fairy advisor and uncle, William Simpson (Pitcairn 1833, 162-5; L. Henderson 2008, 145).

Like the suicides and murder victims buried in infant burial grounds, some fairy men were akin to human ghosts, remnants of those who suffered violent deaths before their time (Wilby 2005, 18). Lizanne Henderson (2008, 15) argues this is a motif mobilised to give charmers otherworldly authenticity (L. Henderson 2008, 157). However, the fact that it served this purpose validates it as a legitimate window into the materiality of the body. Entering the fairy realm was ontologically possible for humans, alive and dead. That tarans flew suggests that, like these human-dead become fairy men, unbaptised dead could move between both worlds. Flying is one of the key means of passing between realms (Pócs 1999, 77), a powerful indication that unbaptised infants should be theorised as a class of revenant (Tarlow 2011, 183).

Whilst possessing haunting like qualities typical of those who meet an untimely end, the unbaptised infant dead were not typically possessed by demons; rather, their polluting nature was understood as the source of a supernatural contagion called grave merels (Caciola 1996, 27; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 44; Boyacıoğlu 2015). This was fatal and contracted, very like the cat who stepped on spilled

south running water, by stepping on their graves (Radford and Radford 1975 [1961], 73; O'Connor 1991, 36-37, 71-73; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 44). The problematic presence of the unbaptised infant dead thus had serious implications in the living world.

This passage of contagion from infant, through soil and into adult is ontologically parallel to the passage of contagion from person into rag into tree (or into person should someone pick up the rag). This may have been a taboo to discourage people wandering off alone to linger over infant graves (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 44). However, in developing a relative taxonomy of things, looking at these similarities matters (Zedeño 2009, 408). That these children were not attributed normal human personhood is evident in their deviant burials (Murphy 2008b). Adult revenant burials typically express the fear surrounding violent death and supernatural capacities attributable to what Boyacıoğlu (2015) describes as failed death rites. This argument doesn't apply to infants; it is superseded by incomplete and violent birth. In failing to emerge over the thresholds of womb and home into the world of the living, their death rites fail by default.

From their place outside of the early modern Christian environment, unbaptised infants exhibit ontologically familiar agency: rags hidden in secret places brought contagion into the homes of witch victims; infants likewise leech contagion into place. Rags build via anonymous layers into place; so do infant remains. Attempts to posthumously baptise these infants demonstrates that (alterity of) personhood was central to their short lives and is, therefore, an essential line of enquiry in attempting to understand them (Fowler 2010, 368). However, their properties in common with rags further problematise the very assumption that people and things were ontologically distinct and unwavering categories.

## 6.6 (Re-)turning to Stone

Returning to the elfshot, the exploration of unbaptised infants interacting with the land is an intimate reminder to rigorously explore the boundaries between person



and stone. Elfshot caused harm from an invisible position inside the body, ontologically distinctive from the modern arrowhead. Such an enquiry thus begins with determining whether they behave as stone at all. Gilchrist (2008, 135) suggests that this will be the case, underscoring that “The choice of natural objects [for charms and amulets] depended on the inherent properties of their materials”. Moving away from a perspective which emphasises a general agency of objects, a relational approach looks for specific agencies embedded in the inherent material properties of things and their entanglements in place.

Unfortunately, the work of collecting charm stones over the past two centuries has invariably severed them from their uses and owners, divorcing them from their ontologically intrinsic properties (Cheape 2008a, 105-106). Whilst Jones (2007, 93) and Cheape (2008a, 117; 2008b) lament this situation, there is no real suggestion on how to remedy it beyond reference to the possibility that psychology may offer opportunities to understand ‘superstition’ as a system of ‘irrational beliefs’. However, resituating charms within a heterogeneous contemporary assemblage allows us to focus on being in the world in practice. Rather than seeking to recover or explain their significance as articulated ‘beliefs’, this problematises existing categories in favour of new ontic connections (Henare *et al* 2007b; Haraway 2008), facilitating deeper understandings of relational materials and embodied others of all kinds.

Exploring medieval burials, Gilchrist (2008, 151-152) observes frequent emphasis on contact between charm and skin. She interprets this as the extension of the female role as carer into the world of the dead. Exploring the use of stones in the early modern period, it seems that proximity to the living body was ambiguous, with the potential for healing or harming. In addition to conjuring spirits, Jean Craig (above) was accused of killing her sister-in-law’s newborns by rubbing them with a set of three small enchanted stones. This was understood as a manner of stealing them for the devil. Alexander Drummond (*MUCKHART*; Chapter 5.2) also had a set of three special stones, known as ‘slake stanes’. Margaret Sandieson, accused 1635, Sanday, Orkney, had three special stones which she used to cure by rubbing them on her patients. There is archaeological evidence supporting use on the skin (figure 59).





*Figure 59: The effect of rubbing stone on skin © National Museums Scotland Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk). H. NO 33 is a slightly rough, waterworn, reddish-brown quartzite pebble with a slightly pimply finish. The darker, glossier patch is worn by rubbing on human and/or animal skin.*

Stones, however, do not exist solely in their interaction with bodies: they have their own stories and are first and foremost encountered in *place*:

**James Knarstoun Orkney**

*Unknown, 1633*

Knarstoun collected three stones, one each for the ebb, hill and kirk. To cure, he placed them (hot) on the lintel of a patient's door to remain overnight. Knarstoun collected St Mary's Well water at midnight, dipping his stones in cold water to

complete the spell and reveal the malignant spirit causing the affliction (Dalyell 1835, 508-9). Katherine Craigie (1643), also of Orkney, placed hot stones on the lintel and then into water for curative effect against kirk, hill and ebb spirits (Maidment 1837, 135-42). A set of three stones documented as belonging to a Bonar Bridge (TAIN) witch who died at the turn of the 20th century is held in the NMS collection and should be understood in terms of the documented sets of three stones.



*Figure 60: A set of three stones which belonged to a Bonar Bridge Witch (TAIN) © National Museums Scotland Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk) . 19thC; H NO 94-96. The greenish quartzite pebble appears to be a strike-alight (Cheape 2008, 114), whilst the largest of the three is liver coloured with cream and pink speckles and has a definite egg-shape. Of the three, it is the ‘cattle’ stone (Chapter 7.6) and people travelled long distances for water it had been dipped in to cure their cattle (Hutcheson 1899-1900). Overall, the evidence suggests that the combination of physical properties and place(s) of origin was important to the constitution of an effective stone set.*

The efficacy of stone charms was also intimately connected to where they were placed. Whilst the examples above are benign, this was not always the case: placing stone (like placing rags) on someone else’s property was transgressive. This

supports the argument that ontological properties may be emergent from material and context in relation.

**Margaret Bane, Aberdeen (*KINTORE*)**

*Executed, 1597*

Bane was seen throwing stones, water and earth over her shoulders (throwing ‘erd and stane’), the accusation that this was assertion of ownership. The previously mentioned Andro Man, (*KINTORE*/1598), had a counter-spell for protecting property by placing four stones, one in each corner of the ward, to stave off malefice.

**Margaret Reauch, Coull (*KINTORE*)**

*Unknown, 1597*

At dawn, Reauch was seen hugging each corner of a man’s house, to which his later death was attributed. She was also accused of throwing stones into the water (also a frequent practice across trials) and making them dance.

## **DIPPING STONES**

In addition to demonstrating the important and enduring connection between stone and place, the trial accounts also clearly demonstrate a relationship between water and stone. There are many extant examples of dipping stones (often but not exclusively quartz), which exemplify this relationship. They were used, like elfshot, to infuse water with special properties, Pennant (2000, 71) describing one in detail in his 1769 *A Tour in Scotland*. Set in silver, he reported that people travelled upwards of 100 miles in order to transform water carried from home into a powerful curative (Pennant 2000, 71-72).



*Figure 61: A 17th/18thC crystal charm stone silver-mounted for dipping; provenance unknown; (H. NO 112). It fits into a general pattern of similar pieces, including H. NO 74; H. NO 80; and H. NO 109 - H. NO 115.*



*Figure 62: A small quartz pebble encased in two strips of copper mounted to make a dipping charm; 18th C; Culbin Sands, CAWDOR; H. NO 82. This emulates the style of more upmarket dipping crystals.*

It has been suggested that crystals like H.NO 12 (figure 61) were once part of medieval reliquaries, salvaged after the Reformation (Black 1892-93, 434-44; 1894-95, 439-48). However, half- (or entirely) forgotten association with a relic, whilst perhaps intimately related to their later use, is unlikely to be their sole source of power. Medieval sources linked such white and clear stones to the apocalypse as described in Revelations (Gilchrist 2008, 138), for example:

*[...] I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it (Revelations 2:7).*

The impending apocalypse was a timely concern for early modern Scots living in the New Jerusalem (Henderson 2011, 238-39). Excavation of Scottish IBG sites is extremely limited, however, the well documented inclusion of white quartz pebbles in early modern infant graves in Ireland (O’Sullivan and Sheehan 1996, 323), and in late medieval infant graves at Whithorn, *BUITTLE* (Hill 1997, 472-474), indicates that they may be present. This suggests an interesting possibility, approachable only through further excavation: could they have been hidden grave markers for the name known only to god? Gilchrist (2008, 150) and Lebour (1913-14) certainly interpret white stones as intimately associated with the rise of the dead for Judgement Day.

In medieval literature white and clear stones were intimately associated with water: like the sites chosen to host IBGs these stones may be frequently associated with medieval burials as they afforded a connection to posthumous healing and baptismal powers (Mitchell 1883-4; Hutcheson 1899-1900, 483; Gilchrist 2008, 138). The practice of the use of white river stones for healing goes back at least as far as Adamnán’s *Life of St Columba* (Hutcheson 1899-1900, 484), the saint blessing one such stone from the River Ness and exclaiming “Behold, this white pebble, by which God will effect cure of many diseases among this heathen nation”.

Continuing to ‘follow the things’, a conclusion based only on articulated religious ‘ideas’ is incomplete. Other interpretations are possible; for example, Fowler (2004, 116), associates quartz with mountains and the seashore. These may be interpreted as liminal interfaces between water and stone: mountains, where water emerges from the underground realm into the human world; the seashore,

where waters meet and land becomes ocean. Given the interplay between stone and other thresholds (such as doorways), this should not be ignored. Practice must be investigated. Martin Martin (1999 [1703], 55, 90, 116) described a number of stones being heated (like the ebb, hill and kirk stones) before being dipped in water or milk to create a curative drink. Working from practice, towards embodied beings and material stones, a situated response can offer new interpretations.

Both elfshot (when possessed as a charm) and dipped water protected against fairies and witches; they possessed at least one quality in common, other than stoniness. That the lychnobiaous fairies, living by lamp/candlelight and best seen at twilight (Andro Man, *KINTORE*; Kirk 2001 [1690-91], 106), would have an affinity-aversion relationship with quartz makes sense when its specific materiality is accounted for. Like elfshot, quartz emerges from the ground in possession of ontologically non-human properties: piezoelectric, quartz pieces rubbed or struck together glow. This phenomenon has been noted to cause beaches to glow at night (Devereux 2008: 193; Reynolds 2009, 157), one of the very places Losey *et al* (2013, 93) argue is a powerful juncture between worlds. Indeed, this triboluminescence gives Gilchrist (2008, 138-139) cause to relate quartz in burial contexts with the cleansing power of purgatory; bringing it into a relationship with the limbo which Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 83-85) argues fairies and some revenants inhabit. Mary nuts in this case also have properties in common with quartz, through the intercessory powers of Mary.

In investigating the very different context of animism in quartz in prehistoric Ireland, Reynold's (2009) work very usefully suggests that rather than exploring quartz as related to the dead, we explore its possibilities as a "life-force". She sees quartz as "[...] always more than themselves; in a process of becoming or regenerating rather than in a static state of being" and "experienced as fluid, dynamic and prone to transformations", its continual re-making implicated in the making and remaking of humans (Reynolds 2009, 164; Ingold 2000, 99). This is ontologically consistent with trees, rag sites and fairies where magical alterity emerges from regenerative cycles of 'becomings'. Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 82) also described the life course of the fairy as "renewed and refreshed in it's [sic] revolutions": in other words, circular.





*Figure 63: Three very different things, all silver-mounted for dipping. Left to right, an 18thC drift nut charm (H. NO 41); a pear-shaped, yellow stone (NP 14); and a 16th/17th C silver-mounted crystal ball charm (H. NO 74). The Mary nut may seem incongruous but, unable to germinate in the Scottish climate, it shares the unbaptised infant's and the quartz's status as simultaneously living and non-living. They are living stones, as much as dead seeds. Each is employed in the (re-)consolidation of the body's boundaries as they come under threat from disease, elf arrows, or perhaps (investigable by excavation) even ambiguous death.*

Fairies, people and stone made and remade each other. It could be argued that the use of quartz dipping crystals to harness the power of stone is somewhat problematised by their potential for residual relic power. However, the widespread deployment of an ontic category incorporating non-relic quartz, Mary nuts, elfshot and selected (or perhaps selecting) other stones as unwitching and healing agents strongly suggests that stoniness, given extra potency by material properties such as quartz-iness, played a more important role in determining the capacities of healing stones.

## STONINESS AND HOLE-YNESS

Another type of stone charm supports this argument: erosion-bored stones were connected to fairies and second sight, fairies sometimes visible through their holes (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 93). Some examples of charms also have mechanical holes, interpreted as simply to facilitate suspension, but the hole itself, in some instances, may have been all that was needed to see fairies. Just as Tom Reid (Dunlop's trial) disappeared through a hole in the wall, the materiality of the hole itself may be significant. In his 1769 tour, Pennant (2000, 118) described viewing the future through a hole in a lamb bone. Campbell (1902, 232) recounts that a traveller in the Highlands was able to navigate his way through fog by peeping through a hole in the rind of a piece of Christmas cheese - suggesting both an unnatural (perhaps fairy) mist, and that the special property of the hole might carry across materials. Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 79) described fairies entering 'in anie cranie or cleft of the earth', Pócs (1999, 80) identifying small cracks and holes as ways into the otherworld.



*Figure 64: A sample of water-worn pebble charms with holes. Left: H. NO 97, unknown. Top: H. NO 60, Wigtownshire (BUITTLE), 19thC. Centre and right, H. NO 34-35, Grange of Lindores, 18th/19thC. Like H.NO 33 (above) three of them have reddish hues.*



Euphame MacCalzean 1591 used a bored stone in the manner others used Mary nuts, “for relieving pains of childbirth” (Normand and Roberts 2000, 265-66). This highlights, as so often appears to be the case, that in practice, contexts and materials cross-cut one another in many different ways. It is therefore impossible to extricate specific examples and pin to them a single definition. Parallel materials appear interchangeable. However, when taken together as an assemblage constituting multiple layers of similar actions it is this flexibility itself that reveals the underlying ontology.

## 6.7 Into the Hills: Boundaries and Life-Force

The ontological-material properties of stone, water and fairy, and their entanglements with the human form are evident as patterns in practice, across witch trial accounts and infant burial. The common property of all three is that they can both emerge from and merge seamlessly into the land: they are imbricated in place; they all have liminal materiality; are fluid and regenerative and work on the cusp between life and death. They all mark and transgress boundaries: property thresholds, the skins of bodies, and the intersections between realms. In doing so, they problematise what bodies and persons were, and what they could do, in the early modern ontology.

Witch trial evidence demonstrates that just as humans shared the ability to interact with the culturally emergent properties of water, stone and fairies, those interactions could afford humans the same transgressive materiality. Isobel Gowdie (*CAWDOR*) claimed to have met with the fairy queen inside Downie Hill. Katharine Briggs (1959, 39) deemed herself ‘indebted’ to Isobel Gowdie for her ‘description of life *in the fairy hills* [my italics]’. However, scholarship to date consistently overlooks the potential materiality the commonly recounted detail of ‘going into the fairy hill’ affords. Katherine Ross (*TAIN*) disappeared into fairy hills. The same Isobel Haldane (*FORTINGALL*) who attempted healing with a child’s shirt claimed to

have stayed inside a fairy hill for three days (Thomson *et al* 1834-45, 38-41). Henderson (2012, 151-2) highlights a number of further cases from mid-17<sup>th</sup> century Bute, noting that one woman returned with “a wyld [sic] smell”.

King James VI, party to many confessions, particularly in the Edinburgh/*HADDINGTON* area, claimed in his *Daemonology* that “sundrie Witches haue gone to death with that confession, that they haue been transported with the Pharie to such a hill, which opening, *they went in* [my italics], and there saw a faire Queen” and that said Queen “gaue them a stone that had sundrie vertues” (Normand and Roberts 2000, 419). Katherine Jones Dochter (Shetland/1616) described trows rising out of the kirkyard at night, especially at Yule. Those who claimed (and, crucially, were then accepted by others) to go into the hill further the argument for a fluidity between human and land.

Much as Zipes (2002) and Maitland (2012) argue that individual trees and forests give rise to their own specific fairy stories, Sir Walter Scott proposed that the mountains, heaths and moors of Scotland inspired the ruggedness and malevolent nature of Scottish fairies (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 18). There is undoubtedly merit in this argument; however, it can be extended significantly, the relationship between fairy and land attesting to fluidity of ordinary embodiment and the boundaries between body and place. If humans can have intercourse with fairies, even have offspring with them, if they can sustain each other’s young, if humans can become fairies and/or live in fairy land when they die, if they can use their ‘things’ (e.g. elfshot), the ontologically experienced materiality of one is the potential of the other. Land must, therefore, share in constructions of personhood and embodiment; person in constructions of landscape and place.



*Figure 65: Sithean Camaslaidh fairy hill and IBG, (FORTINGALL). Like the nearby Sithean A Bhaile-Mheadhonaich it is a natural knoll situated near water with small stones marking grave sites. Here, infant (non-)personhood folds into land.*



*Figure 66: A fairy hill, and site of the Minister's Tree: Doon Hill, Aberfoyle. Like the Sithean hills and St Fillian's Well (FORTINGALL), and the Eildon Hills (DUNS) associated with the ballad relating Thomas the Rhymer's sojourn into fairy land, this is a natural, conical hill which very much stands out in the landscape. Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 85) claimed such hills received the souls of the departed and "so become as a fayrie-hill". He too is part of the landscape, entombed within the Minister's Tree, a fairy stock buried in the nearby graveyard in his place.*

**Jonet Miller, Kirkcudbright (*BUITTLE*)**

*Strangled and burnt, 1658*

Jonet Miller (Chapter 5.8) used foxglove and south running water to treat a fairy-inflicted illness. She recommended the same plant to another client, who was to return her mother to the place where she got ill, wash her and use the leaves there, in order to leave the illness behind at the place where her mother first got it. Miller was also accused of shooting a victim with elfshot, with the help of a fairy-dead companion (Hall 2005, 30).

**Steven Malcome, Gargunnock**

*Unknown, 4/1628*

Another career charmer who claimed his skills were learned from the fairies, Malcome used south running water and charmed shirts. He sent a father with his changeling child out to affect a cure at 11 or 12 o'clock. He made a curative drink using water charmed using a stone (Miller 2002, 99), and also identified the place of origin of a woman's sickness and sent her there 'to find her health' in God's name.

This idea of a landscape in which one can accidentally 'leave' one's health makes good ontological sense: one can 'leave' one's sickness at rag wells. That it is possible to go back for one's health, and that sickness remains until the rag rots away, confirm that land and body are in some manner parallel materials. An aspect of a person can be taken into land and continue to exist there as it would within the body. There is also a further ontological overlap between cloth and land, for just as the sackcloth entwines multiple persons into a polluted and sinful fabric, the infant burial ground draws together multiple human non-persons into a new category of pollutant - a potent combination of place and (multiple) anonymous unbaptised remains from which grave merels emerge.

Whitt and Slack (1994, 22) propose that communities are "conjoined to and interpenetrated by particular environments which they transform and partially construct and which in turn transform and partially construct them" and that "environments so conceived are the embodiment or material extensions of

communities”. Perhaps then, it is not unexpected that unusual spots such as small oddly placed knolls and abandoned ruins around the country were found to cross-cut fairy worlds. Kira O’Reilly’s bloody performance pushed her being into place, allowing her to occupy more space than her human body (Disruption 2). Just as it pooled to the imperfections of the stone floor and claimed them, those interactions with place which lay outside of the everyday (whether through sickness, witchcraft or deviant death) perhaps pooled away from everyday spaces, into those which did not conform to the contours of everyday activities. Henderson and Cowan (2001, 42) argue that “placenames and landscapes can [...] be seen to incorporate and reflect the beliefs and ideas of people”. However, there is greater ontological alterity at stake than a ‘reflection’ of beliefs and ideas. In their interactions with the world, early modern people were not merely inscribing their ideas upon the landscape, but were experiencing a unique embodiment co-created by transgressive collaborations between person and place, from which neither emerge as clear-cut or inviolable.

## 6.8 Discussion

It is difficult within a modern ontology to take seriously the fact that the infant dead were aurally, visually and physically attestable (Pentikäinen 1968; 1990; O’Connor 1991), and that they could cross between human and fairy realms. However, the intimate association with fairies, fairy lands and infant bodies is well documented (Pentikäinen 1968; 1990; Shahar 1990, 47; O’Connor 1991; Finlay 2000; Henderson and Cowan 2001, 39). Equally so, it is hard to imagine a fluid boundary between stone and body, or the possibility of ontologically real relationships between adults and fairy lovers. Their strangeness has left them relegated to the ‘folk notes’ of scholarship, allowing underlying impacts upon things, bodies, places and personhoods to remain un-theorised. Upon scrutiny, persons, fairies, water, stone and place, emerge as existent in states of intersection, experienced by early modern Scots not as strange collisions and juxtapositions but as ontologically seamless fusions of co-creative agencies. Rather than distinct boundaries between members of the heterogeneous assemblage,

things are in process, cyclical and iterative, transgressing and reinforcing one another's margins.

When rags remotely extend bodies, infants pollute place, and beings moving in and out of hills, bodies and places become difficult to spatially confine. Whilst place is “‘drawn’ together by practices and narratives” (Jones and Cloke 2002, 216), these narratives do not accumulate straightforwardly, as bodies/rag-body-parts add layers, flexing not only the margins of the site in space (Doel 2000, 125), but also the margins between body and place. The IBG's overall shape is always unknown, mutable and dangerous through grave merels. Like the unbaptised infant, whose body is permeable to fairy influence and witchcraft, the IBG is ill-defined and troublesome, allowing beings and actions to cross the threshold from one realm to another. Like the rag which can be removed from a person and left behind at a well yet remain part of them, a storied stone, perhaps even arguably a living stone (Reynolds 2009), moves the margins of place with it. It extends the power of place (for example, ebb, kirk, hill or even purgatory), into new contexts, bending spaces and people into one another in unexpected ways.

Water, as expressed through the trials, wells and infant burial grounds, also has powerful connections to place, its efficacy often co-created with the narrative of a specific site; water both deriving its properties from that association and lending them to the ontologically specific capacities of place. Again, bodies are changed through these interactions. This can occur directly by incorporation into a relationship with place; the sick becoming cured, or returning sickness to where it came from; the unbaptised perhaps becoming baptised. It may also be indirect, through the use of water brought from home to be dipped, or dipped water collected and brought home.

Archaeologies of agency and personhood tend to emphasise the human, and especially the living (Crossland 2010). Even in burial, the actions of the living are generally more evident than the agency of the dead. Gilchrist's (2008) ground-breaking research concluded that the charms incorporated into medieval burials represented magic undertaken by women on behalf of the dead. Ultimately, this is to work on the assumption that the dead have no real agency: once the mind is dead, the body is empty (Crossland 2010, 402). Crossland (2010, 402) argues that

“A theory of embodied experience that moves beyond Cartesian understanding of rationality must necessarily acknowledge the materiality and potentiality of the dead body”, advocating that such an archaeology would “explore the ways in which the dead body can disrupt and intrude upon human social life” (Crossland 2010, 403). Such an exploration requires cross-reference with the potential materialities of myriad others that can disrupt and intrude, for the social life of the ambiguous dead being/body is complex and engages with heterogeneous others. In early modern Scotland, this expresses itself variously, for example, in similarities between the infant corpse and the rag in their capacity to contaminate, and the parallel healing uses of corpse (body) water and dipping (stone) water.

Approaching unbaptised infants from a vantage point where they are not empty vessels, but differently persons, ‘enminded’ and material (Ingold 2000, 170-171) raises very important questions. For example:

- If birth and death are protracted (non-exclusive) processes, is the decay of the rag a portion of a human death? Or a portion of human birth (into new health)? Or even, like the unnamed newborn, simultaneously both until the point where one process overtakes the other?
- If cloth and being and wood can compose kinds of bodies; for example, the rowan-thread-body charm or the invalid-rag-tree assemblage (Chapter 5), within which their might be communal embodiments, do unbaptised infant remains and burial site likewise become a composite body or being? Or is this composite ontologically a closer parallel to the rag which is removed from the person?
- Is personhood a meaningful line of enquiry in understanding the charms and rags with which unbaptised infants shared many ontologically significant material properties, or do their similarities only serve to underscore the infant’s lack of personhood?

Throughout this chapter, the ever-recurring theme is one of ontological alterity and flexibility in the demarcation of boundaries. In every case, whether it is the boundary between seasons, between above ground and below, between land and

water, between human and stone, or between life and death, fairies emerge from the interstices. In doing so, they situate the human body within those margins, for the materiality of the fairy is the potential of the person. The high degree of penetrability between human and fairy beings surfaces repeatedly at key points in the day, season, and life course, suggesting that the human body existed in tension between circular time (day, season) and linear time (life events), its boundaries fluctuating most where the two came into contact. To be a person situated within a human form was not a given and immutable thing, visible from every angle. Rather, maintaining this form required constant vigilance. Even then, from a certain perspective, one might appear to be a fairy stock, a witch or, as Chapter 7 goes on to explore, an animal.



## Story 3

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### CAT

I stretched. Licked lazy paws. And waited.  
 Before long, something of interest came by.  
 A Bird. Big-Fat. Prrretty-Wings. A Worrthy Adversary.  
 I followed Bird, into the last ray of the sun,  
 Round corners of houses, and up onto roofs.  
 Bird fluttered, ignorant,  
 And I made subtle moves.  
 Something caught Bird's eye: one last prize before home.  
 Something for nesting, or another borrring Bird-Thing.  
 Something she wanted. Hah!  
 Following her desire, Bird flitted into byre.  
 Trapped, my Big-Fat. Trapped Prrretty-Wings.  
 Then I prowled low, quiet and slow.  
 And Quick-Legs-Whole-Body-Pounced.  
 Bird was mine. And I played with her,  
 As I like to do. Oh yes, Prrretty Wings. Oh, yes!  
 It grew dark as she drew a last breath.  
 Dinner. And a fine death.

Until that lady came back, that Hissssing lady.  
 She hissssed and shouted me away!  
 "You're not my cat! Get out"  
 Whatever that means...I Am My Cat.  
 NIAOOOOO!  
 I left precious Bird in her byre!  
 Chased into the shadows,

I pierce lady with my best look of contempt.  
 Goodbye Broken Bird. You were a very good bird.

## ELSPET

Elspet stood numb. No, broken. Light stabbed at her, sharp and unfamiliar after days locked in the dark. Days spent waiting for execution, but now she waited no more. She was to be strangled and burned. Once familiar faces looked on - faces she had known and had known her - faces whose mouths shaped out a sea of cries “Witch! Witch!” but her ringing ears refused to form them into sounds. A scream shrieked out. Not human, but a fierce and beautiful black cat. That murderous cat, never happy but with bloody feathers sticking to his face, and now Elspet’s own blood would stain those poisonous claws for his wicked nature had finally eclipsed her goodness to others completely.

Witchcraft. *Witchcraft*. All because her beloved Bluebell always gave good milk, and she milk for her own precious child, and Catherine didn’t. Catherine - who called her cow “worthless beast”; Catherine, who had no time for her bairn for she had many, clearly hated them, and already another to come. Catherine, whose husband was nothing but a drunk and a boor. *Catherine. Brankit bitch! Catherine.* She spat the name out, cursed with the blood in her mouth. Always shouting-hissing-scratching at beast, boor and bairns as she battled her own dark version of the world. *That’s not my fault. Not even that shit of a cat’s fault.*

Tears flowed freely. Of course, there was no defence. She had before, on occasion, healed local cattle, and that was enough. Add that devil’s cat, going where he didn’t belong and leaving blasted little corpses and there was no defence. Johnne testifying against her? That was just the last, heart-breaking straw.

## Disruption 3: Skin

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*Figure 67: Inthewrongplaceness, by Kira O'Reilly © Manuel Vason, 2005. Commissioned by HOME for the One to One Salon series.*

*This image is provocative, difficult to look at and yet difficult to look away. Many people find it disgusting or disturbing. In juxtaposing naked pig and human forms, it challenges the fragile cultural constructions we cling to as 'truth' in order to separate humanity from animality. At first glance the image appears sexualised; however, upon closer inspection should one dare, the bodies are intertwined in an intimacy that suggests co-mingling into one being. A shapeshifter. It is unclear whether this body begins as pig and ends as human or vice-versa, or whether the distinction even matters. Anthropocentrism tells us the pig is smiling, while their shared flesh-tone further incorporates them into a single, indivisible entity.*



*Figure 68: Bull by Day, Man by Night, by Sarah Bliss © Sarah Bliss, 2013. Archival pigment print. 16" x 24".*

*Part of a series, this image shows a man interacting with the skin of another animal and then projected upon sculptured rawhide (made by Rosalyn Driscoll). In this layering of living and dead flesh, the artist seeks to “deconstruct bodily boundaries, forefronting the seamlessness between material realities and the continual flux of form and matter” (Bliss 2013). It is, she explains, a work of “shape-shifting” (Bliss 2013).*

*Outofplaceness is an image I have returned to many times. It challenges us to question how our own assumptions about any animal/human divide may predispose us to fail to engage with ontological alterity in the past. In doing so, it inspired me to ask new questions about the interspecies capacity for shapeshifting which*

*emerges from witch trial records and how it reveals ontological alterity in early modern Scotland. It specifically calls into question female bodies, their natural capacity for change perhaps making them more prone to complete expressions of shapeshifting. O'Reilly's irreverence for the apparent divides between human and animal(s), living body and corpse, encouraged me to look in new ways at accounts where 'animal' problematises the bodies and beings of 'ordinary person' and 'witch'. To ask, for example; does a human body have to be entirely 'human'? Does an animal body have to be entirely 'non-human'? What were the similarities which drew together witch bodies and those of animal others into shapeshifter-complexes? For example, witches and cats frequently mingle, but they do not share a skin tone, size, or necessarily comparable facial expressions, so what do they share?*

*Where O'Reilly's pig-woman hybrid is bold, aggressively breaking down the boundary between species, Bliss's bull-man leaves a very different impression. The underlying bodies are not immediately apparent; almost impossible to pick apart, they are, nevertheless, not fused into one being. They exist in the same space, moulding to each other, such that neither man nor cow is discernible. Yet one does not become the other. This shapeshift is subtle - not a dramatic or violent shift, but a process of co-being and interdependency in which one creates the other. It led me to new questions: how might subtler and enduring porosity in human-animal being boundaries manifest themselves? How might they be negotiated, penetrated or preserved? How does this different level of relationship become evident in the witch trials, and what does any difference reveal about early modern embodiment, personhood or ontology?*

## Chapter 7: Cat-Woman-Cow: Where Species Meet

Continuing in the manner of the previous chapters, this chapter also weaves together material evidence and ontologically strange data from the witch trials. This time the aim is to explore how practice reveals the complex overlaps between ordinary bodies, witches and animals. The investigation continues the focus on personhood, this time following one of the most tangible and ill-explained examples of animal use in early modern contexts - the intramural cat. Consideration is presented, regarding whether or not a cat in a wall is a 'thing', an 'animal', a 'person', all three, or something else entirely.

An archaeologically known but historically undocumented practice, these cats are further examples of a recurring theme throughout the thesis; victims, not of a lack of sources, but of a failure to know how to deal with them. Pearson and Weismantel (2010, 18) attribute this to an ontological 'defect': animals are too often missing as they do not meet the "prerequisite for being a subject *in* and *of* history". Sykes (2014) laments the same issue in zooarchaeology, where living animals remain strangely unrendered in the past. The continued marginalisation of animals through interpretative choice prioritises the representational over the material: a current and defining debate in animal studies (Brantz 2010a; 2010b, 5). Even where scholars handle this well and recognise the existence of relational categories, they often fall down at the simplest of hurdles, falling back on "the difference between humans and animals" (e.g. Brantz 2010b, 5) as a presumed given, as opposed to *differences*, or indeed, the distinct possibility of a lack thereof. For this reason, despite discussing cat remains, this chapter does not

present zooarchaeological data analysis, instead working to repopulate the early modern period with living others. This requires the expansion of the theory and practice of following the ‘things’ to accommodate living beings. Following Walker (2008) this is done through the observation of patterns of practice from a non-anthropocentric perspective. Animal beings are explored as central to world making, through their material forms, unique behaviours and intra-/inter-species relationships. Again, as at infant burial grounds, the ontological nature of the living being is also reflected in their post-mortem treatment.

The chapter develops in part by drawing upon video sources to presence live animals. It should be noted that these are not the author’s own works, but are selected from YouTube as they demonstrate behaviours personally encountered and familiar to the author, as discussed in text. All videos were, therefore, very carefully chosen for their visual content; however, as third party productions, all voice-overs, subtitles and music choices are beyond the author’s control and are disclaimed unless otherwise specifically stated. Videos may be watched on mute to avoid this irrelevant content. Still images of the content are hyperlinked in text. A CD is also provided with a hyperlinked PDF to accompany the print version.

The witch trial accounts represent a rich resource on animals in the early modern period, naming many species. However, in the interests of depth of discussion, the chapter focuses primarily on the two most commonly encountered: cats and cows. By incorporating healing and harming, charming and other ‘human’ practices, this chapter seeks to question the current balance of agency in favour of humans, exploring the roles of other kinds of being in interspecies co-habitation and in the making of life, place and ontological alterity.



## 7.1 Introducing Cats in Walls



*Figure 69: Profile of the intramural cat recovered from the old hospital, Stirling (MUCKHART). The cat was uncovered during renovation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Like other examples, it mummified naturally in the wall cavity (Glasgow Museums Collection).*





*Figure 70: An intramural cat build into Breck of Rendall Mill, Orkney, c.1803. (Edwards 2012, 63; NMS). The cat retains a very life-like position, suggesting that it was posed post-mortem, a trend observed in English examples (Hoggard 2004, 176).*

Two examples of intramural cats were identified in major museum collections for this project. However, Merrifield (1987, 176) identified 139 examples from across England, and through discussions with builders, came to understand that intramural cats were normally burned or reburied, rather than reported. This suggests that the extant figure represents a very small sample of those recovered. Swann (1996, 64) put their number in the thousands, and also considered their deposit intentional. Further investigation could therefore uncover many more Scottish cats. Indeed, others are known but remain unpublished: in the course of Hoggard's survey (2004, 175), he reports that finds of intramural cats were common in "parts of Southern Scotland", though unfortunately without giving any examples.

Intramural cats are typically interpreted as interred to 'keep rats and mice away' (e.g. Howard 1951; Merrifield 1987; Clutton-Brock 1999). Discussion is invariably limited, though Hoggard (2004, 167) usefully challenges the 'rodent deterrent' hypothesis on the grounds that rats would be more likely to consume a dead cat than fear it; another possible reason for the low number of known samples. It

should be noted here that, even in life, cats are limited in their rodent control capacities, and that adult rats represent a formidable foe (Childs 1986; Fitzgerald 1988).



*Video 1: Rat vs Cats - A Brave Rat Fights 5 Cats © Kalyan City Life, 2010.*

Hoggard (2004, 167) indicates that the limited interpretation of cats in walls is attributable to the fact that archaeological record appears to be the only one. However, it is far from unusual for archaeologists to work successfully without historical records or documentation (prehistorians reply upon this capacity). Furthermore, this complete lack of documentation is not actually the case: there are significant records of early modern cats in other related contexts, as there are of other things in walls.

Zooarchaeological discussions typically favour dead animals (e.g. Groot 2008). However, Overton and Hamilakis (2013, 113) and Sykes (2014, 115) both consider that beginning with living animals is a more meaningful way to investigate their roles in human culture. Living animal beings are not passive: they are co-creative in the production of culture (e.g. Argent 2010), co-fabricators of the material world (Gould and Gould 2007). The fact that cats were chosen to be interred in walls may have as much (or indeed much more) to do with the things that cats do, as with the symbolical or metaphorical meaning people attach to cats. Indeed, the

latter must arguably follow the former (Renfrew 2004, 23-25; Brantz 2010b, 11). It is also possible that the cats chosen were selected as individual beings *in life*. To some extent this question might be accessible; for example, a trained zooarchaeologist might determine whether they were interred alive or dead and/or whether there are patterns in age, gender, relative size or palaeopathology that could reveal anything specific about the likely biographies and/or dispositions of the cats which were chosen (Sykes 2014, 14-17).

For the purposes of this research, this chapter will consider the wider categories of cats: living cats, dead cats, parts of cats and whether, in the early modern period, those entities which fall under the modern taxa of cats were always and only cats at all. Certainly, from their position interred in walls, these cats were not meant to be seen, but to serve a purpose that related to their cat-ness in life - otherwise animals of any species could have been equally used. Early modern cat-ness, however, need not map out evenly across modern cat-ness. They may barely overlap at all.

## 7.2 Animality, Ontology and Taxonomy

In their discussion of animals and alternative ontologies such as totemic ones, Pearson and Weismantel (2010, 21) conclude that under scrutiny the category of 'animal' evaporates. They argue that there are too many cross-cutting states and intermediate beings for it to remain tenable as a universal categorisation (Pearson and Weismantel 2010, 21). Ucko (1988, xii) recognises that if we accept the subjectivity and cultural specificity of 'animal', 'human' demands the same interrogation: we cannot project back our own ontological preoccupations (O'Connor 2007, 6-9).

There too often remains, however, the unspoken assumption that 'animal' is not under question for the recent western past, culturally contiguous as it is with the present, and indebted to (and contributing to) the same Classical, Judeo-Christian roots (e.g. Ucko 1988, xii). Arising from the Cartesian duality of human vs. non-

human, this position dismisses without thought, the possibility of fluid boundaries; of Haraway's (2003; 2008) cross-cutting ontic categories and interspecies relationships. It similarly denies the potential for animal personhoods (whether individual, dividual, or other), by interpreting them from first encounter as "indivisible entities isolated from the community at large and thought of as resources" (Fowler 2004, 126; Knight 2005). Interpretatively, it works from the assumption that only the human body matters: the 'animal' is an artefact, possessing only thing-like qualities (Philo 1995, 656-7; Flores 1996, xi; Pearson and Weismantel 2010, 17).

Relying upon the uncritical 'animal' allows witchcraft scholars to discuss human-animal interactions (for example, the use of 'transference charms' where disease is transferred from person to animal or vice versa, sometimes via an intermediate object such as a rag), without questioning what kind of bodies - human and otherwise - make this possible (e.g. Wilby 2011, 84). History suffers when elements of the past are overlooked in discourse through uncritical exercise of the modern gaze (Fudge 2002a, 3-4). Too often, 'the Animal' is a notion; a resource or symbol; a 'kind, calorie, or construct'; it is not a *being* (Ray and Thomas 2003; Argent 2010, 157-158). Salisbury (2011, 7) even goes as far as stating that the animals of symbol and imagination were more instrumental in "breaking down barriers between the species [...] than the [real] animals of the medieval world".

This may be presumptuous, even for a period and place as proximate as early modern Scotland. 'Animal' was only just coming into usage, and was not yet widely employed; beast and brute being the more common terms, and the ones which, for example, appear in the King James Bible (Midgley 1988, 36). On the eve of the Reformation in England, domestic animals outnumbered humans by around 4:1, virtually all of these animals were worked, and their rhythms determined the patterns of human community life (Edwards 2010, 170; Oma 2010, 183; Pearson and Weismantel 2010, 30; Salisbury 2011, 18). All beasts were not equal: for example, in early colonial America, any similarities we might now see between deer and cattle as animals were culturally far less important than their different relationships with people (Pearson and Weismantel 2010, 21-22). Brantz (2010b, 3-4) picks up on this, in suggesting that scholars would do well to move away from

any perceived animal/human nature/culture dichotomy in favour of exploring specific encounters of species. Her argument offers opportunities for more sensitive handlings of domesticated and commensal species, which often occupy a range of ontological interstices, too conveniently overlooked.

Sabloff (2001) attributes the failure to recognise ‘domestic animals’ as a problematic category of being to the utilisation of three key metaphors: kinship (pets); object/artefact (e.g. as tools in processes such as meat ‘manufacture’); and citizen (promoted by animal rights activists). The anthropocentrism of each position facilitates a conjurer’s trick, in which animals and the unique materialities of their beings disappear, leaving only a hollow shell which orbits the all-important human centre of everything (Philo and Wilbert 2000; Pearson and Weismantel 2010). Fudge (2002b, 160-162) makes a similar point, stating that even if we attempt to equalise the situation by adopting the now popular ‘human-animal’ and ‘non-human animal’, human remains the common (and higher valued) reference point, subsuming real animals entirely.

History itself emerged from preconditions which prioritised written language as an indicator of culture and value (Descartes 1968; Fudge 2000, 2, 159; Pearson and Weismantel 2010, 18). Our tradition of scholarship, our language, even the very reference points from which we define and experience ourselves, hinge upon our own set of culturally specific assumptions regarding the unquestionable existence and (frequently exaggerated) differences between ‘natural kinds’, separating the ‘human’ from the ‘animal’ (Clark 1988; Midgley 1988; Pearson and Weismantel 2010). In keeping with the argument throughout the thesis regarding the interpretative priorities set by the language we adopt, from this point forward, this chapter will attempt to leave ‘The Animal’ behind, in favour of exploring the specific otherness and boundaries of *animal beings*.

Complicating this further, is openness to the possibility that the Linnean system upon which we are so dependent might not be relevant at all times or across contexts (Sykes 2014, 6-7). Folk taxa, though rarely explored by archaeologists, may offer entirely different possibilities (Clark 1988; e.g. Waspnish 1995; Marciniak 2005; O’Connor 2013). When looking at animals, where potential relationships are far more variable and not necessarily either exclusive to one species or inclusive of

all its members, 'species' as we recognise them may become porous, malleable, or break down entirely. Their boundaries and the surfaces of their bodies may be prone to intermingling (Meskell 2004; Joyce 2005; Haraway 2008). Their forms may be flexible, fluctuating and "becoming" something different entirely in relation to diverse others, in some cases even merging entirely (Deleuze and Guattari 2008 [1987], 291-293). The results of this 'lively knotting' are ontic categories which cut across species (Haraway 2008, vii). In an ontology co-occupied by powerful others, this cross-cutting opens up a further possibility - subversive and dangerous categories of monsters (Bildhauer and Mills 2003a, 6).

### 7.3 Past Animal Beings: Methodology

In order to discuss other beings as more than one dimensional representations, metaphors or ideas, we must get to know them and their unique ways of being (Argent 2010, 158; Orton 2010, 188-189). This requires direct encounter (Sykes 2014). Whilst biologists, zoologists and others in life sciences provide ample accounts of animal ways of being both in text and as visual media (Ucko 1988, xii), personal contact is also invaluable. The materiality of other beings is experienced, learned and incorporated into engagements with the world through flesh encounters (Argent 2010; Sykes 2014, 5). Whilst such encounters are subjective and embedded within one's own world view, this is also the case with engagements mediated by test tubes, magnifying glasses or tagging. Indeed, the former may be more informative in many cases. Those working with animals (rather than on them) can make significant contributions to our understandings of other species. It is they who find themselves in a position where their safety and livelihood depend, not on 'knowing about animals', but on actually knowing them, sharing mutual trust and understandings of co-created, interspecies spaces and social rules (Midgley 1988, 43-44; Bahlig and Turner 1999; Argent 2010). To this end, this chapter incorporates personal experiences alongside the other sources used throughout the thesis, both my own and those of cat owning friends. In addition to keeping and breeding myriad pets and supplying pet shops over the years, I have over a decade of experience working with other beings, having been fortunate to work in three

different capacities (below). Indeed, had it not been for developing a number of inconvenient allergies, I would have been a veterinarian.

### **LONG-TERM VOLUNTEER ANIMAL KEEPER**

In this position I was involved in all aspects of hands on animal care and rehabilitation of wild species for release (e.g. animals injured by traffic), covering a wide range of animal beings. These included:

- Working cattle, ponies, sheep, llamas, pigs, goats, and domesticate fowl. Included hand-rearing animal infants.
- A wide range of small 'zoo' species (e.g. wallabies, reptiles, marmosets).
- Raptors (from little owls to eagle owls);
- Pet breeding facility (rabbits, guinea pigs, chinchillas etc.)
- Wild species rescue station through which passed all manner of bats, hedgehogs, hares, foxes, weasels, common birds and others that lived in the extensive woodlands and marshlands within the park. There were also frequent interactions with wild species in the park itself, such as badgers.
- A substantial population of semi-feral/barn cats resident in the old bunkers where surplus animal food was stored. Their presence was supported by large populations of prey species (predominantly rats) attracted by the food store.

## WORKING RIDER

- Working in close quarters with horses, from the newborn to the old and dying.
- Breaking in colts and fillies; requires excellent interspecies trust building and communication skills.
- Population of barn cats patrolling the site and prey (mainly mice).

## SCOTTISH SOCIETY OF THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS REP

- House visits, meeting, and discussing at length, people's own pets (the majority cats and dogs) within their own home environments.
- A opportunities to observe a wide range of surprising behaviours, uniquely presented by modern living conditions, including a cat who rode around the house like a king, on the back of a pet tortoise, and another who thought the family mobile phones were her kittens.

In addition to the above experiences, I have also spent at least 16 weeks sailing the West Coast of Scotland over the duration of the research, encountering coastal and deep water species as temporary neighbours, including dolphins, whales, porpoise, seals, basking sharks, and a broad range of fish and seabird species.

## CATS SUGGEST THE QUESTIONS: THERAPY CATS

The following account summarises the experience of working with therapy cats, as described by Dr David Dosa (2007; 2010).

*Steere House Nursing and Rehabilitation Centre, Rhode Island, did not always have therapy cats. In fact, its first was an uninvited (and unwelcome) guest. However,*



*when Henry died, he received a regal funeral and burial in the home's garden. Staff now credit Henry with changing their care culture. By forcing his style of therapy upon them, they came to rely upon his contribution: when he died, they actually replaced him - their once unwanted tenant - with six more therapy cats (Dosa 2010, 56-58).*

*One of them, Oscar, arrived as a kitten in 2005. Assigned to the imminently terminal dementia patients, Oscar was generally extremely unfriendly. However, from early 2006, staff observed that Oscar knew exactly when patients were dying, cuddling only those in their final hours, with ongoing aversion to healthier humans. Research geriatrician of Brown University and resident doctor at the centre, David Dosa, was slow to believe these claims by nurses and families, but ultimately confirmed Oscar's behaviour (Dosa 2010). By 2010, in a 41 bed ward, Oscar had consistently attended over 50 deaths, always arriving in the final 2-4 hours of life (Dosa 2007; 2010). He out-performed doctors, who regularly misjudged patients' remaining time by days. Eventually, staff started encouraging family goodbyes based on Oscar's rounds (Dosa 2010, 76-78, 140-141). Oscar also demonstrated the ability to attend the patient who would die first and/or the one who would experience the most discomfort and suffering when two deaths occurred in close timing.*

Whilst there is no unanimous explanation for this, a number of experts consider it likely that he can smell ketones released by the dying body - supported by the many family accounts of Oscar sniffing their relatives regularly in their last days and especially hours, before settling in for what they consistently and fondly refer to as his 'vigil' (Dosa 2010, 76-77, 108-109; see also: Doheny 2007). That Oscar might smell death is not unlikely - many other animals demonstrate similar capacities, including dogs, who can detect cancer (McCulloch *et al* 2006).

The ongoing story of Oscar and the role of Henry, without whom Oscar's ability might never have been discovered, raise questions for our understandings of animals, not just in contemporary society, but in the past. Things happen when animals and people live in close proximity which are often overlooked by scholars of all fields because they are dismissed as anecdotal and subjective, rather than considered in their accumulation. However, to anyone working with animal beings,

whether by choice (e.g. working riders) or otherwise (e.g. Henry's reluctant co-workers), animals are more than the objects of studies. They are subjects, acting in unexpected ways, influencing as much as influenced, and with their own materialities and resulting abilities (e.g. Marzluff and Angell 2005). Living in close quarters, working alongside known-individual animal beings, perhaps working at odds with others, interspecies experiences in the early modern period cannot be assumed to resemble the modern, nor can their ontological positions.

Of the animal beings which recur throughout the witch trials, none are more ubiquitous or flexible in their capacities than cats. Lizanne Henderson (2010), who has worked extensively with early modern historical records, reports having encountered many cases of cats being accused and/or executed for witchcraft. However, none of these cases is included in the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft. Despite being Scottish cats, committing witchcraft in Scotland that was recognised by Scottish courts, they are not the subjects of history; their cases do not count. Throughout the SSW their mention is as 'folk notes', reduced by the modern scholar to anecdotal ingredients, apparitions or symbols. They are never cat-beings. Putting the cats back into the past and acknowledging them as co-creative agents in early modern settlements requires, therefore, that we begin with the culture that was co-created. By understanding the early modern human side of the construction, it becomes possible to reintegrate the contribution of cat beings.

## **7.4 Finding the Cat in the Wall: Returning to Garments**

The methodology of the thesis suggests that, when confronted with a mysterious cat in a wall, we follow two lines of enquiry: cats in other places, and other things in walls. Working in the context of early modern Finland, Herva (2009) takes a similar ontological approach, relating folklore to specific household deposits, and providing an example in interpretation. Herva (2009, 394) concludes that concealed items are related to household spirits and that building-plus-garment equates to an active, person-like being (though perhaps active only at certain special times). Murray and Mills (2013, 136) similarly argue that caching special artefacts "infuses

objects and spaces with agency”. Following the contexts (the hiding places) to expand the heterogonous assemblage of ontologically potent ‘things’ to include animal others and their relationships adds significant new dimensions to the discussion.

**Alexander Hammiltoun, *DUNS***

*Strangled and Burned, circa 2/2/1630*

Hammiltoun was probably a healer as he described lots of healing rituals. He was accused, along with John Neill, John Smith and Katherine Wilson (also of *DUNS*), of killing lots of horses by hiding a dead bird in their barn, and of placing a dead hand in the path of their intended victim to harm him (for discussion of the extensive uses of dead hands see Tarlow 2011 e.g. 157, 168-9). Hammiltoun performed transference (using cats and birds) and also told a woman to heal her husband using wet cloth.

**Isobel Bennet, Stirling (*MUCKHART*)**

*Guilty 1659*

A healer consulted to cure people, amongst other things, of fairy enchantment. For the latter she used straw and meal combined with sea water collected from a hollow as the water ebbed, placing them at the corners of the afflicted’s bed. This practice also incorporated raw flesh, a hook and a horseshoe.

**Jonet Braidheid, Auldearn (*CAWDOR*)**

*Result unknown, 1662*

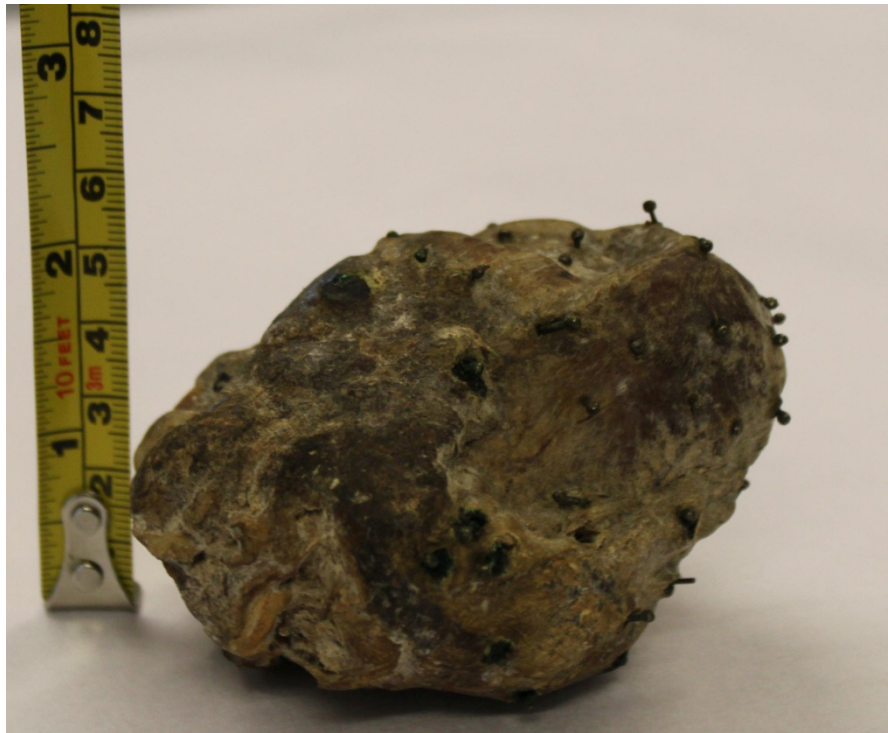
She and her co-accused reportedly sprinkled cooked flesh pieces (likely sheep and/or dog based on the other details) over the properties and gates of their intended victims (two local lairds), similar to the clout left by Christian Stewart (1596).

**Calf’s Heart, Dalkeith (*HADDINGTON*)**

*H. NO 22, NMS*

One archaeological example of this type of practice has also been recovered. Found in 1812, it was asserted at that time by an 80 year old woman that the heart was at least 50 years old and was most likely associated with an outbreak of cattle disease which was, at the time, attributed to witchcraft. The heart was pierced by

multiple pins and buried under a flagstone in a building used for cattle. Cheape (2008a, 117) speculates that whilst it may have been amuletic, it is equally possible that it was placed there to cause (or to transfer from another afflicted site) disease and death.



*Figure 71: The Dalkeith calf's heart. (H. NO 22). Gilchrist (2008, 136) postulates that animal parts may indicate healing and protection; human parts, curses and other 'demonic' practices (later Medieval period). Harte (2001 [1997]) meanwhile links animal hearts with pins in them to "aggressive counter-magic".*

Whilst 'to scare mice away' may be the only semi-comfortably explanation within our own ontology, cat placement is ontologically consistent with other 'things' in walls. The repetition with which household thresholds and flesh recur in collocation throughout trial accounts is a strong indication that cats in walls represent a related practice.

If, as Herva (2009) suggests, caches 'infuse' agency into place, the possibilities of enduring connections between concealer and garment and (perhaps more importantly) wearer and garment demonstrated in Chapter 5, pose questions about

the cat in the wall. Any potential properties which might infuse from flesh, corpse or cat-being into wall, threshold or home raise the question, are cats in walls *Felis catus* at all? Were they individual beings with known life histories akin to those who owned well-worn and 'killed' cached garments? Or were they generic flesh deposits? Does it matter that they were ever cats? The calf heart in the sick cattle barn suggests that the broad answer may be yes, but this raises a bigger question than it answers: if it matters that they were cats, then why did cats matter?

### **CAT SENDING VS. CAT GOING**

One of the most common accusations across trials which involve cats is that the accused 'sent' their cat to do their bidding and cause harm for them.

#### **Marione Corsan, Dumfries (*BUITTLE*)**

*Unknown, 1659*

Corsan was investigated in 1650 and 1659, suggesting a reputation of some length. One woman had a nightmare that she was flyting (engaging in sharp-tongued argument) with Corsan and upon waking found two cats: an accusation of witchcraft against Corsan.

#### **Margaret Hutchison, Duddingston (*HADDINGTON*)**

*Strangled and burnt, 18/9/1661*

Hutchison was well known as a witch and healer, with a reputation spanning 40 years. Amongst accusations against her was that she placed raw flesh under a victim's loom which, when recognised as witchcraft and cast on the fire, caused his cat to die. She was also accused of sending three cats to cause noise and illness at a victim's house. Her neighbour and contemporary, Isobel Ramsay (strangled and burnt, 23/8/1661), faced a similar accusation: that of sending (or perhaps appearing as) a cat three times in a victim's house, after which two of his sons died and his wife fell seriously ill. She transferred disease from a patient to a cat, after which the cat died.

Helen Tait, *BUITTLE*

*Not Guilty*, 5/4/1659

Another woman of longstanding reputation (18 years), Tait's cat was witnessed to continually seek out the company of a neighbour's ill child. When the cat was killed the child recovered.

A number of other cases specify the behaviour of these 'sent' cats as noisy and troublesome. However, cats cannot be sent. Cats cannot, for the most part, be commanded to do anything at all. The witch's capacity for unnatural control over cats is, itself, a breakdown of the species divide: a witch-controlled cat being is a hybrid, a monster, a different ontological category (Bildhauer and Mills 2003b; Haraway 2008). This category may also include other subversions of the normal human-cat relationship. For example, both Maillie Pattersone (1644) and Elizabeth Maxwell (1650) were accused of riding cats. Elizabeth Maxell was accused of leading two further cats in her hands - the way one rides and leads a group of horses together. Riding and leading requires disciplined horses and strong bonds between the rider and all horses. Equally importantly, all of the horses in the group must be on good terms. You can ride and lead horse friends. You cannot do it with horses who dislike each other.

Accusing someone of riding-and-leading cats does not only suggest unnatural control over animal minds and bodies (cats are notoriously hard to lead, and obviously impossible to ride), but indicates the possibility of an ontological allowance for a much deeper intimacy, founded on trust and a mutual working relationship. This account also highlights the fluid nature of the body, evident throughout many witch trials and in many different forms. Here, this fluidity is expressed in the idea of variable size and mass - we do not know whether these were very large cats, very small witches, very strong cats, or very light witches, but there is clearly some subversion of the normal physical constraints of one or more of the participating bodies in the cat-riding experience.

Real, living cats, cannot be sent, led, ridden or otherwise influenced (for the most part); they are wilful and go places and do things entirely of their own volition. Cats are highly territorial: they have their own geographies and do not respect

human boundaries. My family has never owned a cat. We have never needed to - there has always been one cat or another around, because cats have adopted us and our spaces for their own purposes. When a family do already have a cat, feline trespassing can become problematic. Four years ago, my aunt and uncle's tom cat was forced to share his turf with a new cat on the block. New Cat had moved into a home at which their cat had been a regular visitor. Tom was so noisy and disagreeable about this change that the neighbours threatened legal action - he regularly entered into their home (via any opportune aperture), terrorising them and their cat, and damaging everything in his wake. As Goodare (1998, 298) observes, it could be hard for a community to tell who was the 'witch' and who the 'victim' in any given altercation. Association with disorderly cats (or overly orderly cats) could be enough, in itself, to tip the balance from being a respected healer to being accused of witchcraft.

The incidences where cats are reported to have trespassed to spend time around ill and dying people are reminiscent of Oscar, the therapy cat. Just as Oscar could go around the ward, wandering into people's rooms and checking them out, early modern cats would have had ample opportunity to enter any homes they pleased. In doing so, their cat senses may have drawn some of them to behave in a similar manner. We can safely assume Oscar is not the only cat with this capacity - he is simply the only one to have been observed daily by a professional researcher in an environment where profound sickness and death are constant presences.

## **CATS AND THEIR KILLS**

It should not come as a surprise that cats might know dying when they encounter it: cats are, first and foremost, killers. Many of their interspecies encounters result in death. Across medieval Europe it was precisely this quality which encouraged humans to share their spaces with cats (Salisbury 2011, 10-11). Even in modern contexts where cats are well-fed and pampered, they are often still highly driven and successful predators, easily capable of surviving alone (Clutton-Brock 1999, 133).



*Video 2: Barn Cat Killing Spree © Animal House for Real, 2012.*

*Being glossy and loved doesn't stop this cat from keeping its killing skills and senses sharp.*

**Maud** (Kirsty's cat) regularly manages to bring down bats and eviscerate them for her human family. She has also claimed a snake, a squirrel and committed innumerable small rodent marathon massacres.

**Bernard** (Maria's cat), at less than 2 years old, emptied a nest until he had taken home every robin chick and placed them carefully in a line across the hallway. He delights in regularly bringing home frogs for his humans, laying them out carefully each time in the corner of the sitting room, and has a special miaow which he uses only for these occasions. Jean Gilmore (Govan, 1700), was accused of placing a frog in the threshold of a victim's home as a charm. Bernard has a more gentle side: every night he goes round all bedrooms, checking everyone is settled before he too goes to bed.

**Bob** (Nearly Maria's cat) a cat who visits Bernard's (above) family does not bring them gifts, living or dead, but he is attached to them, spending a great deal of time at their house, even regularly waiting outside the door for them to come home.



**Puddles** (Jenny's cat), as an almost-grown kitten, killed and dragged in a rat almost half his own size, leaving it behind the sofa to decay and stink for days before it was eventually found and disposed of.

It is interesting to note that cats often engage in habitual practices with their kills, hiding them in certain places (e.g. corners), 'arranging' them or leaving them on the threshold as 'gifts'. Often these places correspond with areas of vulnerability to witchcraft. The kills that are the most disturbing, however, are those of the many cats, especially first time mothers, who kill their kittens (and not infrequently eat them).



*Video 3: Mother cat eats her kitten © φρεακς 2014.*

This is a side of cats many modern people do not encounter, Western house pets are typically neutered and owners are not involved in their breeding. Their breeding is controlled, under close to ideal conditions. However, in less favourable conditions (e.g. uncontrolled, semi-feral populations), a mother will kill half a large litter of kittens to give the rest a better chance at survival, or cull them entirely if she is over-stressed by their demands or has had another litter too recently. Most mammals eat the afterbirth, and many non-carnivorous new mothers (for example, rabbits), occasionally chew off the odd bit of baby foot or tail. However, of all the species living in close quarters with humans in the early

modern period cats are, in my experience, the most likely to publicly devour their own young.

### **CATS AS WITCHES/CAT BEHAVIOURS AS WITCHCRAFT**

It has been pointed out in the past that cats as witches has a logic to it - both wandering at night and associated with disorderly noises/voices (Clutton-Brock 1999, 140). However, comparison of cat behaviour with witch trial accounts demonstrates deeper and more significant similarities. In early modern settlements, where witch trial accounts suggest that cats were prolific, both the killing of other species, and the killing of infant kittens would have been familiar sights. These patterns are also familiar from another context: witch trials. As demonstrated above, those accused of witchcraft were frequently charged with leaving animal carcasses and/or pieces of meat in the homes of others. Likewise, witches were accused of abnormal interest in neonatal remains and changelings (sickly/weak infants), and even of eating human infants (Chapter 6.4).

It should be noted that the depositing of animal remains in human homes is not a “natural behaviour” of cats, but rather a behaviour which is contingent upon a world in which they co-create spaces with humans and socialise with them. Cats did not leave carcasses in houses until houses existed, or until cats and people began to negotiate a reciprocal agreement which increasingly brought cats into those houses (Todd 1978). Cats, in violating property/community boundaries and publicly playing with life and death, have, over centuries, reinforced their own position as marginal beings that refuse simple categorisation or ‘placement’ in the landscape.

Cats wander off into what humans might consider ‘wilderness’, often for days at a time. This capacity for cats to disappear and return is another motif cross-cutting the categories of cat and witch: those who claimed to have wandered into the fairy realm for a spell and returned changed, from their sojourn (Chapter 6.7).

Scholars have argued, though without reference to cats, that witches were problematic in their capacity to breach the boundaries of home, person or community (e.g. Purkiss 1995; van Gent 2009, 124). This was also discussed in Chapter 6, where boundaries and property rights were disrupted through practices such as Margaret Bane's throwing of 'erd and stane'. However, in light of other parallels, this could be considered akin to the territorial actions of cats. That cats could be accused of witchcraft is beyond doubt: by early modern standards, based on the key common practices observed in cats and witches, cats could and did commit ontologically sound acts of witchcraft. Well known European examples, and the reports of scholars who have encountered such records by chance, suggest that, further to this, cats could *be* witches (Evans 2009 [1906]; Henderson 2010).

As O'Connor (2007, 8) points out, all cats need not be the same: within one culture, some cats might be vermin, some named, special individuals, others witches. Within a single cat life, a cat might experience a number of different statuses. What is well confirmed is that there are few examples in Scotland of familiars in the broader European sense (Wilby 2005), cat sending being a substantial step removed. However, the witch evidence suggests the possibility exists for witch-personhood which both cross-cuts cat and human and creates overlaps within their peripheries.

## 7.5 Shapeshifting and Borderline Beings

Shapeshifting is another form of infraction into the apparent boundary between heterogeneous others, and one of the areas identified by Goodare (2013c, 314) as in need of future study. Although one of the most commonly reported examples of witchcraft in trial accounts, it has variously been dismissed as stories "told ingenuously [...] judges do not seem to have taken [them] very seriously" (Briggs 1996b, 108) and elevated as evidence of a Scottish bardic-shamanic cult (Wilby 2011, 137-8). However, claims of shapeshifting frequently come in the form of accusation, rather than confession, suggesting that shapeshifting was much more widely accepted as within the ordinary possible than either of these extremes

suggest (Goodare 2008, 35). By failing to recognise shapeshifting as something *witnessed* rather than experienced (or falsely related), Briggs (1996b, 108) and Wilby (2011) both relegate shapeshifting to the remote and effectively meaningless margins of early modern culture.

The work of Bildhauer and Mills (2003b; also Bildhauer 2003) suggests, however, that shapeshifting instead be handled as monstrous in nature, and that the very monsters which appear marginal often turn out to be central to understanding a culture. Monstrous hybridity, they argue, need not emerge from physical or psychological deformity (cf. Eberly 1988). Rather, it unfolds across broader differences “in relation to other bodies, social or individual”. This articulation of monstrosity is powerful because many beings are rendered monsters through invisible difference (including, for example, unbaptised infants). Thus, those investigating such others advocate that monsters should be thoroughly explored as a nexus of ontological alterity (Bildhauer 2003, 75; Bynum 2001).

Of the instances of human/animal shapeshifting recorded in the SSW, approximately 50% refer to shifting to or from a cat form, specifically via a female human body. Men rarely shapeshift (and never into cats; Harte 2002 [1997]). As the most common shapeshifting animal beings, cats continue to be the main subject of enquiry. However, as is the methodology of the thesis, it is important to explore patterns across the other species which appear in the same contexts. For the purposes of this discussion, the shifting of the devil into other forms (most commonly a dog) is not covered; however, this would make an excellent future direction of enquiry. The emphasis here is exploring the witch’s body (as a human body and as a subversive body) and the cat bodies with which they so often exchange forms.

## **CROW, JACKDAW AND RAVEN**

All three species are undomesticated but will enter into positive relationships with humans who feed them or, in the case of the injured magpie Maggie nursed to health by myself and colleagues, those who care for them. Magpies frequent human

spaces. They are highly intelligent, recognise specific human faces and relate to humans as individuals (Marzluff and Angell 2005). They are highly damaging to property, including crops, but will also devastate weak livestock. Like all feeders on carrion, they have heightened senses for death and decay. Andy, a very agreeable Vietnamese potbellied pig (not all of them are) with skin cancer, was so plagued by corvids pecking sores on his body that after weeks of being eaten alive, he had to be destroyed by my then supervisor. Necropsy revealed that the tumours were malignant and had spread throughout his body: he was already dying.

### **HARE, BADGER AND PORPOISE**

These three mammalian species make fewer (and less penetrating) incursions into human spaces, tending only to appear on the peripheries. However, they will interact in their own ways. Over three consecutive years I witnessed a large mother hare (or perhaps more than one) spend her spring days biting wool off the underside of fat, angry, pregnant sheep. Bleating and incensed, each sheep would try to run away, in the process assisting mother hare's efforts to shear strips of wool for her nest. On occasion I retrieved pieces of wool the hare dropped for my own rabbit's nest, and found them very welcome gifts. Hares undoubtedly had similar gratitude for any wool and linen rags they could get hold of at rag sites. In the context of early modern Sweden, van Gent (2009, 167) interprets hares as 'symbols of the outside' that 'jump over the fence', however, real hares are more than symbols. They are breachers of space and peace, with their own speed and temporality.

#### **Tibbie Smart, possibly Clova**

*Branded and Banished, 1586*

Smart, accused of ten human deaths, was found to have bite marks on her body after having been attacked by hunting dogs whilst in the form of a badger. Badgers are powerful, forceful and can be aggressive. They willingly violate human boundaries, happily eating young lambs, poultry and eggs and fighting with dogs and cats. The badger setts in the country park woodlands where I worked were a source of continual contention amongst the rangers.



*Video 4: Badgers - vicious fight © Simon King Wildlife, 2013.*

*This video contains useful commentary about the strength and aggressiveness of badgers in their natural habitat and social interactions, suitable for providing context for their engagements with dogs and livestock.*

### **Marion Peebles, Shetland**

#### ***Strangled and Burnt, c. 21/3/1644***

Peebles was associated with two crows, tentatively assigned ‘familiar’ status in the SSW as it was said they went around with her and that they were a form assumed by the devil. She was also accused of drowning four men by overturning their fishing boat whilst in the form of a porpoise. The bodies, when subjected to her touch (bierricht, or corpse bleeding), were said to have bled - proving her guilt in their death. Porpoise do not typically come close to boats in the manner of dolphins and whales; however, they are easily visible in calmer water and it seems one is never far from them. In the 16 weeks I have spent at sea the most spectacular encounters have been with their bigger cousins, but the more frequent, by far, have been hundreds of small meets with harbour porpoise. On occasion they come close enough to nip mackerel (who hunt in quite shallow water, close to the coast) from the fishing line off the back of the yacht.

## BEE AND RAT

Bees contribute a great deal to farming communities through honey production and pollination, and may make their home within human-occupied spaces; however, they are not domesticated. They are, at best, commensal, even when intentionally 'kept'. Bees, like cats, go where they please, often winding up indoors and, like the fairies of Chapter 6, can fit through very small holes. Although much bigger, both rats and cats share this ability, each being able to fit through a hole the size of its own cranium, the body, agile and compressing, able to follow through.

Rats are also a commensal species, often choosing to live near humans, though there was no mutual benefit to early modern Scots to having them around. They are highly destructive, aggressive and dangerous when cornered, and spread disease. Rats are also intelligent, curious, excellent problem solvers, fast and agile. As with cats, there are elements to their behaviours which echo those witches were accused of. For example, they will happily make a nest out of rags in a wall.

## HORSE, SOW AND DOG

Whilst the final group of shapeshifters are commonly understood as 'domesticated', it should be noted that all of them have the capacity for aggression. As a teenager, an acquaintance at my riding school was killed under tragic circumstances. An unskilled rider who had recently purchased a horse, she sadly did not understand the horse or share a bond with him, and was not prepared to wait patiently to grow close to him. Rather, she expected him to bend to her will. A 'beginner horse' who should have been easy to get along with, after a few weeks of riding him violently, he threw her onto the school floor, intentionally crushing her skull with his hooves. This is not anthropomorphism and the naïve assignment of human motives to an animal: as a working rider, I daily saw horses contort themselves and even damage their own limbs to avoid falling on their rider-partner - even those riders they were in the act of intentionally throwing off. Within the circle of riders I have associated with over the years, no one has witnessed or known of another accident where a horse repeatedly or intentionally

stepped on any part of a human body. Most (including myself) have, however, been irritably kicked or nipped, especially when working in close quarters (e.g. within the stable) - a horse-to-horse/peer-to-peer way of relating.

One day Tully, a colt with whom I shared a special relationship, was writhing and bucking on the school floor, choking on a plastic bag. Widely disliked, the young horse was considered dangerous and untrained. Nevertheless, I knew we shared trust and approached him against the strong protestations of others nearby - all sure he would kill me. Even in his panic, he stilled himself and allowed me to put my hand far into his mouth to remove the bag.

Like Tully, my untrained horse friend, pigs cross lines not as a species, but on a one-to-one basis. Recent years have even seen the introduction of pet 'house pigs', though SSPCA reps do not meet too many of them. However, a significant proportion of the legal executions of animal others in medieval and early modern Europe (including accusations of harming or killing humans) were against pigs (Evans 2009 [1906]). Having worked closely with pigs, I would argue that this is not a difference between one pig and another, but between one human-animal relationship and another: all pigs have the capacity for interspecies friendships and to harm those who they do not like.





*Video 5: Ellie the Miniature Pet Pig © matej&katarina, 2013.*

*This young piglet is developing a lovely bond with humans. It's hard to imagine it dangerous, but it almost certainly will grow (despite the 'mini' label) to 100-150lbs (some breeds of pigs easily exceed 3-4 times this).*

### **Isobell Eliot, Alloa (MUCKHART)**

*Unknown, 1658*

A woman walking home from collecting mussels looked behind her to see a sow. Moments later, in place of the sow, she saw Jonet Black, an accusation of shapeshifting. Black confessed to keeping a mole at home (the speculation is made that it may have been familiar-like) and was, like Marion Peebles, accused of damaging a boat while in animal form (as a raven).

Of the (non-witchcraft) criminal cases prosecuting animal beings across early modern Europe, dogs are the most commonly accused after pigs (Kalof 2007, 63, 88; Brantz 2010, 2). Through my work with the SSPCA I have observed many times that a dog dangerous in one situation can be a wonderful companion in a different context or pairing of beings. Both species, like cats, make their own choices in interspecies relationships.

It should also be noted that horses, pigs and dogs, although 'domestic', do work that happens in or beyond the peripheries of the community boundary - horses aid

with travel, pigs with foraging, and dogs with hunting. It is this region that Harte (2003) identifies as the domain of monsters - not in the areas conceived as 'wild' but in the margins: in the *traversed*. Unlike horses, dogs and pigs were unbridled and had some form of roaming autonomy. They were therefore frequently found in the wrong places and deemed sources of disorder (Kalof 2007, 63, 88; Brantz 2010, 2). For example, Todd (2002, 41, 327) notes a number of complaints regarding dogs wandering into churches, Scoonie session going as far as ordering the execution of offending canines. There is a great deal more work of be done on the role of dogs in the witch-prosecuting community. On the very rare occasions of male shapeshifting, it is invariably to dog form. Harte (2001 [1997]) observes "dog is to cat as man is to woman, as devil is to witch".

Before returning to cats, it is useful to compare their ways of being around humans with the interactions observed between other species and humans connected to them through the ontologically relevant, interspecies category 'shapeshifter'. Briggs (1996b, 110) concluded that "[in] symbolic terms, shapeshifting associated witches with predatory creatures, the night and the wilderness outside human society". I would dispute this: in Scotland, shapeshifting stretches the witch's being across the margins, associating them with familiar, transgressive entities. Only the badger is truly nocturnal, it is also one of the only species to consistently live entirely in the human-deemed 'wild' and cross into the human-occupied space. The horse, pig, and dog behave conversely, beginning inside the settlement boundary and moving out.

What they do all share, however, along with the vast majority of shapeshifter beings, is that they are problematic not because they are creatures 'outside of society', but because they are beings who regularly cross the boundaries of social spaces and make infractions (such as the hare stealing the wool) upon the margins. Many of them are uninvited visitors, which may or may not make their home within community space, and who move inside and outside, often causing damage just by being. Of all of the species this is truer for none more so than cats. Cats were the unique position of being invited or perhaps as often as not, self-invited (like Henry the therapy cat), right into the centre of everything. From trial accounts, we know that they lay by the hearth, in the lap, or on the bed, but as with modern cats,

there is no doubt did so only with their own cat provisos. Early modern cats crossed many more human social and spatial boundaries than other species.

Archaeologists and historians find it difficult to handle ‘animals’ - especially ‘wild’ species - in ways that move beyond the symbolic, but it can and must be done. Communities which subsist directly upon the land or sea invariably have physical (rather than purely symbolic) interactions with neighbouring species (Sykes 2014, 51). Moving beyond the symbolism of animals presents new challenges for scholars: their capacities, geographies and temporalities and their co-productions with communities must be contended with (Hamilakis 2003, 240).

## CATS

Bringing together the common themes across each of the species discussed, cats may hold the special place as ‘most common shapeshifter form’, not for their symbolism, but for their role in the community as the most transgressive of familiar beings, and the most familiar of transgressive beings. The cat-human category demonstrates additional properties not observed in the other cases which suggest that this is the case.

### **Margaret Alexander, Livingston**

*Executed, 1647*

A multitude of cats came to her house for meetings, where they turned into men and women; some who she knew as witches, others she knew to be deceased. She also claimed to have had intercourse with the fairy king upon a bridge (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 61).

### **Beatrix Leslie, Newbattle (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and Burnt, 3/8/1661*

An elderly midwife, an accusation was made against Leslie regarding a cat that was walking on its hind legs, the implication being that it was her.

**Jannet Sawyer, Ayr**

*Strangled and burnt, 23/4/1658*

Sawer's reputation extended back at least 19 years. A witness testified to seeing four cats dancing a reel before entering into Sawyer's house. She was also accused of killing an infant, bewitching animals, and of interfering with a woman's milk.

**Jean Craig, HADDINGTON**

*Strangled and burnt, 1/5/1649*

Craig (Chapter 6.3) had a reputation spanning two decades. One of the claims in Craig's trial was that she made a man's fire take on the appearance of ugly cats bearing her own face and placed raw flesh and blood around his floor as a means to enchant him.

**Margaret Murray, Elgin**

*Unknown, 1661*

After examining a pregnant patient, Murray told the woman she had cats (as opposed to an infant) in her womb. The woman died soon afterwards.

**Agnes Sampson, North Berwick (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and Burnt, 28/1/1591*

Sampson, who confessed to 11 meetings and implicated 59 others, confessed with a number of her accomplices to baptising a cat. Another cat, Margaret, appears to have been baptised or otherwise formally named in the same area in 1608 (case of Beigis Tod, strangled and burnt).

Whilst the earlier discussion shows how witches might be cat-like, in these accounts, cats are more than just crossing into human spaces, being 'sent' or even undertaking their own acts of witchcraft. They are not just moving across socio-spatial boundaries. They are straying into the heartland of behaviours typically ontologically reserved for humans. In accusations, cats are talking, dancing, walking, meeting socially in people's homes, even entering into a woman's womb. In confessions, cats are receiving names; an act denied the many children who found their way into infant burial grounds.

Pócs (1999, 79) proposes that transforming into other beings signals a shift into another world or onto another plane of existence. Whilst this might be the case for the human part of a witch considered to be shapeshifting, the cases above do not suggest an overall shift: the animal beings occupy space in this plane. Salisbury (2011, 140) sees in metamorphosis the fear of losing oneself, Bildhauer (2003, 82) arguing that any body which incorporates monstrous elements ceases to be what it was before, becoming a “monstrous composite”: a new ontic category. In this scenario, where cat and human contribute to the acts of a single being, the witch, each must be seen as components of a monstrous composite: the witch. The personhood and body of the witch accused of shapeshifting into actual cats, must encompass both cat and human elements.

A world where a being may be spread over two different physical bodies is fraught with anxiety, because neither component might be recognised as a co-monster until it is already too late, even within one’s own household. As demonstrated, cats are more than capable of independently undertaking acts of witchcraft such as Oscar’s death vigils; meaning they have the potential to draw a woman into a composite cat-witch monster without her even knowing. They are not mere symbols: their ways of being matter.

## 7.6 Cows, Milk and Interspecies Transference

After cats, cows are the most frequent animal beings mentioned in witch trial accounts. Again they appear in ways which problematise boundaries between women and animal being but cows are never witches. To understand this distinction, we must look beyond the symbolism of cows, to the materiality of cow-ness and living with cows.

The accepted myth that rural early modern Scotland was dominated by byre dwelling has recently come into question and may not stand up under scrutiny, byres perhaps actually having been introduced to some areas by Improvers (Dalglish and Tarlow n.d.). However, even should they be later introductions, there are

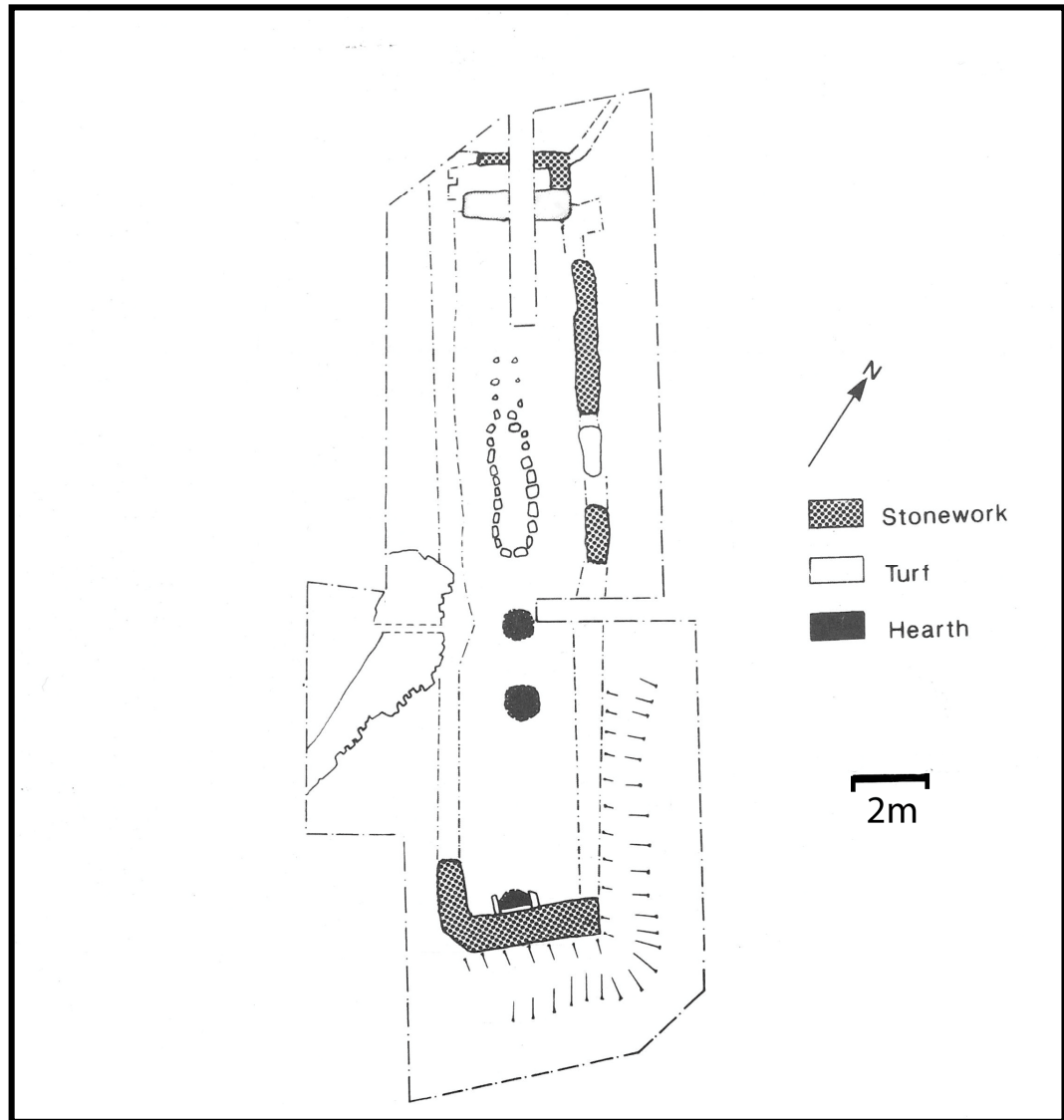
definite instances (as demonstrated below) where byres and witches were active in the same wider communities at the same time: witches did not disappear with the 1736 Act. As van Gent (2009) argues, later instances can also provide invaluable windows into the manners in which human bodies, cattle and witches overlap and conflict in constructions of personhood.

**Isabella Hay, Invergordon (*TAIN*)**

*Autumn 1822*

Hay spent two months in the tollbooth at *TAIN* from early September 1822, following a period of ongoing accusations of witchcraft against her (Brims 1989, 87). Whilst she confessed to almost a decade of working exclusively as a “Cow and Horse Doctress”, her neighbours from as far afield as Nonikiln, Rosskeen, Newmore and Kinraig, readily added their own accounts of her curses, cures and divination, for which they sought to see her punished (Brims 1989, 87). In particular, she was accused of curing an ill cow and killing a man’s horses by cursing them (Brims 1989, 88-89). The local sheriff sought to try her under the 1736 Witchcraft Act, which would have earned her one year in prison and four appearances in the pillory - most likely joughs (Brims 1989, 89). Brims (1989), responsible for the primary research, notes that whilst her accusers denounced her ‘pretended knowledge’ for the court, all other evidence suggests that they were pursuing the case as witchcraft in earnest: the accusations were made by people who had paid her for her services, sometimes over the course of several years, and who had actively sought to end her curses against their livestock by other means.

**BYRE: HOUSE 9, LAIRG (TAIN)**



*Figure 72: An example of a byre: House 9, Lairg (TAIN) © Scottish Trust for Archaeological Research.*

*(McCullagh and Tipping 1998, 66; Figure 43).*

House 9 is a classic byre dwelling designed for cohabitation by humans and cattle, excavated and discussed by McCullagh and Tipping (1998, 61-69), as summarised below. Small finds, particularly glass and pottery, suggest an occupation date c.1800-1850 C.E. The upslope (southern) area, of predominantly turf construction, is home to the humans and features a peat-fire hearth. The downslope (northern)

area has provisions specific to the housing of cattle, including a reinforced wall (stone) for tethering a single line of 6-8 animals and drainage for waste to (but not through) the end wall. The downslope gable was knocked out and rebuilt each spring in order to let the cattle and waste out of the building, an activity that would have been no small undertaking. Over successive alterations, the human dwelling space consistently made up between 1/2 and 1/3 of the internal space. Headroom across the dwelling is estimated at 1.5m. Byres have also been identified by early modern map analysis, in the area of Loch Tay (*FORTINGALL*) c.1769 (Morrison 1980).

A byre-dwelling is not a separate 'human house' and 'cow barn', nor is it simply the convenient joining of these things together to make a composite; it is a different category of thing. It is a human-cow-home, a dwelling for all, where humans and cattle share each other's warmth and wallow in each other's filth. Cows and humans interact; they see, hear, smell and touch one another. As cows lick their humans and humans drink their cow's milk, they even taste one another. Cows were integral to the pace of life, in their milking (dawn and dusk), their breeding, and their daily and seasonal comings and goings. Like the rag site, the byre is an iterative process, made and remade in collaboration with heterogeneous others. Even the smell of the byre is a shared one, co-produced in the eating and eliminating of all, bound up in a heady peat-smoke layer almost certainly a source of carbon monoxide sopor.

This is not the way of life of 'others-in-proximity' but of an interspecies family or community (Oma 2010, 181-184). Cows, like horses, are capable of deep and enduring interspecies bonds which may be characterised as friendship or even kinship (e.g. Oma 2010). Within a group, cows will have a small number of close friends with whom they engage in mutual grooming and choose to socialise. They also recognise and maintain up to 70 further relationships, including family members, acquaintances, others that they dislike and, on occasion, a nemesis (Frazer and Broom 1997; Huxley n.d., 61). Humans who interact with a herd of cows regularly will invariably fall into all of these categories across the group. As a former cow friend and nemesis, I can attest that cows hold grudges for a long time. They become disturbed easily and emotional trauma will stay with them, especially



when you accidentally let them out into an urban environment, requiring police and fire brigade intervention to recapture them: this makes them surly and pushy upon any attempt to get close to them.

Pre-industrial dairying must, therefore, have relied on good human-cow relationships. Traditional dairying is not a ‘process’ and its milk not a manufactured ‘product’. Milk comes into human hands through close, personal bonds and the creation of a safe interspecies space negotiated by gentle touch and other co-learned modes of communication (Moran 1993; Bertenshaw and Rowlinson 2009). In the case of an unsettled cow, Martin (1999 [1703], 100-101) describes this: “use the sweetest voice and sing all the time of milking her”. Dairying sets the rhythm of daily life (Oma 2010, 181; Sykes 2014, 39). People who do not respect their animal partners, or who take their own angers and issues to the milk stool, risk getting kicked, bitten or butted, and certainly do not manage to get any quantity of milk (Oma 2010, 181-2).



*Figure 73: An 18th century byre charm from Cumbernauld.*

*H. NO 98 is very similar to a mare stone, hung in the byre to protect the cows from witchcraft.*



Figure 74: 18th/19th century byre charm, Slains (KINTORE).

*Like the previous example, H. NO 90 is perforated for hanging. The soft yellow flint is alternately scarred and smoothed from prehistoric stone working; it is the negative of the fairy arrow.*

The value of even one cow in an early modern household is hard to quantify: they share heat within the home, are a reliable source of fertiliser, and provide traction and milk. The vast preoccupation of the early modern Scottish legal system with cases of bestiality suggests other assets appreciated in life (Maxwell-Stuart 2004, 85). In death, they contribute materials for tool making (hides, hooves and bones); for fuel (tallow); and for consumption (Clutton-Brock 1999, 81). People may literally clothe themselves in the skin of cows. It is not surprising that measures were taken to protect them similar to those protecting the human family. A byre may not have been the exclusive means of over-wintering cattle, however, extant byre charms and the frequency with which cows are targets in witch trial accusations, support the conclusion that cows were not straightforward ‘animal others’ in early modern Scottish society. Commonly scholars of witchcraft interpret the appearance of cows in witch accusations as a preoccupation with property

damage and the economic/dietary impact on families resulting from animal illness and death, or the fact that cows were ‘women’s work’ (e.g. Purkiss 1995, 413; Briggs 1996b, 84-90; Hutton 1996, 222; Martin 2002, 87;). However, putting real cows back into those records offers the potential for engaging with significant ontological alterity. This approach suggests that in their contribution to an interspecies household (and community) cows were correlates to the model of a good woman.

### WITCHES, WOMEN, COWS AND MILK

Cows are highly social, observe complex hierarchies and maintain lifelong friendships. They are also exceptionally dedicated mothers, even helping the young of others and occasionally suckling them. When separated from their young they mourn and suffer enduring distress.



*Video 6: Mother cow protecting calf © Funny and Crazy Videos, 2016.*

As orderly, motherly, sociable beings, cows have more in common with the ideal of an early modern woman, as Purkiss (1995) describes her, than they do with the witch. Unlike the cat, who eats her young, the mother cow above understands that her infant is under threat and defends him, positioning herself to shield him from attackers. She will continue to mourn his loss for weeks, during which time she will not only suffer emotional trauma - like a human mother, she will experience breast (udder) pain, swelling and the desperate need of release from the milk. For a lactating cow, even lying down often presents a problem; as with human breasts, engorged udders are not comfortable and are prone to mastitis (Albright and Arave 1997). This is a situation early modern Scots were clearly familiar with: young calves were vulnerable, just as young humans were, testified to by the fact that witches, charmers and midwives had the same capacities to treat/harm both.

**Margaret Bane, Lumphanan (*KINTORE*)**

*Execution, 1597*

Bane had a reputation as a midwife, and was consulted about a calf who was not suckling, seemingly transferring the calf's ailment to the woman of the house.

**Marion Layland, Sanday, Orkney**

*Strangled and Burnt, 30/5/1638*

Layland had a reputation going back several years. Amongst the accusations against her was that she took away both a wet nurse and a cow's milk. She also performed a ritual using a fisherman's cat (live) to improve his chances of a good catch.

**Partrick Lowrie, Dundonald**

*Strangled and burnt, c. 23/7/1605*

Lowrie, a healer of longstanding reputation, was accused of turning milk to blood at Beltane. Long-time healer/witch Jean Craig (*HADDINGTON*; Chapter 6.3), was also accused of cursing cows to give blood and taking away the breast milk of another woman so that she might take the woman's children.

**Ellen Gray, Aberdeen (*KINTORE*)**

*Burnt, 4/1597*

Gray was accused of spoiling the milk of cows and women

**Janet McGown, Dumfries (*BUITTLE*)**

*Strangled and burnt, circa. 5/4/1659*

McGown left a black cleise [cloth] and three blue yarns under a milking cow for purposes of malefice. This may have been to harm the cow, but as milking cow is specified, it seems likely the attack was on the milk.

**Elsbeth McEwen, St John's Town of Dalry (*BUITTLE*)**

*Executed, 24/8/1698*

Henderson and Cowan (2001, 203-4) describe her confession at Kirkcudbright tollbooth (*BUITTLE*) to drawing off milk from others' cows using a wooden pin.

**Anie Tailzeour (above), Orkney**

*Strangled and burned, c. 15/7/1624*

Tailzeour was accused of moving the profit of milk between cows by using three of her pubic hairs and breast hairs and three cow tail hairs to do so. A cat wearing her face was also seen out wandering with other cats one evening.

Each of these cases demonstrates one of the three ills that might befall both human and cow milk.

1. Milk was 'taken away', normally transferred to another cow who was claimed to produce prodigious amounts. Loss of milk is not uncommon in either cows or women and is often associated with stress and/or poor health.
2. Milk was turned to blood. This can happen in nature, through damage or infection to the nipple/udder or mammary tissues. In cows vomiting is extremely rare, but in human infants vomiting blood or breasts expressing blood is extremely distressing, even more so for the mother than the child.
3. Milk was otherwise spoiled.

Where milk was 'taken away' by malefice, a wooden pin was not the only tool available. It was more generally considered that this was done using a special tether (figure 75).



*Figure 75: Witch's tether (coarse, horse hair) used to illicitly transfer milk production from one cow to another.*

*H. NO 119, 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century (provenance unknown). Issobell Gowdie confessed to stealing milk by this means.*

Kirk (2001 [1690-91], 81) described the use of a 'hair' tether or a 'spickot fastened in a post' (i.e. a wooden peg) for this purpose, suggesting that fairies also employed similar techniques to steal human food sources. There are further indications that fairies shared the witch's interest in milk: Martin Martin (1999 [1703], 76) noted that a portion of fresh milk was poured out daily for the brownies of 18<sup>th</sup> century Skye. Martin Martin (1999 [1703], 81-82) also described the remaining milk of the bewitched cow-victim: light-weight with very hard curds, and unable to churn into butter. The charmed milk and butter were rich in colour. However, as van Gent (2009, 160) describes of early modern Sweden, not all bad milk was bewitched, just as not all cats were involved in witchcraft - context was everything. Certain activities, such as hanging around another person's cow, particularly at an odd time, drew attention.

The most interesting facet of these cases is that there is interchangeability between breast milk and udder milk in accusations: often the witch is said to have attacked both or to have moved her attack from one to the other. For each, the experience of milk flowing out of the body presented an opportunity for witchcraft to enter. That these two milks (and the beings from which they came) knotted together in ways unfamiliar within modern ontology is supported by material



culture evidence. Just as human beds could be protected by marestones, cow's byres were afforded very similar protection (Figure 73 and 74). Likewise, healing stones were employed in similar manners for both humans and cows:



*Figure 76: An Ollaberry (Shetland) 'cattle' or 'udder' charm stone for rubbing on cows © National Museums Scotland Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).*

*Shetland; 18th/ 19th century. H.NO 92, a water polished, variegated pebble was used to recover the milk of bewitched cows by rubbing it on their udders.*



*Figure 77: H. NO 91, another example of an udder charm © National Museums Scotland Licensor [www.scran.ac.uk](http://www.scran.ac.uk).*

*Ollaberry, Shetland; 18th/ 19th century.*

## MINGLING OF FLESH: INTERSPECIES TRANSFERENCE

In Chapter 5 cloth was discussed as a medium of transference - a material with the property to retain a connection with a past owner and establish a connection with a new one, transferring disease in the process. It retained a connection to their disease until it rotted away at rag sites, but it was never, itself, a recipient for the disease: cloth/clothing was not other, but rather remained connected to self. Sometimes, healers transferred disease (via cloth or otherwise) to another person; however, transfer to other species (and between other species) was also an ontologically viable option. Marion Peebles (above) was known for this practice. The previously mentioned Beatrix Leslie (*HADDINGTON*) rubbed the shirt of a sick woman onto her cow in a healing attempt, the implication that she was attempting to surreptitiously move the cow's illness to someone already in poor health. Typically, where the practice was well-meaning disease is transferred *into* a cat, and *out of* a cow. In cases of malefice, cows frequently become the recipients of human disease.

### **Helen Small, Cupar**

*Unknown, 1649*

Small was accused of witchcraft when a woman with whom she'd quarrelled fell ill. After an altercation with the woman's husband their cow died and the woman recovered, the charge being that she had spared the woman, killing the cow in her place.

### **Andro Man, Talbruith (*KINTORE*)**

*Guilty: outcome unknown, 20/1/1598*

Man (Chapter 6.2) transferred sickness from a man to a cat by passing each through a loop of yarn nine times. First the man is passed forward, then the cat is passed backwards.

Cows, like most humans, were not witches but the targets of witchcraft. Those cows deemed to have been assaulted by a witch were often given very similar treatments to those offered to human patients, and throughout the cases there is a pattern which suggests to the witch they were considered interchangeable - where milk or health is recovered in one, it invariably comes at the expense of the other.



Cows (unlike cats) were even victims of elfshot and treated as human beings were. For example, Johnne Brughe (*MUCHKART*; Chapter 4.12) used his enchanted stones to heal elfshot cows. Furthermore, as with concerns for human health, apprehension about the vulnerability of cows to witchcraft resulted in cattle wells.

**Slot Well, *BUITTLE***

*NMRS No: NX86SW 2*

Frequented until at least the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, visitors attended the well to heal their cattle, leaving behind their shackles or tethers. A similar practice was also described at the nearby Black Loch (Henderson 2007, 14).

**Holy Well, Kennethmont (*KINTORE*)**

*NMRS No: NJ52NW 5*

As discussed in Chapter 5, this well was reputed to heal animals and children. In the case of cattle healing, the cow's harness was left behind (Donaldson 1791-99, 76), suggesting that the harness and clothing and/or bodies are correlate in some way.

**INTERSPECIES MIXING IN LIFE AND DEATH**

Returning to the cat in the wall with this new set of ontological tools, it seems that there are many more possibilities than "it was to scare off mice". The cat may have been a cat, or a cat-witch; in either case it was almost certainly a known being as opposed to any old cat. It may have been an individual or part of a composite woman-cat-witch being; it may well have had some form of personhood. This personhood may be residual and slight, echoing that retained by clothing in walls, or it may have been entirely unique to cat persons. The cat in the wall might also have been part of a blending of beings which incorporated elements of the living world and the dead. There are many other examples to consider in the witch trials:

**Bessie Aiken, South Leith (HADDINGTON)**

*Guilty, 1597*

Aiken was a professional healer. She made a remedy from drippings collected by roasting four or five kittens, which was to be used by rubbing into the patient's skin. Aiken was sentenced to death but successfully petitioned for the lesser sentence of banishment as she had given birth whilst in prison.

**Agnes Sampson, North Berwick (HADDINGTON)**

*Strangled and Burnt, 28/1/1591*

Sampson (Chapter 6.3) confessed to throwing a live cat into the sea with joints of human flesh attached to each leg in their attempt to sink the royal ship in 1590. The cat was expected to swim back; this was not intended to kill it. Margaret Alexander, co-accused, was claimed to have mixed ingredients from a corpse, corpse powder and a cat (presumably dead) and to have participated in meetings at Halloween.

**Barbara Scord, Shetland**

*Strangled and burnt c. 2/10/1616*

To undo milk transference, Scord advised stirring a sample of milk from the afflicted cow with a human finger bone she retained for such purposes, so that she might determine who was stealing the milk and affect its return.

**John Philip, Aberdeen (KINTORE)**

*Strangled and burnt, 1631*

Philip (Chapter 6.4) treated a sick cow with a belt that had been first wrapped around the waist of a dead human infant.

These accounts suggest that the cat may have been contributing a dead element to a mixture of beings. The cat is, perhaps, the violently or unnaturally dead, sought after for ontologically specific properties (Chapter 6.5), or well-used /intentionally 'killed' like the glove and hat hidden in walls (Chapter 5.3). If so, this raises the question, what is the living element? The materiality of the byre may suggest the answer. It is a multi-species home, with a rhythm that is more than human, which flexes to accommodate and variably contain complex, heterogeneous, material

beings as they interact with one another. It is a place, like the rag well, where layers are added, altered and subtracted, made and remade, by the comings and goings of different beings. Could a home as 'becoming', as a way of being (as opposed to simply a residence or shelter), possess some of the ontological properties of life or personhood? Is control of its boundaries so crucial because, somewhere in all the unruly overlaps between beings and 'things' there is the potential for an overlap with the home - a shared orifice or penetrable skin?

Malefice can flow from the home into the beings inside, just as it flows through a number of other mediums from one being into another (via cloth into tree, human or animal others, or via soil at infant burial grounds into human others). Isobel Strauthaquhin (*KINTORE*; Chapter 6.2), transferred the illness from oxen by tying them up with a bridle. Whoever released them became the unfortunate recipient of their malaise - just like the finders and touchers of rags. She was also accused of directing fatal malefice at doorways, afflicting the first person or animal to cross or touch the threshold in question.

Sometimes, a cat is certainly just a cat, and a wall just a wall. But by embedding them together, perhaps they conjoin into something more than a witch's malefice or a powerful, polyvalent amulet. Perhaps this becoming is a shared skin which loosely holds everything together: a collocation like Bliss's work of art, in which living and dead hides do not collide, but rather layer into one another. The result, a very different merging where house + cat equates to an ontologically different category of place, rather than the category of house cat (a pet) with which we are familiar. The alternative - the rag/clothing in the wall, far from disqualifying this interpretation, supports the suggestion that a home is more than the sum of its more obvious material parts. The very act of including secret items confirms just how much the home's orifices and their orderliness matter.

## 7.7 The Yoke (Jougs) and the Bridle (Branks)

It has been argued previously that the Scottish Reformation was both literal in its interpretations and radical, resulting in a particularly material conflation of Old and New Testaments, producing a form of ‘Biblical totalitarianism’ (Hazlett 2003, 166-7; McCabe 2011). This lies at the very heart of the ecclesiastical discipline culture which emerged with the Reformation, evident in the adoption of the sackcloth as a linkage between early modern penitents and deeper biblical time. However, there were other discipline artefacts in use - the penitent’s stool (Chapter 4.9), and the branks and jougs. These were innovations novel to the Reformation period. The jougs and branks were not, however, without precedent: they are human iterations of the yoke and bridle (McCabe 2011).

### THE HUMAN YOKE



*Figure 78: A yoke (jougs) for a working bull, Fyvie, Aberdeenshire; 1850-1940.*

(Marishall Museum: 15908). 1 metre scale rule (top of image).

The Old Testament calls sin the 'iron yoke', locating it 'upon the neck' (e.g. Deuteronomy 28:48), like the yokes of cattle. It has been argued elsewhere that the connection between jugs and cattle yokes would have been well recognised by early modern sinners, who were invariably disciplined by being dressed in sackcloth and made to stand outside the church, in view of all, wearing the jugs (McCabe 2011). Ministers were not short of inspiration for their sermons - the bible repeatedly makes use of images which support the case that jugs are a literal manifestation of a biblical idea:

*'<sup>14</sup>The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck...' (Lamentations 1).*

*'<sup>47-8</sup> Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness ... [He] shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee' (Deuteronomy 28).*



Figure 79: Examples of joug collars.

*They are all designed to be used with a padlock (as at Oxnam). The bull joug also has a ring on it suitable for padlocking. Extant jougs are known throughout the Borders, Kirkcudbrightshire, Lothians, Fife, Ayrshire, Grampian and Aberdeenshire, many retained by parish churches.*

The Reformation abolished the very means by which early modern Scots could affect their own fate after death, and those of others, from good works to purgatory (Todd 2002; Duffy 2005). This left them more vulnerable than ever before to the actions and influences of others around them. Disciplining one became in the interests of all, when actions in life were recast with the capacity to save no one but damn everyone (Douglas 1966, 122-123). In order to shore up their collective defences against sin and ensure proper repentance, Scottish Reformers

adopted the Matthew 18 model for church discipline almost verbatim (Burnett 1991; Knox 1972 [1559]). Matthew 18:8 commands:

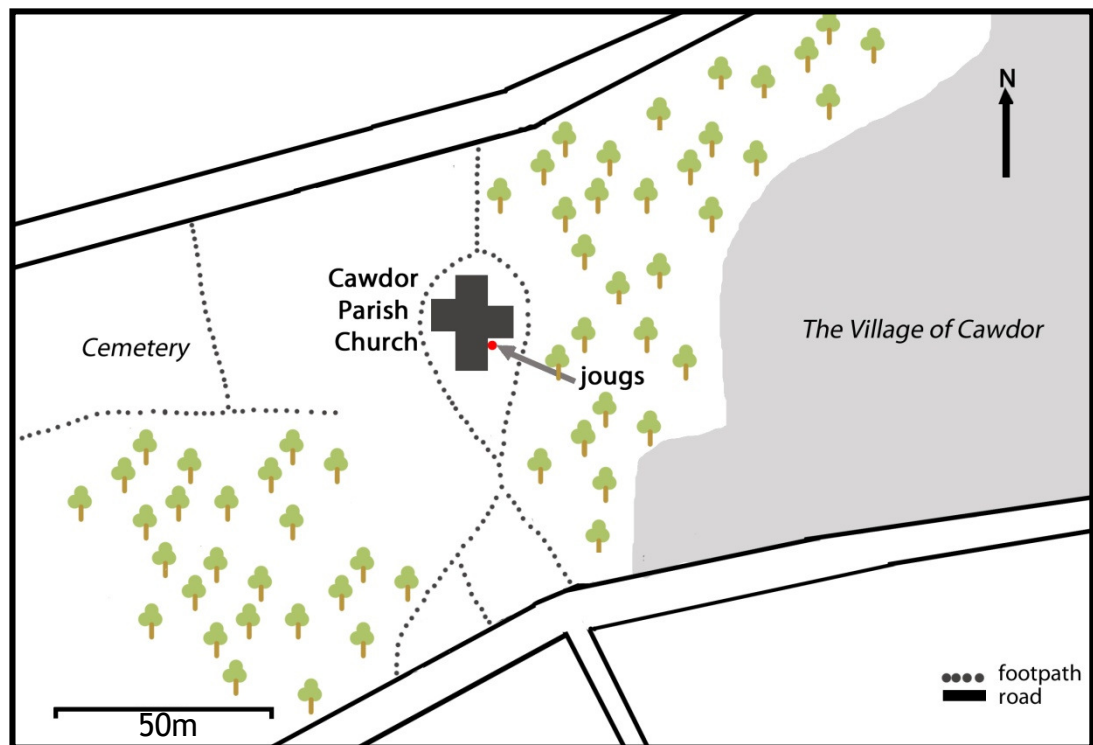
*<sup>8</sup>Wherefore if thy hand or thy foote offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than hauing two handes or two feete, to be cast into the euerlasting fire.*

However, it goes on (Matthew 18: 12) to direct that attempts be made to recover the sinner:

*<sup>12</sup>How thinke ye? if a man haue an hundred sheepe, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leaue the ninetie and nine, and goeth into the mountaines, and seeketh that which is gone astray?*

The combined imperatives of protecting the communal entity whilst attempting to rehabilitate the sinner through discipline provided the theological structure for the use of the joughs. They may have had ‘symbolic’ purpose, signifying to sinner and audience, a dehumanised or animal status (McCabe 2011). However, joughs may also have been in some way comfortingly familiar (for witnesses, rather than those wearing them). The use of the yoke as a machinery for domestication was well established within the community. Returning to the cattle themselves, cattle are relatively readily domesticated: from birth, the nature of the relationships which they form within a herd can extend to include other species. They protect their fellow cow beings. They are (now, perhaps not at first prehistoric domestication) relatively gentle. Nevertheless, my experience of maintaining discipline in cattle is tactile, either in the coming together of sympathetic beings or as a battle of wills. In the latter, cows have the physical advantage - hence the need for material culture of control.





*Figure 80: Map showing the current landscape and position of the CAWDOR jongs.*

*Jongs are normally readily visible from the church approach, where parishioners could not help but notice the disciplined party (McCabe 2011).*





*Figure 81: CAWDOR Parish Church jougs.*

*The tower, south aisle and porch to which it is attached date are part of the original 1619 church. As early as 1769, Pennant (2000, 101) refers to Cawdor jougs as used “in former times” commenting that “these penalties are now happily abolished”.*

Early modern Scottish communities chose to model their normative sanctions on the control of cattle. Dehumanising, perhaps, but also indicative that the many sinners (male and female) who experienced them were still very much within the community. In an existence where cows, their ways, and their yokes were part of everyday life, jougs could have reminded everyone that whilst the sinner may on occasion be wayward, stubborn and have to be reminded to work to earn their (spiritual) keep, they were ultimately a valued part of the herd.

## BETWEEN GOOD WOMAN AND WITCH: BRANKS

Like joughs, the design of branks emerges from animal domestication, in this case, the bridle. Branks as a device of punishment entered Scottish dictionaries in 1559, the eve of Reformation (Harrison 1998, 115). Again there is evidence from the Bible that this is a literal interpretation of a biblical idea.

*‘Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee’ (Psalm 32).*

*‘I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me’ (Psalm 39).*



Figure 82: Two sets of branks.

*Left: Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews. Right: Dunnottar Parish Church, Kincardineshire. The bits (mouth-pieces, top right of each image) are very similar, and appear designed to depress the tongue, rather than cause injury.*



*Figure 83: Broken remains of the branks from KINTORE Old Church; H. MR 49.*

*This design has a simpler, single piece bit. Todd (2002) indicates records of branks from across the country, including Dunning (MUCKHART); Stirling (FORTINGALL/MUCKHART) and Canongate (HADDINGTON).*

Branks, generally held or carried and only occasionally worn, quickly became associated with the imperative to hold still the tongues of vicious women (Hartwig 1982; Boose 1991; McCabe 2011). However, Harrison (1998) observes that in Stirling (MUCKHART) concern about loose, slanderous and scolding women did not occur at a consistent rate. It rose and fell with witchcraft accusations, peaking with witch crazes, and falling out of use entirely just 5 years before the last witch trial in Scotland (Harrison 1998). Of the social infractions demanding of branks treatment, Harrison (1998, 122) identifies “angry words, accusations and ill wishing” as the most common. In witch trial accounts, these are also very commonly the inciting incidents argued to have led to acts of witchcraft. Whether or not Harrison’s (1998) correlation applies across the country remains to be explored (see Graham 1996 and Todd 2002 for a selection of examples from around the country). However, even the fact that branks were primarily reserved for women exhibiting threatening behaviour is enough to argue that there were gender specific concerns which encompassed a proportion of otherwise ‘good women’ and female witches.

Boose (1991, 195) considers women the weak link in the ‘body politic’, their orifices too many and too difficult to control. Unlike joughs, which were for domesticating the ordinary populace, branks are indicative of the fluid boundary between ordinary women and the female witch. They are not inherently separate categories; at some point one merges seamlessly into the other. Matheson (2000, 49) sees in Reformation Germany a move from reactionary discipline to anticipatory. The fact that branks were more frequently threatened than used, and held or carried when used than worn, suggests that they were as much anticipatory discipline to prevent witches emerging from the bodies of ordinary women as they were reactions to flyting and other female transgressions.

## 7.8 Discussion

Pearson and Weismantel (2010, 19) lament that in any discussion about animals and society the animals “appear only to disappear as we look through them at ourselves”. Wilby (2005, 230) in her beautiful evocation of early modern life around animals as a source of inspiration for familiars, inadvertently falls into the same trap: familiars become archetypes, a class of being removed from the real. To conclude that cats are a ‘symbol’ of the ‘wild’ and the witch and ‘cows’ of the domesticated, ‘good’ women would be to continue this tradition, therefore, animals must be brought back into focus, rather than allowed to fade into human culture.

Firstly, the dichotomy between supposedly ‘wild’ animals (often equated with landscape) and domesticated (often automatons, products or machinery) does not hold up under scrutiny: a horse (or any other animal being) is not a predictable ‘biological self’ which can be fitted into one of two camps depending on human intervention. Every mammal and bird being I have worked with or encountered whilst sailing has engaged in sensitive connections and avoidances, as a decision-making, (variably) social entity with their own psychology, biography and biological aptitudes. They are never ‘landscape’ or ‘livestock’ and always participants in unique interspecies relationships, temporary or otherwise (Brandt 2004; Sharpe



2005; Argent 2010). Thus, real cats and real cows offer their own interpretations. Cats were capable, of their own volition, of undertaking a number of acts which fell well within the remit of the witch. Helen Tait's cat, in addition to hanging around a sick child (above) was also accused of suspicious interactions on her behalf with someone's cow - both acts it may well have done, of its own volition:



*Video 7: Rescue cat comforts dying cow and loves to hitch a ride on animals © Inside Edition, 2016.*

*Whilst 'riding' is not a common cat behaviour, cat-led association between species is frequent as cats can easily access the living spaces of other animal beings and may choose to use that opportunity to engage them in positive or negative ways.*

Combining observations of cat behaviours with accounts of cat 'sending', the possibility emerges that the agency of cats could actually outweigh that of a woman. Cats operate within their own ranges and times of day (the latter often the same times as witches, particularly midnight), and do so in ways which could potentially extend the range of a woman to places which she had not, in fact, been. It may not even be a cat which she acknowledged to be 'hers', but a cat which chose to associate with her, or within her space. Whilst Tait (above) was ultimately found not guilty, her accusation demonstrates that a cat who spent too long around someone else's dying child or with their cow could effectively beget the accusation, conviction and death of its owner. In their actions then, a cat (or cats) could draw a woman into a shared two/multi-being personhood - a witch

‘collective’, from which said woman may not be able to legally extricate herself alive.

Cats, then, can be accorded not only a significant form of agency when it comes to acts of witchcraft, but a form of personhood which overlapped that of a human person, to form a heterogeneous, two-body being (or in the case of multiple cats, a multiple-body being), in total constituting one witch. That witches and cats are so associated need not be because the cat is a ‘symbol’ of the witch - a symbol does not emerge before an association. Rather, the synanthropic tendencies of cats actively contributed to the characterisation of the female witch, ultimately resulting in a sharing and extending of both bodily boundaries to the point where shapeshifting into cats and other mergings (dancing cats; humans eating babies etc.) made perfect ontological sense.

Cows were situated across a different boundary between bodies, where animal beings encountered the ‘good’ woman. They were likewise constitutive agents in the form and permeability of those margins. In a rural, small scale farming environment, cows are instrumental to the very understanding of time. Their milking routine - dawn and dusk - starts and ends every working day; their annual breeding and grazing patterns contributing to the shape of the year. Human hands are shared with cows, just as cows share their udders: they are milking-hands and milked-udders, the intimate motion internalised by both beings into their experience of self. Cows provide for their human family, interacting with men and women at different points in their lives and deaths. Their human family equally provide for them, but they also consume them - arguably itself a form of being-blending (Salisbury 2011, 34). Working with cows, it is obvious that they are orderly: they maintain their hierarchies with minimal aggression. However, they have the capacity - like humans - for waywardness. Cow beings were true ‘animal partners’ and the kinship/friendship which they can offer humans was most likely offered back -they were protected from witchcraft as such, through the use of similar protections afforded human beings (Argent 2010, 157-159; Oma 2010). They were a model for (rather than a symbol of) the domestication of sinners.

Together, these two examples and the many cases of disease transference between species confirm that the borders between witches, the common populace and

animal beings were permeable at best, where they existed in any tangible form at all. The preoccupation of the church with discipline and the parallel destruction of cats and witches suggest that Salisbury's (2011, 146) assertion in reference to Medieval Europe, that "once the clear distinctions between the species had blurred, humanity became not what you are, but how you act" remains relevant well into the early modern period in Scotland. The past *is* a foreign country - even the very local, very recent past (Crabtree 2007, 235; Tarlow 2011, 12).

The cat in the wall, like any flesh or other 'thing', is almost certainly not an accident or a cat as we know them, but it is important to consider that it was a *being*. The intramural cat might be many things: a curse; an amulet; a witch; a substance/being which infuses into house; or a coming together of dead and living things. The changeling/unbaptised infant experienced protracted death, beginning before and extending beyond biological expiry, and the rotting rag at the well side may be interpreted as a little death of part of a person. The intramural cat may be alive and dead, neither, or somewhere between. It may be an extension of human personhood or a part of a single multiple-bodied person. It may even be interpreted as part of a house-body (Herva 2009). It might be an ally, keeping witch cats away (Harte 2001 [1997]), or a foe. Perhaps it had unique properties, relational to individual family members/visitors and dependant on their intentions. It may be rag/clothing-like or, on occasion, just a regular (from an early modern ontological perspective) cat. It may be also pass through stages incorporating a sequence of explanations (or multiples - they may not be mutually exclusive), in the course of its life and death. The living cats, to which we had to return to get here, offer these possibilities, many of which would never be accessible, were the study to begin and end with the symbolism of a dead cat.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the argument has been made for an early modern Scotland in which the basic ontic categories of the world were fundamentally different, part of a multi-species, co-fabricated existence, rather than an exclusively human-authored past. Furthermore, it has been argued that such ontological alterity is best accessed through an analysis of practice. This requires an approach in which theory, method and interpretation are ongoing, parallel endeavours developed in an iterative manner. The aim of the research was to raise original questions about the Scottish witchcraft material through a methodology founded upon the principle that ‘things’ (Henare *et al* 2007b) have the potential to lead us towards understanding of the ontological otherworlds from which they emerge. Following these ‘things’ has allowed relational taxonomies to be newly (re-)constituted. These taxonomies have formed the basis of interpretations which were necessarily inspired by ‘disruptions’ - breaks facilitated by modern art - which have helped the research to move beyond the confines of modern assumptions about the world.

Ultimately, in addition to offering a developed methodology for undertaking such a study, the research has contributed to the scholarship relating to early modern Europe by advancing our understanding of personhood and embodiment (human, animal, non-corporeal and otherwise) in this period, both in life and in death. In unfolding relational taxonomies to better understand the heterogeneous assemblage of early modern Scotland, materials and beings were consistently found to shift significantly in ways which elide their differences (by modern standards). Inanimate merged into animate, object into subject (Harwood and Ruuska 2012, 138-9).



The in first thematic contribution, Chapter 5 builds on the work of Jones and Cloke (2002) in exploring tree places and highlighting overlaps between early modern human bodies and tree ‘bodies’. In Chapter 6, the second thematic contribution comes from the analysis of infant burial grounds, which adds new layers to Tarlow’s (2011) conclusion that death in early modern Britain may be best understood not as a moment in time but as protracted social process. Birth and death are demonstrated to have been extended and concurrent within the body and life-course of an unbaptised infant. The third thematic contribution (Chapter 7), is to the archaeology of living animals; for example, deriving new interpretations of the connection between witches and cats by exploring cats as living beings and incorporating their behaviours back into witch trial evidence.

## 8.1 Strange Ontologies and the Dissolution of Boundaries

Breaking down modern ontological categories means that even the most apparently inviolable distinctions between states, such as organic or inorganic, living and inert, cannot be assumed to hold true. For example, special stones came to act upon bodies (human and animal and also bodies of water), sometimes harming (elfshot), others healing (e.g. udder stones), in ways only explicable through the existence of a form of lively knotting (Haraway 2008) between stone, water and flesh. Just as a visitor to a well left behind a rag as part of them, stones (arguably living stones; Reynolds 2009) carried stories with them of their former existence; for example, the tell-tale smoothed-to-perfection feel of a water-worn pebble. In doing so, they moved the margins of place with them, not just ‘stones’ but *ebb* stones, *kirk* stones, *hill* stone all possessing unique properties derived from their find spots. Quartz crystals cross-cut the properties of the category of water, whilst water itself broke into subcategories with potentially variable capacities: well water, ebb water, corpse water and south running water are all examples. In acting upon the body, stones and special water were able to bend place into person in unexpected ways, a connection reflected in the possibility of returning to a place to ‘seek one’s health’ where it had been lost. This is also evident in the reaction of the River Don when Isobel Strauthaquin used bones to make corpse water. Place

and person repeatedly flow into one another; a very different experience of embodiment when compared to the modern world.

Similarly, the bodies of the ambiguous and unbaptised infant dead infused themselves into their burial grounds, becoming part of place and harming visitors to the site through the contagion grave merels, a collocation of body and place which articulates a fundamentally different categorisation of body, being and land. Life and death, from this perspective, also cease to be mutually exclusive, at times occurring simultaneously. The newborn infant and the infant dead did not possess human personhood, but were both locked into a liminal period of protracted birth and expiration which ceased only upon baptism into the Christian community. Biological death did not end this complex process - their burial between the margins of water and land; between the Christian community and the otherworld of fairies, normally on almost forgotten holy ground, attests to an ongoing struggle to place them both firmly into the same category of being.

A seemingly unrelated practice, the hanging of rags at (ecclesiastically disowned) holy wells, echoes the case of the infant burial ground. Both infant burials and rag hanging most often occur at sites of former saintly power. However, the similarities go far beyond the superficial. As rags merge into place, healing occurs, in contrast to infection. Rags and skin emerge not only as parallel materials, but as materials which intermingle, possessing - in their overlap - properties which far exceed those they have when viewed separately, as they are in modern ontology. The rag touched by a stranger passes the ailment to them, suggesting that the rag is responsive (to touch) and reactive, and remains connected to its one time host. In many senses, then, early modern cloth can be seen as very like living skin. Rather than 'token deposits', they may better be interpreted as skin/flesh correlates; interchangeable parts of a person which retain a fundamental aspect of the person even when remote from the body. It is in this capacity that they can become imbricated in place in a way which is reminiscent of the corpse (human, in the case of infant burial grounds; non-human in the case of intramural cats).

As part of a living person left to rot, anonymised by deposition with myriad others, the rag comes to possess properties which extend the margins of the body into a communal expression of place. However, clothing also appears in more private

contexts, for example, hidden within thresholds. This raises a number of questions. Was the intentionally damaged intramural garment therefore formerly living and now dead? Was it part of a person? If so, in what manner did this connection persist? How does the similarly deposited intramural cat fit in? Reflecting back upon unbaptised infants and their endurance beyond the grave as ambiguous sub-human entities, is the intramural garment in fact not dead as we understand it, but rather transformed to possess a different (and perhaps more situated and potent) type of agency? More problematic still, what if the garment is, like the unbaptised infant, *in process* - neither living nor dead, but straddling the cusp between both worlds.

It is all too easy ultimately to focus upon the human outcomes in any archaeological enquiry. For example, looking at intramural cats, it is highly probable that once interred, clothing and cats possessed qualities in common, as may have all other interred flesh. The methodology of comparing materials which share contexts and contrasting the same material as it appears across situations is valid but it does not do justice to the strangeness of the data to then revert to explanations such as 'sympathetic magic' and fail to investigate the cat as *cat*. A deep investigation into the diverse existences of living others is a valuable asset in helping us to move away from seeing everything as 'symbol' and towards engaging with real ontological alterity. The trees at rag sites were more than handy rag hangers: from an individual tree to a forest, they were place-makers and time-makers in their own right. Tree interaction with living visitors and with the rags they deposited at sites were crucial to site efficacy: they literally decomposed rags and reconstituted them as parts of themselves.

Likewise, animals participated in the making of place and shaping of time. As Ingold (2005, 103) notes, "living beings make their way *through* the world-in-becoming rather than *across*" it: they are participants, not 'scenery'. In life before alarm clocks and electric light, dairy cows determined the routine of daily life; cats' activities (especially their noisy fights) not only occurred during but were a constitutive part of the night. In their own ways cats and cows maintained and violated social boundaries. Those animals which appear in the witch trials (especially as shapeshifters) are typically species known for moving into human

spaces, but enquiry must not stop there. A more nuanced understanding of animal behaviours derived from years of working with many different species demonstrates that they too are not simply empty vessels into which people pour symbolism. Animal beings act in both species-specific ways and in ways that are unique to them as individuals, just as human personalities are particular to us. Cats also act at their own volition, often in spite of human efforts, rather than because of them. In any attempt to understand an early modern environment in which animal beings were accused of witchcraft and humans were accused of shapeshifting it is not sufficient to reduce interpretation to questions of symbolism. The heterogeneous assemblage of which they are part is not comprised of inert materials onto which early modern people arbitrarily stamped meaning. Ontological correlation is not superficial: it arises out of material properties and relationships emergent from iterative practices.

Understanding practice and how materials and animal beings (and/or human ones) come to possess parallel properties begins with the first encounter. It should be noted, therefore, that through the properties endowed to the body by an ontology which accommodates shape-shifting, cats and other species cross-cut the same boundaries which clothing negotiates with the skin. The animal-witch being in the community can be interpreted as a single being comprised of two species. The animal such as the cat, although separate from the accused (and acting at its own volition), is effectively a second skin with its own unique properties that contribute to the overall potential materiality of the witch being in ways beyond those of a human body alone. Clothing, cloth, flesh and living animals found in the wrong place were dangerous and polluting, not just because they extended the ever theoretically ambiguous ‘influence’ of the witch into private places, but because they physically extended something of the body of the witch in real space, just as the spreading of Kira O’Reilly’s blood did during her performance (Disruption 2).

However, as the research has demonstrated, witch bodies and ordinary bodies had the same potential capacities. What was unexpected and dangerous was not that witches became enmeshed with space, but that they did so in ways that were not socially acceptable. In the case of witch trials, animal beings engaged in their own endeavours (for example, like those of Oscar the respite cat) and, in doing so,

actively behaved in ways which violated both spatial boundaries and bodily ones. A cat in the wrong place could be enough to tip the balance for a person from 'nosy neighbour' to 'suspected witch'. In addition, the architecture of rag tree sites altered seasonally, in part a reflection of the iterative process through which it was communally constructed, a layering of people as they extended themselves into place. However, it was between times, when the non-human work of the site was done, that magic (or ontologically specific potencies) emerged: as trees, plants, vertebrates and invertebrates, water courses and weather patterns made their multi-agential contributions to the co-fabrication of place, the rags transformed. The result was a liminal place which existed in a permanent state of creation and decay; the clear ontological relative of the extended simultaneous life and death of the unbaptised infant, played out on a larger social scale. At rag sites, remote *parts of persons* mingled in ways which were simultaneously anonymous and demonstrate a residual connection to person in the relationships between rotting and healing, and in the transference of disease. At infant burial grounds, infant bodies (physically whole) with incomplete or sub-personhood similarly polluted place and at the same time interacted positively with the agencies of place (for the potential salvation of their soul). The sites are comparable: step on the infant grave to contract grave merels; remove the rag to contract the infliction of its previous owner. Indeed, rag sites might legitimately be interpreted as a pseudo-burial ground, akin to a mass grave for the dying parts of people. Equally (and perhaps in tandem) both also express hope - the hope of restored health at the rag site, restored Christian personhood through posthumous salvation at the infant burial ground.

The sackcloth, an entirely ecclesiastical thing, fits seamlessly into the same ontological framework as rags when repositioned within the taxonomy of powerful fabrics and clothing. We have been too quick to designate sackcloths as ecclesiastical artefacts (including but not limited to other discipline objects; for example, communion wares or church pews). They can, though, be understood in different terms as a substance into which parts of person might be absorbed (sin, rather than disease), a communal construction, and a medium through which such parts might be transferred from person to person and/or carried through non-linear time. Indeed, non-linear time is a recurring theme throughout the chapters, where

time is flexed over the landscape in inconsistent ways, shaped not by human instruments, but by the seasonal life-courses of animals and trees, the restoration of biblical time (for example, in the presence of the sackcloth) and the activities of witches and fairies.

Fairies significantly problematise the boundaries between species and places and across times within the early modern ontology. Although normally invisible, they were beings with whom humans shared aspects of their embodiment. Some of these were experienced in life; for example, the shared capacity to use elfshot, interspecies procreation, and the mutual need of human and cow milk. Other traits were evident only in untimely death (such as murder or the death of unbaptised infants): flying, and the cessation of aging, for example. Finally, and of great interest, are those traits which emerge specifically from the interstices between life and death - the points where mortals may enter into the earth with them due to circumstantial vulnerability (such as immediately after childbirth). It is at these points that humans invariably receive gifts from the fairies, whether items (like Bessie Dunlop's green thread, Chapter 6.3) or skills such as healing. In these accounts humans temporarily possess one of the most ontologically fascinating qualities of the fairies: the ability to move into and out of the land in ways which suggest that they were considered part of it. In this articulation, body and land appear volatile, and insufficiently bounded.

Signs of violence are, Fowler (2004, 128) argues, signs of the regulation of social boundaries and of how personhood is attained. In the treatment of infant remains, the intentional damage of intramural clothing, the walling up of cats, and the use of joughs and branks against the sinning populace, signs of violence are everywhere. This evidence suggests that to be an early modern Scottish person (and especially to be a woman, the primary target of witchcraft accusations) was not to be an immutable or singular thing. The boundaries of the person were brought into being through continual practice, the margins redrawn and reinforced regularly (Crossland 2010, 395; Salisbury 2011, 146). They were not defined by, nor did they always closely overlay, the biological skin. Even in the case of ordinary, non-witchcraft associated people, cow wellbeing was intimately bound into that of socially good women and mothers and all too easily overlapped; another point on

the spectrum of embodiment where cats and witches intersect. In a time of eschatological panic - thanks to the Reformers' denouncement of traditional means of salvation - it is little wonder that a culture of discipline emerged which drew directly upon the domestication of animals. Branks and joughs, though seeming brutal by modern standards, are things born as much of hope as of desperation: they speak to a problem which can be fixed; a waywardness which could still be reined in. People even confessed to things they would never be caught for, such as marital sex on taboo days (Todd 2002, 170-171): maintaining community spiritual health was a serious endeavour. Witches, far beyond redemptive measures, could not be ignored and required handling with greater finality.

## 8.2 Reflections on 'Things' and 'Disruptions'

Whilst the methodology underpinning the thesis is unorthodox, it has been successful in a number of ways. Fowler (2004, 159-160) argues that one of the difficulties with addressing personhood in the past is that one of the key features must be the pairing of an approach to parts and wholes with the recognition that "conceptions of what constitutes a part and a whole are themselves contextual". Ultimately the relational taxonomies put together in this work (and in any other) remain modern constructions, but that does not invalidate the attempt. The research has proceeded in such a way that taxonomies have been allowed to *emerge* through the placing of things in relation to each other in context. These taxonomies sketch different lines upon the world from which alterity can emerge with an ontological consistency that 'makes sense', allowing the strangeness of the witch trial accounts to flow through the project, rather than being ironed out by it. Stripping everything back, as far as is possible, to bare and uncategorised 'things' is a valid exercise. Henare *et al* (2007a) may prefer to then reconstitute these into possible alternative parts and wholes using ethnographic analogy; however, insight from another culture is ultimately no more relevant than that of a contemporary artist: alterity can be found in many places.

Neither anthropological parallel nor ‘disruption’ can simply be superimposed upon the past as an interpretative framework. Indeed, contemporary art engagements demand that disruptions be used only as an investigative tool - a source of inspiration and questions - as they are often raw, the impression that they leave decipherable only in their detailed unpicking. This is arguably a strength that this source of inspiration has over anthropological correlates, for the latter may be implanted wholesale upon past cultures too easily (for an example, see Wilby 2011). We will never know for certain the exact nature of personhood and embodiment experiences in early modern Scotland; however, the deeply iterative enactment of entwining theory, method and interpretation with wide-ranging evidence of material practice itself represents a framework which could be adapted for use in many historical contexts.

It might be argued that the transferability of the method is hampered by its reliance on the particular experiences of the author: half a life-time of dance lessons, working with animals and engaging in art practices, for example, facilitated the engagements discussed throughout the thesis in ways which would not be immediately replicable. However, while these particular experiences have played a crucial role in the research presented in this thesis, they are not in themselves necessary to the method. Future scholars looking to adapt the methodology will find strengths in their own experiences: disruptions can and should be encountered anywhere from which emerges the inspiration to engage with the material world in different ways.

### **8.3 Future Thematic Directions for Research**

Throughout the thesis care has been taken to note the fate of those accused of witchcraft. In the majority of the cases discussed here this was execution, normally a double death - strangulation and then burning. What of the others? Unlike scolds and other disciplined women, witches were beyond the reach of acts of re-inclusion into the community. Like cats they could not be disciplined (cats cannot, for the most part, be made to comply with human will), and as such, they were not



subjected to joughs or branks. Harrison (1998, 118-9) posits that the difference was one of nature. Most women were punished for specific incidents such as quarrels; witches were considered to be inherently altered, like Bildhauer's composite monsters (2003, 82), forever subsumed into a new category of being. They could not be brought back, and their destruction was again parallel to that of cats, also destroyed in great numbers during the early modern period (Kalof 2007, 112-115). How then, if at all, did the formerly accused reintegrate into their communities and what material evidence might remain? Paterson (2013) begins the work of following up on the remains of those executed, but many questions are yet unanswered: what were the properties of the witch corpse (or dead witch being) which required the destruction of the body, and how do these fit into the wider discussion? Were they buried, as folk memory suggests, at execution sites like the Witch Pot (*KINTORE*) and do these sites actively share or avoid aspects in common with infant burial grounds? Why do places exist such as McNeiven's Craig (*FORTINGALL* and *MUCKHART*), Chanonry Ness Cross (*CAWDOR*) and Maggie Wall's Monument (Dunning, *MUCKHART*) which claim to be burial sites, yet there is little to no evidence of the named witches to which these sites are attached? Were witch remains ever viewed or used positively, as were grave water and hanged men's hands (Tarlow 2011, 168-169)?

Though addressing a number of questions about the ontological capacities of witches, this thesis also raises many more: an investigation into the materiality of dogs may provide significant insight into why men and the devil were so frequently associated with dogs (and very seldom cats). Other species, such as deer (especially stags) might also be further investigated. Furthermore, there would be merit in exploring how the slow incorporation of elements of elite demonology fits into and/or alters the existing ontology. Examples might include an exploration of the devil's mark (for historical approach see MacDonald 2002c), incorporating the material culture of searching for the mark with an approach sensitive to the embodied experience of being subjected to bodily search, or an exploration of how sex with the devil reveals the material properties of the witch's body and its boundaries.

Future comparative studies at more local scales would allow a different level of resolution, potentially offering valuable nuances. For example, there are almost certainly differences between coastal communities and inland agricultural ones in terms of practices, though in the course of this study similarities were more prevalent. Goodare (2008, 30) claims that “at present the Scots seem to have been distinctive for treating the weather as a natural phenomenon”. He bases this on a farmer’s relationship with the weather, documented in ‘*The Chronicle of Fortingall*’ [FORTINGALL] (Innes 1885). However, in coastal communities the influence of witches upon the weather is well documented in the trial accounts, including those of Issobell Gowdie and the infamous North Berwick witches. This highlights a potential case for geographical differences within the ontological framework of early modern Scotland. This is not a return to the Highland/Lowland question, but one rooted in lifeways and dwelling (Ingold 2000). Even subtle changes and their resulting experience of the body and being may be noticeably different. Many of the accused witches in this thesis were male; however, their bodies do not emerge as any more problematic than the ordinary body, for the most part (for recent advances, see Apps and Gow 2003; Goodare 2009; Rowlands 2009). The ocean is vast and unrelenting, requiring its own charms and demanding its own way of being in the world - a fisherman’s way, and an opening for deeper discussion of problematic male bodies, including (predominantly male) seers and the shipwreck victims interred in infant burial grounds (Paolisso 2003; Henderson 2007, 13; Cowan 2009). Such studies might also incorporate a deeper discussion of the role of weather - storms and whirlwinds in particular appearing frequently in witch trial accounts in ways which problematise the capacities of the human body, blasting by an evil fairy wind being one such example. Future research might also extend these and other research questions into the early part of the modern period. There is much evidence which suggests many of the practices documented persisted into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cowan and Henderson 2002, 216; Davies and de Blécourt 2004a, 2; Henderson 2006, 52-53; van Gent 2009, 1).

Many materials were not included in this study due to lack of space, the most significant omission of which is metal. The pins and coins left at wells, the iron of knives and other things appearing in trial accounts as having been used to protect against the fairies, the pins stuck into the calf’s heart from Dalkeith, and the jongs

and branks all share a material with its own specific ontological properties. Like cloth or stone, undoubtedly there are many layers to metal to be peeled back to reveal how it forms and cross-cuts ontological categories. Fire would make a very useful and interesting companion to metal in such a study: in the trial documentation it is fire and metal which destroy changelings and frighten fairies: the two are intimately related. Metal is forged in fire. Just as the river-tumbled stone retains a connection with water, metal and fire may prove to possess meaningful and enduring linkages in their ontologically specific materialities.

Those studying witchcraft in other early modern European countries applying a similar approach may discover comparable or contrasting material within their research environment. However, this would have to be done from the ground up, even if working from the apparently same ‘things’ through the apparently same contexts. Alberti and Marshall (2009, 354) offer this warning:

*“relational ontologies ought to be singularities emergent from specific data and contexts rather than general frameworks applied to all cases, and the specific confluence of theories (archaeological and otherwise) will enable non-predictable materially different pasts to emerge.”*

This thesis does not, therefore, offer a transferable model of early modern ontology. Rather it offers a specific case study and a general template for working through materials towards ontological alterity in the past. If the search is for a multi-authored past, then due consideration must be given in all instances to the specific materialities of all those contributing to any given ‘thing’, body or place as it is enacted *in practice*. A situated response to material from the witch trials in England, Sweden, or Germany should ultimately emerge to be different, in varying degrees to this Scottish example, for it is not a definitive answer. It is, instead, a call to incorporate new categories of material; to ask new questions; and to ask those questions in new ways.

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