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the rivalry that shaped a century

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Very best wishes

Rachel Bellerby
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With a major Hollywood film on the life of Mary Queen of Scots currently in production, we take a look at how modern-day historians view her rule

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The evidence of the prosecution of those accused of witchcraft in 17th-century Orkney

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Mary Queen of Scots

THE CURRENT STATE OF SCHOLARSHIP

With a major Hollywood film on the life of Mary Queen of Scots currently in production, the public's fascination with the life of the Stewart queen shows no sign of abating. **Anna Groundwater** takes a look at how modern-day historians now view Mary's rule personal rule – and detaching this from the guilty adulteress/innocent martyr debate. She also insisted on understanding that reign within its longer term and Scottish contexts, of Mary's place in a line of relatively successful Stewart kings – and the ways in which they governed, the political and social structures available for them to assert royal power. Measured against them, especially her father James V, and her son, the very effective James VI, Wormald found Mary lacking.

Another of her major criticisms was of Mary's failure to defend her own religion, Catholicism, in a kingdom in which the Protestant Reformation was a recent and fragile fledgling. But whether you agreed or not with Wormald's interpretation, she reframed the historical debate over Mary within those Scottish contexts, and away from over-concentration on the drama of her life.

Julian Goodare's subsequent measured biographical entry on Mary in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004) did much to put the case for a more positive understanding of Mary's reign, and redressed the balance in the argument. Goodare concludes that she could only have succeeded by ‘jettisoning ambitions, principles or both’, yet is that not a requirement for effective government in the early modern age? And that ‘ultimately one is left with a historical Mary

What then are we to make of Mary? There can be no doubt of her failure as a ruler’. So wrote the late, great Scottish historian, Jenny Wormald, nearly 30 years ago. But in the years since there have been many that disagreed with her, while Mary's enduring popularity on stage, screen, print and online forums indicates a seemingly undimmed public fascination with the lady herself, her reign, and her disastrous, ultimately tragic downfall.

This year, 2017, the Mary-related production line is churning out at least one major play, 'Glory on Earth'; a Hollywood blockbuster film; an independent dark comedy during the Edinburgh Festival, as well as a concert with newly composed music inspired by her life; and a festival in Kinross dedicated wholly to the ill-fated queen with jousting, music and dance. You can now also read Mary's own words in translations of her letters available online. No doubt there will be an outburst of popular publishing to accompany the film, but first out of the blocks is a republication of Wormald's incisive study that brought the whole of her extensive scholarly work in Scottish history to bear upon a new understanding of Mary Queen of Scots as monarch.

You might ask why yet another tome on Mary is needed? Quite simply, the debate over her reign and life continues. Scholarship remains deeply divided, though most popular accounts of her are romantically sympathetic. Part of the problem is that arguments have been over-personalised in the figure of Mary herself, typified as religious martyr, wicked adulteress, or innocent victim, in the debate over her ‘guilt’ or otherwise in her second husband Lord Darnley's murder, and her relationship with the earl of Bothwell. Was she the author of the 'Casket Letters' or not? Innocence or guilt in these have overshadowed work on whether she was an effective monarch, particularly in her personal rule (1561 to 1567) following her return from France, and until her forced abdication. Innocence or guilt in her personal affairs has been often read as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ruler, where the two are not necessarily linked. It could indeed be argued that complicity in her husband’s murder was probably a sensible thing for an early modern ruler to do, when that husband was actively plotting to undermine her. Machiavelli would have approved.

Assessing Mary's reign

So what is the current state of scholarship on Mary? Wormald's work remains a key text, particularly in her preoccupation with Mary's actions as monarch during her
remarkably close to the popular image: a romantic tragedy queen’, perhaps a somewhat romantic conclusion? That said, all students of Mary should read Goodare alongside Wormald’s criticism, the combination allowing one to get to grips with the historical debate.

Since then many other works have appeared, some more successful than others. Top of the list is Retha Warnicke’s engaging biography of Mary, which makes good use of the expanding body of work being done not just on the queen herself, but on the ‘wide range of cultural rituals, mores and behavior’ that shaped the female monarch’s actions, such as court customs and protocol, gender relations and familial networks. She reminds us ‘of the limited range of choices, specific to their culture, which individuals have when responding to personal crises’, which, in relation to Mary’s decisions, she notes were unavoidably shaped by her gender.

The gender question

Gender has been the hottest area of recent debate in relation to Mary’s life and reign. Wormald sidestepped the issue by insisting that Mary’s reign should be judged on her abilities as a monarch, not merely as a female monarch. However, it would not be possible now to ignore the effect of Mary’s gender. Historians rightly point to the difficulties posed by Mary’s femininity and physical vulnerability. Kristen Post Walton uses the contemporary literature of the *Querelles des Femmes* to demonstrate the constraints within which Mary acted. Within these contexts Warnicke observes, for instance, that Mary was forced to acquiesce in the marriage to Bothwell, following her abduction by him, in order to ‘suppress all references to the sexual violation’, because she ran the risk of appearing to have brought the attack on herself.

Moreover, Mary ran up against a prevalent political mindset of the unacceptability of female rule over men (as so memorably captured in John Knox’s notorious tract, the *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*). Female rule was seen as problematic because women were thought to be governed by their humours, especially, as Knox cautioned of female rulers, that they ‘burned with such inordinat lust’. Mary’s decision-making was seen to be problematically subject to her female frailties. Thus the placards that appeared on Edinburgh’s streets shortly after Darnley’s murder targeted Mary’s alleged sexual immorality, one portraying her as a mermaid (a symbol of promiscuity), linking that to her complicity in her husband’s killing.

Undoubtedly these social mores bore heavily on the manner in which Mary felt she should act, and conversely others’ expectations of her. The strictures on wives are evident in George Buchanan’s poetic advice on wifely obedience to Mary on her marriage to the Dauphin, recommending that ‘Although the Dauphin should yield to you the sceptre of royalty, and declare you with tender countenance his [co-equal] lady,

Yet acknowledge your station in life as a woman, and accustom yourself to your husband’s authority.

Putting your royal authority aside to this extent.

Learn to bear the [nuptial] yoke, but together with a beloved husband,

Learn to be subject to your husband’s direction...

How difficult such tensions between royal authority and wifely obedience would make Mary’s marriage to Darnley.

All this said, it is not possible to conclude that Mary’s downfall was attributable solely to the consequences of her gender. What was preached was not always practiced, and women’s experiences were not all the same, changing according to social status and wealth. We must beware of generalisation in relation to Mary’s gender, because Mary was not like any other woman in Scotland. She was a singular figure, with a different upbringing, and with very different expectations made of her. Almost from birth she had been treated as a monarch.

She had the examples of her forceful mother Marie de Guise’s success in a stridently male world, and Elizabeth I in England. Until her politically disastrous union with Bothwell, no one challenged her right to rule though they may have rebelled against its effects. Mary certainly made bad decisions, but these were not simply to do with being female.

But ultimately, the more I read about Mary, and the words of the queen herself, my conclusion is that the one thing that she was really lacking, crucial to any successful leader, was luck.

Dr Anna Groundwater is a cultural and social historian of early modern Scotland and Britain at the University of Edinburgh. ‘Mary Queen of Scots: A Study in Failure’ by Jenny Wormald with a new Foreword and Afterword by Anna Groundwater is published by John Donald (£14.99, paperback) www.birlinn.co.uk

Mary Queen of Scots

FURTHER READING


• Vol. 2 (1843) https://archive.org/details/lettersofmaryque02mary

• Vol. 3 (1843) https://archive.org/details/lettersofmaryque03mary

• Mary Queen of Scots: a Study in Failure, Jenny Wormald (John Donald: Edinburgh, 2017)

• Mary Queen of Scots, Retha M. Warnicke (London, 2006)

• *My Heart Is My Own: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, John Guy (London, 2004)

• Mary Queen of Scots: An Illustrated Life, Susan Doron (London, 2007)

Joan Morrison Noble explores the early years of Marie de Guise as she discovers what prompted the regent queen to take up arms against her own subjects after an act of ecclesiastical destruction.

In May 1559 Marie de Guise (known in Scotland as Mary), Dowager Queen and Regent of Scotland, rode out of Stirling Castle at the head of a small army, intent on restoring order to the realm. She claimed that the action of the congregation in the Kirk of St John in Perth on 11 May, when they destroyed altars and religious art, was sedition and had nothing to do with religion. Up to that moment she had been tolerant of the Protestants, acknowledging that the Church was in need of reform and allowing them freedom to preach the new religion. So tolerant had she been that English Protestants had fled to Scotland to avoid the fires of Smithfield under the reign of Mary Tudor. Her sudden volte face has led to theories based on political matters at home and abroad. Some historians have claimed that her early tolerance of the Protestants was merely a ruse to lull the Scots into accepting her daughter's marriage into the Catholic French royal family; once that had been accomplished she would suppress the new faith. In fact, the marriage between her daughter, Mary Queen of Scots, and the Dauphin had been celebrated in Paris in April 1558, a whole year prior to the events in Perth.

Similar troubles had occurred in her homeland and on those occasions both her mother, Antoinette de Bourbon, and her grandmother, Philippe de Gueldres, had claimed such destruction was sedition, an attack on lawful authority, and must be quelled. It was not surprising that they should think that way for the richly adorned chapels which were the focus of the reformers' ire were the gift of the aristocracy to the Church. Marie de Guise's dramatic response to iconoclasm could well have been initiated as much by her formative years in France as by political matters in Scotland.

The Chateau of Joinville
Mary was five years old when her parents, Claude de Lorraine, 1st Duc de Guise and Antoinette de Bourbon, took up residence in the chateau of Joinville in 1520. Today only crumbling walls remain of what had become by the 13th century, 'one of the proudest of the feudal castles of eastern France.' It stood on a wide site on top of a hill overlooking the river Marne, a splendid castle surrounded by gleaming towers. Adjoining the main residence stood...
the chapel of Saint Laurent where the family met for daily worship. Here the young Marie de Guise was surrounded by objects of both religious and dynastic importance. The Guises’ pride in their ancestry, an ancestry they claimed to date back to Charlemagne, would have been augmented by the accounts of Jean de Joinville’s crusade to the Holy Land.

A member of a family who had become prominent in Champagne in the 13th century, Jean de Joinville had made his first appearance at the court of Louis IX in 1241. Seven years later he made a pilgrimage to the shrine of Santiago de Compostella in Spain. But the great adventure of his life was the journey that he undertook with the young King Louis when they set out on the Seventh Crusade. They travelled to Egypt, where they planned to launch their attack on Syria; that undertaking failed for they were captured along with the entire army and held for ransom.

It would be six years before they were able to return to France, six years of adventure and privation. When Louis set out on yet another crusade and wanted Joinville to accompany him, Joinville declined. Shortly thereafter news came of Louis’s death. Many years later, at the behest of the king’s mother, Queen Jeanne de Navarre, Joinville wrote Le livre des saintes paroles et des bonnes actions de St Louis (The book of the holy words and goodly deeds of St Louis). The manuscript and Joinville’s verbal testimony helped bring about the canonization of the king. Dynastic pride decreed that the Guises should own a copy of The Life of Saint Louis, for Claude de Lorraine was descended from Jean de Joinville and Antoinette de Bourbon from the king. Two copies, on vellum and illuminated, were commissioned by Antoinette de Bourbon.

The chapel of Saint Laurent was richly adorned. Jean de Joinville took great pride in the exploits of his Crusader ancestors and particularly his grandfather, Geoffroy. There he displayed the shield given to Geoffroy by Richard the Lionheart along with a plaque commemorating the heroic deeds of his family. The chapel also celebrated Joinville’s own crusade. He erected an altar dedicated to Saint Louis and commemorated in stained glass and in a mural an event that he had witnessed during their voyage.

This was the miracle that contributed to the canonization of the young king, for Louis had saved the life of a man who had fallen overboard. Strangely, the man had made no effort to save himself. When they got him aboard he explained that he had prayed to the Virgin of Vauvert to save him and this he had done by holding him upright in the water until Louis’s ship arrived. In honour of this miracle, I have had it depicted on the walls of my chapel at Joinville, as also in the stained glass windows at Blécourt,” he writes.

The most prized object in the chapel was the relic brought by Jean de Joinville himself from the Holy Land: the Belt of Saint Joseph, spouse of the Virgin Mary. During the French Revolution it disappeared and only a brief description of the original exists: it was sheathed in cloth of silver and housed in a silver-gilt reliquary or shrine. When the belt was recovered some years later but without its shrine a new reliquary was fashioned. Since it was created not long after the disappearance of the first and illustrates so perfectly 16th-century religious and dynastic values the shrine is very likely true to the original design. It is of gilded copper, ornamented with precious stones and enamel.

The belt is sheathed in silver silk embroidered with silver lace and is wound around a crystal cylinder borne aloft by a procession of six figures. These statuettes represent Saint Louis, wearing his royal crown, and the Bishop of Chalons in the vanguard; two winged angels in the middle of the procession; and, at the rear, a monk and Jean de Joinville. Jean de Joinville appears in the chain mail of the medieval warrior, a fitting reminder of his family’s role in the Crusades. Here we see encapsulated religious devotion and dynastic pride.

The Convent of the Poor Clares
Marie de Guise spent part of her youth in the convent of the Poor Clares at Pont-à-Mousson in Lorraine, brought there by her devout grandmother, Philippe de Guelders. It is almost certain that she was being groomed for a future role as abbess of a religious house, a role filled by many women of her extended family, but she was removed and presented at court by her uncle, the Duc de Lorraine. The Poor Clares belonged to the Second Order of Franciscans, founded by Saint Clare of Assisi. This was the most austere of the Orders, for the monastic rule decreed a life of physical labour and communal poverty.

We do not have details of worship within the convent when Marie de Guise lived there but it is possible that life was not as stark as one would expect for within the convents of the Poor Clares in Italy a century earlier the visual arts lived in harmony with the ascetic life. The abbesses at Santa Maria de Monteluce at Perugia, for example, commissioned a splendid marble tabernacle by Francesco di Simone Ferrucci and accepted paintings such as Bartolommeo Capalari’s Madonna and Child with Angels to adorn the church. Legacies, bequests
and donations from the wealthy families of the nuns provided paintings and sculptures, illuminated manuscripts and the costly items needed for the liturgy. It is not impossible, then, that religious art was in evidence at Pont-à-Mousson also. Certainly the art of illuminated manuscripts was esteemed, for among Marie de Guise's belongings when she arrived in Scotland was a 15th-century Book of Hours bearing her signature, believed to have originated there.

Chateaudun

At the age of nineteen Marie de Guise married Louis d'Orléans, duc de Longueville and took up residence at Chateaudun overlooking the Loir, a tributary of the greater River Loire. Here also we find appreciation of the visual arts and pride of birth informing a place of worship. This was the chateau of her husband's ancestor, Dunois, one of France's greatest heroes. Jean, Comte de Dunois et de Longueville was descended from King Louis IX, the king whose exploits had been commemorated by Jean de Joinville. As military leader and diplomat, Dunois played a vital role in France's victory over England in the Hundred Years' War, fighting alongside Joan of Arc to relieve the city of Orléans from English siege. He was the son of Louis d'Orléans, brother to the king, was born out of wedlock and known as the Bastard of Orléans.

It is thought that the chapel was built in an effort to overcome the stigma of his birth, for he hoped to receive papal recognition of it as a Holy Chapel or Sainte-Chapelle. A Sainte-Chapelle was a chapel specifically built to house some relic associated with the crucifixion of Christ, was built within a chateau, and was placed directly under the authority of the Pope. To have one's chapel thus sanctioned was to attain acceptance as a member of the royal kindred.

Dunois possessed a fragment of the True Cross and built his chapel to house this relic.

The Sainte Chapelle is an elegant building. Here Marie de Guise walked daily along the nave, under stone arches lit by tall Gothic windows of stained glass, to pray before the altar. Here she saw daily the large mural of the Last Judgement on the south wall, a suitable reminder to the lax in worship. Graphic indeed it was, the winged angels escorting the saved souls upwards toward heaven while, to the right, horned devils herded the wicked into the horrors of Hell. Here she saw also, high on their individual pillars, a magnificent series of fifteen statues. They were not only beautifully sculpted but richly coloured as well.

Among the eight in the main sanctuary were Catherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch, whose virtue and courage made them the favoured saints of Joan of Arc. In contrast to the theme of Biblical figures and saints, a statue belonging in style to a different period, an aged warrior clad in medieval armour, is believed to represent Dunois himself, a daily reminder of the importance of the House of Longueville. But even more telling are the statues representing St Francis of Assisi and St Agnes;

these were in fact portraits of Dunois's son and daughter-in-law, Francois de Longueville and Agnes de Savoie. An attack on such an institution could not but be interpreted as an attack on the aristocracy in its role as lawful authority.

The Abbey of Fontevrault

To the south-west of Chateaudun stood the great Abbey of Fontevrault. We do not know if Marie de Guise worshipped there during her years at Chateaudun but she would know it intimately through family members. The abbey was established by Robert d'Abrissel in 1100, to be a convent for both women and men; from the beginning it was decreed that it should be ruled by women only. It would eventually become one of the wealthiest and most influential in France, the mother-house of about 100 priories scattered throughout France, England and northern Spain. François I and his court visited on occasion and Eleanor of Aquitaine spent her later years there. It was expected that the abbesses who ruled such an establishment were not only educated and cultured women but of the aristocracy as well. When Marie de Guise took up residence at Chateaudun in 1534 the abbess who ruled at Fontevrault was her great-aunt, Renée de Bourbon.

Renée de Bourbon, ‘the Pearl of Fontevrault,’ was honoured by the Church for the reforms that she instituted in the Order. When she died on 8 November, 1534 she was succeeded by her niece, Louise, younger sister of Antoinette de Bourbon. Also in residence was Marie’s younger sister, Renée de Lorraine, who had been sent there at five years of age to be groomed for her future role.
as head of a prestigious abbey.

Louise de Bourbon introduced the art and architecture of Renaissance Italy to Fontevrault Abbey. During the 1540s she had the ancient cloisters repaired, creating a very beautiful series of walkways for the nuns. The range of cloisters that adjoined the refectory retained its Gothic style but in the other three sides she had pairs of Ionic columns installed. She also decorated the chapterhouse where the Sisters met for administrative meetings. To enter it, the Sisters walked under a wide arched doorway richly adorned with Renaissance carvings. The floor tiles were decorated with the initials R B to commemorate her aunt, Renée de Bourbon, and with the letter L adorned with a crowned flight – outspread wings extended across the stem of the letter, which in turn is surmounted by a crown – to commemorate herself. Ahead of them and to each side they saw large colourful murals depicting the Crucifixion, the Ascension and other events pertaining to the Passion of Christ. These had been commissioned by Louise.

At a later date several full-length portraits of the abbesses were incorporated, clad in the black robe of the abbess, a fall of white pleated fabric at the throat. Here the Bourbon abbesses predominate. The elderly Renée de Bourbon stands at the right-hand side of The Crucifixion, a tall staff in the crook of her arm; Louise stands on the left-hand side of the painting, hands folded in prayer. And Marie’s sister, Renée de Lorraine, is depicted above the entrance arch, standing at the right-hand side of The Pentecost. Her portrait, whether an accurate depiction we do not know, shows a tall handsome woman, the aquiline features and the square jaw suggestive of her mother and her father respectively.

Marie de Guise’s extended family clearly were part of a network of aristocrats who gave generously to enrich places of worship. On important occasions such as the official admission of children into Fontevrault Abbey, for example, their families proffered gifts. When the five-year-old Rénee de Lorraine was formally received into the religious community, the Abbey of Fontevrault received from the Guise family a great array of riches. These included magnificent tapestries woven with gold thread as well as statues of silver and of gold. Her uncle, the worldly Jean, Cardinal de Lorraine, presented the abbey with a heaping of gifts, among them a chalice, a patten and a reliquary all made of gold and he repeated his outpouring of riches on the formal admission into the abbey of the young Bourbon daughters as well.

The giving of gifts to ecclesiastical establishments was practiced by Marie’s family with generosity. On his many travels Marie de Guise’s brother, Charles, Cardinal de Lorraine, never returned to his cathedral in Reims without some gift, a tapestry or a gold object, to adorn it. The prized Belt of St Joseph was donated to the church of Notre Dame de Joinville by Antoinette de Bourbon, one of the many examples of the gifts donated by her to churches within their domain. When she organised the relics at the Sainte Chapelle in Paris at the behest of Henri II, the king rewarded her with a small part of each, encased in a silver-gilt reliquary. These she placed in the chapel of St Laurent.

Her daughter, Renée de Lorraine, who became abbess of Saint-Pierre in Reims, followed her example. To Reims Cathedral she donated the Relic of the Sacred Thorn. This relic, a single thorn from the Crown of Thorns, is housed in an elongated oval of rock crystal. The crystal is delicately engraved and further embellished with a cloud of tiny pearls set in fragments of gold. It stands on a slender pedestal and is
surmounted by a white alabaster angel, a much smaller angel at the foot. The work of a French goldsmith named Guillaume Le Maistre and made sometime after 1458, it was given to Renée by Henri II. For her own abbey in Reims, Renée received a gift of a gold cross from the Cardinal de Bourbon.

The visual arts were held by the members of the House of Guise in high regard. So also was music. Claude’s brother, Jean Cardinal of Lorraine, established a salon for artists and musicians in his Hôtel de Cluny in Paris while Claude brought the Italian Arcadelt, composer and choirmaster of the Sistine Chapel, to provide court music at Joinville. In addition to the nine canons and two vicars who conducted daily worship in the Saint Laurent chapel, Claude de Lorraine maintained a Master of the Chapel and four choirboys to compose and to perform church music. The chapel at Joinville would hold musical instruments as well as the paintings and statuary, chalices and reliquaries in precious metals that were the necessary furnishings of places of worship.

These richly furnished places of worship represented the ruling class. On 11 May, 1559 the congregation attacked not only the Kirk of St John in Perth but also the Charterhouse and the destruction was not confined to religious icons but extended to the tombs of royalty. The tombs of James I and his queen, Joan Beaufort, buried there in 1437, were broken open and the bones desecrated as were those of Margaret Tudor, queen of James IV, who died in 1541. Margaret Tudor was Marie de Guise’s mother-in-law; as recorded by her in her letters the two women enjoyed a warm friendship. Such fury could only be seen by Marie de Guise as sedition; the insurrection in Perth left her with no choice but to take up arms to restore order.

Bloodshed was avoided at that time for, learning the size of the opposing forces, she withdrew but the Protestants had now formed their own army. The Reformation Rebellion was underway. This was a vital point in Scotland’s history. By the following summer Marie de Guise was dead, Scotland had officially become Protestant and the age-old alliance with France was severed forever.

During the Reformation many churches in Scotland were stripped of religious art but one example of pre-Reformation art in situ survives in Edinburgh. Secluded within Edinburgh’s Old Town, beneath George IV Bridge, stands the 16th century Magdalen Chapel. Four armorial roundels in stained glass have survived the centuries there, undisturbed. One of these roundels depicts the coat of arms of Mary of Lorraine, the name by which Marie de Guise was known in 16th-century Scotland.

Joan Morrison Noble lives in Victoria, British Columbia. Prior to retirement she was a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Victoria. In earlier years she studied Fine Arts in Aberdeen, Scotland.

Further reading


L’Eglise Notre Dame de Joinville, Humblot, Emile & François Lesprit (rpr 1971)


La Mere des Guises. Antoinette de Bourbon, 1494-1593 Gabriel Pimodan (Marquis de) (Paris, 1889)

Family Tree

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Jocelyn Rendall explores evidence of the prosecution of those accused of witchcraft in 17th-century Orkney and discovers how something as simple as a petty dispute with a neighbour could lead to a terrifying trial and a gruesome death.

"Around 1830 a small boy was taken to Leith to see the great ships in the harbour. An old sailor took him on his knee and started to tell him stories. He asked the child where he came from, and Walter Traill Dennison said he lived in Orkney. The sailor immediately threw him off his knee and cried, ‘O my lad, you hail from that lubber land where so many cursed witches dwell’.

References to witches can be found in the Orkneyinga Saga and throughout Orkney history. In the 1800s there were ‘storm witches’ plying their trade among the seafarers in Stromness and belief in witches survived well into the 20th century. Often it seems that they were an accepted – or even respected – and useful member of their community, but the surviving records of witchcraft trials that took place in Kirkwall are evidence of serious persecution in the late 16th and first half of the 17th century. They allow us an insight into the sort of people who were accused, and the activities that led them to be condemned for ‘the devilish and abominable crime of Superstition, Witchcraft and Sorcery’.

An Act anentis Witchcraftis was passed by the Scottish Parliament in 1563, just three years after it had adopted a Protestant Confession of Faith. The Act made practising witchcraft, claiming supernatural powers and consulting witches capital offences, but there were very few prosecutions made under it until 1589. In that year James VI visited Denmark to marry Anne (the sister of King Christian IV) and apparently found the Danish court seething with suspicion of sorcery. The bridal party’s stormy journey home was blamed on witchcraft, and on arriving in Scotland the paranoid king unleashed a bloodhunt against the ‘witches’ who were plotting his death. Over 100 women were arrested in North Berwick and many of them confessed under torture to having met with the Devil and conspired to poison the king or sink his ship. James became so obsessed with witchcraft that in 1597 he wrote a treatise on it. When he became king of England in 1603, James found the southern court more sophisticated and unimpressed by his Daemonologie, but he had done the damage in Scotland. The high-profile trials in North Berwick had stirred up anti-witch feeling and sparked off a wave of arrests. The Scottish Witchcraft Act was not repealed until 1736 and it has been estimated that somewhere between 3,000 and 4,000 witches were put to death in Scotland in the 170 years that it was on the statute books. The last one was Janet Thorne, accused of trying to turn her daughter into a pony with the help of the devil, and burned in Dornoch in 1722. Her daughter had a congenital deformity of the hands and feet.

Witches were usually but not invariably women. The historian Ernest Marwick found references..."
The Orkney witchcraft trials

To 72 named Orkney witches, from the 16th century onwards, and his list included twelve men. Among them are Thomas Swintone, who was 'made to answer [to the Session] for his scandal in raising the wind that stormy Sunday' in 1689, (and so preventing godfearing islanders from getting to kirk). The Accounts of the Burgh of Aberdeen for the financial year 1596/97 include the bills for burning witches – 23 women and one man. This is a chilling document for its very banality, and allows us to imagine more vividly the horrors that followed the trials.

Nobody, at this time, of any rank or education, had the slightest doubt that witches existed. The Old Testament law: 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' was frequently quoted as evidence that witches did live, and should be put to death. There were intelligent men like Judge George Mackenzie in Edinburgh who were concerned about women being condemned in error, or out of malice, but they never questioned that there were real witches who had powers which came from the Devil.

The General Assembly of the Kirk followed up the Witchcraft Act with a series of its own Condemnatory Acts, 'and with each act, cases and convictions increased'.

A copy of each Condemnatory Act was sent to every Presbytery ordering them to search out and prosecute witches, so kirk elders were primed and ready to find evidence of witchcraft when tales were carried to them about a neighbour's malevolence. In Orkney, the Condemnatory Act passed in the Assembly of May 1643, for example, was swiftly followed by the arrest of Katherine Craigie and Jonet Reid who were burned in Kirkwall that July.

The Old Testament law ‘Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live’ was frequently quoted as evidence that witches did live, and should be put to death

The Kirk Sessions could interrogate and call witnesses, but they were not criminal courts. They could only punish, with fines or public penance, sins like drunkenness or swearing or fornication. Anyone accused of a more serious crime was handed over to the civil courts and taken to Kirkwall. This must have been a traumatic experience in itself: many of the 'witches' were from country parishes or even the North Isles and had probably never been to the town or among strangers before. Before their trial they were incarcerated in the cathedral in Marwick's Hole, a totally dark bottle-dungeon between the walls of the south transept and the choir. From here they were dragged out – frozen with cold, half-starved and absolutely terrified – to face a court of fifteen kirk elders and small landowners, the minor gentry of the county. No wonder that when Annie Taylor from Sanday was interrogated 'she denied not but said she was uncouth [ignorant] and wist not what to say'.

If it was the woman's first trial and the accusations did not seem sufficiently weighty or credible, she escaped with banishment, from her parish or even the county. The Aberdeen accounts attest the practice of branding banished persons with a hot iron, so that there could be no possibility of them returning home undetected. 'Item, to John Justice for burning upone the cheik of 4 several persones suspect of witchcraft, and baneschit, £1 6s 8d.' In 1615 Jonet Drever in the island of Westray was accused of conversing with fairies and fostering a bairn to them. She was condemned to be scourged from one end of the town to the other and then banished the country, never to return, under pain of death. Again,
the Aberdeen accounts give a chilling illustration of the practice: ‘Item, for trailing of Manteith thro the streets of the toun in ane cart, who hangit herself in prison, and for burying her. 10 shillings.’ Presumably there were many others who committed suicide as a result of, or in fear of, this brutal punishment.

Banishment was little better than a death sentence, as the next county would be equally hostile. In 1698 the Kirk Session of Wick minuted that: ‘Being informed likewise that sorcery and witchcraft abound so much in the parish – that sorcerors banished out of Orkney lurke there – they recommend seriously to the heritors and magistrate to banish all such out of the town and country.’

So where did they go? By law, paupers and beggars were obliged to stay in their own parish, and if they turned up homeless in another parish they would be arrested as vagabonds. There were Kirkwall statutes forbidding anyone to ‘support or grant hospitality to such persons, under pain of 40 shillings Scots……’, and ordering them ‘to be punished in the joggs or stocks’. (The joggs was an iron collar attached to a short chain which was stapled to the wall of a kirk or to the mercat cross). Judge George Mackenzie wrote of examining a woman who told him: …she had not confess because she was guilty, but being a poor creature, who wrought for her meat, and being defam’ed for a witch she knew she would starve, for no person thereafter would either give her meat or lodging, and that all men would beat her, and hound Dogs at her, and that therefore she desired to be out of the World.

At least half of the surviving witchcraft charges relate to the sickness or death of cattle – a family’s most vital and vulnerable economic asset

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Around 1620 Marable Couper was accused of witchcraft and banished from the Orkney parish of Birsay, but she returned – she had a home and a husband and at least one child there after all – and when new accusations rolled in and she was arrested again the result was a foregone conclusion: The Judge ordains the pannell [the accused] to be tane be the lockman, hir hands bund, and be carried to the head of the Loan, the place of execution, and thair to be knet to ane staik, wiried [strangled] to the death, and brunt in ashes.

So what had Marable and the other women who received this ghastly sentence actually done? A typical charge (in modernised spelling) is this one brought by the Mowats:

David and Margaret Mowat had three cows, but one died when she calved; the second cow calved a calf, but she never gave any milk, and the third cow for four years past never took bull [i.e. never got in calf again]. And at the following Beltane, she [Margaret] had one cow and two young cattle that died. You [Marable] did not only do these things by your witchcraft and devilry, but made it public that you had the skill to do these things. Which, rank witch, you cannot deny.

The last words state volumes about the kind of justice that a woman accused of witchcraft could expect. There is no question of ‘Innocent until proved guilty’. The trial has only just started and Sir John Buchanan,
sherriff-principal of Orkney and Zetland, has made his judgement: *rank witch, you cannot deny!*

The story of the Mowat’s cows is typical. At least half of the surviving witchcraft charges relate to the sickness or death of cattle – a family’s most vital and vulnerable economic asset. Because both people and animals were under-fed and cramped together in insanitary conditions, disease was endemic and mortality very high, and the half-starved cows often unproductive. It seems to be a constant of the human condition that we need to find someone or something to blame for apparently randomly afflicted tragedy. In records of witchcraft trials throughout the world, we invariably find that an outbreak of plague or exceptionally bad weather or other disaster has been blamed on witches. The Orkney witchcraft trials occurred in the so-called ‘Little Ice Age’, a time of particularly harsh weather and so of frequent crop failure. Malnutrition was a norm and, in the worst years, death from starvation not uncommon. Conditions in the islands were so bad that one of the 17th century Kirkwall statutes forbade anyone to recruit young men to go away to the fishing off Iceland or elsewhere, ‘forasmuch as the lands are laid lay and waste by]

It is interesting that Marable was charged with advertising that she had the skill to make the cows die. Perhaps because no-one will employ her, she is trying to make a living by her reputation, and she enhances that by claiming that her ‘company’ [coven] come and take her away with them every moon. Sometimes one is not sure if the witch actually believes that she does have such power, (is she mad, or hallucinating with hunger, or literally frightened out of her wits?) Or is she running a protection racket, exploiting the credulity of her wits?) Or is she running a protection racket, exploiting the credulity of her neighbours, so that they are afraid to refuse her when she comes whining round their door begging? Here are some other typical examples of charges against the grumpy, dishonest or thriftless neighbours who are unpopular in every small community: Robert Miller refused you meal that he was grinding – you went away murmuring to yourself – Robert could not make the mill gang that day for all his skill.

Even today, modern veterinary science can often find no cause for apparently inexplicable deaths of cattle. For the Mowats, it meant ruin staring them starkly in the face: no calf to sell, no milk for the family, no butter to pay the rent. And at a time when poverty was at its worst, the message from the Kirk was at its most harsh and comfortless. Sunday after Sunday the Mowats heard from the pulpit that they were miserable sinners, and the Devil and his accomplices prowling about them.

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Katherine Craigie was tried for witchcraft twice, but the first time acquitted for lack of sufficient evidence against her. One of the charms that she was accused of using is often referred to, and was clearly in common use long before and after Katherine’s time.

The accusation against her went: ‘Coming to the house of Jonet Craigie, spouse to Robert Robson, who was deadly sick, and none that visited him expected that he could recover from that sickness . . . you said to Jonet: “Jonet, if I dared trust in you, I should know what lies on your husband... I could tell if were a hill spirit, a kirk-spirit or a water-spirit that troubles him.”

Jonet Craigie answered you that she would never reveal anything upon you, if you helped her goodman. You replied, “Tomorrow at evening I shall know.” [what kind of spirit]. The next morning you came to Jonet’s house before day, and brought with you three stones, which you put on the fire, where they stayed all day till after sunset, and then you took them out of the fire, laying them under the threshold of the door, where they stayed all night till early in the morning before sunrise you took them up, and taking a vessel filled with water, you put the stones in, one after another . . . Jonet Craigie heard them grind and grate in the water, whereupon you said, “It is a kirk-spirit which troubles Robbie your husband.”

Then you gave the vessel with the water to Jonet, and directed her to wash her husband with it.

A time honoured charm

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The Orkney witchcraft trials

Detail from the frontplate of The Triumph of God’s Revenge Against the Crying and Excrerable Sinne of Murder by John Reynolds (1621)
she could not make butter because it was too thin), Marion told her to go down to the sea, count nine waves, and take water from the next one home and put it into her churn, and she would get the profit again. This aspect of the trials is particularly interesting, and tragic. Frequently the witch is not being blamed for causing misfortune, but for healing, or trying to heal, or for bringing good luck.

Marion Richart heard David Jok complaining he had no luck fishing. She called for the cat and said she would wash its head and feet in the bait water, and then throw the water over him and his bait basket and he would get fish. We are not told if David’s fishing was successful or not, but there is no suggestion that Marion did the charm with the cat for payment or any reason except to help a neighbour.

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Katherine Craigie, whose crimes seem to mostly consist of charms to help her neighbours, was burned at the stake in 1643

The trials appear even more unpleasant when you realise that it is these same neighbours who have had the good fortune to recover from sickness or have good luck fishing, and have gone voluntarily to the witch for charms and advice, who are witnessing against them. At the beginning of all the trials the witches are accused of contravening the Witchcraft Act, but under the Act consulting a witch is also a capital offence. Clearly most of the witnesses are guilty of consulting, but they are not being charged. Was there a deal in which the witnesses were promised immunity if they gave evidence?

Very often the ‘crimes’ were committed eight, ten, fifteen years before the trial or even more. Jonet Drever – who was beaten through the town and banished – was accused of conversing with the Westray fairies 26 years earlier. We would question how accurate people’s memory was after that time, and why they suddenly decided that these events were evidence of witchcraft.

The trials and convictions of the witches appear to be almost random. The charms and incantations which they used in healing spells had been handed down to them and in use for generations. The same, or very similar spells, have been found in use at different times and places well into the 19th century.

The ‘witches’ who ended up in Marwick’s Hole, or on Galliowha’, were scapegoats for practices which were widespread and common and harmless. At Katherine Craigie’s trial she tried to deflect the charges by saying: ‘It wasn’t just me! Margaret Ranie healed John Bell’s cow, and Cristine Poke charmed the sickness from an ox in Saviskaill and got for doing it a plate of meal and a blood-pudding on top of it. She was paid for it, so why am I being blamed?’ A just question, which was never answered.

In Margaret Corston’s deposition against Marable Couper, she related that she had been suffering from an incurable illness for four months when she passed by Marable’s house. She called Marable a banished witch and told her that, if she died, she would blame her for her death. The accusation ran: ‘You, [Marable] said that she might have reproved her quietly if she had anything to say to her, and you took her into your house, and heated some ale and gave it to her to drink. Whereby, as by your witchcraft you caused the sickness, so by the same devilry she got her health.’ If Margaret really believed that Marable was a witch, why did she go into her house and drink her ale? It reads as if the court had determined on a conviction, and chose not to notice the flaws in the witnesses’ stories.

Katherine Craigie, whose crimes
The Orkney witchcraft trials

The accounts make it clear that much more is going on than simply an execution. A huge and expensive bonfire is being prepared, intended as a terrifying drama about the power of Kirk and State to destroy the Devil and all his works. It is put on for the benefit of the spectators, and this account includes 8s 8d for carrying four railings ‘to withstand the press of the people’ struggling to get a closer view. John Justice, the hangman, received a fee of 6s 8d for every execution.

By the late 17th century, attitudes were starting to change and presbyteries were less likely to accept accusations uncritically. Slander - taking away someone’s good name - was regarded as a very serious offence by the Kirk and severely punished, as in the case of Hugh Moare of Orphir who was put in Marwick’s Hole in 1688 for maliciously declaring Barbara Hutchison a witch.

One of Katherine Craigie’s ‘crimes’ was seeking a cure for a sick neighbour by walking him round Wasbuster Loch in Rousay in silence before sunrise. St Tredwell’s Loch in Papa Westray was famous for centuries for miraculous cures sought in exactly the same way.

Less than 60 years after Katherine’s execution, the Reverend John Brand was visiting Papa Westray in his capacity as a Commissioner for the Kirk, with the brief of extirpating ‘heathenish and popish rites’ from Orkney. He wrote a detailed account of the rituals at the loch and, although he disapproved, he was actually quite intrigued by the evidence of cures, and his description is almost sympathetic.

Jocelyn Rendall is a freelance historian, with Orkney social history a sideline to helping to run the 400-acre family farm in Papa Westray.

Further reading

The Court Books of Orkney and Shetland 1614-1615, R.S. Barclay (ed.) (Edinburgh 1967)


A Brief Description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland Firth and Caithness 1701, J. Brand, (repr. Edinburgh 1883)

Abbotsford Club Miscellany vol I: Witchcraft Sorcery and Superstition in Orkney, J. Maidment and W.B.D.D. Turnbull (eds.) (Edinburgh 1837)


Extracts from the accounts of the Burgh of Aberdeen, Miscellany of the Spalding Club, John Stuart (ed.) (Vol.5, Aberdeen 1852)
n 16 May, 1568 a demoralised Mary Queen of Scots fled from her native land in a fishing boat across the Solway Firth. She had been forced to abdicate in favour of her baby son, James VI, nearly a year earlier by a confederation of disaffected Scottish aristocrats who had grown weary of the difficulties posed by a female ruler.

Mary thus became the unwelcome guest of her cousin, Elizabeth I, whom she had always hoped would acknowledge her as heir to the English throne. For the next nineteen years she would be held in the north of England, well away from the Tudor queen whose common ties of blood and monarchy she hoped would help her regain her throne. Eventually, after a series of plots against her life in which the increasingly desperate Mary became entangled, Elizabeth was persuaded to sign the warrant for Mary's execution and the Scottish queen was beheaded at Fotheringay in February 1587.

Historians and novelists have been fascinated ever since by this tale of personal rivalry, but the struggle between the Tudors and the Stewarts had much deeper roots. It is an epic tale of flamboyant kings and queens, sophisticated courts, murder and mayhem, sexual licence and bloody battles.

Often overlooked in the English obsession with the Tudors is that Scotland, despite the fact that all its kings after the year 1400 acceded to the throne as minors, continued to function successfully, and that Mary's father and grandfather were both capable Renaissance monarchs who raised the standing of their country in Europe.

The Stewarts had been on the throne of Scotland for over a century when Henry VII of England won his unlikely victory at Bosworth in 1485, bringing to an end the Wars of the Roses. Henry had spent half his life in exile, was not aggressive by nature, and wanted to improve relations with Scotland, which were frequently bedevilled by violence in the contested area of the Borders.

This conciliatory approach was welcomed by James III, a remote and austere man who passed his time in Edinburgh Castle and had none of the Stewart charm. But appeasement of the English...
irritated the Scottish nobility and King James was overthrown by a revolt in 1488 in which his eldest son participated, and he was murdered fleeing the battlefield.

**A new era**
The rebellious prince came to the throne at the age of fifteen as James IV and proceeded, after a period of adjustment, to leave his mark on Scotland. He did not share his father’s views on Anglo-Scottish relations, was keen on restoring the Auld Alliance with France and enhancing his prestige as the ruler of a nation that the rest of Europe could not ignore.

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**The struggle between the Stewarts and the Tudors is an epic tale of flamboyant kings and queens, sophisticated courts, murder and mayhem**

A charismatic man of restless energy and something of a polymath, James IV was a worthy rival to the more ascetic Henry VII. He built up the Scottish navy, was fascinated by the latest military technology and dabbled in everything from dentistry to gunpowder making, whilst seeing off the English in several Border skirmishes where his reckless personal bravery was noted. But at the turn of the 16th century he was still unmarried, though he had seven illegitimate children, an aspect of their rivalry in which he and his son, James V, who had at least nine illegitimate offspring, beat the Tudors conclusively.

The search for a suitable match eventually led to Margaret Tudor, Henry VII’s elder daughter, who came north as a thirteen-year-old bride in 1502. Her substantial dowry and the prospect that only Margaret’s brother, the future Henry VIII, stood between her and the English throne, were attractions enough. The couple kept a glittering court, encouraging a flowering of Scottish literature and the arts, but none of their children survived the williness of the English earl of Surrey, the opposing commander, led to the slaughter of the Scottish forces, destroying a generation in one afternoon. James IV himself fell in the fighting, leaving his country in deep shock. But the English could not follow up their victory and Scotland survived. The minority of James V was long and difficult, as various factions vied for supremacy.

His mother, remarried to Archibald Douglas, earl of Angus, struggled not just with her husband’s opponents, but also with her own brother, whose astonishing lack of support for his sister bears witness to a Tudor sibling rivalry that is seldom noted. As a teenager, James V was essentially held hostage by his stepfather and never lost his hatred of the Douglases thereafter. In 1528, he freed himself from their control and became a competent ruler in his own right. He was cultured, undertook extensive building works on his palaces, and married the French Princess Madeleine, a notable diplomatic coup. When Madeleine died he married another French noblewoman, Mary of Guise. She bore him two sons who perished young and, six days before his own death, a daughter, Mary.

All his life, James had evaded the clutches of his uncle, Henry VIII, and ignored his advice. When James did not turn up for a meeting at York in 1541, his uncle was infuriated. Henry’s forces invaded Scotland in 1542, inflicting a resounding defeat on the Scots at Solway Moss.

James died shortly afterwards, probably from cholera contracted while on campaign.

**French connection**
But, as after Flodden, the English could not capitalise on Scotland’s woes. Henry VIII hoped to marry Mary to his son, Edward, but the Scots could not stomach such a match and Mary of Guise sent her daughter to France in 1548, as the prospective bride of the French dauphin. There, this intelligent and charming child was brought up as a future queen consort, not as the Scottish queen regnant she already was. Her return in 1561, after her young husband’s death, saw her ride the whirlwinds of Scottish politics with considerable aplomb for four years, until her marriage to her cousin, Lord Darnley, set in train a series of events which caused a progressive loss of control of her country.

Still, there is much that remains unexplained about Mary’s downfall. The decision to flee to England after her supporters were defeated outside Glasgow seems to have been taken in panic. Fearful for her life in Scotland, she would eventually lose it in England, giving rise to the legend of the doomed, romantic queen, the most famous victim of the rivalry between the Stewarts and the Tudors.

The 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act: whys and wherefores

In the first of a two-part series on midwives in Scotland, Dr Lindsay Reid explains how the ancient practice of midwifery was passed down through the generations, until attempts to formalise the training led to the Midwives (Scotland) Act, which celebrated its centenary in 2015.

The Centenary of the 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act falls on 23 December, 2015. The 1915 Act allowed for statutory regulation, certification, registration, education and organisation of midwifery in Scotland and what follows discusses how the Midwives Act in Scotland came about and the reasons why the Act was passed thirteen years later than the equivalent Act for midwives in England and Wales.

The Background
The unique art and craft of the midwife combine to form what has been an enduring profession. As long as women have given birth, they have needed someone to tend, support, help at the birthing, and care for them and their babies afterwards. There have been midwives in Scotland for centuries, using instinct, ancient learnings, customs, folklore and habits, but ‘unqualified’ as understood today. It was not until the 20th century that midwives achieved statutory regulation and certification. Before regulation, uncertified midwives, or ‘howdies’ as they were commonly known, learned the craft of midwifery by observing other howdies or local general practitioners (GPs), at work before practising on their own. Other would-be midwives obtained a midwifery qualification from a maternity hospital. Although more formal, this was still not State-

There is agreement that midwives’ status suffered in the 18th and 19th centuries because of their lack of formal training, regulation, and associated lack of professional solidarity.

Ancient Roman relief carving of a midwife
by word of mouth, by stepping into the shoes of their predecessors, or on a GP’s recommendation.

Chrissie Sandison from Shetland recalled:

I had a grand-aunt (Meggie) who was the age I am now (80) when I was a teenager. She was born in 1858. She had had no children of her own, never was married, a peerie body who was in attendance at many a birth. I asked her how it was she had taken up to be a howdie for she had had no proper training. Apparently, her mother, Hannah, had been a howdie and when she began to get old she began taking Meggie along too (...) There were big families in those days – that would have been from about 1880 onwards. She was in attendance at the birth of one of my nephews in 1926.

The term 'midwife' is very old and is commonly understood to mean the ‘with-woman’. That is, the woman who is with a woman in childbirth. However, midwives in Scotland have been known by other names. The aforementioned ‘Howdie’, for example, was understood across Scotland with variations depending on the area, like ‘howdie-wife’, or, sometimes, ‘howdie-wife’. Doddie Davidson, an Aberdeenshire howdie in the 1930s and 1940s, said: ‘There wis nae midwife. They ca’ed ye the howdie. Fan ye arrived they said, ‘Are you the howdie?’ Elsewhere were other terms, like ‘skillful’, or ‘skilful-woman’, ‘handy-woman’, ‘neighbour woman’, ‘helping woman’. Gaelic words were used where appropriate: ‘bean-glhuine’ or ‘knee woman’ on St Kilda and, elsewhere in the Highlands, ‘bean chuideachaidh’ meaning ‘aid woman’. Occasionally the howdie was called ‘Mam’. Mima Sutherland, a Shetland midwife during the mid-20th century, said, ‘My grannie was a howdie. She was called Mam Willa.’

Another Shetland howdie, Betty Balfour, was known in her latter years as ‘Aald Mam o Houbanster’. Her skills were well-known – people consulted her from far and wide. The story goes that once, Jeemie, her blacksmith fisherman husband, rowed her from Houbanster to the island of Muckle Röe, to a labouring woman. Eventually Betty could see that prolonged labour was putting the lives of both mother and baby in danger. She consulted Jeemie who used his blacksmithing expertise to create forceps. With these she saved both mother and baby and was apparently the first in the area to deliver by forceps. She died aged 86 in 1918.

Yet, howdies were not all so able. They were accused of being too ignorant to recognise the signs of danger, too late in seeking medical assistance and too impatient. But not all historians agree. Irvine Loudon acknowledges the ability of uncertified midwives in the late 19th century and, while Hilary Marland acknowledges great variation in midwives’ ability, she discounts the ‘ignorant midwife’ theory in Early Modern Europe.
Howdies were an important part of the birthing scene in Scotland up to and sometimes after the 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act when they practised outside the law. Nevertheless, they are remembered with affection and for the caring they brought to the work they did.

**Early attempts to formalise midwifery training in Scotland**

There is agreement that midwives’ status suffered in the 18th and 19th centuries because of their lack of formal training, regulation, and associated lack of professional solidarity. Also, they lacked clout due to their sex. They had little hope alongside the medical practitioners involved in the speedy rise of the male medical profession.

From the 18th century midwives’ lack of formal training and regulation became issues which attracted attention. In Scotland, where male medical practitioners underwent a university course that included medicine, surgery and midwifery, medical men, called originally to birthing-rooms to help in emergency situations, became a common presence even at some normal births from the mid-18th century. This dominance further eroded midwives’ practice. Simultaneously the introduction of formal training schools for midwives and an attempt to control their activities arrived. The first training through lectures for midwives were blamed on midwives. Professor of Midwifery. The Council appointed Joseph Gibson as Professor of Midwifery. The Council also advertised the lectures in the Aberdeen Journal of 9 January, 1759 and offered to help financially: those ‘who may not be able to afford the necessary Expence (sic) of their Education this Way’.

The Dundee Weekly Advertiser of 16 January, 1801 advertised:

**MIDWIFERY**

SEVERAL WOMEN having applied to Mr Grant, Surgeon in DUNDEE, for instructions in the above art, and it being inconvenient to his private practice to give the attention necessary to instruct them separately; he takes this method of acquainting them and the public, that he intends to OPEN a CLASS sometime in the month of January, 1801, for that purpose — Of the particular time and scene, information may be obtained at his house in St Andrews Street, Dundee.

However, there was neither uniformity nor regulation of midwifery training. Apart from the Glasgow regulatory attempt, any woman could practise midwifery, and howdies were regularly in attendance at births, especially among less well-off women. Most babies were born at home; particularly in rural Scotland, trained midwives were seldom available. At the end of the 19th century, maternal and infant mortality rates remained high. This brought maternal and child health, along with a falling birth rate and fear of population decline, into the political arena.

**Towards a Midwives Act for England and Wales**

To put the Midwives (Scotland) Act in context, it is necessary to include in the discussion the 1902 Midwives Act for midwives in England and Wales: much of the early discussion surrounded midwifery practice in the UK as a whole.

In the second half of the 19th century, occupational boundaries between midwifery and medicine continued to be contested throughout the UK. In the late 1870s, members of the London Obstetrical Society proposed a Midwives Bill that would put midwives completely under obstetricians’ control and seriously restrict the formers’ practice. Members of the women’s movement opposed this legislation on the grounds that it placed restrictions on women’s work. In an effort to raise the status of the midwife by recruiting educated women and by State registration, influential women including Louisa Hubbard (1836-1906) and three midwives including Zepherina Veitch (1836-94), formed the Matrons’ Aid Society, later known as the Midwives’ Institute, the forerunner of the College of Midwives. To further their aims and obtain obstetricians’ approval and reciprocal co-operation, they
proposed to work ‘in harmony’ with the medical profession. This price put them into a non-competitive role: midwives would not be allowed to give direct care to women whose labour was not ‘normal’. It would suit obstetricians to have co-operative control through licensing of midwives. A lesser practitioner would relieve them of unproductive, time-consuming work. This was also a way of bypassing the GP.

Many GPs therefore opposed legislation for the registration of midwives and resisted midwives’ registration for many years because to do so would increase competition for work. However, this perceived threat could be ruled out because with more education, midwives would recognise the abnormal and call medical aid.

Opposition to registration in the 1890s also came from some Manchester midwives. They saw this development, and the projected plans of governance mainly by medical men, as a removal of much of their autonomy.

In addition, some members of the British Nurses’ Association (BNA) while campaigning for nursing registration, opposed midwives’ registration. In an attempt to strengthen the nurses’ cause, Elgin-born Mrs Ethel Bedford Fenwick (1856-1947), leader of the BNA and Matron of St Bartholomew’s Hospital, London, suggested a midwife-nurse alliance. However, members of the Midwives’ Institute, asserting the independent-practitioner status of midwives, declared that they required ‘separate and prior consideration’: they declined Mrs Bedford Fenwick’s invitation. From that point, she and her followers campaigned against registration of midwives. It did not help when the voice of nursing, the Nursing Record, referred to midwives as ‘obsolete’, ‘an anachronism’, and an ‘historical curiosity’.

After twenty years of effort, the first Midwives Act was passed in 1902 for midwives in England and Wales. This was a major landmark in the professionalisation of midwifery and for the mothers and infants they cared for. Nevertheless, this legislation restricted midwives’ practice through medical dominance of the Central Midwives Board for England and Wales (CMBE&W) and by imposing Rules and allowing policies which promoted the idea that doctors should be the lead professionals in all areas of childbearing.

**Midwifery in Scotland after 1902**

Prior to 1902, the maternity hospitals of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee independently granted certificates to the midwives that they trained. In 1903, the medical staffs of these maternity hospitals set up a Scottish Examining Board for Obstetric Nurses and held quarterly oral and written examinations for pupil midwives. This attempt by the medical profession to regulate midwifery in Scotland and to keep midwives in Scotland as far as possible in line with those in England was reasonably successful. The newly formed CMBE&W formally recognised some Scottish maternity hospitals as training institutions, and some Scottish midwives went to England to sit its new examination. However, the CMBE&W had no jurisdiction over their practice in Scotland. Despite these initiatives, most midwives in Scotland were without formal registration for many years because of their autonomy.

However, the 2,179 women who were recorded as sick nurses in 1881 had increased to 10,316 by 1911. While nurses were nearly five times as numerous in 1911 as in 1881, midwives were little more than half as numerous in 1881 as in 1881.

It is likely that the Census underestimates the number of midwives practising in Scotland before the 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act. When midwives enrolled following the Act, over 2,000 signed up within the first year. Firstly, it is possible that uncertified midwives used terms like ‘howdie’ or ‘neighbour-woman’, which were either not recorded on the census form or were categorised differently by the Registrar General’s office. Secondly, in the 1911 Census, the 313 women who described themselves as ‘midwife’ were unmarried or widowed. Uncertified midwives or howdies probably included married women who practised midwifery on an informal basis without being recorded on the census return. The Central Midwives Board for Scotland (CMBS) Roll from 1916 did not contain information about marital status; however, the CMBS required marriage certificates from midwives seeking enrolment, suggesting that some midwives were married.

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in the home which influenced women’s participation in paid work. Also, as the 1911 Census Report suggests, the fall in the number of midwives and rise in the number of nurses might be partly accounted for by midwives describing themselves as nurses.

One woman who described herself as a midwife and who appears in the 1901 census as such, was Elizabeth Sanderson, aged 44, of Young’s Land, Thorniewood in the Ward of Uddingston, Parish of Bothwell. Elizabeth Rae was born in the Parish of Govan in 1854, married James Sanderson on 16 February, 1872 and had six children (one boy and five girls) between 1873 and 1891. James, a roadsman in a collieme, was ‘killed’ (in August 1891) by being crushed by a fall of stone in No 2 Pit, Nackerty, in the Parish of Bothwell, (duration of illness) 14 hours.

Elizabeth, on poor relief with ‘young children dependent’, continued to live in damp, straitened circumstances in New Rows, Nackerton (or Nackerty; also called Aitkenhead) before moving to Thorniewood. In 1901, this dwelling accommodated six people in two rooms.

It is likely that, like many widows, Elizabeth Sanderson turned to midwifery as a way of earning a living. In 1901, there were still two of her own children at home along with her adult nephew, William, a coal miner, his wife Florence and their infant son Joseph. Elizabeth probably had no formal training. We do not know many details of how hard she had to work as a midwife, but her daughter Elizabeth Hutchison remembered her mother assisting at confinements and her dedication:

> From the confinements, she would bring home sheets for the laundering which she did at night. (I remember) as a child often joining (my) mother, at her request, in the wash-house to keep her company while she worked there (…) It was always cold in the wash-house (…) she was asthmatic and (I believe that) it was the cold, damp conditions of this work that contributed to her death at a relatively early age.

Elizabeth Sanderson died in Thorniewood at the age of 52 on 2 March, 1907 of acute broncho-pneumonia after five days’ illness.

Whatever the nomenclature, and whether they were census-cited or not, the majority of midwives practising in Scotland post-1902 lacked formal training and helped mothers give birth at home. In their practice, they could call for medical aid if they had problems. In Unst, Shetland, in 1917, for instance, there were four ‘very capable women’ who attended most of the confinements, and called in the doctor when they thought the labour was ‘unduly prolonged’. The procedure of calling for medical aid when a mother’s labour went beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ also became an important rule for certified midwives and was based on the terms of the 1915 Act.

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Background to the Midwives (Scotland) Act

Despite the cross-parliamentary debates prior to the 1902 Midwives Act for England and Wales, the mid-1890s proposals for Midwives Registration Bills were not intended to apply to Scotland. One reason for this given in the House of Commons was the different administrative structure in Scotland: too many districts the (medical) practitioner had ‘to apply to Scotland. Also, ‘a joint Bill would have been difficult because of differences in the legal systems’. This came from the Rt Hon Eugene Wason MP (Clackmannan and Kinross) who also explained to the House that the situation at the time in Scotland was satisfactory as ‘these things are managed better in Scotland’.

Wason’s argument reflected the view of a powerful section of the Scottish medical profession, the GPs and the consultant obstetricians. ‘false position of being considered duly competent to attend labour cases on their own responsibility’. In short, while the uncertified midwife or howdie would be there for a time, ‘he would leave midwives to die a natural death’. Another member, Sir William Turner, said that ‘it seemed as if the midwife in Scotland was rather an accident. She did not seem to be required, but undoubtedly she was required in England.’ But a dissenting voice argued that:

(certified) midwives were absolutely essential in Scotland. In large colliery districts and large manufacturing districts the (medical) practitioner had not time to do the work, and it was very important that women expecting to have children should be properly attended to.

The summing up concluded that there was no great need for the registration of midwives in Scotland.
However, Dr Freeland Barbour advised his colleagues to watch the progress of the Midwives Bill for England and Wales very closely as ‘if anything was passed for England it would sooner or later cross the border’.

With all this opposition it might be surprising that midwifery legislation in Scotland was implemented at all. However, the EOS had a challenger. The influential views of another section of the Scottish medical profession, the Medical Officers of Health (MOH), argued that ‘these things were not done better in Scotland’. They opposed the EOS and campaigned in the early 20th century for legislation for the training, registration and regulation of midwives in Scotland. The heart of their case was that infant and maternal mortality rates in Scotland, and particularly in Glasgow, were very high. Key figures in this campaign were Dr A K Chalmers, MOH for Glasgow and Dr Campbell Munro, MOH for Renfrewshire, whose work along with other MOHs in Scotland formed the basis of the first Scottish Midwives Bill.

In 1906, Chalmers, working on infection surrounding childbirth and investigating causes of infant deaths, began keeping a record of who attended births in Glasgow. The 1907 Notification of Births Act requiring notification of births to the MOH within 36 hours of birth, reinforced this practice. It revealed the absence of a systematic record of the qualifications of midwives and that a ‘considerable proportion’ was without qualifications.

At the same time, there was a growing acknowledgement of the poor physical stature of children of Britain. This was highlighted by the rejection of army recruits for the Boer War. This stimulated interest in the importance of maternal and infant welfare. In the thick of this was Chalmers, who in 1908 met with Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and pressed for a Scottish Midwives Act on the grounds that women who were attended by untrained midwives in Glasgow had a very high rate of puerperal fever. Investigations in 1913 revealed similar results. Furthermore, Chalmers stated that there were many more cases of mothers with puerperal fever where the mother had been attended by a midwife rather than a doctor. He reasoned that the higher rate was beyond the midwife’s control. It was not necessarily that the midwives were somehow deficient in knowledge or practice. As midwives charged less than doctors for their services, the women the midwives attended were usually poorer, less well-nourished and less able to withstand infection than the clients of doctors. Nevertheless, Chalmers indicated a correlation between the number of untrained midwives and the number of mothers suffering from puerperal fever and he reflected the anxiety of others when he wrote:

"Many of those (midwives and howdies) who were interviewed, (in Cowcaddens in 1906) carried whatever equipment they might require, such as syringes and catheters and such disinfectants as they deemed necessary, in the pocket of their dress, and many who had a bag, misused some of the material they carried in them (…)"
As midwives charged less than doctors for their services, the women the midwives attended were usually poorer, less well-nourished and less able to withstand infection than the clients of doctors.

While removing some of the blame for maternal mortality from the shoulders of midwives, he implied that because of the high maternal mortality rate (MMR), midwives’ practice required regulation. This reflected the claims of doctors to the House of Commons Select Committee on Midwifery Registration 1891-93 who also blamed untrained midwives for high mortality rates.

Although persuasive at the time, Chalmers data and views are contrary to other contemporary and recent studies which show that maternal mortality figures in Britain for the late 19th and early 20th centuries were, on average, better for those mothers who were delivered by midwives than by doctors.

A second major reason why legislation was enacted for midwives in Scotland was that the welfare legislation of the early 20th century provided an administrative basis said to be lacking in Scotland during the debate leading to the 1902 Midwives Act. The Midwives (Scotland) Act became part of the Schemes of Maternity and Child Welfare. The Schemes emerged in Scotland in the early 20th century and resulted in other related acts which laid an administrative basis for the Midwives Act.

The 1915 Notification of Births (Extension) Act and its timing as legislation to meet a national emergency arising out of the war conditions was used in an appeal for a Midwives (Scotland) Act. The Notification of Births Act gave wide powers to Local Authorities (LA) in Scotland through the Local Government Board for Scotland. These included attending to the health of pregnant and nursing mothers, and of children less than five years of age. The powers of Scottish LAs, thus extended, were put to even greater use with the passing of the Midwives (Scotland) Act in 1915 and in the same breadth, with LA powers in place, any objection to a Midwives Act for Scotland was invalid.

Thus, the increasing influence of the MOHs and the welfare legislation of the first decade of the 20th century overcame the initial opposition of GPs and consultants.

There was another over-riding reason for the Act’s eventual speedy passage through Parliament in the later months of 1915. This was that World War I was instrumental in sending many doctors from Scotland to the front leaving mothers to be looked after by midwives, many of whom were unqualified and unsupervised.

Dr Lindsay Reid is a midwife historian and writer. She acknowledges with thanks the help given in the research for these articles by Professors Marguerite Dupree and Malcolm Nicolson, University of Glasgow, and Professor Edith Hillan, University of Toronto.

**Further Reading**

- Death in Childbirth, I Loudon (Oxford, 1992)
- Midwifery in Scotland: A History, L Reid (Erskine, 2011)
- Scottish Midwives: twentieth century voices, L Reid (East Linton, 2000)
The 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act: Moving towards legislation for midwives in Scotland

Part Two

In part II of her study of the 1915 Midwives Act, Lindsay Reid demonstrates how the outbreak of World War I caused the need for qualified midwives to become an urgent one, as many doctors were called up for military service, leaving a void in maternity care.

For midwifery in Scotland to progress, statutory legislation was necessary. As shown in the first part of this series (vol 15.6) this was provided in England and Wales by the 1902 Midwives Act which epitomised a major legislative milestone in the professionalisation of midwifery. This Act included neither Scotland nor Ireland. It was to be another thirteen years before the Midwives (Scotland) Act was passed in 1915. This second article explores why the Scottish Act was enacted when it was, and the early after effects.

The run-up to the Act

The first Midwives (Scotland) Bills were proposed before the outbreak of World War I. By this time opinion had shifted in Scotland to unanimous support: the Act might have been passed sooner had war not broken out. Nevertheless, the war put the Act’s passage beyond doubt when its provisions were portrayed as part of the war effort.

The first reading of a Midwives (Scotland) Bill took place in the House of Commons on 23 April, 1912. Hansard’s record states that its purpose was ‘to secure the better training of Midwives in Scotland, and to regulate their practice.’ It was drafted as a consequence of the efforts of the ‘infant mortality movement’ by the Society of Medical Officers of Health (MOH), and in particular Dr Campbell Munro, MOH for Renfrewshire, but it failed to pass into law.

The next Bill was put forward in April 1914. The Scottish Examining Board for Midwives, set up in 1903 by the hospitals in the four Scottish cities, ceased to function in 1914 because of lack of Government support. Certificates given to midwives training through the hospitals were the only protection against the work of the untrained midwives or howdies, many of whom were employed by families obtaining maternity benefit under the National Insurance Act of 1911. In February 1914, recognising the need for action, representatives from the hospitals of the four cities prepared for a privately sponsored bill promoting legislation for midwifery in Scotland. The result was the presentation of an amended Midwives (Scotland) Bill to the House of Lords on 1 April, 1914. Lord Balfour of Burleigh, who had been ‘in charge’ of the 1902 Midwives Bill for England, hinted why the Act was not passed in Scotland at the same time:

A fresco now kept in the Dark Church, Cappadocia, of the midwife Salome bathing the infant Jesus. Many early Christian representations of the Nativity included Salome.
I became aware that opinion was not sufficiently ripe in Scotland to make it expedient at that time to extend similar proposals to the country north of the Tweed. I need not go into the reasons for it. There are certain differences of practice, and opinion was not in favour of the change at that time.

However, opinions had now changed. Lord Balfour went on to emphasise the changes in attitudes in Scotland towards midwifery legislation and how, in 1914, opinion in favour of a Bill was ‘practically unanimous’. This included opinions from the Committee of the British Medical Association (BMA) for Scotland, the Local Government Board for Scotland (LGBS), the Medical Service Committee for the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the MOHs of many large towns, the medical staff of the ‘four great centres of medical education – Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Dundee’, and nurses at an ‘important nursing conference in Glasgow’ held the previous month. There is no mention of any opinion from midwives. However, because of the frequent use at the time of the term ‘nurse’ for ‘midwife’ it is possible that some of these nurses were midwives.

This Bill was held up for a long time. It might have become law in 1914 if war had not broken out, diverting Parliamentary attention. It was therefore ‘dropped in the House of Commons mainly for want of time at the end of a busy session’. There were also Parliamentary rules about measures Parliament could address during wartime. There was a skirmish in the Commons over a Scottish Bill taking precedence over English measures especially during wartime, with the argument that the Midwives (Scotland) Bill was not directly to do with the war. However, some MPs saw it as an emergency measure, especially as the Minister of Munitions approved. The Lord President of the Council, the marquis of Crewe, defended the Bill’s passage during wartime:

_The Bill was urgent and a war measure due to the mortality of war; there was a current awareness to preserve new life; and, war was instrumental in many doctors being called up for military service. Their absence created a void in maternity care which was rapidly being filled by midwives, many of whom were unqualified and uncertificated._

According to the obstetrician Sir John Halliday Croom, the action of influential medical personnel was the origin of the 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act. The Memorial anent a Midwives Bill for Scotland, sent to the Secretary for Scotland and the Lord President of the Privy Council on 19 August, 1915, carried 30 influential signatures. These included medical practitioners, obstetricians, MOHs, lecturers and examiners from Scottish universities and other senior university staff. The urgency of the need for a Midwives Bill for Scotland was made clear at its second reading in the Commons on 25 November, 1915, by Thomas McKinnon Wood (1855-1927), Secretary for Scotland. He had been inundated by approaches from those making a case for a Midwives Act for Scotland, particularly at this time of war:

_As the House is aware, the medical profession has been sadly depleted. A great many doctors have gone to the front, leaving rural districts inadequately provided with medical practitioners; so that competent midwives are absolutely necessary throughout Scotland... The Scottish midwife is not able to obtain a formal qualification except in England. When she returns to Scotland she is not under the same control as the English midwife is. Altogether, I think, the case for treating this as a matter of urgency is virtually made out on very high authority indeed._

_Mary Bryce Smellie Henderson, howdie. She was one of the first midwives to be enrolled after the 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act._
The Midwives (Scotland) Bill received the Royal Assent on 23 December, 1915 and came into operation on 1 January, 1916. However, the speedy enactment of the Bill was due primarily to the wartime shortage of doctors in Scotland and not because of the need to recognise the importance of the profession of midwifery and its place in the health care of the people of Scotland. The Bill’s passage through the Houses of Parliament was helped by many of its clauses being similar to those in the Midwives Act for England and Wales, and as Eugene Wason MP, who had previously argued against midwifery legislation in Scotland, said, ‘that measure has, I believe worked exceedingly well.’

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Rules pertaining to suspension or removal of names from the roll of midwives who offended or who broke Rules of practice. Rules about local supervision of midwives; annual reports and definitions, and, it seemed, everything else that a midwife may or may not do.

As in England and Wales, a Central Midwives Board (CMBS) was set up in Scotland as an examining and supervisory body and to establish a Roll of midwives. Its duties included the regulation of the issue of certificates, conditions of admission to the Roll of midwives, the course of training in midwifery, and conduct of examinations and remuneration of examiners. Also, like the CMBE&W, the CMBS initially recognised three categories of midwife:

- Those who were enrolled ‘by virtue of bona fide practice’ who were nicknamed the ‘bona fide’;
- The ‘certificated midwives’ who had obtained a certificate from one of a variety of institutions... and were enrolled ‘by virtue of prior certification’;
- And... those who had taken and passed the CMBS examination.

The Provisions of the Midwives (Scotland) Act 1915

The Provisions of the Midwives (Scotland) Act (known as ‘the Act’) were similar to those of the Midwives Act 1902, with a few specific differences. Its 29 sections lay down rules regarding:

- Certification of midwives and provision for existing midwives; the Constitution of the Central Midwives Board for Scotland, its future revision, and duties and powers of the Board;
- Provisions of the Midwives (Scotland) Act 1915

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Midwives Act centenary

The ‘bona fide’ had to have been in practice (as uncertified midwives or howdies) for a minimum of a year before the passing of the Act and had to be of ‘good character’. Although the ‘bona fides’ could be registered without examination, one third of the candidates presenting themselves for the first CMBS examination were already on the new CMBS roll of midwives in Scotland as bona fide midwives and had voluntarily come forward for examination.

One of the first bona fides to register was Mary Bryce Smellie Henderson. She was one of the first midwives in Scotland to be certified as a midwife after the implementation of the Act. She lived and worked as a midwife in Larkhall, Lanarkshire, about twenty miles from Glasgow city centre. Her grand-daughter, Agnes Young, wrote:

She worked ...on many cases, living with her patient for some three weeks at a time and bringing home the accouchement linen to be washed. She had six children of her own, five surviving to adulthood. Born in 1854, she married on 29 July 1880... and died in 1938.

Although bringing home the accouchement linen to be washed seems over and above the call of duty, the practice of staying with the mothers for a few weeks was common among howdies. Two howdies whom I interviewed made a practice of booking mothers for a certain number of weeks. Annie Kerr, a howdie in the Borders in the 1940s, said:

I went a wee while before the baby wis born. Not as much as a couple o weeks. I was there before, I know that. I wis wi them and did everything that wis to be done, ye knew, to give her a rest. That workit in... I took care of the baby afterwards until she wis fit. I wad mibb be there a fortnight.

Doddie Davidson, howdie, Aberdeenshire, 1930s and 1940s, said:

I went an lived in the hoose afore the bairns were born. The babies delivered themselves. There wis naebiddy there bit me. Sometimes, if there wis a neighbour handy she wad ha come in, bit oten ye see, in a fairm it’s usually on its own an it wis mainly cotter hooses or fairms... I aye kent me in time afore... Usually they were needin some help especially fan there
Howdies were evident in Scotland until at least the 1950s. Their early importance and contribution to midwifery history in Scotland is recognised and should be remembered

Most certified midwives did not ‘live-in’ the mother’s home. However, exceptions existed particularly in rural areas. For instance, Mima Sutherland, on Raasay in the 1930s, described the difficulties of an island midwife when she said:

I was called to Fladda [from Raasay] on a terrible midsummer’s day... The garage-man put me the nine miles then I had to start walking... up and down hills... about five miles to the shore... you could see the banks on the opposite side. If the tide was in, the boatman came across for me but if it was out I walked across. On that day, the baby had been born before I arrived and it was just wrapped up and I did the rest. I had to stay three days that time – stayed in the same room as the patient. The beds had lovely fresh chaff.

Who may act as a midwife?

For decades after the Act, there was argument and discussion about ‘who may act as a midwife’. This debate particularly surrounded the howdies. Initially, after a year’s grace, no woman could call herself, or even imply that she was a midwife without being certified under the Act. Also, after 1 January, 1922, the culmination of another five years’ period of grace, the Act stated that no woman in Scotland ‘shall habitually and for gain attend women in childbirth otherwise than under the direction of a registered medical practitioner unless she be certified under this Act.’ This breathing space was seen as a reasonable time for the howdies to see about applying for enrolment. Many, like Mary Henderson, did.

The use of the term, ‘habitually and for gain’ which appeared in both Midwives Acts was controversial. It allowed uncertified women (howdies) to practise midwifery as long as it could be seen that they were not doing it ‘habitually and for gain’.

This, and the phrase ‘otherwise than under the direction of a registered medical practitioner’, left loopholes in the law for exploitation by some uncertified midwives and some medical practitioners. However, Sir John Halliday Croom, the CMBS’s first Chairman, said:

[I] regret that the qualifying words ‘habitually and for gain’ which was a distinct flaw in the English Act, is perpetuated in the Scottish one, but we have good reason to believe that had the abolition of these words been insisted upon the Act would not have been passed.

Croom did not explain his reasoning. MPs may have felt that to omit ‘habitually and for gain’ in 1915 would have made too great a difference between the two Acts.

‘Covering’ of howdies by medical practitioners

After the passing of the Act, and the time allowed for enrolment, unless it was an emergency, howdies could only continue to practise legally under the direct supervision of a medical practitioner.

The CMBS did its best to stop the practice of howdies. Its statutory role in the regulation of midwifery in Scotland was to a certain extent undermined by the howdies and, sometimes, by working with them, members of the medical profession. This continued for many years after the authorised time ended in 1922.

The CMBE&W had a similar problem after the 1902 Midwives Act. Uncertified women practised midwifery with the nominal co-operation of qualified medical practitioners who professed to give them medical supervision. This was known as ‘covering’ of bona fide midwives by medical practitioners. Without direct medical supervision, it was unacceptable, illegal and could result in the removal of a medical practitioner’s name from the General Medical Council (GMC) Register. Also, the certified midwife’s livelihood was threatened by this practice, while the medical practitioner and the howdie, could prosper.

LAs acted as Local Supervising Authorities (LSA) to midwives. In December 1921, the CMBS reminded LAs and GPs of the law, and requested MOHs to notify Procurators Fiscal of any cases of women practising midwifery without certification in their areas. So, this was not only a further warning to medical practitioners about covering howdies, the Board also asked doctors to inform against them and this began in 1922. The first documented case of someone using the ‘cover’ of a doctor was in 1923. Here a howdie was prosecuted in Kilmarnock by the Procurator Fiscal for practising without enrolment, ‘covered’ by a medical practitioner certifying for maternity benefit under the Insurance Act. She was fined £5 or 21 days imprisonment. In this instance, it was only the midwife who was punished. However, even with threats of prosecution, the practice of the uncertified midwife, or howdie, continued in Scotland until the 1950s.

Some GP-uncertified midwife teams worked legally with the GP giving direct supervision. For instance, a grand-daughter wrote:

I was delivered [in 1934] by my grandmother – Johnann Roberton who was the uncertificated midwife for...
the King Street area [Aberdeen]. She was employed by a Dr Coutts who specialised in confinements and child care. He ran the main surgery in King Street and she was called out at all hours to confinements in houses. She had her own special bag… When a birth happened unexpectedly, Dr Coutts would collect her in his little car, but otherwise she had to walk to all the other call-outs.

In some rural areas there was a shortage of midwives. For instance, Doddie Davidson, an Aberdeenshire howdie in the 1940s, said: ‘There wis nae midwife. They ca’ed ye the howdie. Fan ye arrived they said, ‘Are you the howdie?’

Sometimes GPs appeared to prefer working with howdies than with certified midwives, as Chrissie Sandison, historian, of Shetland illustrated:

The doctor that I remember [in the 1920s]…[he] was a good doctor and the women liked him but he would never fetch the midwife [certified midwife] until she was required. This was my aunt’s second baby. She said he sat down the stairs reading a book and he never went upstairs until he knew that the midwife had gone to the lavatory. This was a good bit from the house. It was a wee house across a burn, there was no bucket just a seat across a burn and I don’t know about a toilet roll — likely it was a bit of newspaper and no buckets to empty… When she had to go, he went up to see the mother and when she came back he’d go downstairs again. When she had her next baby… in 1929, she employed another woman… who wasn’t a certified midwife. Then the doctor was quite happy. He didn’t like working with the trained midwife… he maybe thought she knew as much as he did.

The continuing presence of the howdies caused problems for the certified midwives as another midwife told me:

I came [here] from the ‘Simpson’ where everything was… ahead of its time… At that time there were at least five or six… howdies. I found it extremely difficult because… these other people were depending on it for a livelihood… Of course the people here knew them. The mothers booked these howdies… and the doctor might or might not be involved.

Another midwife described a similar situation where the howdie made a habit of being present for the birth instead of the midwife:

In that area I was in, in Central Scotland [in the 1940s], there was a howdie… she was very loath to give up. You see she was in a… country area of town, and she was kind and she was the one who would deliver the babies. Some of [the certified midwives] had battles with her. I think she would say [to the mother], ‘Oh you’ve time enough to send for the midwife,’ and then she would be able to get the baby.

One midwife agreed that the howdie learned skills from the doctor with whom she worked. ‘The doctor might… take her with him, if he needed somebody. Therefore she would get a bit of experience.’ But then mothers sometimes just had the howdie. ‘If they [the mothers] needed the doctor… you had to hope that the howdie knew enough to know when to get him.’ She was also concerned that the howdies took on mothers whom she felt should have gone to hospital to have their babies:
To have eight and nine children wasn’t unusual at one time and if you had that howdie for your first baby and everything was all right, you would go on and have another and so… [this howdie] would have delivered eight and nine of the same family… not always with the doctor and might not spot a problem in time.

Local GPs, especially in rural areas, could be influential in obtaining work for howdies. Doddie Davidson, in early 1940s Aberdeenshire, had never seen a baby born before. She was eighteen and attending her first birth. The woman was in labour and her husband had gone to fetch the doctor in the snow. She recalled a hair-raising birth:

... An I could see there wis two cords on its neck. The heid wis oot, an the bairn jist didna look richt. It wis groovin bluer… So I pushed the heidle back a wee bittie and I got one finger in below the cord and I got it oover. The second bit o the cord wis easy. It wis the first ye see. An eventually, the baby wis born, nae doctor, nae hubby, naebiddy….

Later, when the doctor came:

I telt him. I wis fair shakkin, ye ken, wi fit I did. Ye ken, pushed the bairn back a bit and put ma finger in. So he commended me. He said, ‘Oh, at wis jist great.’ He says, ‘Oh I could dae wi you on the [district]’. I wis really worried about it… but A wis wi him a few times efter at.

This gives some indication of the deference ‘ordinary’ people accorded medical practitioners. It also demonstrates the GP’s ability to obtain work for howdies and how they worked together.

Annie Kerr, another howdie, made a similar comment: ‘Dr Welsh knew I likit these kind of jobs away oot of the road of everybody and no other body would go near them… I can min Dr Welsh gied me great jobs.’ However, GPs not only obtained work and recommendations for the howdies, they needed them. Ann Lamb indicated this when describing her mother in rural Banffshire. She said, ‘She was a bit of a midwife as well and the Doctor always told them, ‘Fetch Mrs. Lamb until I come.’ (from Tomintoul).

Howdies were evident in Scotland until at least the 1950s. Their early importance and contribution to midwifery history in Scotland is recognised and should be remembered.

As midwives charged less than doctors for their services, the women the midwives attended were usually poorer, less well-nourished and less able to withstand infection than the clients of doctors.

The work of the CMBS and LSA

The CMBS comprising twelve members was set up early in 1916. The CMBS had the power to frame Rules which were valid only after approval by the Privy Council and who had to take into consideration comments from the GMC.

To a certain extent, the CMBS benefited from seeing how the CMBE&W had fared over the previous thirteen years and, stimulated by this, the introduction of improvements within the Scottish Act. An important difference between the two CMBS was that the CMBE&W comprised just nine members; having twelve members on the CMBS made room for the statutory inclusion of two midwives as well as six medical practitioners and four lay members. Initially, the CMBE&W had no statutory midwife members, although midwives sat on the CMBE&W as representatives of other bodies. Other differences were financial. Scottish LAs were authorised to contribute financially to training of midwives (although for many years midwives in Scotland had to pay for
midwives, as long as they paid an appropriate enrolment fee, could practise in any of the UK countries. The 1915 Act, like the 1902 Act for England and Wales, placed much of the responsibility for supervising midwives and regularising midwifery with LAs. Under the Act, each LA became the Local Supervising Authority (LSA) over midwives. This title carried with it extensive powers and duties (as shown in the table below). The power of LSAs in Scotland was strengthened in 1915 by a clause in the 1915 Notification of Births (Extension) Act, and which heralded the evolution of the Maternity Services Schemes in Scotland. However, even with their wide supervisory powers, LAs were obliged to work under the rules of the CMBS. So, the Act was not only for regulation and training purposes. It was an administrative Act that placed an obligation on LAs to see that the work of midwives was maintained on high professional levels.

Thus, the 1915 Midwives (Scotland) Act, implemented speedily because of the war and a shortage of doctors, was also part of a move to benefit the health of mothers and babies through the provision of a practical, educational and administrative midwifery service in Scotland.

Conclusion
Before 1915, midwifery in Scotland was 'alegal' with no existing regulations or licensing requirements. Early attempts to formalise midwifery training in Scotland preceded the eventual statutory regulation of midwifery in Scotland in 1915, thirteen years after a similar Act for England and Wales. Scotland's unique 'Schemes of Maternity and Child Welfare in Scotland', and the removal of doctors to the Front during World War I, acted as significant levers for the Act's passing at this time. An important objective, only fulfilled four decades later, was to prevent unqualified, unsupervised midwives attending women in childbirth.

Powers and duties of the Local Supervising Authority

1. Supervision of midwives practising within their district in accordance with the Rules framed by the CMBS.

2. Investigation of charges against a midwife of malpractice, negligence or misconduct, conviction or unprofessional conduct.

3. The power to suspend a midwife to prevent the spread of infection.

4. Power of Entry' to premises where a midwife was known to be practising and also where a woman who was not a certified midwife might be practising in contravention of the Act.

5. An obligation to report these activities to the CMBS as they happened and also through the MOH, on an annual basis.

6. Receive and supply to the CMBS names of all midwives who had notified their intention to practise within the district.

7. Ensure that all midwives knew that they had to notify their intention to practise annually as well as the new rules about certification.

8. Keep a current copy of the Roll of midwives accessible for public inspection. This enabled the public, especially to begin with, to find out which midwives were certified.

The CMBS, as an examining and supervisory body, oversaw midwives who became legal practitioners of normal midwifery. At the start, after the Act, only two midwives representing this new professional group, were allowed to be on the CMBS: their own Board. Midwives were licensed by Statute to practise autonomously, and yet they were unable at the time to withstand the power of the historically strong medical profession in Scotland, members of which comprised the largest professional entity in the early CMBS. This medically dominated Board and the power of the medical profession was further strengthened by the Maternity Services Schemes in Scotland, LAs with LSAs and the MOHs. Together they held power when it came to organising maternity care in Scotland.

A century later the 'new professional group' is a very different entity. Comprising both women and men, midwives now work in partnership with other professional people. While normal birth has remained the same, midwives today can practise within different models and varying strands of the profession. They use their professionalism and expertise to work with women as partners to try to give them the birth of their choice. Rules and codes of practice remain, but alongside, there is a confidence and strength of purpose which have taken 100 tumultuous years to develop.

Dr Lindsay Reid is a midwife historian and writer and works from home. She acknowledges with thanks the help given in the research for these articles by Professors Marguerite Dupree and Malcolm Nicolson, University of Glasgow, and Professor Edith Hillan, University of Toronto.

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Women with a strong sense of their own worth

The Scottish Co-operative Women’s Guild 1918-1929
**The Scottish Co-operative Women’s Guild**

For a decade following World War I, the Scottish Co-operative Women’s Guild provided working-class women with a platform from which to become politically active and champion causes such as education, housing, and even international relations, writes Morag Gibson.

The Scottish Co-operative Women’s Guild (SCWG) was by far the largest, and arguably only, mass membership organisation of working class women in 20th century Scotland, and played an important part in providing its members with a bridge to wider political involvement. The first branch was formed in 1890 under the auspices of the Kinning Park Co-operative Society Educational Committee and other Co-operative Societies quickly followed suit. A Central Council was set up in 1892 and by 1928-29 the Guild had 362 branches throughout Scotland organised into eight Sections and 26,333 members.

Branches were in predominantly urban, industrial locations but covered most of Scotland excluding the Highlands and Islands outside Inverness. The enfranchisement of women over 30 in 1918 meant the majority of guildswomen gained the vote. An examination of the Guild’s Annual Reports and the minutes of their Central Council gives an insight into what was important to them and why, in the following decade.

The Co-operative movement itself had been founded to enable workers to buy goods of a reasonable quality at reasonable prices and have a share in the profits or ‘dividend’. By the 1920s the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society – established in 1868 – produced and sold a wide variety of goods. However, the co-operative movement also promoted a wider vision of a world – ‘Each for all and all for each’ - in which a better society would arise from the pursuit of co-operation rather than competition and international co-operation would result in world peace. This vision was at the heart of the Guild’s outlook. From an initial focus on sewing classes, cookery demonstrations, health lectures and mutual aid, the Guild became increasingly concerned about social issues.

Clockwise from top left: banners of Cowlaws Women’s Guild, Bishopbriggs branch; Cowlaws Women’s Guild, Possilpark branch; Anniesland Women’s Guild; Rentfrew Women’s Guild.

They had grown up in the 19th century and would often have been the first women in their families or social circles to have taken on a role in public life. Their fathers and husbands were skilled workers, but some had raised large families and known difficult family circumstances.

The Guild initially attracted the wives of better-off sections of the working class but clearly had a different membership from other, more middle class, women’s organisations such as the Women’s Citizenship Associations. The geographical and socio-economic spread of branches would tend to suggest that, as the Guild grew, its membership became more inclusively working class – ‘a large proportion of our members are drawn from the mining areas’ as one report put it in 1929. Although lower prices meant lower dividends.

The key office bearers on the Central Council of the Guild in the 1920s were the presidents: Mrs MacDonald 1918-1921; Mrs McLean 1921-1925; Mrs McNair 1925-1929, Mrs Hardstaff 1929-1933 and Miss Callen, General Secretary from 1918 until 1950, the post having become a full time paid position in 1922. Except Miss Callen, they were well into middle age before taking office.

The resources at the Guild’s disposal were limited. This is particularly evident in August 1927 when, against a background of branches not being able to meet their affiliation fees, the treasurer advised that ‘the funds were exhausted’ and additional grants from the Co-operative Union (£250) and UCBS (£25) were required. However, each member of the Central Council was allocated a series of branch and section meetings to attend each month along with any other committees they might be linked to. One suspects that when the various
economic freedom and to enhance their status as ‘home workers’.

Campaigning for peace
A major concern for the Guild in the years after World War I was making international links and pursuing international peace. The language used seems surprisingly radical. Mrs McDonald in her President’s Address to the Annual Meeting held on 17 May 1919 said:

Seven million men in the flower of their manhood sent into eternity! For what? To make the world better and happier, to solve our social and economic problems? No. There was an easier and better way, and the women who know the value of human life had a duty to perform to ensure that life would be more valued and protected ... and the duty before them was to extend these (Co- operative) principles to embrace international relations.

The ‘Mothers’ International’ was sung at the beginning of Guild meetings from 1926. There were English and Esperanto versions and the music was composed by Mr R. Stickle of Leith, the son of a Guild member.

Round the world a new song’s ringing,
Listen; women of all climes:
‘Tis the mothers’ song we’re singing,
Telling hopes of happier times:
We will put all hate behind us,
We whose hearts are sick and sore,
Tired of strife and empty vict’ries –
Bear the pangs of war no more,
Tired of strife and empty vict’ries –
Bear the pangs of war no more.

They regularly made their views known directly and through the International Women’s Co-operative Guild not only to the British Government but to other governments and the League of Nations on subjects such as the occupation of the Ruhr, Mussolini’s dictatorship, the mobilisation and embarkation of troops to China, and international disarmament. Pacifism can always be written off as wishful thinking, an unwillingness to face up to reality. Pacifism linked to a specifically female world view is particularly vulnerable to such short shift. Co-operative principles, however, provided an

Politicising the domestic
The Guild could be seen as an early consumer organisation but instead of relying solely on the combined, but inevitably limited, spending power of individual working class shoppers, it sought to use the whole apparatus of the Co-operative movement in order to take on the forces of capitalism. The extent to which loyalty to the co-operative movement was taken seriously can be seen in the enquiries that were made in 1918 into rumours that a number of prominent Guildswomen had not registered their wartime sugar cards with their own societies and similarly, in 1923, enquiries were made into how loyal members of the Central Council and Section Executives were being in terms of their purchases. These enquiries were apparently satisfactorily resolved. Not only could individuals who were engaged in ‘private trade’ not be office holders but, as was outlined on a number of occasions, this extended to individuals whose family members were private traders or agents of private traders.

The Guild was concerned with a broad standard of living agenda. Housing was an ongoing issue for the Guild. Individual Guildswomen may have taken an important role in the 1915 rent strikes, and have been given the skills and confidence to do so by their involvement in the Guild, but they do not appear to have been doing this on an official basis. As an organisation, the Guild saw rents as part of a bigger picture of rising prices and sought to address this through making use of the political system rather than through direct action, campaigning for the continuance of the Rent Restriction Act in 1920, 1922 and 1927.

The Guild had no doubts about the value of what women were doing as wives and mothers but also sought to find ways of making life easier through promoting the availability of labour saving appliances, strategic thinking about housing design and the promotion of commercial laundries as a way of relieving the burden on individual women. They campaigned for ‘Mothers Pensions’ – a payment for women to provide them with

From left: a Samovar, engraved with indistinct initials set within a cartouche above the spout.
Attached card label ‘Urn used by Kinning Park Co-op Women’s Guild’;
a Samovar engraved above the spout with ‘Kinning Park co-operative Society Ltd Educational Dept Presented to Gorbals and Laureston Women’s Guild on their coming of age 1897-1919’

From left: a Samovar, engraved with indistinct initials set within a cartouche above the spout. 
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a Samovar engraved above the spout with ‘Kinning Park co-operative Society Ltd Educational Dept Presented to Gorbals and Laureston Women’s Guild on their coming of age 1897-1919’
underpinning analysis of the causes of conflict and a potential framework for their solution.

The Guild’s representations were also part of a bigger picture of particular concerns to avoid repeating the cataclysm of World War I and therefore were possibly more cogent during the 1920s than they might have been at other times. Above all, they provided a means through which their members could express their views to those in power both nationally and internationally.

‘A fight for all workers’
The Guild was critical of Conservative and Liberal approaches to industrial issues, resolutely on the side of the miners during their 1921 strike. An emergency resolution was passed at the Annual Meeting in May 1926 expressing deep sympathy with the miners. Later that year, a resolution was sent to Government calling on them to bring the coal dispute to an end or resign. An emergency resolution was passed unanimously at the Annual Meeting in May 1928:

This Congress representing 27,000 Guildswomen desires to express strong disapproval and dismay at the failure of the Government to deal adequately with the conditions of industrial depression in the mining and other areas. We agree with the opinion that only by the establishment of a Labour and Co-operative Government will such conditions be definitely improved.

Women’s issues
The Guild was clearly trying to address the major threats posed by the possibility of further international conflict and the attack on the living standards of working class people posed by changing economic circumstances and political responses to them. These took precedence over what might more usually be seen as ‘women’s issues’. This was a time when ‘women’s issues’, class issues and the interface between them was not straightforward.

The Guild initially attracted the wives of better-off sections of the working class but clearly had a different membership from other, more middle class, women’s organisations such as the Women’s Citizenship Associations

The Guild’s stance on education was primarily focused on the needs of working class children rather than specifically on gender. They saw raising the school leaving age from fourteen to sixteen, with an adequate maintenance grant, as a means of addressing unemployment. Ensuring that all working class children were able to stay on at school until sixteen was more likely to promote the life chances of working class girls than focusing on women being able to pursue university education.

They sought to pursue their concerns practically through representation on Education Committees and Education Authorities. They were sympathetic to the Women’s Patrol Committee of Scotland’s desire for properly trained policewomen both as a means of better addressing criminal cases involving women and children, and opening up a new career for women but their main concern was to protect women from sweated labour,
achieve a reasonable lifestyle.

The Central Council often seems quite cautious in its approach, seeking further information before acting. This may be because they were keen to avoid the kind of situation that arose in 1926 when, at the behest of one of the Fife branches, they wrote to the Queen asking her to use her influence on behalf of the women and children in the mining areas on the verge of starvation. This resulted in an investigation by the Inspectors of the Poor who dismissed their claims and decided that there was no need for further action. If the Guild had felt that referral to the Poor Law Inspectors was the appropriate action they were well enough acquainted with the Poor Law regulations to have done so themselves, but instead they had put the very people they were trying to help in a difficult position.

Tact and persuasion in introducing controversial subjects was seen as essential and the Central Council attempted to work together ‘considering all problems in the spirit of sweet reasonableness and true co-operation.’ There was no Scottish equivalent of the English Women’s Co-operative Guild’s publication of Maternity: letters from mothers of birth control but identified it as a potentially divisive matter and handled it accordingly. The issue was framed in class terms: birth control was practiced by the rich and facilities for carrying out the practice should be given to the poor. A resolution ‘in support of facilities at all Maternity Centres for the guidance and instruction in constructive birth control to married women who require it’ was passed by a substantial majority at the Annual Meeting in 1927.

Providing a political voice

The SCWG provided a political voice for working class women in a number of ways. At its broadest, branch meetings provided the opportunity for women, who would mostly have had only the minimum statutory education, to discuss matters that were of concern to them and to have the benefit of an analytical framework within which to understand the social, economic and political issues of the day. This could be followed up by attendance at classes initially focussed on public speaking but subsequently widening out to reflect the more overtly political stance of the Guild.

From 1920 onwards guildswomen could undertake three consecutive years of classes and a special course on Industrial History

for making views known in places of power. Resolutions were routinely framed ‘on behalf of (current number of members) guildswomen’.

The Secretary’s annual report gives an update each year on the increasing involvement of guild members in their own society, their appointment to various public bodies and eventually councils. The number of guildswomen on Boards of Management continued to increase and, by 1927, guildswomen were being elected as presidents of their retail societies. Similarly guildswomen were ‘steadily increasing’ their presence on educational boards (and subsequently Local Education Authorities) and Parish Councils.

A clear line of engagement was provided for the Guild as the majority of guildswomen gaining the vote in 1918 followed shortly on the Co-operative movement’s new pursuit of direct representation in Parliament through the Co-operative Party. Although there was not unanimous support for the Co-operative movement or the Guild becoming involved in party politics, the number of Guild Branches continued to rise. Although individual membership fluctuated it was consistently over 26,000 after 1920, suggesting that the vast majority of members were not deterred by the Guild’s stance.

The Guild saw the potential in the advent of a Co-operative Party and their own right to vote as means towards the kind of society they sought – ‘the real answer was to use their vote to get the right kind of government’. None of the main political parties were really responsive to women’s views. Women having the vote worried Labour because they feared women would vote Conservative while the Unionists feared that women were particularly susceptible to socialism and there were concerns about the possibility of women forming their own party.

The Scottish Co-operative Party was very keen to have guildswomen on board and politicians worrying about the women’s vote were left in no doubt as to the stance Guild members were taking. The Guild
was keen to engage with the political process and work within the system to which they had been newly admitted. They also continued to pursue the unfinished business of an equal franchise which was finally gained in 1929 – ‘we had been cheated out of our birthright by not having the vote on the same terms as that given to men’. They were patient and incremental in their approach – it is not necessary to succeed in the short term to feel empowered. As an association that recommended co-operation, they were not in the business of breaking windows and they did not think they needed to. They were always in the political game for the long term.

Again and again they celebrated small gains and saw even setbacks as a practice run for the future. This was the opportunity to help to elect people with the right ideas and get women (who were more likely to have the right ideas) into positions of power through supporting Co-operative Party candidates including their own members at both local and national elections. Mrs Beaton was elected to represent Hutchestown Ward on Glasgow Town Council in 1923 but other guild candidates in Edinburgh, Greenock and Troon were less successful in 1928 and 1929. The SCWG was perhaps not winning but they were certainly providing their members with opportunities to take part. Probably the Guild’s greatest achievement during this period was being a mass organisation which moved forward politically but kept their members with them. Rioting and being a member of a political party are always minority activities.

**Was the Guild a success?**

In 1915 Mrs Hardstaff sparked a lively correspondence by writing to the *Scottish Co-operator*, the weekly newspaper of the Scottish co-operative movement, asking ‘Are Guilds Failures?’ and lamenting the lack of education and discussion at her branch which she had newly joined after moving up from England. Responses from other guildswomen generally painted a more positive picture in other branches and urged Mrs Hardstaff to speak out at her branch about her concerns. The correspondence closed with Mrs Hardstaff concluding that ‘The Guild is not a failure.’ By 1929, Mrs Hardstaff had worked her way up through the Guild hierarchy to President and her assessment of how thing stood in September 1929 was very upbeat: the Co-operative movement was in a process of revival, efforts were being made to ease the situation in mining areas and Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald’s visit to the USA to discuss peace proposals ‘indicated events were slowly moving towards a better understanding between nations in the cause of peace.’

That, with hindsight, Mrs Hardstaff’s optimism was totally misplaced, does not detract from the fact that that was how things genuinely seemed to her at the time. The economic depression of the 1930s and the outbreak of further global warfare were still in the future. She was entitled to her moment of celebration.

Women tend to appear in the history books either in a purely domestic role, as victims of oppression or when engaged in stereotypically masculine activities, often of a disruptive nature, and it has become a truism that women behaving themselves never achieved anything. The Guild could be seen as socially conservative, not very exciting and perhaps not sufficiently feminist. They do not comply with either the victim or militant stereotypes.

The SCWG did not overtly challenge the social norms of the 1920s but persistently pursued their own agendas in a way that inherently increased the role of women and provided its large, working class female membership with a bridge to wider political involvement and in a steady, considered manner enabled them to have their voices heard, address their issues and broaden their horizons.

Morag Gibson is a graduate of the Dundee University MLitt in Scottish History by distance learning course. She acknowledges with thanks the advice and guidance given by Dr Annie Tindley and the assistance in locating resources provided by the staff of Glasgow City Archives and The Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

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**SCWG guild notes and minute book. These documents, along with publications such as the Scottish Co-operative Movement’s newspaper Scottish Co-operator allow us to discover what issues were important to the Guild over the years**

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