

People & Place 6 Appendix

Witches in Moray

Additional information to accompany The Witches Ball, item 1

The Edinburgh University *Survey of Scottish Witchcraft* is a database which lists 3,837 people in Scotland accused of witchcraft between 1563 and 1736 while the Witchcraft Act was in force. Of these, 84% were women.

Witches have received serious attention from academic historians particularly since the publication in 1981 of the late Christina Lerner's *Enemies of God: The Witch-hunt in Scotland*. Historians are principally interested in the social, religious and political conditions which led to the witch-hunts. Over the centuries and in many different places throughout Europe and New England, thousands of people were accused of witchcraft and were therefore at risk of imprisonment, torture and death. At one time it was thought that there were as many as nine million witches throughout Europe, but the figure has been reduced to a much more realistic 100,000.

Of 3,837 Scottish accusations, twenty-nine are identified as living in Moray (Elgin and Elginshire) and twenty-five are women (86%). Unfortunately, records of witch trials are very unsatisfactory since few have any details, and the outcome of the trial is known in only 305 cases. Of the twenty-nine Moray cases, there are no known verdicts or sentences.

The best-recorded case is that of Margaret Murray in 1661. This is found in the Elgin St Giles Kirk Session Records (CH2/145/7). She was accused of maleficium (the performance of harmful deeds by some supernatural means), of neighbourhood disputes and of white magic. She was investigated by the Kirk Session who also examined other witnesses. One woman said that there were black dogs at meetings of witches, but Murray said nothing about this. Another woman accused Murray of attending dancing with a group of witches. Murray did not appear to make any statement about this, either.

It was said she caused human illness and death, and also caused illness and then cured it ('laying on'). She was accused of cursing and quarrelling. It was asserted that she had cursed a man who later became sick.

She had also cursed a woman who later died. She told a woman in labour that there were cats in her womb and the woman later died. She agreed that she cursed and argued but denied that she caused harm. She denied that she had taken away the substance of milk. Her white magic was prophesy. There are no further details and no record of the outcome.

The use of trial by water seems only to have been used in Scotland in the East Lothian witch hunt of 1597 when it was discredited. This would mean that popular beliefs about the 'Order (or Ordeal) Pot' in Elgin and 'Gaun's Pot' in Keith are likely to have no foundation.

For more and up-to-date information, and for a valuable and accessible introduction to Scottish witchcraft, go to the Edinburgh University database:

<http://www.shc.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/index.html>

Dr Anna Buchan (Suckling)
1897-1964

Additional information to accompany the drawing of a frog and the two brittle star fossils, Items 9 and 10.

On display you will see an anatomical drawing of a frog. This is one from a folder of zoological drawings (ELGNM: 1998.1). It was brought into the Museum by Anna's niece, Dr Alison Hoppen, who greatly admired her aunt with whom she spent many happy summers in Elgin.

Anna Buchan was born in Rosehearty, Banffshire. Her father, Alexander, was a fisherman, who moved to Elgin about 1906 to become a Foreman at Hamilton's Nets. Anna went into First World War munitions work on leaving school. Her youngest brother graduated from Aberdeen University, and persuaded Anna she was well able to do a science degree. Anna graduated BSc 1930, Honours 1931 and PhD (Zoology) 1935.

In 1937, she married Edward Suckling (1887-1963) in Glasgow. There follows a gap in the story, but she worked as a Museum Assistant in the Marischal Museum, Aberdeen from 1946-8. She then moved back to Elgin to look after her widowed father, and her husband opened a hairdresser's in South Street. He was also pastor of the Apostolic Church in Academy Street. From our Minutes, it seems Anna Buchan was active in Elgin Museum between at least 1948 and 1953. She was variously an Honorary Curator, on the Board and very active in "cleaning, reviewing and rearranging geological specimens in the store and the exhibits".

There is a copy of Dr Buchan's thesis, "Investigation of the glacial and post-glacial deposits of Spynie" in the Queen Mother Library, Aberdeen University (Th 1935 Bu). This is of interest not only for the geological and Palaeo-biological content, but also the industrial archaeology, in that she was studying in the clay pits of the Tile Works between the Elgin-Lossiemouth Road and Railway.

Mary McCallum-Webster
31/12/1906 to 07/11/1985

Additional information to accompany the pressed flowers, Item 8

Eminent botanist Mary McCallum-Webster made her home in Moray and lived in Dyke for many years. She became the outstanding authority on the plants of this region. Her major work, 'The Flora of Moray, Nairn and East Inverness', a 600-page book, was the result of 50 years of field work and research. She was working on a companion book about Banffshire flora when she died.

Mary McCallum-Webster served on the council of many botanical organisations, and she became a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London and of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh. She joined an expedition to Africa to collect and study grasses and worked at Kew Gardens for 3 years. She also worked at the Botany School in Cambridge. With her great depth of knowledge, she was in constant demand.

Mary McCallum-Webster chose to live in Dyke to be near Culbin Forest with its great diversity of plants and rare species which she was responsible for identifying and cataloguing. She shared her enthusiasm and knowledge with all who were interested and led botanical outings with the Moray Field Club.

There is a memorial stone to Mary McCallum-Webster in Culbin Forest near a cluster of the rare one-flowered Wintergreen, *Moneses uniflora*, one of the plants she identified.

Miss Sylvia Benton 1887-1985

Additional information to accompany the archaeological finds from Sculptor's Cave, Item 13 to 24

Sylvia Benton was born in Lahore; her father was a judge in India. Her first degree was in Classics, from Cambridge, where she represented her College in hockey and tennis. For 15 years she was a schoolmistress, until after the death of her father she was able to follow her ambition as a classical archaeologist. First admitted as a student at the British School of Athens in the session 1927-8, she obtained the Diploma in Classical Archaeology from Oxford in 1930.

It was around this time that, home at Sheriffston, near Elgin, she visited the Sculptor's Cave at Covesea. The Cave had long been known for the Pictish carvings on the walls, but her companion pointed out the many bones on the floor. For 3 summers, Miss Benton excavated in the Cave, then wrote a detailed report and returned to her career in Greece.

Her lively mind and adventurous spirit led to numerous escapades and a direct and pithy style of writing. During the War, in London, she used her knowledge of Greece by day and was a firefighter by night. She retired initially to Oxford, and then in 1970, to her beloved Moray, where she was for a time Honorary Curator of Elgin Museum.

In 1979, Ian and Alexandra Shepherd excavated the parts of the Cave that Miss Benton had left for future archaeologists. Over 90 years old, she was up and down the 90 feet of scaffolding on the cliff like a hamster, and able to give helpful advice.