**Witchcraft Belief, Representation and Memory in Modern Ireland**

**Abstract:**

This micro study of Islandmagee, Co. Antrim, the site of Ireland’s last witch trial in 1711, offers new insight into the understudied area of modern Irish witchcraft. It suggests that belief in witchcraft continued at a popular level in Ireland up until the twentieth century as an evolving, shared body of beliefs that were nevertheless shaped at a local level by the social memory of historic trials transmitted culturally via oral tradition and ‘dark heritage’. It further argues that in the nineteenth and twentieth century, Irish writers produced a variety ideologically charged and gendered readings of the 1711 case that created an accepted narrative of Irish witchcraft, which at once questioned its reality and distanced Ireland from the legacy of early modern-European witch-hunting. Along with controversy created over twenty-first century commemoration, this highlights a longstanding discursive avoidance of the issue of Ireland’s witch-hunting past.

Keywords: Ireland; witchcraft; ‘Islandmagee Witches’; memory; representation

**Introduction**

Feeding into wider studies of enchanted modernity, where the relationship between science, orthodox religion, and the occult is explored,[[1]](#endnote-1) historians of witchcraft in Britain, continental Europe and America have suggested that witch belief continued among ordinary people up until the twentieth century, and that this occasioned sporadic private (rather than state) action and violence against suspected witches. The ways in which continuing belief in witchcraft was represented in discourse has also been explored, as has modern representation and memorialisation of historic, early modern witch trials.[[2]](#endnote-2) In an article for this journal, Ronald Hutton combined these approaches in an innovative way to demonstrate that changing attitudes to witchcraft in modern Britain and the Isle of Man shaped how historic witch trials were represented on the Island.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In terms of witchcraft research, Ireland has long been the poor relation of Britain and continental Europe. Academic writing on early modern Irish witchcraft has traditionally focused on explaining Ireland’s low prosecution rates in comparison to European witch-hunting, which cost between 40-50,000 lives between 1400 and 1800.[[4]](#endnote-4) Recent research has suggested that Ireland’s lack of sustained witch-hunting was rooted in the fact that belief in malefic, demonic witchcraft, increasingly widespread in Europe from the late medieval period onward and thought to pose an immediate threat to person, property and livestock, did not penetrate the culture of most of Ireland’s population, the Gaelic speaking, native-Irish Catholics. This community was after all already well-catered for in terms of explanatory mechanisms for uncanny misfortune: fairies and the evil-eye (magic powers located in the eyes) were blamed for various afflictions in humans; while attacks on agricultural produce and livestock were laid at the door of butter-stealing female witches who stole milk while in the form of a hare, or transferred the goodness from neighbours’ butter to their own using sympathetic magic. The relatively benign butter-witch, divest of Satanic connotation, was easily repelled by protective or counter magic and thought to be active only at certain times of the ritual year, primarily May Eve and May Day.[[5]](#endnote-5) The Scottish, and to a far lesser extent, English settlers who arrived in increasing numbers to seventeenth-century Ireland, particularly Ulster, brought with them belief in, and fear of malefic, demonic witches.[[6]](#endnote-6) However, in the hands of a sceptical judiciary reluctant to countenance formal proceedings, the witchcraft accusations they levied rarely ended in criminal prosecution, and only four witchcraft trials were held under the 1586 Irish Witchcraft Act (Eliz. I, 1586, 2 [Ire.]): in 1655, Marion Fisher was found guilty and imprisoned for witchcraft at Carrickfergus Assizes, Co. Antrim; in 1661, Florence Newton died during her trial at Cork Assizes; and in 1711, eight women and one man, the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ were found guilty at the spring and summer sessions of Carrickfergus Assizes.[[7]](#endnote-7)

By the end of the long eighteenth-century, cultural cross-fertilisation had transformed popular belief in witchcraft in Ireland, which was now less polarised across denominational lines. The witch figure now prevalent in both Catholic and Protestant popular culture stole milk and butter, often in the form of a hare, but also killed and harmed humans, sometimes at the behest of the devil.[[8]](#endnote-8) Irish Protestant elites, who became economically and politically ascendant in the early eighteenth century, ignored continuing belief as it clashed with their vision of a polite, enlightened Ireland. Instead, they broached the subject through condemnations of early modern witch-hunting expressed using Enlightenment rhetoric. This rhetoric was almost identical to that found in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain and America. [[9]](#endnote-9) In that period, British and American elites distanced themselves from their witch-hunting pasts by representing witchcraft as the product of unreason, righted only by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. In this triumphalist reading, witch-hunts were the product of religious zeal and intolerance imposed from above, from the Church and State, and ignorance and superstition coming from below, from the mass of the population.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The limited targeted research undertaken on witchcraft in nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland suggests that the shadowy female figures that haunted the margins of Catholic folklore and oral culture, and believed to be of limited threat to life and limb, became culturally irrelevant after the Great Famine of the 1840s, due to religious, demographic, linguistic and social transformation, especially in rural areas.[[11]](#endnote-11)This historiography has begun to be challenged, with a recent article suggesting that witchcraft remained part of Protestant and Catholic popular culture throughout the long nineteenth century, followed patterns established in the preceding century, and occasioned accusations that arose from interpersonal tensions rather than sectarian conflict. Furthermore, accused Irish witches were both male and female, Catholic and Protestant, were known to their accusers, and formed part of their local community. Accusers and the accused respectively fought bewitchment and witchcraft accusation using legal, magical, physical and verbal means. As witchcraft was no longer a crime in Ireland after an Act of 1821 repealed the 1586 Act, accused witches were prosecuted by their neighbours under other statutory crimes such as assault, slander, theft, and fraud in an era of expansion of policing and the court system.[[12]](#endnote-12) Despite this new research, we know little of the ways in which historic trials were represented in nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Adapting methodologies and approaches outlined above and used in studies of modern witchcraft in Britain and America, this article explores continuing belief in witchcraft in Ireland in combination with cultural representations of historic Irish trials through a micro-history of Islandmagee, Co Antrim, an eight-mile long peninsula on the east coast of Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, the site of Ireland’s last witchcraft trial held in 1711.[[14]](#endnote-14) This analysis is based on a wide range of new and under-used source material: nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish newspapers have been systematically searched for discussions of the Islandmagee case,[[15]](#endnote-15) along with printed and manuscript folklore accounts,[[16]](#endnote-16) travel writing, and parish memoirs; while objects of material culture relating to witchcraft in Islandmagee have been analysed.[[17]](#endnote-17) It demonstrates that belief in witchcraft evolved over time and retained cultural currency up until the twentieth century in Ulster just as it did in other parts of Ireland. More importantly, it shows how the social memory of a witchcraft trial, transmitted culturally by oral tradition and local ‘dark’ heritage sites, in a path dependent community such as Islandmagee, shaped belief at a local level.[[18]](#endnote-18) This highlights the importance of local and regional studies in producing nuanced accounts of modern witchcraft, as well as the need to balance institutionalised memories, articulated through national commemoration, with studies of how events were represented informally in folk and oral tradition.[[19]](#endnote-19) It also illustrates how Presbyterian communities in Ireland dealt with difficult episodes or inconvenient events in their history not only by forgetting, as Guy Beiner has shown in relation to Ulster Protestants and the republican rebellion of 1798, but through remembering.[[20]](#endnote-20) By examining how the trial of the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ was represented in nineteenth and twentieth-century newspapers and historical, periodical and antiquarian writing, a comparison has been made between local narratives and those presented at a national level in public discourse. Starting from a position of disbelief in witchcraft, Irish writers used the 1711 trial to distance Ireland from a perceived dark period in European history, the early modern witch-hunts. Ireland was thus cast as a paragon of rationality and morality; national characteristics that ensured avoidance of large-scale witch-hunting. Consequently, the 1711 case was explained away as historical aberration in gendered, rationalist, and occasionally political terms. This inability or unwillingness to deal with the legacy of Irish belief in witchcraft and resulting trials is traced into the twenty first century through controversy created over plans to commemorate the ‘Islandmagee Witches’.

***Islandmagee, Co. Antrim***

In contrast to the island of Ireland as a whole, Islandmagee, from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century, was almost completely Protestant; a denomination that in 1824 constituted 86.4 % of the population. Mainly of Presbyterian-Scots descent their ancestry was noted in their culture, traditions, and speech patterns. Islandmagee avoided the general post-Famine population decline but succumbed to rural depopulation by the third decade of the twentieth century: it contained 2,990 people in 1821; 2,644 in 1881; and 2,034 in 1926. An unusually cohesive community, it lacked the rigid class structure evident elsewhere in Ireland. The aristocracy, gentry and destitute were all underrepresented and it lacked a large male servant class, with little social gap existing between small-holding farmers and agricultural labourers, fishermen, and craftsmen. The peninsula was largely cut-off from the main revolutions in nineteenth-century communications but benefitted in the latter half of the century from the extension of the railways and improvement in road and water transport networks.[[21]](#endnote-21) Criminal administration was almost non-existent in eighteenth-century Islandmagee, with the nearest constables and *Justice of the Peace* (JP) located in Larne and Carrickfergus, both of which were around ten miles away by road. In the nineteenth century, Islandmagee inhabitants still had to travel to Carrickfergus to avail of Petty Sessions to resolve minor criminal matters, or to bring more serious cases before the Quarter Sessions. Although a formal police presence was not established in Islandmagee until the mid-twentieth century, crimes against person, property and livestock were rare. Apart from the agrarian disturbances of the 1770s and the rising of United Irishmen in 1798, economically or politically motivated crime was also uncommon. Nineteenth-century Islandmagee also lacked a settled medical practitioner and the sick poor had to travel to Larne to enter the nearest Poor Law Union Workhouse, or to Ballycarry, five miles away by road, to use the out-patient medical care provided by its dispensary. From the mid-seventeenth century Islandmagee children, of all social levels, received rudimentary formal education and by the 1830s the peninsula had ten elementary schools. Teaching standards and literacy rates however remained low until Islandmagee’s schools were absorbed into the National School System in the late nineteenth century.[[22]](#endnote-22)

In common with other contemporary Scottish migrants settling in Ulster, witchcraft was seen to pose a significant threat to person, property and livestock by the 300 or so Presbyterian-Scots residents of late seventeenth, early eighteenth-century Islandmagee.[[23]](#endnote-23) The trials of the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ arguably began in February 1711 when Ann Haltridge, the elderly widow of Islandmagee minster Rev. John Haltridge, died suddenly after suffering months of supernatural attack by a demonic presence in her home, Knowehead House, which she shared with her son and his family. After Ann’s funeral, her niece, Mary Dunbar, an educated, pretty gentlewoman, arrived at Knowehead from nearby Castlereagh, Co. Antrim. Almost immediately, Knowehead House was wracked by supernatural disturbance and Dunbar began to display classic symptoms of demonic possession, from convulsions, to vomiting household objects, to levitation.During the next month, March 1711, Dunbar accused eight Presbyterian women of using witchcraft to attack her in spectral form and to summon demons to possess her body. The women were examined, imprisoned and tried on 31 March 1711 at the spring session of the County Assizes, held at Carrickfergus on the North-East Ulster Circuit. Despite pleading not guilty, all eight women were convicted under the 1586 Act for a first offence of using witchcraft and sentenced to one year’s imprisonment and four stints in the pillory. Unlike many demoniacs, the incarceration of the accused did not lead to an improvement in Dunbar’s health as she claimed that a ninth witch, William Sellor, the hard-drinking husband of one of the convicted women, had started where his wife had left off and was spectrally attacking her. After resisting arrest and trying to abscond, Sellor was charged with Dunbar’s bewitchment and later found guilty of witchcraft at the summer session of Carrickfergus Assizes on 11 September 1711.[[24]](#endnote-24) That the 1711 trial had a second act is perhaps not surprising since men such as Sellor who challenged hegemonic masculinity, articulated and maintained by patriarchy, were more likely to be prosecuted for witchcraft in early modern Europe than those who did not.[[25]](#endnote-25) My recent discovery of a Dublin newspaper from 1711 has revealed for first time that Mary Dunbar died a few weeks after the first trial, which would have turned Sellor’s initial, lesser offence of harming by witchcraft into a capital crime for which he would have been executed.[[26]](#endnote-26) Sellor would thus have been the last witch convicted in Ireland under the 1586 Act and the only ‘Islandmagee Witch’ put to death. This makes the fact that, as we shall see, Sellor was written out of later representations of the case particularly significant.

A paucity of source material for eighteenth-century Islandmagee makes it impossible to describe attitudes to the supernatural in that period but in the following two centuries people there continued to view the world in essentially magical terms. They believed in fairies and witches, availed of the services of magical practitioners such as cunning-folk, and used a variety of everyday magical charms and cures.[[27]](#endnote-27) As a collector for the *Ordnance Survey Memoirs of Ireland* (OSMI), James Boyle put it in April 1840, ‘in no part of Ireland are the people more generally and inveterately superstitious than here,’ where ‘most of the better educated class implicitly believe in witchcraft, fairies, brownies and enchantments.’[[28]](#endnote-28) The Devil was regularly reported as having been seen in the shape of a black pig or a dog,[[29]](#endnote-29) and witchcraft was regarded as a potent enough threat to milk and butter production for locals to take magical precautions against it. Prior to the move, after the First World War to selective livestock breeding, dairy farming along with fishing was a side-line to farmers’ main income: milk and cheese were produced for domestic consumption but butter was made in small quantities for sale to local shops using the slow, labour-intensive ‘plunge churn’ method.[[30]](#endnote-30) ‘Witch-stones’ or ‘elf-stones’ (naturally occurring holed stones or pebbles) were thus hung in cowsheds in Islandmagee to protect livestock against fairy and butter-witch attack.[[31]](#endnote-31) Two such stones were used on a farm in Islandmagee up until the 1970s and are preserved in the *Ulster Folk and Transport Museum* (UFTM).[[32]](#endnote-32) Folklore questionnaires issued by the UFTM in 1963 and completed by Islandmagee residents confirm that ‘witch-stones’ were used there up until the late twentieth century, so that ‘anyone who practiced the black art … could not … witch the [butter] churn,’[[33]](#endnote-33) and to prevent ‘cows from being bewitched.’[[34]](#endnote-34) Other types of protective magic were used in Islandmagee which were variations on rituals and practices found elsewhere in Ireland. Silver coins were placed in milking pails and flowers strewn on thresholds of byres and barns, while visitors were expected to wish the churn and churner “good luck”.[[35]](#endnote-35)

Changing attitudes to witchcraft seen at a national level in eighteenth and nineteenth century Ireland, namely the absorption into Protestant culture of practices and beliefs associated with Gaelic-Irish butter witchcraft and vice versa, can be detected in the same period in Islandmagee. However, belief in witches who killed and harmed humans was now articulated through the social memory of the 1711 trial rather than, as it had done in the past, as witchcraft accusations directed against neighbours. The trial thus framed how the local community understood witchcraft: it was a reality; the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ had practiced it; they had been correctly punished by the criminal justice system for it; and they were able to harm the living through a lingering, supernatural presence. Islandmagee was thus a path dependant community haunted by the memory of the 1711 trial and as such unique: there is no evidence that the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ were remembered in this way elsewhere in Ulster or Ireland. Unfortunately, there is also no surviving material to indicate how the clergy in Islandmagee, whether Catholic or Protestant, reacted to continuing belief in witchcraft among their parishioners. Certainly, in the earlier part of the eighteenth century Irish Presbyterian clergy in Ulster while reluctant to publicly condemn witchcraft ensured accusations were not turned into formal prosecutions.[[36]](#endnote-36) By the beginning of the new century this stymied scepticism had turned into indifference. In contrast to mid-nineteenth-century England,[[37]](#endnote-37) nineteenth-century Irish elite animus to witchcraft lacked clerical impulse or direction, with clergy from both majority and minority churches in Ireland (including Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and the Church of Ireland) remaining silent and non-committal on the subject. Although the mid to later nineteenth century was a period of Protestant and Catholic religious revival and renewal, there was no discernible, religiously inspired effort to challenge belief in witchcraft and magic.[[38]](#endnote-38)

The fact that descendants of the Haltridge family were still living in Islandmagee in the 1840s,[[39]](#endnote-39) as were, up until the early twentieth century, relatives of the main trial witnesses and one of the convicted witches, Catherine McCalmond,[[40]](#endnote-40) provided a continuity of residence of people personally connected by ancestry to the ‘Islandmagee Witches.’ This allowed for inter-generational, familial transmission of narratives of the case, and accounts for ‘the tenaciousness of … [it] in oral tradition’ up until the end of the twentieth century.[[41]](#endnote-41) Traces of this oral tradition found its way into print in the nineteenth century, recorded by primarily by visitors to the area. The print record is only indicative of the nature and depth of local belief as Islandmagee residents, especially those deemed respectable and well educated, were reluctant to share with strangers their ‘unwritten stories’ about witchcraft and the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ until they fully trusted them.[[42]](#endnote-42) This divergence between private belief and public discourse, between what was believed and what was considered politically or culturally expedient to discuss publicly, has been demonstrated in relation to spirit belief in enlightenment Bristol.[[43]](#endnote-43) In October 1839, OSMI collector J. Bleakly, interviewed a number of local men about the 1711 trial, including John Magill, a blacksmith then living in Knowehead House, who ‘confidently affirmed … that witchcraft was practiced to a great extent and particularly on a female who resided in the house … about the year 1710 or 1711.’[[44]](#endnote-44) In April 1840, fellow collector Boyle also detailed the case using interviews with locals which he supplemented with a close reading of *The History and Antiquities of the County of the Town of Carrickfergus* (2nd ed., 1823), a lauded local history written by Carrickfergus antiquarian Samuel McSkimmin.[[45]](#endnote-45) Boyle ended his piece by stating that ‘there are few who are not perfectly convinced of the guilt of the unfortunate individuals convicted of witchcraft alleged to have been committed here in 1711.’[[46]](#endnote-46)

‘Dark heritage’ sites designated locally in oral culture to have links with the ‘Islandmagee Witches’, and thus with supernatural malevolence, were studiously avoided by residents. Bleakley reported that ‘many of the inhabitants of the island are until this day afraid to pass by the [Knowehead] house’ as it was ‘haunted by these supposed witches.’[[47]](#endnote-47) While Boyle reported that ‘many strange sights had been seen and sounds heard about’ Knowehead House and consequently ‘many educated and grown men and women … would not on any account pass it alone at night.’[[48]](#endnote-48) In 1914, St. John Drelincourt Seymour, Church of Ireland archdeacon of Cashel and Emly, stated that Knowehead House ‘is eternally famous as having furnished the material for the last trial for witchcraft in the country, [and] is said to be haunted.’ The previous year, in 1913, a local woman had informed him by letter that as she passed by the infamous house, an apparition of a recently drowned sailor began to follow her home.[[49]](#endnote-49) The area near to a house in Brown’s Bay, Islandmagee, where convicted witch Catherine McCalmond was reputed to have lived also garnered a sinister reputation. In September 1876, the *Belfast Newsletter* stated that near McCalmond’s house stood a ‘huge old rocking stone’ where the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ danced at night.[[50]](#endnote-50) In 1927, in a privately printed local history of Islandmagee, headmaster of Kilcoan National School, Islandmagee, Dixon Donaldson described how this ‘Witch Stone’ was ‘given a wide berth by the superstitious after night-fall,’ and that it was believed to bear deep claw marks left by McCalmond when she was dragged off it to stand trial.[[51]](#endnote-51) The ‘rocking stone’ still stands today overlooking Brown’s Bay: stripped of its cultural significance and coated in graffiti, its traditional rocking movement is now restricted by a cement foundation.

In the late nineteenth century, tourists from Belfast and further afield flocked in increasing numbers to Islandmagee for its bathing, scenery, and (from the early twentieth century) the celebrated Gobbins Cliff walk.[[52]](#endnote-52) However, in an early example of tourism of ‘dark heritage’ sites,[[53]](#endnote-53) its witchcraft history also proved a draw. In September 1870, the *Belfast Naturalists’ Field Club*, established in 1863 to promote the study of the natural history and archaeology of Belfast and its surrounding areas, visited Islandmagee ‘to talk over the old stories about the evil doings of witches in this neighbourhood in former days.’[[54]](#endnote-54) The trial was also described in some detail in nineteenth-century travel guides and handbooks.[[55]](#endnote-55) In 1843, Anna Maria Hall and her husband, journalist Samuel Carter Hall, in the final volume of their guide to Irish life, gave a full account of the 1711 trial based on field trips to Ireland and a close reading of McSkimmin’s *History of Carrickfergus*.[[56]](#endnote-56)

Establishing exactly how far this fear surrounding the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ stretched into the later twentieth century would require a dedicated oral history project to fully document and explore folklore narratives.[[57]](#endnote-57) Unfortunately, scoping exercises carried out in the Republic of Ireland’s national folklore collections held at University College Dublin[[58]](#endnote-58) have failed to find mention of the Islandmagee case, as did similar work carried out at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum (UFTM), which holds broadly comparable sources for Northern Ireland. The UFTM’s records are generally weak for the peninsula: no collector notebooks, compiled in the 1950s for Co. Antrim, were produced for Islandmagee,[[59]](#endnote-59) and only two folklore questionnaires were completed by locals.[[60]](#endnote-60) Nevertheless, it is evident that Islandmagee was unable to escape its association with witchcraft. Sociologist Richard Jenkins remembered that while growing up in Larne in the 1960s, ‘the Gobbins cliffs on the eastern coast of the Islandmagee peninsula … enjoyed a vaguely sinister reputation … no doubt by association with the 1711 case of the ‘Islandmagee Witches,’ the last of Ireland’s witch trials.’[[61]](#endnote-61) Around this time, the peninsula had also began to be drawn into wider popular fears over the growth of Satanism.[[62]](#endnote-62) In October 1961, the Royal Ulster Constabulary investigated a ‘black magic’ cult in the area after objects popularly associated with Satanic rituals, including black candles and black cloaks, had been found in a cave there.[[63]](#endnote-63) In late 1973, early 1974, a small group of British Army Intelligence Officers based in Lisburn, Co. Antrim staged a Satanic ritual in Islandmagee as part of a more general campaign to fabricate black magic sites in Northern Ireland in order to ‘tar paramilitary organizations with the brush of Satan, and to keep young people in at night, particularly in the vicinity of Army observation posts.’[[64]](#endnote-64) Islandmagee was chosen as a suitable location because of its existing links to witchcraft.[[65]](#endnote-65)

***Memorialising the ‘Islandmagee Witches’***

The trial of the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ was brought to public attention by the media once more in 2011 during its 300th year anniversary, resulting in widespread radio and TV coverage,[[66]](#endnote-66) newspaper editorials,[[67]](#endnote-67) a play,[[68]](#endnote-68) and a children’s book.[[69]](#endnote-69) It was during this re-ignition of interest in the case that older narratives linking Satanism and demonic ritual with the Islandmagee trial resurfaced. In 2015, a True Unionist Voice Alderman sitting on Larne Borough Council, the late Jack McKee, objected to a proposal to erect a small memorial near to the Gobbins Visitor Centre in Islandmagee to mark the conviction of the eight women because to do so would be ‘anti-God’. McKee had previously stated at a Larne Council meeting that ‘he could not tell whether or not the women were rightly or wrongly convicted as he didn’t have the facts and he was not going to support devil worship.’[[70]](#endnote-70) The wellspring of this position is unclear but could be taken as evidence of the continuing influence of radical Protestant evangelicalism informed by the link created by the media in the 1960s and 1970s between the Islandmagee case, witchcraft, and modern Satanism. The initial motion for the memorial lay with journalist Martina Devlin, who having just published a novel based on the case,[[71]](#endnote-71) began campaigning to have the eight women posthumously pardoned because they had been wrongly convicted on evidence that would not stand up in a modern court.[[72]](#endnote-72) Devlin’s campaign did not include William Sellor, an exclusion which had become customary in Irish public discourse by the end of the nineteenth-century. More controversy followed a few months later in September 2015 with the *Belfast Telegraph* reporting that ‘rumours have been flying about that tour guides have been ordered to avoid talking about one of the area's most notorious historical events - the Islandmagee witch trials.’[[73]](#endnote-73)

Secular remembrance and commemoration, often underpinned by competing, religiously and politically informed views of the past, has remained controversial in post-conflict but nevertheless divided Northern Ireland; whether in relation to remembering (or forgetting) civil wars, the Great Famine, the World Wars, or the Irish Williamite Wars, 1688-91.[[74]](#endnote-74) Indeed, for the island of Ireland as a whole, ‘the interpretation of the past has always been at the heart of national conflict,’[[75]](#endnote-75) because there, ‘perhaps more than in other cultures, collective groups have … expressed their values and assumptions’ through historical representation.[[76]](#endnote-76) The recent, adverse reaction to plans to commemorate the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ is however rooted more in a longstanding unwillingness in Ireland to confront its witchcraft legacy. It thus stands apart from the United States, which has done so particularly well. Despite campaigns from the 1970s onwards by Christian activists to link witchcraft (particularly, modern pagan witchcraft, including Wicca) with Satanic cultism, America has been more able to confront the legacy of its own Islandmagee, the Salem Witch Trials: from verdicts being overturned and compensation issued in 1711; to the erection of monuments to the executed witches in 1885 and 2001; to the issue of pardons in 1957 and 2001. Furthermore, unlike twentieth and twenty-first century Salem town, organised dark tourism associated with the Islandmagee trial has been largely avoided in Northern Ireland. In America, the commercial exploitation of the Salem Witch Trials began in the 1970s and can be regarded as part of a longer development, starting in the 1930s that saw the gradual acceptance of witchcraft in American culture. In that period, witches on TV, in film, comic books, and novels were increasingly portrayed as young, attractive, and actively good rather than evil old hags.[[77]](#endnote-77)

***Writing the History of Irish Witchcraft***

This inability or unwillingness to deal with Ireland’s witchcraft legacy has a long lineage which can be traced back two centuries or more in narratives of the Islandmagee case appearing in historical and antiquarian accounts, newspapers, and periodicals. From the late eighteenth-century onwards, antiquarians and historians turned their attention to the ‘Islandmagee Witches’, producing the first narratives of the case and publishing relevant primary source material. These publications would prove extremely influential in shaping later representations. In January 1775, the *Hibernian Magazine* published a letter originally written in April 1711 by Rev.William Tisdall, the rabidly anti-Presbyterian, High-Church, Tory vicar of Belfast, detailing the trial he had attended four days previously.[[78]](#endnote-78) In the letter, Tisdall argued for the acquittal of the convicted women on the grounds that Dunbar’s bewitchment was engineered by Satan to implicate innocent people.[[79]](#endnote-79) In reality, Tisdall took up the defence of the eight women because his Tory party politics would not allow him to side with the Presbyterian Whigs who supported the prosecution, including one of the trial judges, Justice of the Queen’s Bench, James MacCartney. Tisdall consequently portrayed the convicted women as innocent victims, as pious, industrious churchgoers, and thus the unlikeliest of witches. In reality, many of the accused women had bad reputations locally for swearing, smoking, drinking alcohol, and using harmful magic.[[80]](#endnote-80) The Tisdall letter was followed in 1822 by the publication of a pamphlet-length manuscript account of events leading up to the trial which had been written in 1711 by an ‘unknown but intelligent Chronicler.’[[81]](#endnote-81) This manuscript was edited and published by Samuel McSkimmin to which he appended the Tisdall letter (verbatim) to provide otherwise absent details of the day of the trial.[[82]](#endnote-82) Finally, in 1896, Robert Magill Young, a Belfast-based architect, writer and antiquary, published the pre-trial depositions of Mary Dunbar and local Protestant worthies as recorded by Mayor of Carrickfergus, Edward Clements.[[83]](#endnote-83) Young’s publication was based on transcriptions of the original depositions housed in Trinity College, Dublin.[[84]](#endnote-84) These had been compiled in the 1860s by fellow antiquarian and historian of Belfast, William Pinkerton, who had intended ‘printing’ the documents himself ‘to give away among my friends.’[[85]](#endnote-85)

Although McSkimmin mentioned the 1711 trial briefly in a periodical article from 1809,[[86]](#endnote-86) it was in his *History of Carrickfergus* (1st ed., 1812) that he first discussed it in detail, using Tisdall’s letter as source material.[[87]](#endnote-87) At the time McSkimmin published his book some of his Protestant contemporaries remained convinced that unlike Scotland and England Ireland had been witch-trial free.[[88]](#endnote-88) As a result of his book later commentators were forced to admit that Ireland had hosted at least one trial, even if it was explained away as exceptional. In 1835, Robert Young, father of R.M. Young, architect and amateur archaeologist, argued in the *Dublin Penny Journal* that the Islandmagee trial was a rare and unfortunate by-product of immigration to Ulster of witch-hating, lowland Scots.[[89]](#endnote-89) Young based his discussion on Tisdall’s letter, which he had copied out in full from the *Hibernian Magazine*.[[90]](#endnote-90) Peter Finlay used this argument forty years later in 1874 in the Jesuit-founded *Irish Monthly* but placed it within a wider nationalist, anti-British, historical narrative.[[91]](#endnote-91)

The second edition of McSkimmin’s book, published in 1823, was far more detailed than its 1812 predecessor and was based on the 1711/1822 pamphlet account, which he had discovered, edited and published in the intervening years.[[92]](#endnote-92) This edition covered the demonic obsession of Knowehead House, described Dunbar’s symptoms, and followed Tisdall’s lead by suggesting that the accused women were sober, industrious and churchgoing. McSkimmin also introduced an enduring myth to his narrative, for which there is no surviving evidence, that one of the convicted women lost an eye while being pilloried in Carrickfergus as part of her sentence: ‘these unfortunate people … were severely pelted in the pillory, with boiled eggs, cabbage stalks and the like, by which one of them had an eye beaten out.’[[93]](#endnote-93) McSkimmin set another important precedent by excluding William Sellor from his narrative, despite having detailed Sellor’s trial in his 1822 edition of the 1711 pamphlet.[[94]](#endnote-94) McSkimmin’s 1823 account was reproduced (almost) verbatim 55 years later by William Butler Yeats in the notes section of his anthology, *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*.[[95]](#endnote-95) Yeats’ book was produced in the context of a reassertion of national and individual identity during the Irish Revival of the 1880s to the 1920s. Along with writers such as Isabella, Lady Gregory, Yeats reshaped and revitalised folklore accounts of the Irish peasantry produced earlier in the nineteenth century by Irish Protestant antiquaries such as Thomas Crofton Croker.[[96]](#endnote-96)

In 1927, in a privately printed local history of Islandmagee, Dixon Donaldson brought to the tale of the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ an intimate local knowledge of Knowehead House and its inhabitants, as well as the lives of various trial witnesses and deponents.[[97]](#endnote-97) He was the first Irish historian to locate the 1711 trial within the wider context of European witch-hunting, which he regarded as a product of popular irrationality and superstition combined with a conspiracy of Church and State to rid the world of the ‘defenceless classes of poor and the aged.’[[98]](#endnote-98) Witchcraft specialists were also increasingly drawn to the Islandmagee case from the late nineteenth century. In 1885, Classon Porter, non-subscribing Presbyterian minister of Larne, local historian and biographer, wrote a series of articles on Ulster’s witchcraft trials, including Islandmagee, for the Belfast-based, Unionist *Northern Whig* newspaper, which were reprinted in book form later the same year.[[99]](#endnote-99) The empirical scholarship of Irish witchcraft and magic peaked in 1913 with the publication of *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology* by St. John Drelincourt Seymour. Seymour’s book used an impressive array of printed and manuscript sources to furnish readers with narratives of Irish demons and ghosts, and witchcraft, including Islandmagee.[[100]](#endnote-100) The book received mixed reviews from critics[[101]](#endnote-101) but his middle class, urban, reading public were more enthusiastic.[[102]](#endnote-102)

***Witchcraft and Irish Newspapers***

Until the late eighteenth century, Irish newspapers enjoyed small print-runs, employed small numbers of journalists and catered mostly for an urban, English-speaking Protestant elite plied with news taken from English newspapers.[[103]](#endnote-103) The nineteenth century saw a growth in both numbers of professional journalists and Irish provincial and metropolitan newspapers, facilitated by the abolition of newspaper taxes after 1855, increased Catholic and plebeian readership, and innovations in communication (telegraphy), printing technology, and distribution networks (expansion of the railways).[[104]](#endnote-104) Operating in a period of almost continual political upheaval and turmoil, nineteenth-century Irish ‘journalists worked as professional recorders of … events, working for a politicised press and a tradition of political engagement into the twentieth century, not unlike the journalism in Europe.’[[105]](#endnote-105) From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Irish newspapers, both provincial weeklies and Dublin dailies, increasingly identified politically with either Unionism or Nationalism.[[106]](#endnote-106) These developments, along with changes to policing and court structures and administration, increased the scope for court reporting. Criminal cases involving witchcraft, with their unique blend of the amusing, tragic and gruesome were regarded as attractive to readers by Irish reporters in the later nineteenth century. As part of a wider educated elite who had abandoned witchcraft, journalists regarded these cases as an opportunity cases to mock continuing belief and link it to irrationality, ill education and lower-class credulity.[[107]](#endnote-107)

An examination of digitised Irish newspapers published between the eighteenth and late twentieth century has uncovered 26 articles dedicated to the Islandmagee case. Coverage was particularly strong in Ulster, where the trial originated, and started relatively late, in the later nineteenth century, coinciding with the rise of court reporting of criminal trials involving witchcraft. The articles built on earlier work by antiquarians and historians and although they differed to a greater or lesser extent in content, tone and interpretation, together they provided an accepted narrative of Ireland’s witch-hunting past.

The Islandmagee case was first detailed in the liberal *Banner of Ulster* in a light-hearted feature from August 1845 riven with misrepresentation. It was suggested for example that the eight female, ‘Islandmagee Witches’ were convicted by a jury on the grounds they were ‘old and ugly.’[[108]](#endnote-108) Although some of their number, such as Janet Main and Janet Millar, did not conform to contemporary male standards of female beauty, others such as Elizabeth Sellor were described in surviving sources as young and pretty.[[109]](#endnote-109) In 1860, the *Ballymena Observer* provided a more factually accurate account but included a flawless rendition of the lost eye-myth and portrayed the women as ‘unfortunate victims of national ignorance and superstition.’[[110]](#endnote-110) This position was more forcefully defended in the periodical literature of the time. In 1873, the *Dublin University Magazine*, a bastion of mid nineteenth century Protestant periodical literature, which under the new editorship of Keningale Cook had re-orientated its emphases towards the esoteric and supernatural, included a piece on early modern witchcraft. Witchcraft belief was described as a delusion of the lower orders, and ‘a weapon … wielded by the powerful against the weak,’ one of many ‘debasing superstitions’ swept away by ‘the progress of experimental science.’[[111]](#endnote-111) Ireland, it pointed out, escaped this mania for hunting witches, with the exception of the Islandmagee trial of 1711, where ‘poor eight women’ were found guilty of witchcraft, one of whom ‘lost an eye’ in the pillory at the hands of an ‘uneducated mass of people.’[[112]](#endnote-112) In 1888, the *Belfast Telegraph* stated, in a rather muddled account that it claimed was based on the 1711/1822 pamphlet account, that the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ were four in number.[[113]](#endnote-113)

In the twentieth century, from the 1900s to the 1970s, a small number of newspapers, using McSkimmin’s *History of Carrickfergus* as source material, provided straightforward narratives of the case in which the lost-eye myth was given prominence.[[114]](#endnote-114) Others provided more ideologically-charged accounts. In August 1912, the *Limerick Leader* stated that among all European countries, Ireland was the only one to escape the ‘mania’ that ‘caused the deaths of thousands of innocent women,’ with three exceptions: the prosecution of Dame Alice Kyteler (1324), the trial of the ‘Islandmagee Witches’, and the trial of Mary Butters (1808); all of which were attributable to English and Scottish immigration which brought to Ireland the toxic, colonial import of witchcraft.[[115]](#endnote-115) Ironically, two of these examples concerned women who were not accused of, or tried for malefic, demonic witchcraft under the 1586 Act. In Kilkenny in 1324, Alice Kyteler and her associates were accused of harmful magic and politically motivated demonic sorcery. Kyteler evaded arrest by fleeing to England but her co-conspirators were variously excommunicated, banished and flogged, while Petronella de Midia was burned alive.[[116]](#endnote-116) Mary Butters, the ‘Carnmoney witch,’ was a Carrickfergus-based cunning-woman unsuccessfully tried in 1808 for the unwitting killing of her clients while performing counter-magic to cure a bewitched cow.[[117]](#endnote-117)

The *Northern Whig* in the 1920s regarded Irish witchcraft belief as no different to other superstitions such as Banshees and fairies,[[118]](#endnote-118) and the Islandmagee Witches as pious, industrious innocent victims of an ignorant, irrational age.[[119]](#endnote-119) The *Ballymena Observer* in January 1939 used similar enlightenment rhetoric but went even further by placing the Islandmagee trial in the context of early modern European witch-hunting ,which it argued was a top-down process whereby traditional female healers were hunted down by professionally-minded male physicians.[[120]](#endnote-120) This argument was articulated more fully in a controversial text published in the 1970s by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English in which the rising male medical profession was charged with using witch-hunting to regulate and control women’s bodies and to protect their interests from competition from females healers and midwives.[[121]](#endnote-121) In the *Larne Times*, in December 1943, Belfast-born, Protestant playwright and novelist, Olga Fielden, suggested that Ireland’s clean sheet in terms of ‘trials for witchcraft’ was besmirched only by the Kyteler and Islandmagee cases; the latter she explained away in medical terms as a consequence of Dunbar’s ‘hysterical disposition.’[[122]](#endnote-122)

In November 1950, a private member’s bill presented to the House of Commons in Westminster to repeal the 1736 Witchcraft Act that had decriminalised witchcraft in England, Wales and Scotland, prompted the *Northern Whig* to recall the Islandmagee case.[[123]](#endnote-123) With scant regard to evidentiary standards, it argued that if the second presiding Judge at the trial, Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, Anthony Upton had not advised the jury against convicting the eight women they would have been ‘burnt at the stake.’[[124]](#endnote-124) In Ireland, whose system of legal administration, law enforcement, and prosecution was, by the early seventeenth century, almost identical to that of England, and with whom it shared similar common law precepts,[[125]](#endnote-125) convicted witches would have been hanged. In 1939, the same newspaper once more favoured invention over verifiable evidence by claiming that the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ had bewitched Dunbar using the ‘evil-eye’.[[126]](#endnote-126)

In a series of articles written in the 1950s, the *Larne Times* portrayed the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ as paragons of virtue,[[127]](#endnote-127) her accusers as ignorant yokels,[[128]](#endnote-128) and Dunbar as a mentally ill puppet of a persecuting Church and State.[[129]](#endnote-129) One journalist, writing under the initials W.G., and clearly harbouring literary aspirations, built suspense into his narrative and littered it with factual error. He claimed for example that deponent and trial witness at the 1711 trial James Stannus lived in Islandmagee and not in Larne.[[130]](#endnote-130) These errors infuriated well-informed readers and provoked them into writing stern letters to the editor in complaint.[[131]](#endnote-131) In 1955, Malachy Hynes argued in the Dublin-based *Irish Independent* that witch-hunting was solely a problem of ‘northern settlement[s],’ having ceased in the south in the fourteenth-century with the Kyteler case,[[132]](#endnote-132) and that Protestants were as prone to superstitious belief as Catholics.[[133]](#endnote-133) In June 1966, the same newspaper posed a question it was unable to answer at that time: what happened to Mary Dunbar after the trial?[[134]](#endnote-134)

**Conclusion**

This article fills an important gap in our understanding of magical mentalities in nineteenth and twentieth-century Ireland through a study of continuing belief in witchcraft and the cultural representation of historic trials. It is argued that ordinary people in Islandmagee continued to believe in witchcraft throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. In common with the rest of Ireland, witchcraft in Islandmagee evolved during the eighteenth century, moving away from its religiously polarised roots in the early modern period to become a blend of Gaelic-Irish and Protestant settler beliefs. This homogenization should not be taken so far as to exclude regional and local difference, as witch belief there was also shaped by the shared memory of the traumatic events of 1711, transmitted culturally from generation to generation via a rich oral tradition and ‘dark heritage’.

Proceeding from a position of disbelief in the reality of witchcraft, nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish journalists and writers provided an array of interpretations of the trial of the ‘Islandmagee Witches’. At a surface level, they based their discussions on verifiable facts of the case gleaned from primary sources made accessible in print by antiquarians from the late eighteenth century onwards, and from the narrative histories that first appeared in the early nineteenth century. In practice, they highlighted some aspects of the case, while inventing and/or ignoring others to serve a variety of ideological roles and functions. A minority used the 1711 case for overtly political purposes to articulate the perceived consequences of colonialism and immigration, while others regarded it either as the product of collusion between Church and State, or as a conspiracy by a protectionist male medical profession. Irrespective of the interpretative framework used, most commentators highlighted the victimhood of the convicted women and portrayed them as the embodiment of virtue, honesty and piety, while some medicalised Dunbar’s accusation as mental illness. In practical terms, this meant taking at face value Rev. Tisdall’s highly subjective description of the characters of the convicted women, Samuel McSkimmin’s lost-eye myth, and excluding William Sellor, the ninth, male Islandmagee witch from their accounts; a significant omission given he was possibly the last, and sole male, witch to be executed in Ireland. Sellor’s exclusion was in some sense self-perpetuating: the more he was left out of published narratives, the more he became lost to history.

This discourse also created an accepted narrative of Irish witch-hunting, or rather a lack of it, by feeding into long established, eighteenth-century, triumphalist enlightenment rhetoric. They elevated Ireland to a position of moral superiority over other early modern European witch-hunting nations by regarding the Islandmagee trial as an aberrational stain on the country’s otherwise witch free legacy; a short-term submission to religious zealotry and irrationality. This unwillingness to confront the fact people in Ireland did believe in witchcraft and did accuse and prosecute people for it reaches into the twenty-first century when proposed commemoration of the ‘Islandmagee Witches’ can still create controversy.

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2. This research includes: Richard Suggett, *A History of Magic and Witchcraft in Wales* (Stroud, 2008), pp. 128-33, 142-54; Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture, 1736-1951* (Manchester, 1999); idem, *America Bewitched: the Story of Witchcraft after Salem* (Oxford, 2013); Tom Waters, ‘Belief in Witchcraft in Oxfordshire and Warwickshire, c. 1860-1900: the Evidence of the Newspaper Archive’, *Midland History*, 34:1 (2009), pp. 103-5; idem, ‘Maleficent Witchcraft in Britain since 1900’, *History Workshop*, 80:1 (2015), pp. 99-122; Willem De Blécourt, ‘On the Continuation of Witchcraft’, in Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, eds, (Cambridge, 1996) pp. 335-52; Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, ‘Witchcraft after the Witch Trials’, in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (eds), Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter (London, 1999), pp. 97-188; Lizanne Henderson, *Witchcraft and Folk Belief in the Age of Enlightenment, Scotland, 1670-1740* (Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 312-13; Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Representations* (London, 1996), chapters 1-2; Marian Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths in American Culture* (London, 2007); Jonathan Barry, *Raising Spirits: How a Conjuror’s Tale was Transmitted across the Enlightenment* (Basingstoke, 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ronald Hutton, ‘The Changing Face of Manx Witchcraft’, *Cultural and Social History*, 7:2 (2010), pp. 153-69. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Elwyn C. Lapoint, in 'Irish Immunity to Witch-hunting, 1534-1711', *Éire-Ireland*, 27 (1992), pp. 76-92; Raymond Gillespie, ‘Women and Crime in Seventeenth-Century Ireland’, in Margaret MacCurtain and Mary O’Dowd (eds), *Women in Early Modern Ireland*, (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 45-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See, Andrew Sneddon, ‘Witchcraft Belief and Trials in Early Modern Ireland’, *Irish Economic and Social History*, 39 (2012), pp. 1-25; Ronald Hutton, ‘Witch-hunting in Celtic Societies’, *Past and Present*, 212:1 (2011), pp. 43-71. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Andrew Sneddon, *Witchcraft and Magic in Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2015), chapters 2, 4, 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Sneddon, ‘Witchcraft Belief and Trials’; idem, ‘Florence Newton’s Trial for Witchcraft, Cork, 1661: Sir William Aston’s transcript’, *forthcoming*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Sneddon, *Witchcraft,* chapters 4-6. See also, John Fulton, ‘Clerics, Conjurors and Courtrooms: Witchcraft, Magic and Religion in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Ireland’ (PhD thesis, Ulster University, 2016), chapter 1, and Richard Jenkins, ‘Witches and Fairies: Supernatural Aggression and Deviance among the Irish Peasantry’, in Peter Narváez (ed.), *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* (Kentucky, 1997), pp. 302-35. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Sneddon, *Witchcraft*, chapter 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Malcolm Gaskill, ‘Witchcraft Trials in England’, in Brian P. Levack (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 283-5; Karl Bell, *The Magical Imagination: Magic and Modernity in Urban England 1780–1914* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 118; Davies, *America Bewitched*. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. See: G. W. Saunderson, ‘Butter Witches and Cow doctors’, *Ulster Folklife*, 7 (1961), p. 73; Kevin Danaher, *The Year in Ireland*, (Dublin, 1972), pp. 109-18; Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, ‘The Fairy Belief and Official Religion in Ireland’, in *Good People*, pp. 199-212; Sean J. Connolly, *Priests and People in Pre-famine Ireland, 1780-1845* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 112-29; idem, ‘“Ag Déanamh *Commanding*”: Elite Response to Popular Culture, 1600-1850’, in J. S. Donnelly and Kerby A. Miller (eds), *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1859* (Dublin, 1999), pp. 21-4; Timothy Corrigan Correll, ‘Believers, Sceptics, and Charlatans: Evidential Rhetoric, the Fairies and Fairy Healers’, *Folklore*, 116 (2005), pp. 1-18; Angela Bourke, ‘The Baby and the Bathwater: Cultural Loss in Nineteenth-century Ireland’, in Tadhg Foley and Seán Ryder (eds), *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth century* (Dublin, 1998), p. 79; Sean J. Connolly and Andrew R. Holmes, ‘Popular Culture, 1600-1914’, in Liam Kennedy and Phillip Ollerenshaw (eds), *Ulster since 1600: Politics, Economy, and Society* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 109-16; Andrew. R. Holmes, *The Shaping of Ulster Presbyterian Belief and Practice, 1770-1840* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 101-3, 309-13; Hofstra, ‘Witch-trials’, pp. 141- 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. See, Andrew Sneddon, John Fulton, ‘Witchcraft, the Press and Crime in Ireland, 1822-1922’, *Historical Journal* (2018), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X18000365>, pp. 1-24. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Notable exceptions are: Richard Jenkins, ‘The Transformations of Biddy Early’, *Folklore*, 118 (2007), pp. 162-82; and, Ronald Hutton, *The Witch* (New Haven, 2017), pp. 253-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Micro-history is ‘a practice based on the reduction of the scale of observation, on a microscopic analysis and an intensive study of the documentary material’: Giovanni Levi, ‘On Micro-history’, in Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge, 2nd ed., 2005), p. 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Four digitised newspaper and periodical databases have been used: National Micro Media Ltd, Irish Newspaper Archives; British Library/Bright, The British Newspaper Archive; British Library/Gale Cengage British Newspapers, 1600–1950; British Periodicals online, ProQuest. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Unlike witchcraft, nineteenth and twentieth-century folklore of Irish fairies, banshees, cursing and magical healing have received scholarly attention: Gearóid Ó Crualaich, *The Book of the Cailleach: Stories of the Wise Woman Healer* (Cork, repr. 2015); Patricia Lysaght, *The Banshee: the Irish Supernatural Death* messenger (Dublin, 1986); Christina S. Brophy, “What Nobody Does Now”: Imaginative Resistance of Rural Labouring Women’, in Christina S. Brophy and Cara Delay (eds), *Women, Reform and Resistance in Ireland, 1850-1950* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp. 185-210; E. Moore Quinn, “All I had Left were my Words”: the Widow’s Curse in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Ireland’, in *idem*, pp. 211-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. For the use of material culture to understand witchcraft and magic: Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London, 1987); Ceri Houlbrook, Natalie Armitage (eds), *The Materiality of Magic* (Oxford, 2015); Ronald Hutton (ed.), *Physical Evidence for Ritual Acts, Sorcery and Witchcraft in Christian Britain* (Basingstoke, 2016). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Social memory provides members of a community with a framework through which they can interpret their past, whether in relation to personal or to shared recollection, see: Sean O’Connell, ‘Violence and Social Memory in Twentieth-century Belfast: Stories of Buck Alec’, *Journal of British Studies*, 53:3 (2014), pp. 734-56; James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992); James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge, 2002); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989). ‘Dark’ heritage refers to sites or commemorative events linked to death, suffering or atrocities: A. Biran, Y. Poria, G. Oren, ‘Sought Experiences at Dark Heritage Sites,’ *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38:3 (2011), pp. 820–41. Path dependence is where historic events start event chains, institutional patterns, or collective behaviour that have ‘deterministic properties’: James Mahony, ‘Path Dependence in Historical Sociology’, *Theory and Society*, 29:4 (2000), p. 507. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. For this argument in relation to folklore recollections of the Great Famine of the 1840s: Niall Ó Ciosáin, ‘Famine Memory and the Popular Representations of Scarcity’, in Ian McBride (ed.), *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 95-117. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Guy Beiner, *Forgetful Remembrance: Social Forgetting and Vernacular Historiography of a Rebellion in Ulster* (Oxford, 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Angélique Day and Patrick McWilliams (eds), *Ordnance Survey Memoirs* (OSMI) (Belfast, 1990-1998, 40 vols), x, 26, 41; Donald Harmon Akenson, *Between Two Revolutions, Islandmagee, County Antrim, 1798-1920* (Ontario, 1979), chapters 3-4, 6-7. The OSMI were a series of parish accounts for the North of Ireland compiled in the 1830s to accompany the new 6 inch *Ordinance Survey Maps.* [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. OSMI, x, 28, 30-2, 68-9; Akenson, *Two Revolutions*, chapters 8-9; Carol Baraniuk, *James Orr, Poet and Irish Radical* (London, 2014), pp. 31, 36-7; Dixon Donaldson, *History of Islandmagee* (Islandmagee, 1927, repr. 2002), pp. 55-8. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), MS D/1759/1/A/1, pp. 93-4, ‘Antrim Presbytery Minutes,’ 14 February 1656; Trinity College, Dublin (TCD), Papers of William and Samuel Molyneux, Ms 883/1, p. 187, ‘Richard Dobbs’ Brief description of County Antrim,’ 3 May 1683; Donaldson, *Islandmagee*, pp. 42-3; Classon Porter, *Witches, Warlocks and Ghosts* (Belfast, 1885), p. 1; OSMI, X, 40, 66-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. *Dublin Intelligence,* 14 April, 11 August 1711; ‘*The Islandmagee Witches: a Narrative of the Suffering of a Young Girl Called Mary Dunbar …*’, ed. Samuel McSkimmin (Belfast, 1822) p. 33; Andrew Sneddon, *Possessed by the Devil*: *the Real History of the Islandmagee Witches …* (Dublin, 2013), chapters 3, 5, 8, 10. The ‘Islandmagee Witches’ were so called because four of their number lived in Islandmagee, Co. Antrim (Janet Carson, Janet Sellor or Liston, her daughter, Elizabeth Sellor, and Catherine McCalmond). Of the remaining four, Janet Mean came from Broadisland, Co. Antrim, Janet Latimer and Janet Millar from Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim, and Margaret Mitchell from Kilroot, Co. Antrim. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Alison Rowlands (ed.), *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2009), chapters 1, 3, 6, 7; Rolf Schulte, *Man as Witch: Male Witches in Central Europe* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 246-50; Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2003), chapters 1, 2, 5; Robert Walinski-Kiehl, ‘Males, “Masculine Honour,” and Witch Hunting in Seventeenth-Century Germany’, *Men and Masculinities*, 6:3 (2004), p. 265. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. *Dublin Intelligence*, 24 April 1711. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Akenson, *Two Revolutions*, 88-9, 135-7, 142-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. OSMI, x, 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Akenson, *Two Revolutions*, p. 135. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Akenson, *Two Revolutions*, pp. 54-55. For butter production in Ireland: George Chambers, *The History of the Dairy Industry in Ulster* (Belfast 2017); Ian Miller, *Reforming Food in Post famine Ireland: Medicine, Science and Improvement, 1845-1922* (Manchester, 2014), pp. 121-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. OSMI, x, 62-3, 67; Akenson, *Two Revolutions*, p. 135. Witch-stones were used elsewhere in early modern Ireland and Europe, including England: Merrifield, *Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, pp. 161-2; J.G. Dent, ‘The Witch-stone in Ulster and England’, *Ulster Folklife* 10 (1964), pp. 46–8. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. *Ulster Folk and Transport Museum* (UFTM), Collection Number 186.1972, ‘Witch-stone originally hung in a byre in Islandmagee,’ E.N. (donator), 1972; UFTM, Collection Number 563.1972, ‘Witch-stone from Gransha, Islandmagee,’ A.W. J. (donator), 1972. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. UFTM, 63/Q2b/0056, E.F., ‘Completed folklore questionnaire on Witch-stones, Islandmagee’, 1963. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. UFTM 63/Q2b/0014, E.L.M., ‘Completed folklore questionnaire on Witch-stones, Islandmagee’, 1963. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. OSMI, x, 67; Jeanne Cooper Foster, *Ulster Folklore* (Belfast, 1951), p. 90; Akenson, *Two Revolutions*, pp. 54-5, 135-6, 143; Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*: a *True Story* (London, 1999), pp. 100-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Sneddon, *Witchcraft*, chapters 4-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Tom Waters, ‘Magic and the Middle Classes, 1750-1900’, *Journal of British Studies*, 54:3 (2015), p. 644 n. 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Fulton, ‘Clerics, Conjurors and Courtrooms’, chapters 3 and 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. OSMI, x, 95. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Donaldson, *Islandmagee*, p. 48; *The Belfast and Province of Ulster Street Directory* (Belfast, 1918). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Akenson, *Two Revolutions*, pp. 134, 206 n46. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. *Belfast Morning News*, 2 June 1859. See also, *Belfast Newsletter*, 11 August 1888, and OSMI, x, 67. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Jonathan Barry, ‘Public Infidelity and Private Belief: the Discourse of Spirits in Enlightenment Bristol’, in Owen Davies and Willem De Blécourt (eds), *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe* (Manchester, 2004), pp. 117-43. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
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