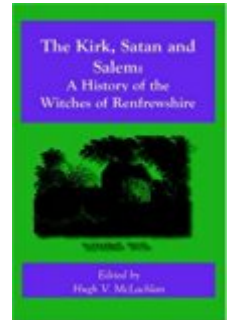


Hugh V. McLachlan, ed.. *The Kirk, Satan and Salem: A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire*. Glasgow: Grimsay Press, 2006. 506 pp. \$70.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84530-035-7.



Reviewed by Julian Goodare

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This is a book about a famous case of witchcraft and demonic possession that occurred in Renfrewshire, in the west of Scotland, in 1697. A ten-year-old girl, Christian Shaw, daughter of the laird of Bargarran, suffered fits that were attributed to demonic possession, and accused several people of bewitching her. Seven people were executed at nearby Paisley, and an eighth committed suicide in prison. This was during the later and declining stages of the Scottish witch hunt; executions on this scale attracted attention at the time, and the Shaw case has often been discussed since.

The book is a collection of documents rather than a monograph. It is multilayered; some of the documents are contemporary, others were first written at various other dates. About half of the book is a photographic reprint of a previous collection, published in 1877; that collection was an expanded version of a yet earlier collection, published in 1809. That collection included reprints of some contemporary documents that had previously been published in 1785. The 1809 work was the first to use the title *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire*. At its heart was a pamphlet about

Christian Shaw, originally published in 1698, called *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girl*.

The remainder of the present book comprises three types of material: contemporary manuscripts concerning the Shaw case and other related witchcraft cases; contemporary publications concerning the witchcraft panic in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692 (the relevance of which the editor hopes to establish); and two previously-published modern articles concerning the Shaw case.

The book does not provide a list of contents, although one seems essential in order to make sense of the book (and is provided as a lengthy note below).[1] In compiling the list, attention has been paid to the dates at which the various items were written, assuming that publications were written in their year of first publication. The book has modern page numbers, cited below, as well as the page numbers of the 1877 volume. The cited page numbers are not continuous because there are various blank or near-blank pages. Unfortunately, there have been printer's errors in repro-

ducing the 1877 volume; one page of the introduction to that volume and one page of the extracts from the presbytery records have been omitted, and a further page of the extracts has been misplaced within the introduction (p. 85). In general it is worth noting that pages 71-321 comprise the photographic reprint of the 1877 volume, and that within this volume, pages 98-315 comprise the text of 1809.

The first general comment to make is that much of this is fascinating material. It reproduces the texts, but is not really an "edition" of them. It says little or nothing about the 1809 and 1877 editors or their purpose, and it offers only occasional comments on the text. There is no assessment of the nineteenth-century editors' practices (they appear to have transcribed *verbatim* but certainly did not do so *literatim*). Nor does the editorial material from 1809 and 1877 provide much guidance. There is an extensive introduction to the 1877 edition, but scholarship has moved on, and nineteenth-century ideas about seventeenth-century witchcraft can tell us about the nineteenth century but not the seventeenth. The 1809 editor's practices make it difficult to disentangle the primary documents from his running commentary. He also chopped up and rearranged the text of *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle*, adding and subtracting headings and substantially obscuring the structure of the work. He even omitted some of the text, particularly a fascinating "Advertisement" on the final page about a "Villanous project" that the authors had heard of, by which someone else was going to write another pamphlet with contrary information. Anyone wanting to study the text of the *True Narrative* in detail is thus unfortunately required to consult the original rather than this edition.

As a compilation, this volume is compendious but far from comprehensive. Several other contemporary documents bear on the Shaw case, but these are either mentioned only in passing or not mentioned at all. These documents which are ei-

ther reprinted over available on Early English Books Online include: James Hutchison, "A Sermon on Witchcraft in 1697" (this sermon, which was preached to the commissioners trying the witches during the Shaw case; has been edited by George Neilson, *Scottish Historical Review* 7 [1910]: 390-99); T. P., *A Relation of the Diabolical Practices of above Twenty Wizards and Witches of the Sherifffdom of Renfrew in the Kingdom of Scotland* (London: 1697); and *Sadducismus Debellatus: or a True Narrative of the Sorceries and Witchcrafts Exercis'd by the Devil and his Instruments upon Mrs. Christian Shaw, Daughter of Mr. John Shaw, of Bargarran, in the County of Renfrew in the West of Scotland, from Aug. 1696 to Apr. 1697* (London: 1698). Of these three works, *Sadducismus Debellatus* is another version of *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle*, but with textual variations that would be worth investigating. This work and the Hutchison sermon are ignored completely by the present edition. *A Relation of the Diabolical Practices* is listed in the bibliography, but seems to have had no effect on the text. This is a pity, since this work was undoubtedly important, and may well have been the publication described by the compilers of *A True Narrative* as "a late scurrilous pamphlet" (p. 239). Further research should investigate this.

Two substantial sections of *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire* predate the Christian Shaw case by two decades. The first of these, the bewitching of Sir George Maxwell of Pollok in 1676-77, was another *cause célèbre*, and it is relevant to the Shaw case, having occurred less than ten miles from Bargarran. Sir George's son, Sir John Maxwell of Pollok, who helped to compile the account of his father's bewitchment, was himself one of the commissioners who investigated and tried the Bargarran witches. The Maxwell account, a composite document, circulated in manuscript at the time, and another version of it were

published by George Sinclair in his *Satan's Invisible World Discovered* (1685).

The second document from the 1670s, Sir George Mackenzie's witchcraft chapter, is of much interest to scholars, though of only tangential relevance to the Shaw case. Mackenzie was lord advocate of Scotland in the 1670s and 1680s, and did much to discourage witchcraft prosecutions; his chapter is a sophisticated and cautious approach to the subject. Scholars will presumably continue to use the original edition of Mackenzie's work, but it might be noted that the 1809 editor has added helpful footnote translations of his Latin and Greek quotations and legal maxims.

The Shaw case itself will be discussed in a moment, but the present editor, Hugh McLachlan, seeks to set it in a broader context. One aspect of this is that Shaw's case, in 1697, soon led to others, as the commission of 1699 against twenty-five more accused witches demonstrates. McLachlan uses the document to argue that "Christian Shaw had a far smaller part on a far larger stage than has commonly been imagined" (p. 336). A more straightforward interpretation might be that the 1699 prosecutions were inspired by the 1697 ones, and that Shaw's part was thus *larger* than has been thought. There were two demoniacs in 1699, Margaret Murdoch and Margaret Laird, and it is probably no coincidence that their symptoms resembled Shaw's. Sir John Maxwell of Pollok was also heavily involved in the 1699 prosecutions. These prosecutions, which all led to acquittals, have been more fully discussed by Michael Wasser.[2]

The text of the 1699 commission gives some details of the activities of which the alleged witches were accused, and may be a useful complement to Wasser's work. Unfortunately, it has been poorly transcribed; as well as obvious misreadings (such as "when she same to see her," p. 346), there are many words where the transcriber has given up and put "[illegible]". Here one also feels particularly keenly the lack of editorial comment on the

text. For instance, when John Dougall is said to have "advised John Hunter to sow sour milk amongst his corn on Bellan day to make the corn crow well" (p. 349), a conscientious editor would offer some comment. "Bellan" is probably a mis-transcription for "Beltan" or Beltane, a seasonal festival on May 1 (and "crow" should presumably be "grow").

The two modern essays reprinted in the book are both general interpretations of the Shaw case. The first, originally published in 1996 in a medical journal, offers a psychiatric diagnosis of Christian Shaw's disturbed behavior that, although necessarily tentative, is probably more plausible than any of the alternatives on offer. The second was written by Hugh McLachlan and Kim Swales for electronic publication in 2000. A fuller version with a more conventional title was published in 2002.[3] It is surprising that the older, shorter version has been selected for republication.

The most original argument of McLachlan and Swales is that *A True Narrative* has been influenced textually by the works of Deodat Lawson concerning the well-known witchcraft panic at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. This is the justification for including the word "Salem" in the title of the present book, and for reprinting three works by Lawson that together comprise about one-fifth of the book. Clearly this cannot justify the reprinting of Lawson's 1704 appendix (pp. 434-454), as this postdates the Shaw case; but what about the publications of 1692 and 1693?

There is a plausible *a priori* case for regarding the Salem and Shaw cases as similar and even as connected. Both were cases, not just of witchcraft, but of demonic possession. This was an unusual feature of early modern European witchcraft. Accusations of witchcraft usually arose from village quarrels; when a villager feared that a misfortune they had suffered had a non-natural cause, they might search back in their memories for someone they had offended, fearing that that person might be taking their revenge through

witchcraft--especially if they fit a popular stereotype of what a witch was like. Quarrels followed by misfortune, not demonic possession, fuelled most early modern witch hunts. Yet Salem's witchcraft panic had been prompted by the demonic possession of a number of girls and women--and now, shortly afterwards, Scotland saw the almost unprecedented emergence of a similar phenomenon.[4] Salem attracted much attention at the time; did it influence the Shaw case?

In the essay reprinted here, McLachlan and Swales argue that "both in style and content, as well as in rationale, the Salem *Narrative* and the later Bargarran one are remarkably similar" (p. 491). They give two extracts from Lawson's *Brief and True Narrative*, but provide no text from the Bargarran *True Narrative* with which to compare them. In the fuller version of their essay they provide four extracts from Lawson but again none from the Bargarran *True Narrative*; they also distance themselves from any explicitly textual argument by concluding that "The author or authors of the [Bargarran] *Narrative* were, we suggest, familiar with Lawson's Salem narrative and/or with some other such book which closely resembled it." [5] This is certainly plausible, and may be substantiated in the future by textual analysis; at present, however, the case remains unproven and even speculative.

There is another way of considering the possible relationship of Salem to the Shaw case. McLachlan and Swales concentrate on Salem's influence on the authors of the Shaw narrative, but it might have influenced Shaw herself. Knowledge of Salem might have encouraged her to emulate the behavior of the Salem demoniacs, just as the later Scottish demoniacs would go on to emulate her own behavior--one such demoniac in 1704, Patrick Morton, even had *A True Narrative* read to him. McLachlan and Swales do not ask this question, but it may become a topic for the further research that the present publication may encourage.

Many of the arguments of McDonald *et al.* and of McLachlan and Swales were anticipated in 1978 by a journalist, Isabel Adam, in her fictionalized book on the Shaw case.[6] This is one of those books that historians find endlessly frustrating; it contains much careful research, but buried within novelistic prose ("Mr Dunlop greeted him cordially and waved him to a chair, accepting the commentaries on Christian's sufferings which he had brought with him," p. 161). Adam made clear that Christian Shaw, who did probably suffer from a psychiatric disorder, was not the malicious mainspring of the witch hunt. She assigned that role, plausibly, to the girl's father, John Shaw of Bargarran. Since no recent scholar has criticized Christian Shaw, McLachlan and Swales's enthusiasm for "exonerating" her seems unnecessary.

So far it has been unnecessary to discuss the present book's introductory essay, because it is not primarily an introduction in the normal sense. Only small parts of it introduce the text that follows it--mainly pages 55-61, a section entitled "The Renfrewshire Witchcraft Prosecution of 1697." This is too brief to achieve much, and it does not even tell us where we can find further discussion of the documents. For instance, the sermon by David Brown (pp. 276-293) was discussed at length by Christina Lerner in her seminal book on the Scottish witch hunt, but there is no mention of this in the present publication.[7] The remainder of the introductory essay is largely a general discussion of witchcraft in Salem (pp. 18-26) and in Scotland (pp. 27-54). McLachlan has worked on Scottish witchcraft over a long period, and his thoughts on his own and other recent publications on the subject are often thought-provoking. Overall, though, the discussion is fragmented, and the whole does not add up to more than the sum of its parts.

There is some indication that the principal intended readers of the introductory essay are not scholars at all, but interested lay people. McLachlan spends much of his time debunking popular

myths rather than advancing scholarship. Lay readers may learn a good deal from statements like "witchcraft belief was not (and is not) inconsistent with an enthusiasm for science" (p. 26), but scholars will not. One group of interested lay readers may be found in the Paisley area, in which McLachlan clearly takes a special interest. He argues that Christian Shaw should be celebrated as a local heroine; she has been unjustly traduced as an "impostor," mainly by Hugo Arnot and Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, writing in 1785 and 1818 respectively; no recent scholars have followed their line.[8] When Shaw grew up, she played a significant early role in establishing a thread-manufacturing industry in Paisley. Later, after the Industrial Revolution, this would lead to the dramatic expansion of the town and the creation of the world-famous "Paisley Pattern." This, however, seems remote from the scholarly investigation of seventeenth-century witchcraft.

The *History of the Witches of Renfrewshire*, compiled so assiduously in 1809, has never been a neglected document. Its reprinting with additional material must be welcomed in making it more accessible. The texts contained in the present volume would have been even more accessible if they had been given an adequate editorial apparatus, but it is appropriate to recognize the importance of what this volume has achieved. It will surely be useful in stimulating further research on Scottish witchcraft. It is less useful on Salem, despite reprinting so much from Deodat Lawson. Nor does it have much on demonic possession, except through the indirect suggestion (on which more work is needed) that we need not take literally the texts that describe the behavior of those possessed. Overall, a perusal of its pages can certainly be recommended, and will show that there is much still to find out about the bewitchment of Christian Shaw.

Notes

[1]. Contents of *The Kirk, Satan and Salem*: Prelims (pp. 1-14) / Present editor's introduction

(pp. 15-67) / Introduction to second edition of *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire*, written by "J. D." in 1877 (pp. 73-88). / Extracts from the records of the presbytery of Paisley, from December 30, 1696 to June 9, 1697, first published in 1877 (pp. 89-95) / Preface to first edition of *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire*, written by the editor, John Millar, in 1809 (p. 98) / Chapter on the crime of witchcraft from *The Laws and Customs of Scotland in Matters Criminal* by Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, written and first published in 1678 (entitled by the 1809 editor "A Treatise on Witchcraft") (pp. 101-133) / Collection of contemporary documents on the bewitching of Sir George Maxwell of Pollok, 1676-1677 (pp. 135-151) / Preface to *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle*, written and first published in 1698 (pp. 152-165) / *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle*, written and first published in 1698 (pp. 167-220) / Afterword to *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle*, written and first published in 1698 (pp. 221-224) / Abbreviated statements of Matthew Brisbane, physician, and Henry Marshall, apothecary, who examined Christian Shaw; written December 31, 1696 and January 1, 1697, originally appended to *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle* (pp. 225-226) / Abbreviate of commission by the privy council to arrest and interrogate witches, January 19, 1697 (pp. 226-227) / Abbreviate of the report of the above commission, with confessions of three accused witches, March 9, 1697, originally appended to *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle* (pp. 227-234) / Abbreviate of commission by the privy council to try witches, April 5, 1697 (p. 234) / Discussion by 1809 editor of the views of Hugo Arnot, who had given an account of the Shaw case in his *A Collection and Abridgement of Celebrated Criminal Trials in Scotland, 1536-1784* (Edinburgh, 1785); the commissions by the privy council had originally been published by Arnot (pp. 234-236) / Preface to two newsletters appended to *A True Narrative of the*

Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle, written and first published in 1698 (pp. 237-240) / Two news-letters appended to *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle*, written and first published in 1698 (pp. 240-253, 253-272); the first of these consists largely of a copy of the prosecuting advocate's speech to the jury, while the second is a short demonological treatise justifying the prosecutions / Contemporary official account of the apparent suicide in prison of John Reid, one of those accused of bewitching Christian Shaw, originally appended to *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle* (pp. 273-275) / Sermon preached to the condemned witches by David Brown, June 9, 1697, the day before their execution at Paisley (pp. 276-293) / "Some passages which fell out before and at the execution of the seven persons who were condemned and burned for Witchcraft on the Gallowgreen of Paisley," written and published in 1698, originally appended to *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle* (pp. 293-297) / Passages concerning the Shaw case by Hugo Arnot, in his *A Collection and Abridgement of Celebrated Criminal Trials in Scotland, 1536-1784* (Edinburgh, 1785), written and first published 1785, reprinted 1809 (pp. 297-300) / Passage concerning the Shaw case by Walter Young, minister of Erskine (the parish including Bargarran), written and first published in 1792 as part of the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (pp. 301-303) / Account of Christian Shaw's first husband, John Millar, minister of Kilmaurs, by the 1809 editor (pp. 303-305) / Notes on the possible execution of a witch in Paisley in 1661, by the 1809 editor (pp. 305-306) / Act of Parliament of 1736, repealing the English and Scottish Witchcraft Acts (pp. 307-309) / Comments on the above Act by Hugo Arnot (see above), written and first published 1785, reprinted 1809 (pp. 309-310) / Notes on proceedings concerning witchcraft by the General Assembly of the Church between 1640 and 1647, by the 1809 editor (pp. 310-312) / Announcement of a public fast in Paisley on behalf of Christian Shaw, March 28, 1697

(pp. 312-315) / Extracts from the Poll Tax records of 1695 concerning a number of the people involved in the Shaw case, originally published in the *Glasgow Herald* in 1864 and reprinted in the 1877 publication (pp. 317-321) / *A Brief and True Narrative of some Remarkable Passages Relating to Sundry Persons Afflicted by Witchcraft, at Salem Village, which happened from the nineteenth of March to the fifth of April 1692*, by Deodat Lawson; written and first published in 1692 (pp. 323-335) / Commission of justiciary for the trial of twenty-five Renfrewshire people for witchcraft, May 1699 (pp. 336-363) / Present editor's introduction to the following document (pp. 364-367) / *Christ's Fidelity the Only Shield Against Satan's Malignity*, by Deodat Lawson, a sermon preached by Lawson at Salem Village, March 24, 1692, and first published 1693 (pp. 368-431) / Extract from the manuscript diary of Lady Anne Halkett, October 12, 1698 (pp. 432-434); Lady Halkett was a devout widow in Dunfermline, and this passage reproduces her notes on reading *A True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle* / Appendix to the 1704 edition of *Christ's Fidelity the Only Shield Against Satan's Malignity*, by Deodat Lawson (pp. 434-454) / S. W. McDonald, A. Thom and A. Thom, "The Bargarran Witch Trial: a Psychiatric Reassessment," *Scottish Medical Journal* 41 (1996): 152-158 (pp. 455-479) / "Exonerate the Erskine One!" by Hugh V. McLachlan and J. Kim Swales, written and first published in 2000 (pp. 480-493) / Bibliography (pp. 495-499) / Index (covering only the non-facsimile material) (pp. 501-506).

[2]. Michael Wasser, "The Western Witch-Hunt of 1697-1700: The Last Major Witch-Hunt in Scotland," in *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, ed. Julian Goodare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 146-165.

[3]. Hugh McLachlan and Kim Swales, "The Bewitchment of Christian Shaw: A Reassessment of the Famous Paisley Witchcraft Case of 1697," in *Twisted Sisters: Women, Crime and Deviance in*

Scotland since 1400, ed. Yvonne G. Brown and Rona Ferguson (East Linton: Tuckwell, 2002), 54-83.

[4]. Brian P. Levack, "Demonic Possession in Early Modern Scotland," in *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, forthcoming).

[5]. McLachlan and Swales, "The Bewitchment of Christian Shaw," 71-72.

[6]. Isabel Adam, *Witch Hunt: The Great Scottish Witchcraft Trials of 1697* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

[7]. Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (London: Chatto, 1981), 166-168.

[8]. Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe, *A Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft in Scotland* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1884; first published as part of another work 1818), 171-174. Sharpe was perhaps the first to observe that the Shaw case had what he called a "shocking prototype" in Salem (p. 174).

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