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‘Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts’: To what extent was the execution of Gwen ferch Ellis (1594) a turning point in the Welsh perception of common magic? An exploration of the ‘cunning folk’ of Wales at the turn of the seventeenth century.

Joseph Ellis – May 2019

A329 - The Making of Welsh History

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Introduction

The early modern period was one of transition and uncertainty, where disease, political upheaval or crop failure could result in unexpected and catastrophic hardship. As well as religion, people turned to 'common magic', a separate body of supernatural beliefs and practices, to understand, alleviate and protect them from everyday misfortune.¹ The English regarded Wales in particular as a 'hotbed of ignorance, superstition and witchcraft';² however, the vast majority of towns and villages throughout Europe had recourse to a local 'cunning person' who could assist 'with all infirmities of body and mind'.³ By regularly carrying out beneficent magic, such as producing healing remedies or the restoration of lost or stolen property, the 'cunning folk' of sixteenth-century Wales often attained a respectable social standing within their communities, despite the Protestant church viewing all forms of magic as heretical.⁴ However, the ability of these practitioners to counteract curses, hints at the belief in a darker power, distinct from traditional restorative magic, practiced in Wales by *rheibwyr*:⁵ Welsh witches.

Welsh trial documentation and published discourse from the turn of the seventeenth century suggests that around this time there was a blurring of the traditional distinction between 'white' and 'black' magic, which led to an increase in accusations of maleficent witchcraft, peaking in the 1650s.⁶ Through analysis of the practices and perceptions of Welsh 'cunning folk' in the years between the Witchcraft Act of 1563 and the final Welsh witch execution in 1655, this dissertation will attempt to determine how and why this transformation occurred. By focusing on the 1590s as a pivotal decade, it will ask whether the witch-trial of Gwen ferch Ellis in 1594, the first to result in execution, set a precedent for further accusations, or whether English secular and religious views on the diabolic nature

¹ Keith Wrightson, '14. Witchcraft and Magic', *Yale Courses Early Modern England* (2009). Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rHSu2oDZXE&list=PL18B9F132DFD967A3&index=14>, Accessed 27 March 2019.

² Peter Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography* (Stroud, 2016), p. 165.

³ Fae Honeybell, 'Cunning Folk and Wizards in Early Modern England', Warwick University: The Early Modern and Eighteenth Century Centre (2010). Available at <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/ecc/emforum/projects/disstheses/dissertations/fhoneybell/>, Accessed 27 February 2019.

⁴ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 2003), p. 561.

⁵ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 82.

⁶ Richard Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives of Witchcraft and Magic from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Wales* (Wales, 2018), p. 15.

of magic were beginning to permeate through Wales. Moreover, it will examine the reasons why a comparatively small number of witchcraft prosecutions occurred in the principality.

The historiography of magic in Europe is extensive, enduring and multifaceted. Scholarly study largely began in the nineteenth century, when there was a steady stream of monographs published on the subject of witchcraft, which were largely products of 'Whig history', asserting that the elimination of witchcraft was a significant step in civilised society's forward progress.⁷ Subsequently, during the interwar years, English studies, such as Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), declared that witchcraft 'was really the survival of a pre-Christian fertility cult, the worship of Diana'.⁸ However, the 1970s saw the most significant development in the historiography of magic, with the emergence of 'new social historians',⁹ who published anthropologically-inspired studies such as Alan Macfarlane's *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (1970), and Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971). Macfarlane's hypothesis that communal pressures within villages led to accusations, 'rather than an external event such as the arrival of a witch-hunter',¹⁰ is particularly relevant to the Welsh experience of witchcraft that will be discussed further in Chapter I. Meanwhile, Thomas examines the friction between functional attitudes towards witchcraft emanating 'from below',¹¹ and Protestant attempts to 'take the magic out of religion'.¹² These studies were influential for pioneering the 'bottom-up' model for scholarly study of witchcraft;¹³ however, neither makes more than a passing reference to the question of gender, or the role of the supernatural in Welsh society. Alongside a more recent work, P. G. Maxwell-Stuart's *The British Witch* (2014), they portray Wales as a mere appendage of England, unworthy of separate examination, or convey the Welsh as untroubled by maleficent witchcraft,¹⁴ a view reassessed in Chapter II.

Despite this, some historians have attempted to redress this gap in the literature. Historian J. Gwynn Williams pioneered the study of witchcraft in Wales during the 1970s, by undertaking

⁷ E. William Monter, 'The Historiography of European Witchcraft: Progress and Prospects', in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1972), p. 437.

⁸ Monter, 'The Historiography of European Witchcraft', p. 438. Diana was a Germanic, Pagan god of the hunt, the moon and nature.

⁹ Malcolm Gaskill, 'Witchcraft Trials in England' in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, Brian Levack ed. (Oxford, 2013), p. 4.

¹⁰ Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1999), p. 95.

¹¹ Monter, 'The Historiography of European Witchcraft', p. 444.

¹² Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, back cover.

¹³ Gaskill, 'Witchcraft Trials in England', p. 4.

¹⁴ Richard Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics in Early Modern Wales*, ed. Michael Roberts and Simone Clarke (Wales, 2000), p. 76.

comprehensive research on the witch-trials of Flintshire. He concludes, correctly, that there were few witchcraft prosecutions in Wales;¹⁵ however, the focus on a single county leaves regional disparity and the effect of English views on the borderlands unconsidered. More recently, in *Witchcraft, Women's Honour and Customary Law in Early Modern Wales* (2006), Sally Parkin has concluded that Welsh customary law, with its emphasis on reconciliation over punishment and the restoration of communal harmony, often shielded those accused of witchcraft from prosecution.¹⁶ Whilst this may be a significant factor, the relative lack of witchcraft prosecutions in Wales is unlikely to be mono-causal and Chapter III will attempt to present a more complex set of underlying contributors. Only in the last two decades has the history of Welsh witchcraft started to take on its own identity, notably through the research conducted by Richard Suggett. As the 'leading historian of beliefs and legal actions concerning witchcraft in early modern Wales',¹⁷ he has authored a broad and balanced survey on the subject,¹⁸ as well as transcribed the entire set of surviving documents available for Welsh witchcraft trials,¹⁹ an invaluable historical resource for any research on the subject.

The study of 'black' witchcraft in Europe is therefore extensive; however, the scholarship of 'white magic' still has gaps that require filling, especially from a Welsh perspective. Research into this is fundamentally the study of early modern coping mechanisms and social relations,²⁰ and this dissertation intends to use it as a lens through which to view wider issues central to the history of Wales: religion, gender and the effect of the core on its peripheries. Furthermore, this dissertation will argue for the first time that the 1590s was a pivotal decade in Welsh perceptions of the supernatural by illuminating the collision of 'white' and 'black' magic that resulted in the first execution for witchcraft in 1594.

In light of this, Chapter I will explore who the Welsh 'cunning folk' were, what they did and perceptions of common magic in the years surrounding the trial of Gwen ferch Ellis. It will use primary evidence from Suggett's *Narratives* to examine how Welsh communities viewed and spoke about the 'cunning folk' living amongst them, with a particular focus on the depositions made for Gwen's trial. Chapter II will then investigate the differences between English and Welsh concepts of magic and

¹⁵ J. Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2', in *Flintshire Historical Society*, 26 (1975), p. 22.

¹⁶ Sally Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law in early modern Wales', in *Social History*, 31 (2006), p. 318.

¹⁷ Ronald Hutton in Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 7.

¹⁸ Richard Suggett, *A History of Magic & Witchcraft in Wales* (Stroud, 2008).

¹⁹ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, pp. 81-179.

²⁰ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 100.

attempt to determine the part played by English secular and religious views on the persecution of witches in Wales. A study of Robert Holland's demonological tract, *Dau Gymro yn Taring* (Two Tarrying Welshmen),²¹ will show how elite concepts of magic and witchcraft fused with popular beliefs, resulting in an atmosphere that was fertile for increased persecution during the 1590s. Chapter III will then examine why Wales remained comparatively untroubled by witch-hunts, including analysis of the role played by Welsh customary law and the drive of Tudor state-builders to 'eliminate disorder from the periphery of the realm.'²² Finally, the conclusion will tie these chapters together to establish to what extent there was a change in the perception of 'cunning folk' at the turn of the seventeenth century and whether the execution of Gwen ferch Ellis was a symptom of this transformation or an isolated and extraordinary event.

²¹ Stuart Clark and P.T.J. Morgan, 'Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales: Robert Holland's Dialogue on Witchcraft', in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 27 (2011), pp. 31-46. No copies of the original edition, published in approximately 1595, remain so the quotations in this dissertation are taken from Clark and Morgan's 2011 article, which in turn were 'translated from the 1681 edition of the Vicar Pritchard's *Cannwyll y Cymru* ('The Welshman's Candle')', pp. 457-468.

²² Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 98.

Chapter I

The air of early modern Europe 'teemed with invisible supernatural entities, which constantly influenced...the lives of men'.¹ Alongside God's influence on the material world, a second sphere of beliefs were part of the fabric of everyday life that 'stood outside the world of formal religion':² the sphere of magic. Whilst Christianity rested in the hands of the clergy and the state, the custodians of magical beliefs and practices were the common people,³ the Welsh being no exception. The association between 'Celt' and 'magic'⁴ was strong enough for John Penry to remark in 1597 that Wales was a nation 'stark blinded with superstition...from which flows swarmes of southsaiers and enchanter's'.⁵ But who was this army of 'enchanters', and were the communities that contained them similarly alarmed by their presence?

There was a diverse range of cultural signifiers used to describe those who practiced common magic in early modern Wales. The terms 'wizard', 'sorcerer' 'conjuror' and 'healer' were common, but varied over time and by geographic location, making a conclusive definition of a 'cunning person' difficult to pin down. Within this dissertation the term 'cunning folk' will be applied to those who used magic for good and the term 'witch' for those who were driven by revenge or anger to perform harmful magic, although in practice there were considerable grey areas and a dangerous potential for the two concepts to overlap. Furthermore, whilst Owen Davies asserts that 'roughly two-thirds' of Britain's 'cunning folk' were men,⁶ evidence suggests that 'women were associated more easily with harmful magic'⁷ and were more likely to practice magic that did not require literacy.⁸ Therefore, it seems that the services available depended on the gender of the practitioner.

¹ Emma Wilby, *Cunning-Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton, 2005), p.8.

² Wrightson, '14: Witchcraft and Magic'.

³ Wilby, *Cunning-Folk*, p. 255.

⁴ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 76.

⁵ Regina Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith: Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture* (New Jersey, 2006), p. 96.

⁶ Owen Davies, *Popular Magic: Cunning Folk in English History* (London, 2007), pp. 68-69.

⁷ Alison Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe' in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, Brian Levack ed. (Oxford, 2013), p. 7.

⁸ Davies, *Popular Magic*, p. 71.

The fear of legal reprisals means that the activities of 'cunning folk' goes largely unrecorded, and it is therefore not possible to ascertain the number of practitioners who operated in Wales.⁹ Apart from fragments of documentary evidence, such as court records, demonological tracts, and the occasional discovery of physical artefacts,¹⁰ there are 'few direct links with the actions and beliefs of the silent majority'.¹¹ However, Thomas Cooper's contemporary remark that 'good witches were rife almost in everie parish',¹² suggests that 'cunning folk' were widespread across Britain and employed their skills in 'almost any sphere of life'.¹³ The origin, status and gender of the practitioner fundamentally affected the type of skills they possessed, as well as the clients they attracted, but commonly included the recovery of lost possessions, divination, love-magic, healing or providing both a deterrent and a cure for black witchcraft.¹⁴ The supposed origin of these skills varied, but especially predominant in Wales, and other Celtic nations,¹⁵ was the claim that they originated from 'a small sort of airy people call'd fairies'.¹⁶

Furthermore, Welsh 'cunning folk' were often not the poor and elderly commonly alluded to in folklore, but active community participants: 'a miscellaneous group of widows, yeoman and wives of craftsmen'.¹⁷ At a basic level, common magic replaced the recourse to Catholic magic that the Reformation had swept away and gave people both an explanation and a cure for the 'remorseless and impersonal forces of sickness and death'.¹⁸ However, on a practical level, it seems that the appeal of 'cunning folk' lay in the fact that they were affordable and available. Contemporary literature, often written with predisposed hostility towards magic and as a warning against associating with those that practiced it, unwittingly reveals its popularity amongst the people. For example, theologian William

⁹ Davies, *Popular Magic*, p. 67.

¹⁰ Brian Hoggard's survey on the archaeology of magic in Britain includes details on charms, witch-bottles, desiccated cats, concealed shoes and horse skulls. Whilst the scope of this dissertation prevents additional analysis, the subject would benefit from further examination.

¹¹ Brian Hoggard, 'The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Magic' in *Beyond the Witch Trials: Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment Europe*, Owen Davies and Willem de Blecourt eds. (Manchester, 2004), p.9.

¹² Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of Witchcraft* (London, 1617), p. 315. Available at <http://downloads.it.ox.ac.uk/ota-public/tcp/Texts-HTML/free/A19/A19295.html>, Accessed 1 May 2019.

¹³ Catherine Rider, 'Common Magic' in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, D. J. Collins ed. (Cambridge, 2015), p. 310.

¹⁴ Hunnybell, *Cunning Folk*, p. 23.

¹⁵ Ronald Hutton, 'Witch-hunting in Celtic Societies', in *Past & Present*, 212 (2011), p. 67.

¹⁶ Moses Pitt, *An Account of one Ann Jefferies* (London, 1696). Available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A54935.0001.001?view=toc>, Accessed 1 May 2019

¹⁷ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire', p. 21.

Perkins observed that people 'depend on [the cunning man] as their God',¹⁹ whilst Rhys Pritchard, similarly opposed to magic due to his clerical profession, proclaimed that in Wales 'wizards, sorcerers, conjurors and enchanters are the apostles whom the people prefer to follow; their pronouncements are the 'scriptures' they consult'.²⁰ Furthermore, whilst 'cunning folk' often 'possessed a certain degree of authority within the community',²¹ their knowledge of magic could also leave them teetering on the edge of social isolation if their neighbours suddenly deemed them equally able to harm as to heal.²² In this social climate, magical practitioners would have moved 'up and down the good/bad continuum',²³ depending on how their acts were judged by others, with female practitioners of white magic particularly prone to being relabelled a witch.²⁴ It was this situation that Gwen ferch Ellis found herself in 1594.

The 'gaol-files', containing the evidence gathered by the Court of Great Sessions in preparation for Gwen's trial, should be read with caution not only because they are translations into English from Welsh oral testimony, but because they are 'a point of intersection between elite and popular culture'.²⁵ The men who mediated the voices of those involved for posterity may have misinterpreted, willingly or accidentally, definitions and concepts of witchcraft based on their own perspective. However, they do give us a rare insight into the alarming shift of perceptions that transformed a healer into a suspected witch. In Denbighshire during the 1590s, Gwen was 'for the tenne yeres nowe last past' well known by her neighbours for her ability to 'holpen diseased children and beastes by charming, as also by salves, drinckes and plasters'.²⁶ However, before her arrest, a set of strange occurrences and a growing reputation for doing 'somme harme to men, woomen and beastes',²⁷ ignited suspicions of maleficent witchcraft. The first of these events, in 1589, involved a miller's son who had struck Gwen during a disagreement, but then mysteriously 'fell to be franticke and madde besides himself' before dying shortly afterwards.²⁸

¹⁹ William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1610), p. 256. Available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A09402.0001.001?rgn=subject;view=toc;q1=Witchcraft+--+Early+works+to+1800>, Accessed 5 March 2019.

²⁰ Clark & Morgan, 'Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales', p. 44.

²¹ Davies, *Popular Magic*, p. 69.

²² Rider, 'Common Magic', p. 325.

²³ Wilby, *Cunning-Folk*, p. 116.

²⁴ Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Gender', p. 4.

²⁵ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 13.

²⁶ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 56.

²⁷ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 64.

²⁸ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 66.

Later, in 1591, a group of men led by the local bailiff, decided to 'make tryall'²⁹ of Gwen's magical abilities by arriving unexpected at her house, demanding ale. At some point during the encounter, Roger Evans used his left arm to push Gwen aside, to which she responded that 'shee woulde revenge upon them any injurye they should offer'.³⁰ When she eventually relinquished and supplied the requested ale, they found a 'greate flye, ugly to behoulde...upon the toppe of the drinke'³¹, which they took to be the 'divell by which she woorkethe mischieff'.³² This is an example of how external ideas about witchcraft were starting to permeate through Wales: the familiar being a reoccurring feature of European witch-trials. Within a fortnight, the arm that Roger Evans had used to push Gwen had been broken and the bailiff's wife had mysteriously lost the use of her limbs: misfortune not perceived to be coincidental, but 'by the meanes of the said supposed witche'.³³ These events comply precisely with the 'community-based nature of witchcraft accusation'³⁴ first presented by Alan Macfarlane in 1970. In this set of 'classic circumstances', the victim offends a neighbour to the extent that they have reason to verbally curse him, and a personal misfortune follows. The victim then settles on the curser as the perpetrator of his misfortune and projects his own guilt onto them in the form of a witchcraft accusation.³⁵

Despite compliance to these classic circumstances, the case of Gwen ferch Ellis was extraordinary for a number of reasons. Firstly, the 1590s was a transitional period in Welsh concepts of witchcraft when English persecution of witches was at its height,³⁶ and learned and popular concepts of magic were beginning to pervade the Welsh border. Furthermore, 'academic interest in demonology reached its climax at around this time',³⁷ with anti-witchcraft tracts such as *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* by theologian William Perkins.³⁸ In his writing, Perkins asserts that black witches 'did onely hurt the bodie', whilst white witches 'hath laid fast hold on the soule', and therefore did 'a thousand-

²⁹ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 62.

³⁰ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 62.

³¹ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 62.

³² Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 62.

³³ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 63.

³⁴ Willow Winsham, *Accused: British Witches throughout History* (Barnsley, 2016), p. 27.

³⁵ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p. 196.

³⁶ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 41.

³⁷ Clark & Morgan, 'Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales', p. 33.

³⁸ Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1610).

fold more harme'.³⁹ It is conceivable that some of those involved in Gwen's trial unwittingly had their perceptions of black and white magic moulded by 'these sensational pamphlets reporting witchcraft trials in England',⁴⁰ and made judgements accordingly.

Gwen's entanglement 'with something much bigger than herself',⁴¹ shows that common magic was most treacherous when crossing social boundaries of gender or status. In 1594, a written charm was found inside the house of influential landowner Thomas Mostyn, and the implication was that Jane Conway, an associate of Gwen's who had previously had disagreements with Mostyn, had employed Gwen to bewitch him.⁴² The concept of written or oral 'charming' was widely used 'by the educated as well as uneducated',⁴³ because although the meanings behind the words was often unknown by either the practitioner or the patient, it's 'impenetrability and secrecy gave it its power'.⁴⁴ Although there is no specific reference to Gwen's case in any subsequent Welsh trials, hers is the first to feature the negative use of 'charming', which appeared regularly in subsequent accusations. For example, in 1611, Jane Bulkeley of Caernarfon was charged with inscribing charms on 'tenne several peeces of cheese',⁴⁵ whilst part of the evidence against Margaret David of Carmarthenshire in 1656 was that she had 'mumbled some prayer or charme'.⁴⁶ Had Gwen restricted her magical activities to her neighbours she may have avoided the attention of the authorities, however the discovery of the Mostyn charm led to Gwen's execution for witchcraft: the first in Welsh history.

This chapter has demonstrated that the 'cunning folk' of Wales were a numerous, respected and often indispensable aspect of rural village life. In a world where 'the modern compartmentalisation of religion, magic and science had not yet taken place',⁴⁷ white magic was perceived to be no more outlandish than the methods used by physicians or barber-surgeons. Positive perceptions of 'cunning folk' tended to descend into accusations of witchcraft only when there was a breach of hierarchical norms or traditional neighbourly behaviour, as in the case of Gwen ferch Ellis, or when concepts became confused and blurred through processes of acculturation, as shall be demonstrated in Chapter II.

³⁹ Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, p. 176.

⁴⁰ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 47.

⁴¹ Winsham, *Accused: British Witches*, p. 34.

⁴² Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 46.

⁴³ Rider, 'Common Magic', p. 314.

⁴⁴ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 214.

⁴⁵ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 115.

⁴⁶ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 142.

⁴⁷ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 35.

Chapter II

Early modern social and cultural processes had a significant effect on ‘what was done, what was feared, what was seen as magic and how magic was regarded’.¹ Closely linked to these processes was the attempts by elites to influence popular culture and by the acculturation of one country over its neighbour, a situation acutely relevant to early modern Wales. As such, this chapter will examine how far and in what ways its parent state, England, influenced Welsh ideas about magic and witchcraft.

Although concern about witchcraft was more severe in continental Europe and notably different in England,² where there was around a thousand witch-trials,³ by the seventeenth century it had advanced into the peripheries.⁴ Like other territories with a dominant Celtic language,⁵ Wales suffered relatively few trials and did not see a peak in witchcraft prosecutions until the mid-seventeenth century (see Appendix I), over half a decade after the English zenith ‘in the latter half of Elizabeth’s reign’.⁶ Of the thirty-five Welsh cases for which evidence remains, there was only eight guilty verdicts and five executions,⁷ suggesting that these were exceptional events, rather than a Welsh witch-hunt. However, at the turn of the seventeenth century, accusations that had once been resolved within the community increasingly began to make their way into the courtroom.

In the period between the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act of 1563 and the Jacobean Act of 1604, there were only ten indictments and one execution, but in the sixty years following the Jacobean Act, there were twenty-three indictments and four executions (see Appendix I). This suggests that the ‘apparent unity of the Tudor government was an illusion’,⁸ because what concerned the English did not concern the Welsh in the same way or at the same time. Furthermore, the Welsh concept of witchcraft was ‘relatively underdeveloped’,⁹ with suspected witches indicted for their disruptive activities rather

¹ Rider, ‘Common Magic’, p. 328.

² Nachman Ben-Yahuda, ‘The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective’, in *American Journal of Sociology*, 86 (1980), p. 3.

³ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 12.

⁴ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 75.

⁵ Ronald Hutton, ‘Witch-hunting in Celtic Societies’, in *Past & Present*, 212 (2011), p. 66.

⁶ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p. 196. This comment does not take into account Matthew Hopkins’ anomalous and virulent witch-hunting activities in East Anglia during the 1640s.

⁷ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 14.

⁸ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 165.

⁹ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 27.

than a diabolic pact and rarely was there a mention of Sabbats or familiars, with the notable exception of Gwen's 'uglie flye'.¹⁰ Despite these differences, trial evidence reveals common features that unify the Welsh and English experience, indicating that, as a Celtic society 'outnumbered and dominated by the non-Celtic',¹¹ Wales was vulnerable to the intrusion and acculturation by English ideas. As such, it is significant that the majority of Welsh witch-trials occurred in Breconshire, Montgomeryshire and Pembrokeshire (see Appendix 1): the areas 'most susceptible to external influence'.¹²

In addition, whilst 'words may appear to be fixed and definite, their semantic stability is deceptive'¹³ and the language used in Welsh discourse shows significant English acculturation. For example, the term 'witch' was not native to Wales and first appeared in William Salesbury's Welsh-English dictionary in 1547.¹⁴ Before this, practitioners of black and white magic were distinguished by the words *rheibwr* and *swynwr* respectively, with *rheibwr* denoting those who 'ravage people', as opposed to those who 'do good to man and beast'.¹⁵ Moreover, unlike in England, 'witch' was a gendered term in Wales,¹⁶ meaning that labels such as 'white witch' and 'good witch' were potentially fraught with danger for female 'cunning folk'.¹⁷ In Welsh indictment records, there was only one reference to 'witchcraft' as a distinct concept before the 1590s,¹⁸ although references to 'charming' or 'soothsaying' were common. Subsequent to Gwen's trial however, references appear regularly, suggesting that this was when 'the English witch-figure was becoming internalized in Wales'.¹⁹ Whilst it is possible that this was solely the result of English acculturation, Catherine Rider contends that the phenomenon was unlikely to be mono-causal as there is much evidence of similar ideas and practices over long periods of time and across disparate geographical areas.²⁰

¹⁰ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 62.

¹¹ Hutton, 'Witch-hunting in Celtic Societies', p. 69.

¹² Hutton in Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 8.

¹³ John Newton, 'Introduction: Witchcraft; Witch Codes; Witch Act' in *Witchcraft and the Act of 1604*, John Newton and Jo Bath eds. (Leiden, 2008), p. 3.

¹⁴ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 296.

¹⁵ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 82.

¹⁶ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 297.

¹⁷ Newton, 'Introduction: Witchcraft', p. 7.

¹⁸ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 87. The Grand Jury eventually threw out the 1579 accusation of Margaret ferch David.

¹⁹ Hutton, 'Witch-hunting in Celtic Societies', p. 67.

²⁰ Rider, 'Common Magic', p. 327.

Terms used in cultural discourse such as parliamentary legislation and demonological tracts also created linguistic codes that refined and influenced actual belief.²¹ Individual European authorities shaped the definition of a guilty witch differently, however broadly speaking those that defined witchcraft as *diabolism* had more intense witch-hunts than those who defined it as *maleficium*,²² with England and Wales falling into the latter. Following the Acts of Union in 1536 and 1543, Welsh law should have disintegrated completely, leaving legal concepts of witchcraft to be guided by those of England, however in reality English law was ‘consciously ignored’ in large parts of Wales.²³ Despite this, when community countermeasures such as ‘reconciliation through arbitration’ did not successfully restore harmony,²⁴ the suspect’s fate was placed in the hands of the law.

Both Witchcraft Acts of 1563 and 1604 passed at the beginning of new reigns, perhaps functioning as symbolic and legitimising tools that showed ‘a firm stance against deviance’.²⁵ Upon Elizabeth I’s accession in 1558, secular and ecclesiastical authorities were also concerned that Catholics might use sorcery to harm the queen and therefore a new law was required to deal with harmful magic.²⁶ The Act of 1563 ensured that if any person ‘shall use practise or exercise any Witchecrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie, wherby any person shall bee killed or destroyed, they shall suffer paynes of Deathe as a Felon’.²⁷ Although a felony, witchcraft remained largely a composite crime, often prosecuted alongside ‘murder, heresy, poisoning and infanticide’.²⁸ The Act subsequently goes on to condemn specific magical acts, perhaps as an attempt to eliminate any legal loopholes,²⁹ focusing particularly on those that occupied ‘cunning folk’, such as ‘provoking any person to unlauffull love’ or ‘declaring where Goodes or Thinges lost or stollen should bee founde’.³⁰ Despite these specifics, the wording of the Act offers no legal definition of key terms, perhaps taking for granted that regional courts would know the meaning of ‘witchcraft’, ‘sorcery’ and ‘enchantment’.³¹

²¹ Newton, ‘Introduction: Witchcraft’, p. 4.

²² Brian Levack, ‘Witchcraft and the Law’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, Brian Levack ed. (Oxford, 2013), p. 3.

²³ Parkin, ‘Witchcraft, women’s honour and customary law’, p. 318.

²⁴ Parkin, ‘Witchcraft, women’s honour and customary law’, p. 302.

²⁵ Wrightson, ‘14: Witchcraft and Magic’.

²⁶ Gaskill, ‘Witchcraft Trials in England’, p. 5.

²⁷ *The Witchcraft Act of 1563* (5 Eliz. I, c. 16).

²⁸ Levack, ‘Witchcraft and the Law’, p. 3.

²⁹ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 135.

³⁰ *The Witchcraft Act of 1563* (5 Eliz. I, c. 16).

³¹ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 134.

When James I's government refreshed the legislation in 1604, its severity was not vastly increased, nor did it go as far as the Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1563.³² Much of the wording remained the same; however, crucially for 'cunning folk' it now declared that they could be tried for a capital offence if they attempted to invoke spirits 'for any intent or purpose',³³ whether maliciously motivated or otherwise. Despite this, the comparatively small number of witch-trials in England and Wales suggests that the legislation had little impact on prosecutions or popular reactions to magical practitioners, who generally continued to practice without fear of persecution.³⁴ It seems that their neighbours 'chose their own response from a much wider range of options than those suggested by the Act',³⁵ with recourse to the law not usually being the initial response. However, 'words conjured devils',³⁶ and the declaration in law that witches were 'devilishe persons',³⁷ officially sealed the word 'witch' in relation to other words in the document such as 'charms' and 'enchantment', further closing the gap between perceptions of black and white magic.

Perceptions of common magic at the turn of the seventeenth century were often 'laid down not by lawyers, but by writers of popular pamphlets'³⁸ that were a reflection of both elite and popular understanding. Elite magic usually revolved around the arts of astrology and alchemy that required a certain level of education, but also focused on its heretical and diabolic implications.³⁹ Common magic, on the other hand, was performed because people genuinely believed in its ability to cure disease and prevent the shortening of life, not 'because those in authority compelled them to do so'.⁴⁰ In Wales, concern about harmful magic had always existed, but reached its apex in the 1590s when popular beliefs intertwined with the publication of demonologies reporting that witches were an organised cult of enemies of God.⁴¹ Although much of what was contained in these demonologies was gathered from the beliefs and customs of common people, and vice versa, in what Edward Bever calls a 'continuous cycle'

³² Peter Maxwell-Stuart, 'King James's Experience of Witches, and the 1604 English Witchcraft Act' in *Witchcraft and the Act of 1604*, John Newton and Jo Bath eds. (Leiden, 2008), p. 42.

³³ *The Witchcraft Act of 1604* (1 Jas. I, c. 12).

³⁴ Hunnybell, *Cunning Folk*, p. 9.

³⁵ Jo Bath, 'The Treatment of Potential Witches in North-East England c. 1649-1680' in *Witchcraft and the Act of 1604*, John Newton and Jo Bath eds. (Leiden, 2008), p. 145.

³⁶ Newton, 'Introduction: Witchcraft', p. 27.

³⁷ *The Witchcraft Act of 1563* (5 Eliz. I, c. 16).

³⁸ Frederick Valetta, *Witchcraft, Magic and Superstition in England, 1640-1670* (Ashgate, 2000), p. 218.

³⁹ Michael Bailey, 'Diabolic Magic' in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, D. J. Collins ed. (Cambridge, 2015), p. 371.

⁴⁰ Wilby, *Cunning-Folk*, p. 255.

⁴¹ Wrightson, '14: Witchcraft and Magic'.

of acculturation and adaption,⁴² this fusion could be ‘an explosive combination’⁴³ that manifested itself in events such as the execution of Gwen ferch Ellis.

One such demonology was Robert Holland’s *Dau Gymro yn Taring*. Holland had the ‘mixed-language and mixed-culture experience’⁴⁴ of both Wales and England, which inspired him to transmit the values of Cambridge to ordinary Welsh people in a way that they would understand.⁴⁵ Written as a dialogue, a format likely influenced by George Gifford’s 1593 *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes*,⁴⁶ the demonology’s purpose was not to educate the reader on how to detect witches, but to educate them out of ‘relying on demonic remedies for misfortune’.⁴⁷ Puritan demonologists, such as Holland, his brother Henry and their English contemporaries, vigorously denounced ‘cunning folk’ because all magic originated with the devil and therefore those using it had turned their back on God.⁴⁸ For example, the character of Tudyr, a villager eager to learn about the outside world, states that ‘witches and wizards...do great good...for livestock and men’.⁴⁹ In response, Gronw, a man with more worldly experience, replies that ‘magical ‘healing’ is spurious because it kills the soul’ and therefore faith in Christ is the only genuine relief from affliction.⁵⁰

The dialogue is a remarkable and significant contribution to the history of Welsh magic firstly because whilst most demonologies originated in England, Holland was ‘the only Renaissance demonologist to venture into print in the Welsh language’.⁵¹ Secondly, because it was written from Holland’s own experience of rural Wales, it is peppered with the ‘folklore that coloured the belief in magic and witchcraft at a popular level’⁵² and can therefore tell us much about life in early modern Welsh agricultural communities. However, the characters of Tudyr and Gronw were written from an elite perspective so must be viewed in the context of the ‘campaign to bring first generation Puritan

⁴² Bever, ‘Popular Witch Beliefs’, p. 10.

⁴³ Wilby, *Cunning-Folk*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 202.

⁴⁵ Clark & Morgan, ‘Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales’, p. 34.

⁴⁶ George Gifford, *A Dialogue concerning witches and witchcrafts*, 1593 Available at http://eebo.chadwyck.com/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgthumbs.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=99838886&FILE=._/session/1557918077_24028&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=AUTHOR, Accessed 15 May 2019

⁴⁷ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 164.

⁴⁸ Hunnybell, *Cunning Folk*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ Clark & Morgan, ‘Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales’, p. 39.

⁵⁰ Clark & Morgan, ‘Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales’, p. 44.

⁵¹ Clark & Morgan, ‘Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales’, p. 31.

⁵² Clark & Morgan, ‘Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales’, p. 35.

piety to Wales',⁵³ and as such are not entirely representative of Welsh people or their beliefs. Thirdly, it is interesting to speculate upon what impact the demonology may have had on the trial on Gwen ferch Ellis. No original copies survive meaning that the publication date of 1595 is merely an estimate and therefore it may have preceded Gwen's trial, colouring the climate in which she was prosecuted.⁵⁴

Maxwell-Stuart describes witchcraft as 'a vilified subdivision of magic, which in turn is a vilified subdivision of religion',⁵⁵ and therefore, alongside English parliamentary legislation and elite discourse, the interaction between magic and religion cannot be over-emphasised. The Protestant Church did not deny the existence of the supernatural but declared that 'the individual stood in a direct relationship with God and was solely dependent upon his omnipotence'.⁵⁶ This implies that any misfortune suffered was 'divine providence', either a test of faith or a judgement of sin, and therefore it was 'simply impossible for either the devil or witches to change or alter the course that God hath set in nature'.⁵⁷ For the Welsh, the beliefs and practices of the Protestant Church largely emanated from outside and above,⁵⁸ and although most ordinary people outwardly endured the Reformation, many hoped that 'the old faith would come home again'.⁵⁹ In Flintshire, people would remain essentially untouched by Protestantism until the late seventeenth century,⁶⁰ with Benjamin Rudyerd declaring in 1628, nearly a century after the English Reformation, that Wales remained scarcely Christian in belief and the 'prayers of the common people are more like spells and charms than devotions'.⁶¹ Therefore, rejection of the traditions of the Catholic past was slow to take effect and everyday life retained significant elements of the old faith, such as the Latin prayers that re-emerged as folk charms.⁶²

⁵³ Clark & Morgan, 'Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales', p. 46.

⁵⁴ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 51.

⁵⁵ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 87.

⁵⁷ Edward Bever, 'Witchcraft Prosecutions and the Decline of Magic', in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 40 (2009), p. 276.

⁵⁸ Richard Marsden, 'The Reformation in Context', *The Open University* (n. d.) Available at https://openedx.open.ac.uk/courses/course-v1:ou+A329+2018J/courseware/7286a5790f7b4807aac42d709f0308f6/eec74549542447fbb724ee98faa8039f/?activate_block_id=block-v1%3Aou%2BA329%2B2018J%2Btype%40sequential%2Bblock%40eec74549542447fbb724ee98faa8039f, Accessed 1 May 2019.

⁵⁹ Wilby, *Cunning-Folk*, p. xiv.

⁶⁰ Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2', p. 21.

⁶¹ Clark & Morgan, 'Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales', p. 41.

⁶² Wilby, *Cunning-Folk*, p. 12.

Although it seems that the Reformation produced no substantial change in popular Welsh conceptions of common magic, church elites were concerned by the threat posed by 'cunning folk' to their monopoly over the supernatural.⁶³ All parish 'witchcraft, conjuring, southsaying and charmes' was theoretically supposed to be reported to the bishop during visitations,⁶⁴ however local churchmen often declined to act upon this, perhaps through fear of retribution from a community whose magical practitioner 'met a genuinely emotional need'.⁶⁵ Therefore, ecclesiastical policies were only effective if they upheld the same standard as the wider community and the Reformation largely failed to eradicate the practice of common magic in Wales because the 'prosecutorial momentum came from below',⁶⁶ not at the instigation of the elites. Furthermore, as will be discussed in Chapter III, despite the existence of English legislation designed to prohibit magical practices, the Welsh were guided by 'tradition and custom that continued to be adhered to, over and above English law that was imposed on them by the Acts of Union'.⁶⁷

⁶³ Clark & Morgan, 'Religion and Magic in Elizabethan Wales', p. 45.

⁶⁴ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 639.

⁶⁶ Gaskill, 'Witchcraft Trials in England', p. 5.

⁶⁷ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 295.

Chapter III

Wales, the ‘schoolroom for magic’,¹ remained distinctly untroubled by witch-hunts in comparison to elsewhere, despite the influence of English secular and religious ideas. Firstly, from a demographic perspective, the population of Wales was only ever around ten percent of England in this period (see Appendix II) and it is therefore natural to assume that a country with fewer people would produce fewer potential witches. Secondly, from a practical perspective, prosecuting a person for witchcraft was both challenging and costly.² For example, not only did the accuser have to secure the support of witnesses, but also justices of the peace were often reluctant to apprehend a suspect due to the fear of ‘hanging blameless women’.³ Furthermore, time and money were required to attend the Court of Great Sessions with no guarantee that the case would ever reach a full trial.⁴ These practical considerations ensured that ‘for all its fierce intentions’,⁵ the law was rarely put into practice.

In the 1970s, historian J. Gwynn Williams presented further arguments to explain the low incidence of Welsh witchcraft prosecutions. First, he suggested that as the seventeenth century progressed, people started to look for more reasonable, empirical explanations for strange phenomena,⁶ causing those in authority to become increasingly sceptical of witchcraft and ‘actively discourage accusations long before they ever reached the Court of Great Sessions’.⁷ Whilst Welsh pre-trial documentation lends support to this by showing that ‘acquittals were high and many cases were thrown out by Grand Juries’,⁸ there would rarely be any paper trail if a magistrate refused to countenance a witchcraft accusation at the outset, and therefore their reasons for disregarding it can only ever be supposition. Secondly, he argues that the lack of witchcraft prosecutions in Wales was due to a ‘prevailing sense of social solidarity at parish level’,⁹ resulting in an unwillingness amongst local officials to risk community disharmony by indicting a suspected witch. This argument is debateable because the evidence offered may not be entirely representative. For example, Gwynn Williams cites Elis Gruffudd

¹ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 163.

² Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 16.

³ Gaskill, ‘Witchcraft Trials in England’, p. 2.

⁴ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 16.

⁵ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 136.

⁶ Gwynn Williams, ‘Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2’, p. 24.

⁷ Gwynn Williams, ‘Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2’, p. 25.

⁸ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 14.

⁹ Gwynn Williams, ‘Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2’, p. 22.

writing fondly of his birthplace Llanasa in 1552;¹⁰ however, Gruffudd was an emigrant in France when writing and it is conceivable that living abroad may have induced him to extol the virtues of his homeland. He also cites the writing of seventy-seven year-old Thomas Pennant from 1796, who describes the sense of 'affection and connection'¹¹ he felt in his community. However, the declaration that this was 'almost extinguished'¹² amongst younger generations, could be an example of the older generation's propensity to sentimentalise the past.

Richard Suggett also challenges the view that Wales enjoyed an exceptionally cohesive community bond. He has found that the attempts of Tudor state-builders to 'eliminate all disorder from the periphery of the realm',¹³ led to the execution of four thousand Welsh thieves in the years 1550-1600 alone. This fact suggests that conflict was not only commonplace, but that Wales was 'too busy encouraging the prosecution of thieves to worry about witches'.¹⁴ Moreover, top-down economic pressure, in the form of the Poor Law Act of 1601, 'undoubtedly confused men's minds as to the proper attitude towards the destitute at their doors',¹⁵ making them reluctant to dispense further charity. To give sparingly was a discourtesy 'tantamount to the repudiation of a social connection'¹⁶ that a suspected witch could potentially avenge. Therefore, in England, a breakdown of traditional communal society led to situations of social conflict becoming inseparable from witchcraft accusations.¹⁷ However, the fact that the Poor Law was largely unobserved in Wales¹⁸ means that applying the 'charity-refused' model to the principality is more problematic, and perhaps the absence of this additional economic tension ensured that there were comparatively few prosecutions for vengeful witchcraft.

More recently, social historian Sally Parkin has argued that the low rate of Welsh witch-trials is due to a continued adherence to *Hywel Dda*, a set of ancient cultural and legal codes designed to restore community harmony by emphasising reconciliation over punishment, which took precedence over English law in large parts of the principality.¹⁹ Parkin also believes that there is evidence of a clear

¹⁰ Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2', p. 22.

¹¹ Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2', p. 23.

¹² Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2', p. 23.

¹³ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 98.

¹⁴ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 98.

¹⁵ Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2', p. 15.

¹⁶ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Bever, 'Popular Witch Beliefs', p. 13.

¹⁸ Gwynn Williams, 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Flintshire: Part 2', p. 15.

¹⁹ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 301.

'three-phase system' of accusation that shielded women from the harsher responses to common magic seen elsewhere, and is apparent in almost every extant Welsh witchcraft case.²⁰ In the initial *personal phase*, an accuser would attempt to effect a reconciliation by acknowledging their own part in the conflict, before asking the suspected witch for 'a hands-on or verbal blessing',²¹ which, if granted, would resolve the dispute. The efficacy of phase one is illustrated in the 1657 case of Dorothy Griffith who, accused of bewitching a traveling mariner into 'something wild', was able to 'utter good words tending to prayer for him', upon which he 'threw off his bed clothes, and rise, and came to himself'.²² If the witch refused to acquiesce, the accuser could progress to the *communal phase* in which other members of the community, such as a local magical practitioner with the ability to counteract maleficent curses, would intercede or conciliate on their behalf.²³ For example, in 1694, labourer Erasmus Thomas employed 'a man of judgement in such particulars', to treat his daughter whom he believed had been 'deform'd' by suspected witch Catherine Rees.²⁴

Primary evidence of the 'three phase system' at work suggests that the Welsh largely 'reacted in a communal, village-oriented, way'²⁵ towards maleficent magic, without recourse to the final phase: prosecution. Because Welsh custom dictated that punishment of the suspect would not 'alleviate the problem of either bewitchment or interpersonal disharmony',²⁶ it was more important for a witch to acknowledge her guilt and relieve the victims suffering. However, Parkin's assertion that conciliatory reactions were specific to Wales is problematic. Whilst Welsh pre-trial documents are the earliest relating to witchcraft in Britain, 'few examinations made before trials have survived among English assize records at all',²⁷ and what largely remains is evidence from those accusations that escalated to full legal proceedings. Without the oral testimony 'painstakingly gathered by justices of the peace before trial'²⁸ available for comparison, the assumption that English accusers did not attempt personal or communal reconciliation before resorting to the law is untenable.

²⁰ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 296.

²¹ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 309.

²² Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, pp. 150-154.

²³ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 314.

²⁴ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 178.

²⁵ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 318.

²⁶ Parkin, 'Witchcraft, women's honour and customary law', p. 308.

²⁷ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 13.

²⁸ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 12.

Overall, mono-causal explanations for witch-hunts or the lack thereof, are never plausible²⁹ and it is likely that a complex set of underlying contributors caused the phenomenon specific to Wales. Furthermore, although the low rate of prosecution suggests that 'sorcery was not a prevalent practice in Wales or that it did not greatly perturb the Welshman',³⁰ there is evidence of a robust Welsh belief in the efficacy of common magic and the reality of maleficent witchcraft as late as 1830.³¹ However, the way that the Welsh approached and managed these anxieties, with recourse to ancient and specifically Welsh custom, distinguished their experience from that of other European societies.

²⁹ Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Gender', p. 13.

³⁰ Cecil L'estrange Ewen, *Witchcraft and Demonianism* (London, 1932), p. 422.

³¹ Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography*, p. 393.

Conclusion

Over the course of the preceding chapters, this dissertation has explored the somewhat neglected topic of Welsh ‘cunning folk’, in order to uncover how far there was a transformation in Welsh perceptions of common magic at the turn of the seventeenth century. To do this, it questioned whether blurred notions of ‘white’ and ‘black’ magic caused an increase in accusations of maleficent witchcraft, and whether the trial of Gwen ferch Ellis was a cause or symptom of this conceptual shift. It has also assessed a range of arguments concerning the reasons behind the comparative lack of Welsh witchcraft prosecutions and concluded that the phenomenon was not mono-causal, but the result of a complex and interwoven set of factors. Moreover, it has encountered themes such as religion, social relations, acculturation and early modern coping mechanisms, which shed light on everyday life in early modern Wales and illuminate two clear conclusions.

First, this dissertation has shown for the first time that the 1590s was an acutely significant decade in the history of Welsh magic and witchcraft: a contribution that should complement and enlarge the current range of academic research on the subject. The use of primary sources such as parliamentary legislation and Protestant demonologies has shown that Welsh perceptions of ‘cunning folk’ were ambiguous in this period, whilst the rare survival of Welsh indictment records has revealed a cast of ‘stock human characters that can be found down the millennia’.¹ Moreover, evidence of the language used by accusers and witnesses in pre-trial documentation has led to the supposition that the fusion of elite and popular concepts of magic, as well as acculturation of English ideas by the Welsh, were the cause of this dynamic change in perceptions. It is also now clear that elite discourse, as well as improved literacy rates and availability of printed material,² further closed the conceptual gap between beneficent and maleficent magic, creating new anxieties that manifested themselves in the 1594 execution of Gwen ferch Ellis, the first for witchcraft in Wales.

Second, modern discourse used to explore the wider impact of Gwen’s execution by academics of history, anthropology, gender and law, has led to both confirmation and modification of the existing historiography. It confirms Suggett’s theory that the significance of Gwen’s case lies in its crossing of a

¹ Hutton in Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 9.

² Rider, ‘Common Magic’, p. 309.

‘significant social boundary’ and its unique position as the first witchcraft execution in Wales.³ Moreover, it demonstrates the treacherous nature of the supernatural when used by the ‘socially and physically weak against the strong’⁴ as well as the vulnerability of ‘cunning folk’ to the fluctuating perceptions of their communities. However, there is no explicit reference to Gwen’s case in subsequent Welsh witch-trials and the circumstances of the event precisely conform to Macfarlane’s widespread community-based model of accusation. This suggests that it did not ignite a Welsh witch-hunt, set a dangerous precedent, or that contemporaries viewed it as an event of profound and unprecedented significance. Therefore, the curious and tragic case of Gwen ferch Ellis is not only a mere symptom of wider cultural and social changes, but also simultaneously an extraordinary and isolated event.

Overall, this exploration of the ‘cunning folk’ of Wales at the turn of the seventeenth century has been a window through which to view ‘the underlying beliefs and needs of early modern people’.⁵ Despite low levels of persecution, the Welsh had a profound belief in the supernatural and widely accepted it as a ‘pragmatic response to common needs and problems’.⁶ As such, the greatest instrument ‘cunning folk’ had at their disposal was the people’s faith in their ability to heal, cure and protect. Therefore, common magic, and those that practiced it, ‘met a genuinely emotional need’⁷ by assisting people through the hardships and uncertainties of early modern life, in a world where a blessing or a curse could tip the balance between life and death.

³ Suggett, *Welsh Witches: Narratives*, p. 54.

⁴ Suggett, *Witchcraft Dynamics*, p. 90.

⁵ Hunnybell, *Cunning Folk*, p. 88.

⁶ Rider, ‘Common Magic’, p. 320.

⁷ Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 639.

Appendices

Appendix I⁸

Decade	Total Number	Name	Year	Circuit	Court of Great Sessions	Charge	Result
1560	1	Hugh Brychan	1568	Brecon	Glamorgan	Art Magic	No further proceedings recorded
		Hugh Brychan	1570	Chester	Denbighshire	Art Magic	Confessed, fined and bailed
1570	3	Margaret ferch David Wyn	1579	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Sorcery (bewitching to unlawful love)	Discharged
		Howell ap William of Maen	1579	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Sorcery (bewitching to unlawful love)	Discharged
1580	1	Henry ap John Bedo	1589	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Enchantments	Discharged
1590	4	Roger Adams of Cyfronydd	1592	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Witchcraft	Discharged
		Rosser John Howell	1592	Brecon	Breconshire	Witchcraft and Murder	Discharged
		Gwen ferch Ellis	1594	Chester	Denbighshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Found guilty and executed by hanging
		Margaret Knight	1596	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Witchcraft	Discharged
1600	3	Maud ferch David	1601	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Witchcraft	Acquitted
		Thomas Jones	1606	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Sorcery (enchantment)	Discharged
		Katherine Lewis	1607	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Witchcraft	Bailed and found not guilty
1610	3	William Morris	1613	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Charming	Confessed, released on bail
		Ann Havard	1616	Brecon	Radnorshire	Art Magic	Discharged
		Agnes Griffith	1618	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Witchcraft	Acquitted
1620	4	Rhydderch ap Evan of Llannor	1622	North Wales	Caernarvonshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Found guilty and executed by hanging
		Lowri ferch Evan	1622	North Wales	Caernarvonshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Found guilty and executed by hanging
		Agnes ferch Evan	1622	North Wales	Caernarvonshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Found guilty and executed by hanging
		Catherine Harries (Maunsell)	1626	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Charming	Discharged
1630	4	Hugh Davies	1631	Brecon	Radnorshire	Diabolical arts	Imprisoned for 1 year
		Ann Lloyd	1633	Brecon	Radnorshire	Illicit Arts	Discharged
		Ann Jones (aka Elen Gilbert)	1635	Chester	Denbighshire	Witchcraft, theft and cosenage	Not guilty of witchcraft, but guilty of theft
		Edward Jenkin	1639	Brecon	Breconshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Discharged
1650	10	Joan Roger	1654	Carmarthen	Carmarthenshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Discharged
		David John	1654	Carmarthen	Carmarthenshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Discharged
		Tanglwst ferch Rees	1655	Brecon	Breconshire	Witchcraft	Discharged
		Margaret ferch Richard of Beaumaris	1655	North Wales	Anglesey	Witchcraft	Found guilty and executed by hanging
		Golly Lullock	1655	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Witchcraft	Acquitted
		Margaret David (aka Maggi Hir)	1656	Carmarthen	Carmarthenshire	Witchcraft	Acquitted
		Gwenllian David (aka Llio Hir)	1656	Carmarthen	Carmarthenshire	Witchcraft	Discharged
		Dorothy Gruffith	1656	Chester	Flintshire	Felonious Witchcraft	No further proceedings recorded
		Ann Ellis	1657	Chester	Flintshire	Witchcraft	Discharged
		Owen Jones	1658	Brecon	Radnorshire	Witchcraft (charming)	Acquitted
1670	1	Thomas Hughes	1678	Chester	Montgomeryshire	Bewitching to unlawful love	Acquitted
1680	2	Margaret Thomas	1682	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Witchcraft and other offenses	Discharged
		David Lewis	1684	Chester	Denbighshire	Adjuration and cosenage	Fined
1690	6	Joan Baker	1691	Brecon	Glamorgan	Witchcraft	Discharged
		Maud, wife of Llewelyn Prees	1691	Brecon	Breconshire	Witchcraft	Discharged
		Elizabeth, wife of Watkin Prees	1691	Brecon	Breconshire	Witchcraft	Discharged
		Olly Powell	1693	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Not guilty
		Catherine Rees	1694	Carmarthen	Cardiganshire	Felonious Witchcraft	Acquitted
		Dorcus Heddin	1699	Carmarthen	Pembrokeshire	Witchcraft	Discharged

Appendix II⁹

	Wales	England
1570	422,479	3,737,841
1600	351,264	4,460,454
1630	375,354	5,225,263
1670	378,461	5,295,185

⁸ The data in Appendix I is from the witch-trial transcriptions in Richard Suggett's *Welsh Witches: Narratives of Witchcraft and Magic from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Wales*. This valuable source contains all extant depositions for those indicted for witchcraft (or associated acts) in Wales.

⁹ The data in Appendix II originates at http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/GB1841ABS_1/6. This was 'calculated on the supposition that the Registered Baptisms, Burials and Marriages, on an average of three years in 1570, 1600, 1630, bore the same proportion to the Actual Population as in the year 1801'.

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