The Royal Society of Edinburgh

Bordering on the Supernatural

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Saturday 22 August 2015, Bowhill House, Selkirk

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Pushing Back the Borders

Discover how Scott, Hogg and Burns set the pattern for their followers, from Stevenson to present.

Professor Gifford commenced by acknowledging the legacy that Hogg, Scott and Burns left to later writers, commenting that their supernatural stories and greatest novels “emerged from the tension between traditional beliefs and a new dominance of reason and science. Moreover, all the stories that have been discussed today are essentially elegies for old wonder being threatened by psychology and reason”.

Discussing Hogg, Professor Gifford suggests, “his work crosses a borderline between explicit traditional belief to rationalism, embodied in sly exploitation of ambiguity”. At different points of his career, Hogg wrote for complete acceptance of the supernatural, for qualified elegiac acceptance and, by the time of The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner, a clear suggestion emerges that supernatural events are all in the minds of the credulous protagonists. Furthermore, Hogg wrote poems about the supernatural as it related to the Borders, in Verses Addressed to Lady Anne Scott of Buccleuch he mentions how the “fairies have now totally disappeared, it is a pity, as they seem to have been the most delightful little spirits”. In this passage he is referring specifically to fairies, as he goes on to say that the present-day witches are even more believed in than ever before. By 1818, in his poem Superstition, Hogg acknowledges the debt his poetry has for fairies and spirits. Indeed, this poem shows an emerging element of confusion about the supernatural world.

Professor Gifford stated that Hogg well knew that he lived between two worlds, that of rural Ettrick and that of Enlightened Edinburgh. He was different things, in different places and to different people, almost role playing. As a writer of fiction, he sought to impress the literati of Edinburgh, especially since the failure of his first novel, The Brownie of Bodsbeck, which Sir Walter Scott described as nonsense. However, another of Hogg’s novels that displeased Scott, The Three Perils of Man is now recognised as one of the wonderful articulations of straightforward, concrete credible belief in witches and other supernatural beings. Edinburgh preferred to keep Hogg as the almost ‘kailyard’ writer rather than a respected philosophical writer. Around 1820, Hogg realised that he needed a strategy to bridge the gap between the persona of kailyard stories and philosophical, deep writings. He wanted to be respected not just as a shepherd writer. Poet, Allan Ramsay provided him with the inspiration to develop a rich vein of supernatural Scottish writing. Ramsay was an important figure in the transition of tradition as, by republishing older writers’ works, he ensured the
literature of the past was kept alive. Furthermore, he was inspired by the medieval poets who were adept at concealing messages within their work; for example, in *The Cherry and the Slave*, the cherry stands for Catholicism and the slave, Calvinism. In times when it wasn’t safe to speak out, this kind of allegory could hide your true meaning. Hogg admired Ramsay and sought to employ similar strategies in his own writing.

Professor Gifford commented that Burns’ *Tam o’ Shanter* is a terribly important story and forms the way that writers of the nineteenth century would handle the supernatural. “The supernatural interpretation within it is very strong and powerful. Tam goes out into the night and because he’s guilty of desiring wine, women and song, he pays the price. This poem is actually the founding story that sets the pattern for all our great stories that follow. On one hand there is the supernatural interpretation and on the other the psychological and rational interpretation”. Another reading of the work is that the poem can be split into two ‘arches’ between which the action happens; the first when Tam leaves the pub and the second towards the end when his horse loses its tail. This is the core of the poem and signals to the reader the possibility that, at the ‘witching hour’, Tam is going home, drunk and slumped over his horse and everything that happens thereafter exists solely within his mind. Professor Gifford opined that this text is representing the Scotsman who wants something more out of life, but social and religious morays won’t allow it. He also referred to a modern Scottish poem *A Day in Scotland*, that tells of how on a glorious day in Edinburgh, the birds are singing in Princes Street and the poet’s heart is overflowing. As he walks along, the poet sees a lady in a buckled-up, black raincoat and he says “isn’t it glorious?”. She replies, “we’ll pay for this!” This sentiment is reflected in *Tam o’ Shanter*. But the price Tam pays is simply the tail of his horse; no more, no less. Professor Gifford commented that “all the central philosophical images suggest to us that the guilt of Tam and his thwarted desires have led in his mind to the devils that have been implanted there by Calvinism. This is the real moral of the poem”. Within *Tam o’ Shanter*, Burns draws on the ballad condition, with characters articulating a desire for something that they really shouldn’t be asking for. Professor Gifford also argues that Burns and *Tam o’ Shanter* have an answer to Hogg’s search for a writing strategy by providing a template to combine past supernatural belief with contemporary rationalism, employing the technique of creative ambiguity.

Hogg’s *Justified Sinner* is one of the greatest-ever Scottish novels, recognised for the subtlety it contains. Again, there are two ways of reading this novel; firstly that the protagonist, told by his minister father that he is one of God’s chosen elect, becomes a disciple of the Devil and murders his brother with the Devil’s help. Alternatively, it can be read as the story of the son of a bigoted minister who goes mad and alters reality to suit his egotistical ambitions. Professor Gifford suggests that the “novel beautifully manages to allow both interpretations, so Hogg can exploit his folk supernatural inheritance whilst allowing the events to have an allegorical meaning which is profoundly satirical regarding Scottish religion taken to extremities.” Some of Hogg’s best short stories were completely constructed within the simple morality of the traditional folk tale. They succeed with a simple ambiguity with little satirical or social point to make, other than to be careful what you wish for.

Hogg also established the importance of provenance in the oral tradition. The narrator of Hogg’s *The Brownie of the Black Haggs* states “this story was told to me by an old man...he was one of those that found the body”. Almost all of his stories of this type give a provenance, telling us how the writer got them and setting them within ancestral memory. In *The Brownie of the Black Haggs*, the ‘brownie’ is a wizened, ageless changeling figure representing a ferocious natural morality. Merodach represents the natural world revolting against the immoralities committed
in his territory. He comes to haunt Lady Wheelhope, thwarting all her intended wickednesses, causing her to damn and destroy herself by calling forth deepest wickedness. Professor Gifford commented, “one way of looking at some of these stories is as nasty events that happened and have been changed into legendary or mythical situations for edification, or to emphasise country moralities”.

Sir Walter Scott’s lifetime, 1771 to 1832, spanned many changes in Scotland; before 1800, old Edinburgh, revolutions, political agitation and slavery and after 1800, new Edinburgh, Waterloo, reform, industrial revolution and Clearance. Many critics have identified Scott as being torn between adhering to the past whilst recognising a need for progress. One of the great themes in his writing is the clash between progression and conservatism, with his novels depicting past versus present, Highlands versus Lowlands and Crusaders versus Saracens. In one sense, he is divided Scotland, representing the fundamental division apparent at the time of his life and, to this extent, he too is creatively ambiguous; it is difficult to identify heroes and villains in his poetry. Paradoxically, however, he increasingly returns to the supernatural in his writing. Professor Gifford commented that Scott was not moved by folk tradition. Despite his early interest in traditional balladry, he also had a somewhat negative effect on folk tradition. Indeed, when collecting works for the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders, he visited Hogg’s mother, who proclaimed “these sangs were made for singing and noo they’re printed they’ll nae be sang mair”.

Professor Gifford notes that Hogg’s mother was very perceptive in this matter, almost realising that she too was on a ‘borderline’ in changing times. Scott, however, did not turn against the use of the supernatural; he exploited it to the end of his career. In Wandering Willie’s Tale, like Burns in Tam o’ Shanter, Scott implies that the dark days of the supernatural are gone. This reflects the elegiac side of Scott. Indeed, in the nineteenth century these great tales appear in order to mark the end of the tradition, the end of an era. There is a sense that Scott wants to recreate older Scotland, whether or not he believes in it.

Professor Gifford concluded that the crucial overriding principle in all these stories is wonder; they are meant to disorientate us and the reader is meant to be at a loss for true meaning. The two mutually exclusive readings of such stories generate wonder; an electricity between their two poles, the supernatural and the natural.
Professor Kirsteen McCue, University of Glasgow

*Devils, Ghosts, Fairies, Brownies and the Rest: Burns, Hogg and the Supernatural*

James Hogg, The Ettrick Shepherd, and his predecessor Robert Burns, The Ploughman Poet, are both well known for work which engages with the songs and stories of their localities. Both of them were inspired by what they heard at home, and both loved scary stories about other worldly beings. This talk takes a brief look at this context for their development as writers and national songsters.

Both James Hogg and Robert Burns were fascinated by the supernatural and the natural. Within their writing, however, Burns is more famous for his work detailing nature and the environment; indeed, his poetry and song is not overwhelmingly noted for its reference to the supernatural. On the contrary, Hogg’s writing is replete with reference to the supernatural, despite having, at its core, a preoccupation with the workings of human nature and the natural world around him. Professor McCue commented that, when assessing their work, it is important to understand the role of the supernatural in the world of Scottish men and women during the period. Today, the supernatural remains popular in terms of the books we read and the films and television shows we watch but, generally, unlike during the eighteenth century, it is not integral to our daily lives. Ballads, including the Border Ballads, provided “an acceptable platform upon which early modern culture could legitimately explore some of the more testing moral issues in life. Through this narrative song form, contemporary society tried to explain, understand and explore human experiences that are difficult to articulate”.

Burns, born in 1759, and Hogg, born in 1770, had many similarities and qualities that set them apart from their peers. Both were born into working agricultural households and spent a lot of time with people who worked the land. Both attended school for a short period as young boys and, significantly to their work, both were also part of a living tradition of storytelling and singing; this early experience being pivotal in their role as writers. Burns recalled this experience in his autobiographical letter to John Moore in 1787, stating “In my infant and boyish days too, I owed much to an old Maid of my Mother’s, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the county of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wrathis, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of Poesy; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical in these matters than I, yet it often takes an effort of Philosophy to shake off these idle terrors.” Hogg’s elder brother William gives an account which is uncannily similar to that of Burns, recalling the place of ballads in their daily life, “Our mother to keep us boys quiet would often tell us tales of kings, giants, knights, fairies, kelpies, brownies […] These tales arrested our attention and filled our minds with the most dreadful apprehensions.” Furthermore, Hogg’s grandfather was known locally to have conversed with the fairies and his mother was known to be a great ballad singer.

Burns does use several supernatural beings within his poems, being particularly preoccupied with devils, often in quite playful depictions. Examples include the *Address to the Deil*, *The Deil’s Awa Wi the Exciseman* and the appearance of the Devil playing the pipes in the Alloway Kirk in *Tam o’ Shanter*. ‘Death’ appears in poems such as *Death and Doctor Hornbook* where Burns challenges Dr Hornbook whose medical potions are killing so many people in the community that he’s doing
death out of a job; and within poems such as *Halloween*, where Burns explores ideas of superstition and belief, listing customs within the poem. Professor McCue noted that reference to the supernatural is not as evident in Burns' song opus; this deals rather more with themes of love, politics and history. One exception to this is *Tam Lin* in which the hero of the ballad, Tam, has been captured by the Queen of the Fairies and is living as part of fairy world; after seven years, he has only one chance to escape to the mortal world. Tam is in love with Janet of Carterhaugh, who met him in the Green Wood and is expecting his child. He explains to her that in order to be reclaimed from the fairy world she must be present at the fairy procession at midnight on Halloween. To become his true love and reclaim him from the fairy world, she must pull Tam from the white horse he will be riding and hold on tight to him throughout the various nasty transformations of his form (an adder, a lion, hot rod of iron, burning lead) that the fairies will undertake in order to keep him from returning to the mortal world. Burns' 1796 version of *Tam Lin*, published with a suggested accompanying tune, is one of the first printed versions of the ballad. And it is a fine example of Burns engaging with a performing oral world, whilst also being aware of a text in written versions. He had seen the text in manuscript form as well as hearing it sung.

Despite Burns' poetry and song not being especially famed for the use of the supernatural, his poetic *tour de force*, *Tam o' Shanter*, written towards the end of his life, is a wonderful story of the supernatural. Published in 1791, the underlying moral of the story is about the moderation of alcoholic beverages and a warning against adultery. The action and core of the poem describes Tam's night ride; his fearfulness of the stormy night, what it holds for him and his encounter with the witches and warlocks dancing in the kirk accompanied by the Deil on the pipes. In *Tam o' Shanter*, Burns creates a story rather than 'borrowing' one so directly from tradition, the opposite of *Tam Lin*. Professor McCue noted that he does, however, acknowledge aspects he has learned from publishing the traditional tale of *Tam Lin*. "Whilst Tam Lin is struggling to return from the fairy world, Tam o' Shanter is almost destined to end up there, just managing to avoid the wrath of the Hellish Legion and the 'other side'. The flamboyant fairy ride in *Tam Lin* is matched by the witches and warlocks dancing in *Tam o' Shanter* and the horses which appear in both tales are considered to be white, a symbol of truth".

Light, darkness and the movement between a physical body and an immortal soul fascinated Hogg; indeed, wraiths and apparitions are a frequent characteristic of his writing. He examines journeys between different worlds on multiple occasions in his work, sometimes scientifically and sometimes in the realm of fantasy. Within *The Pilgrims of the Sun* (1815), the protagonist of the piece is laid out in an open grave for burial the next day and during the night she is visited by a figure dressed as a monk. She is taken by this being on a journey through the spheres of the Universe to the Sun and the next morning, when her soul returns to her body, a grave thief is just about to cut off her fingers, but she succeeds in returning to the mortal world. Hogg's best-known work, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, is a masterpiece which explores the connection between the protagonist and his close relationship with another being. This being could either be his alter ego or even the Devil in disguise; the book can be read in both ways. Later in the novel, in a story also describes the Devil's presence in a local community, where he is not recognised within a story Hogg until it is too late.

Hogg, unlike Burns, had a fascination with long narrative ballads. His friendship with Walter Scott was based on work he did for him on Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*. He knew many balladeers and took Scott around the region to introduce him to people who were living resources of the ballad tradition. Hogg was also
convinced that he was able to write better ballads than anyone else. The Queen’s Wake, the poem that drew the literary world’s and the public’s attention to Hogg, is a long narrative poem describing a singing competition put on over three nights to entertain Mary, Queen of Scots. Bards from throughout the nation and abroad attended to present their ballads for the Queen. On the third night, the Queen chooses a winner and awards him with her harp. Within the poem, Hogg showcases a diverse range of his own songs and ballads; fast and pacey, slow and melancholic, Highland and Lowland, about battles and failure to respect the past, about the power of song and melody to overcome the wickedness of the fairy world, referring to visitations of spectres to the battlefield, and tales of love and revenge. This poem fell into obscurity in the nineteenth century, but two of the supernatural ballads within it did not, remaining in anthologies of poetry throughout the century. The Witch of Fife, a long ballad of sixty-seven verses, about a drunken encounter with other worldly beings, is a warning against drunkenness and debauchery (not so far away from the theme of Burns’s Tam o’Shanter). The protagonist, an old man who has journeyed in the far north and met with the fairies, warlocks and mermaids, returns to Scotland and is accused of dark dealings and is burned at the stake. Kilmeny, still well known today, tells of a beautiful ethereal character, a woman of quiet wonderment, who wanders the glens and one day disappears and does not return. Her community searches for her and prays for her soul. She returns late in the gloaming and the community asks her many questions; she’s been in the land of the spirits and wanted to return to her own world to tell of the things she has seen. Upon her return, Kilmeny realises that she has been gone for seven years. She returns for only a month and a day and then disappears once more in to the Green Wood, never to be seen again. Professor McCue describes this as a “breath-taking ballad describing the movement between two worlds; mortal and immortal, human and spiritual. It gives a sense of bringing a haunting world right next to our own”.

At the end of The Queen’s Wake, the prize harp is awarded to the Ossianic bard from the Highlands; however, the Ettrick bard, horrified that he hasn’t won, makes a claim to need a harp for the benefit of future Scottish songs and ballads. The Queen, moved by his passion, thus awards him the Caledonian Harp, which is much plainer, simpler and more durable in comparison. It is also a ‘magic harp’ – and as a symbol it journeys with Hogg throughout the rest of his career, even being depicted on his gravestone in Ettrick.

Both Hogg and Burns deal with the supernatural within their writing; an understanding of which they both developed as children living at a time when ‘other worldliness’ and superstition was a daily consideration. They never forget the power of the stories they learned in their youth and the mysterious aura and atmosphere that such stories create. Through this interaction with the supernatural during their childhood, both Burns and Hogg have created fine works that are still enjoyed today.
One figure who made a massive contribution to the dissemination of information and ideas about a wide range of supernatural beliefs was Sir Walter Scott, particularly of his ancestral Borders region. This talk will discuss Scott’s attitudes towards the supernatural, with particular reference to fairy and witch belief.

Scotts’ Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft, published in 1830 state “there remains hope…that the grosser faults of our ancestors are now out of date”. There is an assumption that the age of Enlightenment, was also a period of time when people’s customary practices and supernatural beliefs began to diminish; to be replaced by more rational thought and an enlightened view of the world. Contrary to this view, Dr Henderson suggests that these attempts to eradicate popular belief and folk culture were not as strong as thought, and even somewhat resisted. “The topic of the supernatural did not recede, but remained in the forefront of people’s lives, albeit undergoing change and reinterpretation”.

Whilst, even at height of Enlightenment in the later eighteenth century, the workings of the invisible world had not yet lost their attraction, it can be conceded that over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the fear of magic, the supernatural and witchcraft did diminish. Dr Henderson noted that the rise of scepticism should, however, be viewed as an evolutionary process; it did not happen overnight. “Keen to dismiss supernatural beliefs to the ‘dustbin of history’, many commentators at the time were guilty of a triumphalist view towards the past, regarding the era of the witch hunts as a struggle between reason and science on one hand and intellectual obscurantism and religious bigotry on the other. A battle fought and allegedly won by the proponents of Enlightenment values”. Belief is a challenging historical topic; accessing what people believe and why they believe it is complicated. There are many contradictions even within one contemporary individual’s beliefs, let alone community belief of the past. “It is also important to lay aside our own anachronistic attitudes to belief and not impose how we, today, think about things onto people in the past. We need to accept that our predecessors did not necessarily share our modern-day perceptions and views. What might seem impossible or ludicrous to us could seem entirely logical and plausible to people in the past. This is not intended to suggest that earlier generations were less intelligent or naïve, just to acknowledge that there are other mental frameworks and world views”.

Folk belief is a belief that is communally accepted as being true. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when folk beliefs were under sustained attack from the Church and the State, the primary aim was to separate the supernatural and magical beliefs held by the folk from supernatural or magical beliefs expressed by religion; thus drawing a line between what was and was not acceptable. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, folk beliefs were debased as relics of bygone superstition and considered no longer relevant to enlightened civilised times. “Manners became the order of the day, as the elite sought ways to demarcate their status; expressed in many aspects of life, not just the supernatural. An emergent gulf between the folk and elite culture was becoming ever more pronounced in European society”. This emerging gulf led to the rise of antiquarianism and the eventual birth of folklore, a term invented by William Thoms in 1846. Furthermore, this also created a tension between participants and practitioners of folklore and those antiquarians who wished to collect and record these beliefs. The collecting of oral tradition was given a further boost in the aftermath of the immensely successful publication of James
MacPherson’s *Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland* (1760). Whether or not the content of this collection was fraudulent, the impact of this work was far reaching and gave a renewed vigour to the retention and collecting of oral tradition. It also contributed to the notion that Scotland was the ideal place for such mythological settings and experiences. Sir John Stoddart, an English tourist in 1799, expressed no surprise that a country like Scotland should be marked by superstitions, as the landscape made it so. “The scenery here is very favourable to the excursive flights of the imagination”.

No individual or society at any time in the past or present is united in homogenous thought about the supernatural and belief. Dr Henderson commented that, “when it comes to an understanding of what constituted the supernatural, most thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did dismiss superstitions as the product of credulous ignorance, flourishing like mushrooms in dark places away from the light”. This, however, is not the full story. Enlightenment philosophies aside, eighteenth-century Scotland was experiencing a period of drastic change; the onset of large waves of outward migration, population movements towards centres of industrialisation, increased urbanisation and a rapidly growing economy. When charting the decline of witchcraft prosecutions, there are reasonable grounds for linking this to the wider socio-economic changes of the time. “The ‘classic village witch’ may have struggled to operate within these new urban centres”. In less industrialised settings, traditional witchcraft could still be encountered within Sir Walter Scott’s lifetime.

Dr Henderson commented that Scott’s Waverley novels are heavily embroidered with supernatural elements, making a huge contribution to the dissemination of information about the subject. Indeed, it could be said that he based his literary career on the collection of Scottish lore and traditions, particularly of the Borders region. *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* (1802/3) was immensely popular and had a great influence. Furthermore, in *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, published late in his career, Scott refers to his longstanding interest and curiosity in the credulity of our ancestors and confesses that in his earlier days he “travelled a good deal in the twilight regions of superstitious dispositions”. As with other Enlightenment authors, Scott often described the folklore materials he dealt with in terms of perceived opposites; credulity and incredulity, belief and unbelief, savage and civilized, ignorance and enlightenment. Dr Henderson suggests that this was done in an attempt to distance himself from what might be regarded as foolishness. Nevertheless, his fascination with the supernatural and occult remained.

When Scott wrote that he hoped the “grosser faults of our ancestors are now out of date”, he was specifically referring to the prosecutions for witchcraft. By Scott’s lifetime, the Scottish witch hunts that had involved approximately 4000 trials and 2000 executions were a thing of the past, with the repeal of Witchcraft Act in 1736. Scott could therefore confidently expect that his own generation was more enlightened regarding such matters and witchcraft had been dispelled from Scotland. Whilst it was a fact that no one could legally be persecuted or prosecuted for witchcraft, this did not mean that the belief in such activities disappeared; it is very difficult to legislate against belief.

Dr Henderson considered, what was the nature of witch and fairy belief in Walter Scott’s Scottish Borders? According to the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders*, “the belief in ghosts, which has been well termed the last lingering phantom of superstition, still maintains its ground upon the Borders”. Scott devotes a whole essay to the topic of “fairies of popular superstition”, introducing *Tam Lin* and claiming that “in no part of Scotland has the belief in fairies maintained its ground
with more pertinacity than Selkirkshire”. He frequently points out the continued belief in the supernatural in the Borders, stating “no part of Scotland teemed with superstitious fears and observances more that they [the Border counties] did.”

Scott draws his evidence for *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* from a vast range of learned sources, including demonologists, trial and court records and literary greats; but rarely engages with the oral tradition, being more focused on the printed record, the elite sources of information rather than the folk themselves. Similarly, in his essay on fairies within the *Minstrelsy*, the material he uses could be considered more learned than popular. Dr Henderson suggested that Scott was probably trying to find corroboration for popular belief within the sources that he used. Furthermore, Scott does not cite witchcraft cases from the Borders, despite recognising the region as holding strong supernatural beliefs. Scott, however, was aware that although prosecutions for witchcraft were long past, witch beliefs were not, commenting, “the remains of superstition sometimes occur; there can be no doubt that the vulgar are still addicted to the custom of scoring above the breath, as it is termed, and other counter-spells, evincing that the belief in witchcraft is only asleep, and might in remote corners be awakened to deeds of blood.”

In 1833, John Gordon Barbour commented, “since Sir Walter Scott hath published his letters, all the demons, witches, fairies in Albion must lie dead forever! They are entirely exorcised now; and that magic wand, which about twenty-five or thirty years ago, could call forth, and did call forth, sprites, spaewives, Orkney witches and eidolons at pleasure, has now disenchanted them all.” Thus suggesting that by having written down these aspects of the supernatural for posterity, Sir Walter Scott has banished them forever. In the course of the eighteenth century, popular belief in the supernatural was under assault as never before; virtually every Enlightenment figure celebrated the passing of the old beliefs. However, it is likely that the literary interest in witches actually reinforced folk belief in certain sectors of society and it is doubtful that Scott was right that the “grosser faults of our ancestors” were truly eradicated. Dr Henderson concluded that “the folk traditions to which he so regularly referred do not easily fade, but they do adapt with the times. What this generation was witnessing was not an eradication but a transformative process which, for the Borders and Scotland in general, had less to do with the Enlightenment and was more aligned with massive agrarian change, rural depopulation and increased urbanisation. By the nineteenth century, witches, fairies and other supernatural beings who had helped the folk interpret their world were losing their rationale and were being subsumed by alternative interpretations, or replaced with new manifestations of supernatural belief”.

The Vote of Thanks was offered by Professor Jan McDonald FRSE