Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.
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Dedication

For my father, Greig.
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Abstract

Established only two years after the Union between England and Scotland of 1707, the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) sought to establish charity schools throughout the Highlands of Scotland, and eventually the New World. In recent years its efforts have been criticised as an assault on Highland culture, specifically with regard to the “language problem” that arose from its policy of teaching English to Gaelic-speaking children. However, the early SSPCK was full of contradictions. It taught with English texts while insisting on Gaelic speaking schoolmasters; warned against Catholicism while settling of schools in mainly Protestant parishes; and complained about the Highlands’ difficult terrain while sending schoolmasters to some of its most inaccessible places. This thesis examines the early years of the SSPCK in terms of its place in the newly established Union, and its contradictions in ideas of space, religion and language. In doing so we begin to understand the SSPCK as an organisation confronted by conflicting perceptions of identity, both of itself and of the new nation it aimed to serve. As a product of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, national identity for the SSPCK was inextricably linked to Calvinism. Hence, although the SSPCK was pro-Union, there were elements of the new Establishment which challenged the Society’s pro-Presbyterianism, especially with regard to perceived encroachments of Episcopalians in Scotland. The SSPCK’s reaction was to negotiate various representations of identity so as to promote a homogenous Scotland in keeping with the Society’s notions of loyalty to the Union, while at the same time ensuring the continued supremacy of the Presbyterian religion within Scotland.
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Source: Map adapted from Clotilde Prunier, *Anti-Catholic Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 15.
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Introduction

This thesis considers the early history of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), along with the Western Highland and Island communities that it sought to reform, in the context of the search for a new national identity for Scotland that followed Union with England in 1707. It explores the SSPCK’s attempts to impose its own sense of identity in relation to three themes that seem to have preoccupied the Society: namely Scotland as physical space, Scotland as religious entity, and the language of Scotland. It seeks a more holistic result than might otherwise be achieved if one were to consider the Society purely in the context of its mission of religious reform. In doing so, discrepancies emerge between the ideas of identity (both its own and that of Highlanders) which the Society projected into the public arena and those that accompanied its members into the field. Hence it becomes necessary to reconsider the accepted agenda of the SSPCK and challenge stereotypes that have evolved concerning the Society. Indeed, one can detect amongst some of its members a subtle differences in attitude towards those groups with which the Society professed to share little or no identity, that is, Highlanders and Catholics; tolerances that were soon quashed by the events of 1715. However, perhaps most telling of the Presbyterian SSPCK’s struggle with identity in this new era is its interaction with Episcopalian Protestants, both Scottish and English, with whom Calvinist Scots were now partners under the banner of Union.

The SSPCK was formed in 1709 by Royal Charter, with subscribers from all over Scotland, at the instigation of William Carstares (chaplain to the late William II and III)
and other members of a society in Edinburgh for the reformation of manners. The terms of the Charter stated that the SSPCK was to be an “Incorporation, Society and Body Politic,” with its own seal, legally empowered to receive funds in order to establish schools to teach reading, writing and arithmetic, using “good and pious Books”, so as to bring Christian knowledge to the Highlands, Islands and “remote corners” of Scotland and “Popish and Infidel Parts of the World.”¹ Subscribers and contributors were to be Protestant.² The Society’s teachers were to be “Men of Piety, Loyalty, Prudence, Gravity, competent Knowledge and Literature, and other Christian and Necessary Qualifications”, in accordance with the laws of Scotland and to the satisfaction of the Church of Scotland judicatories.³

Essentially a product of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, many of the SSPCK’s committee members were also active members of the Assembly. As such, the “Christian Knowledge” which it hoped to promote was that of the Presbyterian or “Reformed” faith. Set up in order to establish charity schools in the Highlands of Scotland, the curriculum it prescribed for its students was one of indoctrination, consisting entirely of Presbyterian tracts. The SSPCK has long been recognised for its educational achievements throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Highlands of Scotland and in North America. Its charity schools have been deemed the first successful attempts to “civilise” the Highlanders through education. This had long

² SSPCK, An Account, 15.
been an item on the General Assembly’s agenda — “education” as a means of spreading
the Reformed religion — and the SSPCK was part of an ongoing process of previously
passed Acts that aimed to improve “education” in the Highlands, Islands and North of
Scotland. Indeed, the objectives of the SSPCK, sitting alongside campaigns of the
General Assembly to fill empty parishes with ministers and libraries, can be seen as part
of an overall mission to (re-)establish “true religion” throughout Scotland. However,
its formation coincided with debate within the General Assembly, not only regarding
the control of Catholics within Scotland, but also dealing with uniformity within
Protestant ranks and the abolition of such heresies as Atheism and Deism.

An Episcopalian presence in the Highlands and the continued insistence of
Episcopalian to take an active interest in Protestant affairs in Scotland cannot be
underestimated as a motive for decisions and policies of the SSPCK. Actions of the
Society that otherwise seem contradictory, begin to fall into place when seen in the light
of trying to counteract Episcopalian influences. The Act of Union had won
Presbyterians religious authority as the official Church of Scotland, but at the same time
tied their hands as to how freely they could enforce their own form of Protestantism
upon others within Northern Britain. With its endorsement of Anglicanism as the
official Church of England, Union had certainly dashed any hopes of Calvinism rising
to dominance throughout the rest of the British Isles. As Presbyterian Scots now found
themselves in partnership with Anglican England, open criticism or attack of

Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638-1842, ed. Church Law Society (1843), 316-324; “Acts: 1709,”

Episcopalians by Presbyterians, and vice versa, was no longer an option. Indeed, it had been out of bounds since William and Mary’s conditional endorsement of the Kirk in Scotland in 1690. The struggle over whose was the right and true reformed religion, however, did not dissipate with the signing of the Treaties of Union, just as it had not under any previous directions from monarch or parliament. Hence the SSPCK’s intention to assert a Presbyterian identity by setting up charity schools throughout the Highlands was as much about overcoming Episcopalian influences in that region as it was about correcting the “error” of Catholicism or Jacobitism.

**Historical Background**

The SSPCK was established in a climate of global mission. Other Protestant missionary organisations were already in existence before the Society began settling schools in the Highlands, including organisations focused on bringing religion to the New World.6 One of the earliest of these was the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England (the NEC — New England Company), which began to take shape during the Interregnum, providing assistance to colonists in the conversion of Native Americans with the endorsement of the Commonwealth.7 There was also the Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (the SPG), founded by royal charter in 1701,

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7 Gregerson, “The commonwealth of the word,” 178-179.
which emerged as the overseas affiliate of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in England, at the instigation of SPCK founding member Thomas Bray. While, like the NEC, it sought to convert indigenous Americans, the SPG’s number one priority was maintaining the Christian faith among colonists in the plantations, or more specifically “propagating the Christian religion, as professed in the Church of England, in our Foreign Plantations.” These voluntary organisations were partly driven by a continuing sense of urgency to outpace the Catholic Sacra Congregatio de propaganda fide, a missionary movement instigated by Pope Gregory XV, itself a response to the spread of Protestantism in the New World thanks to the growth of Dutch and English colonies there. The advance of Catholicism was certainly motivation for the SPG, its 1701 charter noting that “for Want of Learned and Orthodox Ministers . . . divers Romish Priests and Jesuits are the more incouraged to pervert and draw over Our said Loving Subjects.” Since Europe’s inroads into Asia in the fifteenth century, mission had always been a part of colonisation, the “brand” of Christianity to be propagated often a matter of what was endorsed by the state in question whose territories were expanding. From the turn of the eighteenth century, however, the emergence of charity schools shows an increasing interest in missionary work on a domestic front. Such was the focus of the SPCK in England and others like it, including (initially) the SSPCK. In the case of the English SPCK, formed in 1699, founded in 1699.


9 Pascoe, Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G, 4.

10 “Charter of the Society, June 16, 1701,” in Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G., 932.

11 Thomas Bray, A short account of the several kinds of societies, set up of late years, for carrying on the reformation of manners, and for the propagation of Christian knowledge (London: J. Brudewell, 1700);
this was seen as the next logical step after growing interest in societies for the reformation of manners, as a means of curbing vice and combating Atheists, Deists and Socinians.\textsuperscript{12}

As for Scotland, there the Reformed Church’s growing interest in education as a form of religious propagation began with John Knox himself, the Calvinist whose leading role in the Protestant Reformation in Scotland contributed to Presbyterian dominance. He suggested a program of learning in his \textit{First Book of Discipline} as early as 1560.\textsuperscript{13} Historians M.G. Jones and T.C. Smout see the SSPCK as part of a philosophy that evolved from Knox’s \textit{Discipline}.\textsuperscript{14} Education was for the benefit of the soul rather than the mind. The enrichment of both seem to have been envisaged by Knox, and for Lowlanders and the children of wealthy Highlanders both were achievable, but not so for the Highland poor. Since Knox’s \textit{Discipline}, there had been several Acts passed in an effort to bring education to every parish of Scotland, but with relatively little success in the Highlands. “Education” more often than not meant no more than the “trew religion” of the Presbyterian Kirk, hence it was often resisted by those with Episcopalian or Catholic sympathies.

\textsuperscript{12} Anonymous, \textit{An Account of Charity Schools in Great Britain and Ireland: With the Benefactions thereto; and of The Methods whereby they were set up, and are governed} (London: Joseph Downing, 1711).

\textsuperscript{13} Bray, \textit{Short account of the several kinds of societies}, 1.


At the time of the SSPCK’s formation, Scotland was experiencing a period of relative peace and stability, compared with the religious and political upheaval of the previous century. That century had seen a turbulent monarchy, starting with the beheading of Charles I, the interregnum that followed, and the eventual restoration of Charles’s son Charles II, a major catalyst being resentment towards State interference in religion. Suspicion regarding the intentions of Charles I’s other son, the openly Catholic James VII of Scotland and II of England, were placated for a time in the knowledge that James’s Protestant daughters from his first marriage stood to inherit the throne. Although matters came to a head with the birth of his son and possibly Catholic heir, the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 saw James ousted in favour of his daughter Mary II and nephew come son-in-law William II and III, without resorting to all out civil war. Throughout this period the main Protestant religions of Episcopalianism and Calvinism had vied for supremacy in Scotland, seesawing back and forth depending on the government of the day, while Catholics (apart from a brief respite under James) tended to keep a low profile. The two covenants of greatest national significance to Scottish Presbyterians, the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, stood united not against Catholics, but against the Episcopalian and their king Charles I.

In contrast, by 1709 the Presbyterian faith had been the unchallenged official religion of Scotland since 1689, and James’s other Anglican daughter Anne had inherited the throne without incident, despite the continued good health of her Catholic half-brother. Yet the recent discourse that had preceded the 1707 Act of Union had brought into focus differences and rivalries between England and Scotland, as well as having a polarising effect within the separate boundaries of the two kingdoms. Under several
Acts of Scotland’s Parliament in the 1690s, Scottish ministers could only preach if they had taken the oath of allegiance to William and Mary as well as the Presbyterian Confession of Faith. Hence many Scottish Episcopalian ministers had removed themselves to England, or practised their faith at the risk of being deposed or censured by the General Assembly. It would not be until the Toleration Act of 1712 that Episcopalian ministers and their flocks would have any legal recognition within Scotland. However, the “Act for securing of the Protestant religion and presbyterian church government”, which was a prerequisite for the passing of the Act of Union, not only stated that Scotland’s subjects were free from any “oath, test or subscription” that worked against the Presbyterian faith and church government, but also that “the same within the bounds of this church and kingdom shall never be imposed upon or required of them in any sort.”

While this hint at religious tolerance may have been encouraging for Episcopalians, it contributed to fundamentalist splinter groups within Presbyterian ranks. Groups such as the Cameronians saw the terms of the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian church Act, in conjunction with the Maintenance of the Church of England Act passed in England the same year reaffirming Charles II’s Act of Uniformity, as a hindrance to the true Covenanter’s goal of spreading Calvinism throughout the whole of Britain and beyond. Within this climate, the SSPCK’s attempts to establish charity schools throughout the Highlands can be seen as an attempt to assert a spiritually and politically harmonious, cooperative Scotland in keeping with the ideal of Union, while at the same time maintaining Presbyterian control. The Society’s own composition, however, was as diverse as that of the country it hoped to homogenise.

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15 Scotland, The Act for securing of the Protestant religion and presbyterian church government, 1706, 5
Historiography

Although there has been recent research relating to eighteenth-century British charity school movements and the later years of the SSPCK, especially with regard to missionary work overseas, the founding years of the Society at home have been largely neglected in the historiography. Yet this period provides valuable insight into the interaction between two very different cultures at this crucial moment in Britain’s history. However, examination of the early days of the SSPCK reveals more than simply a clash of cultures. It also shows us reaction to the 1707 Union itself, as many Scots attempted to reassess their identity and that of Scotland in the context of the new Great Britain. It is the SSPCK as part of this reaction to Union per se that will be addressed in this thesis. For many Lowland gentlemen, the differences they perceived in the “barbaric” Highlanders — their allegiances to the Pope and to an ousted king,

Anne c. 6.

their rumoured thieving and murderous ways, the “foreign” language that they spoke — were a threat to the stability of this new nation. In their efforts to assimilate the Highlands with the Lowlands through “education”, representatives of the SSPCK regularly assigned stereotypes of what it was to be a Highlander, and in doing so were making a conscious statement of what British patriots such as themselves were not, drawing mainly on ideas of foreignness, physical remoteness from civilised society, the dangers of Catholic or even heathen religious practices, and the isolation caused by continued use of the Gaelic language. Yet this emphasis on the differences of two geographical halves of a “united” Scotland seems to deliberately ignore another very real dilemma that the Union posed for Scottish Presbyterians, namely their relationship with Episcopacy, newly established by law to their South, and still alive and well within their own borders.

Historians, whether supportive or critical of the SSPCK’s work, can underestimate the extent to which Lowland and Highland societies considered each other alien. These differences, however, were more complex than a clash of easily recognisable labels — Catholic versus Protestant or Gaelic- versus English-speaking. They involved other subtler contrasts, often overlooked, especially in the Western Highlands and Islands, such as oral versus written tradition, the communal versus the individual, female versus male, sea-based versus land-based communities, undercurrents that shaped the cultures in question. Another underlying issue often missed is the subtle tug-of-war that existed between Presbyterians and Episcopalians, an almost clandestine struggle for religious dominance in the Highlands. When this unspoken conflict is taken into consideration, many of the early SSPCK’s actions which at first seem contradictory begin to make sense.
Apart from accounts written by the Society itself in order to generate interest among potential subscribers, historical treatment of the SSPCK’s efforts in Scotland appears to be limited to a handful of works from the 1930s onwards. The earlier of these studies tended to look rather favourably on the efforts of the SSPCK, often adopting a grand narrative approach to education in Scotland, with the Society prominently linked in its evolution. Although they acknowledged the SSPCK’s use of education as a means of promoting the established Church, they tended not to question either its motives or its methods. It is only in the last thirty or so years that critical analysis of the early SSPCK and its policies has been undertaken. This has tended to be restricted to the issue of the Society’s long-time refusal to teach Gaelic-speaking students in anything but English. In fact, it is only with this recent interest in what is regarded by many as the Society’s anti-Gaelic policy that its early days have received any attention. While those historians with a grand narrative approach saw the Society’s early “teething” problems as the result of an isolating geography and local hostilities, later critical historians linked the Society’s difficulties to its own policy to prioritise anglicisation over

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education or salvation. Both arguments accept as fact the motivations offered by the Society, namely that the Highlands teemed with Catholic dissenters and Jacobite sympathisers enslaved by their chiefs through the continued use of the Gaelic tongue, otherwise known to contemporaries as “Irish” or “Erse”. However, if one looks further afield, in Highland studies unrelated to education, the evidence often conflicts with notions put forward by the SSPCK concerning conditions in the Highlands and the Society’s motives for setting up schools there. Hence the Society’s questionable motives reveal Lowland misconceptions, “foreign” interpretations, of the Highlanders they hoped to “tame”; as well as Presbyterian apprehension over other Protestant interests in the area.

Various stages in the SSPCK’s progress have been noted for their strategic significance in education: for example, the Society’s second charter granted in 1738, allowing it to establish technical schools; its early attempts to send missionaries to indigenous tribes in North America in 1739; the decision in 1766 to allow Gaelic to be used in the process of teaching English.\(^{20}\) John Mason wrote the first in depth study of the SSPCK in his 1936 *History of Scottish Experiments in Rural Education*. However, Mason’s *History* was more interested in the ramifications of the Society’s 1738 charter than in the early history of the Society. When he did write about this early period, he tended to take at face value the “laudable intention . . . of a few private gentleman of the city of Edinburgh”.\(^{21}\) This is perhaps understandable when the only sources consulted were

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Society documents. Mason did expand on the initial function of the SSPCK in a later article, but again he was more interested in its later achievements, specifically with regard to its schoolmasters who “held tenaciously” to their posts. Jones included the SSPCK as part of her overall survey of the charity school movement throughout Britain and Ireland in the eighteenth century. Jones recognised that the tenets of the puritan faith were the backbone of this movement. For her, the eighteenth century was a humanitarian and philanthropic age. The charity school represented this humanitarianism in a very puritan way, that is, helping the poor to become not only good but useful Christians. This entailed “Christian charity by the rich, and uncompaining acquiescence by the poor”.

These historians are uncritical of, if not somewhat favourable towards, the operations and policies of the SSPCK. They tend to gloss over the first thirty years of trial and error, making excuses for the Society’s slow progress, despite the fact that charity schools in general received plenty of criticism from their contemporaries. The most controversial at the time was that of Bernard Mandeville, whose *Essay on Charity and Charity Schools* caused consternation with its assertion that such schools were fuelled by ulterior motives rather than compassion, and that it was hypocritical to indulge the working poor with a religious education while still expecting them to continue on with


23 Jones, *Charity School Movement*, 3.

24 An Account of Charity Schools in Great Britain and Ireland: With the Benefactions thereto; and of The Methods whereby they were set up, and are governed. Also A Proposal for Increasing their Number, and adding some Work to the Childrens Learning, thereby to render their Education more Useful to the Publick (London: Joseph Downing, 1711), 3.

the “Abundance of hard and dirty Labour” that was the key to a successful capitalist state.26 Not as scandalous, although more persistent, were complaints from within the charity school system itself. Several of the Highland schoolmasters continually sought to change the SSPCK’s pro-English written language policy. On that same topic, James Kirkwood, the very man who introduced the charity schools concept to the Edinburgh gentlemen of a society for the reformation of manners, constantly made warnings as to the policy’s detrimental effect, up until his death in 1709, the year of the SSPCK’s first charter.27

These historians tend to take at face value those suggestions offered by the Society itself to account for early difficulties. The geography of the Highlands was considered a hindrance, as were hostile locals and a lack of resources and manpower, surely circumstances beyond the SSPCK’s control. When willing to admit there were problems, the Society occasionally blamed “Discouragements from the Inhabitants”, as was the case with the preliminary attempt at a school in Abertarf in the shire of Inverness, “being the Centre of a Country where Popery does much abound.”28 Yet the SSPCK schools were supposed to be only attempted in parishes where legal schools were already established, and hence presumably the locals were not as hostile to the Establishment as the Society implied. All of these obstacles were as real after 1738 as they had been before, but the fact that the SSPCK schools were more successful as technical or craft schools, after the second charter of 1738 altered their character, has

not prompted historians to seek a more substantial explanation for the earlier model’s failures or consider problems within the SSPCK itself.

William Ferguson’s article on the progress of the Established Church in the Highlands does appear to support the “hostile locals” argument. Ferguson examined the plight of the synod of Argyll which, for much of the early eighteenth century, was the only synod, from Argyll to western Inverness-shire to the outer Hebrides, until the synod of Glenelg was finally created in 1728. He catalogues several examples of ministers pleading for assistance against the “abuses” of Catholicism. However, it is interesting to note that, according to his article, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland only seemed intent on listening to the grievances of ministers in these areas, or encouraging them to be pro-active, when there was a “popish scare”. In the meantime, most Highland Presbyterian clergy tended to show “quite remarkable tolerance and humanity” towards their Catholic neighbours. One of the Church’s main problems was a lack of Gaelic-speaking ministers in the Highlands, and Ferguson is particularly interested in the General Assembly’s efforts to increase their numbers in an effort to combat the perceived threat of Catholicism. Yet this attitude of the Established Church

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29 The hierarchy of the Church of Scotland’s administrative and judicatory structure worked its way up from local parish at its roots to presbytery, synod and then at its peak the General Assembly. For a more detailed explanation see Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland, and Scotland 1801-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24-26.


31 Ferguson, “Problems of the Established Church,” 22.

32 Ferguson, “Problems of the Established Church,” 16.
regarding the use of Gaelic appears to be in stark contrast to that of the SSPCK which the General Assembly endorsed.

Indeed, one of the failings of the SSPCK which cannot be ignored was their attitude towards Gaelic, which seems at odds with the General Assembly’s pro-Gaelic speaking ministers policy. Historians like Mason and Jones acknowledge that the policy to teach only in English was counter-productive to students’ ability to learn and the Society’s ability to gain popularity amongst the local inhabitants. Mason excuses the SSPCK for this self-imposed difficulty with the claim that at the time there simply was no Gaelic Bible or Catechism available for the schoolmasters to teach with. Jones and T.C. Smout follow suit, their only concern being that the policy was a bit of an inconvenience for the Society. Jones, however, considers the problem was rectified when the SSPCK at last contributed to the publication of the “first” Gaelic New Testament in 1767. The ramifications of the Society’s pro-English policy for language and culture in the Highlands were not a consideration. It was not until Durkacz wrote about the “language problem” in 1978 that the SSPCK’s anti-Gaelic policy came under scrutiny as a deliberate attempt to tame the Highlands. Leah Leneman and Charles Withers have also been critical of this “anglicisation” of the Highlands. Durkacz’s research destroyed the misconception that there were no Gaelic religious texts and that the 1767 New Testament was one of the first. Correspondence between James Kirkwood and the General Assembly reveals that as early as 1687 there was a large

33 Mason, “Scottish Charity Schools,” 8; Jones, Charity School Movement, 194.


35 Jones, Charity School Movement, 196.

quantity of Irish Bibles that the Irish philanthropist Robert Boyle was willing to make available for distribution in the Highlands.\textsuperscript{37} Even before this, however, there had been two Gaelic Catechisms and a Psalter.\textsuperscript{38} Indeed, the Synod of Argyll, due to its large number of Gaelic speaking parishioners, had for some time been active in supplying Gaelic texts within its bounds. The Episcopalian minister of Aberfoyle, Robert Kirk, had also translated into Gaelic a complete Psalter.

Although the General Assembly’s failure to effectively use Boyle’s bibles might be due to discrepancies between Irish Gaelic and Highland Gaelic vocabulary, historians have suggested that the more likely cause was the agenda to extirpate Gaelic all together, although the evidence is conflicting. Leneman accuses the SSPCK of being willing to risk the progress of the Word in order to stay true to their English-only policy.\textsuperscript{39} However, correspondence between the schoolmaster James Murray and the SSPCK’s managing committee reveals that there were even members of the committee who were willing to consider his use of “Irish” to teach students once they had an understanding of English.\textsuperscript{40} Likewise, Withers admits that, prior to the Jacobite Rising of 1715, the SSPCK had been flexible in its application of the policy.\textsuperscript{41} The fact that the General Assembly went to great pains to procure Gaelic speaking ministers through bursars would seem to support this, yet Withers argues the opposite. He sees the mesh of influential members, involved in the SSPCK and various General Assembly


\textsuperscript{39} Leneman, “SSPCK and the Question of Gaelic,” 58.

\textsuperscript{40} Leneman, “SSPCK and the Question of Gaelic,” 58.

\textsuperscript{41} Withers, “Education and Anglicisation,” 40.
committees, as evidence that these institutions worked together toward the goal of anglicisation, a goal which stretched back to at least 1609 and the Statutes of Iona, when James VI and I attempted to assert his sovereignty over the Western Highlands and Islands.\textsuperscript{42}

The Society’s position on Gaelic was indicative of its mission to reform the Highlands, driven by Lowland perceptions of conditions there. A major consideration in establishing the SSPCK was the desire to ease the poverty of the Highlanders, through the application of industry and freedom from the “slavery” imposed by their chiefs. However, any motives of charity tended to be overshadowed by two more urgent needs, in the eyes of the Society, to combat the rampant spread of Roman Catholicism and to stem the rise of Jacobitism. Indeed, Smout notes that the enthusiastic gentlemen who founded the Society, while “moved by the illiteracy, ignorance and superstition of the Highlands”, were also “concerned by their abiding Jacobitism, and alarmed by the current success of Catholic missionaries.”\textsuperscript{43} Yet, like the Gaelic question, there is evidence that conflicts with the image put forward by the SSPCK and some historians regarding relations between the Establishment and dissenting bodies, and the reasons given for sending the SSPCK out into the Highlands.

Today the Protestant fear of Roman Catholicism seems unjustified when one considers some of the more recent research into the impact of Catholicism in the Highlands. However, Catholicism was often synonymous with foreign oppression, whether it was


\textsuperscript{43} Smout, \textit{History of the Scottish People}, 462.
from the Papacy or from the French court which in the past had held sway over Scottish affairs. Yet while Catholics were regarded by their Protestant neighbours as “other”, for much of William and Mary’s reign in the late seventeenth century they appear to have been considered an other that could be controlled and contained. It was a policy reflective of events in Europe. While the Peace of Augsburg (1555) had ruled in favour of any ruling prince’s religion, with no consideration towards the toleration of religious minorities within his or her realm, the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 had made some inroads, however small, stating that all Christians of non established faiths, “shall have the free Exercise of their Religion, as well in publick Churches at the appointed Hours, as in private in their own Houses, or in others chosen for this purpose by their Ministers, or by those of their Neighbours, preaching the Word of God.” 44 Hence, while atheistic Deists, for example, were not to be tolerated, the General Assembly was content to keep lists and follow the movements of Catholics, becoming agitated only when there were attempts by “trafficking priests” to increase their numbers. 45 Typical of William’s annual addresses to the General Assembly was that sentiment expressed to the first meeting in 1690:

We never could be of the mind that violence was suited to the advancing of true religion;

nor do we intend that our authority shall ever be a tool to the irregular passions of any party. Moderation is what religion enjoins, neighbouring churches expect from you, and we recommend to you. And we assure you of our constant favour and protection in your following of these methods, which shall be for the real advantage of true piety and the peace of our kingdoms. 46


While it could be argued that here he had only discord between Protestant denominations in mind, William himself does seem to have been tolerant of Catholics within his realm as long as he was given the allegiance he deserved. Indeed, a propagandist letter from a French Protestant soldier serving in Ireland praised his leniency compared to that of Louis:

> The King of Great Britain, being become the head of the protestant interest of Europe, well knows his interest to be the encouragement of protestants, and though he has too often experienced the disloyalty of his popish subjects yet gives them equal justice, and is far from using them as our king uses us.\(^47\)

In fact, of all recorded addresses to the General Assembly, only once did William call upon that body to look to the matter of Catholicism — in the Highlands, “where there appears to be so much need of a reformation, both from Popery and profanity.”\(^48\) Mary McHugh admits that some areas to the west had become Catholic, thanks to the work of Vincentian Fathers from Ireland fulfilling the *Propaganda Fide*.\(^49\) However, the number of Catholics throughout the eighteenth century remained static, with few conversions.\(^50\) Christina Larner, in her study of seventeenth century witch trials, asserts that even then, during the Fathers’ missionary phase, the number of Catholics was


\(^{50}\) McHugh, “Religious Conditions of the Highlands,” 18.
minimal. Since the government-endorsed persecutions were directed at pagan rather than papist practices, Larner reasons that Catholics were considered less of a threat.\textsuperscript{51} McHugh also identifies those areas in the Highlands that were deemed the most popish by a survey conducted in 1704, the “List of Popish Parents and their Children in various parts of Scotland.”\textsuperscript{52} Not one of these areas correlates with areas targeted by the SSPCK as candidates for settled schools in the first few years of its existence. Some areas where the Society settled had no Catholics at all.\textsuperscript{53} McHugh cites sympathetic landlords as a means of maintaining Catholicism and hindering the progress of the Presbyterian Kirk, but Clotilde Prunier argues that the 1700 \textit{Act for Preventing the Growth of Popery}, with its restrictions on inheritance, was an “enticement” for Catholic landowners to convert to Protestantism.\textsuperscript{54} As for Protestant landowners, while they would not have been interested in maintaining Catholicism, those of the Episcopalian faith would also have been resistant to any agents of Presbyterianism, including the SSPCK.

The other perceived threat of the Highlands, often associated with Catholicism, was Jacobitism. While William may have put forward an image of toleration for all his subjects, there were still occasions when his administration went on high alert, and Catholics would, for example, be ordered out of London and Westminster and a ten-


\textsuperscript{52} McHugh, “Religious Conditions of the Highlands,” 12.

\textsuperscript{53} McHugh, “Religious Conditions of the Highlands,” 15.

mile radius thereof, for the security of the kingdom. Such measures tended to be in response to a political challenge, usually Jacobite, to the Prince and Princess of Orange’s right to the thrones, and once the perceived threat had passed such restrictions were relaxed. However, the claim of the Jacobite heir apparent, James Francis Edward, took on new potency when, towards the end of William’s reign, Louis XIV broke the Treaty of Ryswick (1697) by declaring James the true king of Scotland and England after James VII and II’s death in 1701. For William’s successor Anne, the possible arrival of her half-brother was a very real anxiety, and fears of James Francis Edward finding a support base in the Highlands helped fuel the perception that Catholicism there was on the rise. Unlike William, Anne reminded the General Assembly on several occasions of their duty to suppress Popery in the Highlands. Catholics tended to be singled out because the champion of the Jacobite cause was, of course, the Catholic heir of James VII and II. However, loyalty to James tended to cross religious divides. Catholic Jacobites were far outnumbered by those holding to the Episcopalian faith. Indeed, the Presbyterian Kirk’s rise after the “Glorious Revolution” (1688) had been launched when the Episcopalian bishops had declared to William II and III that their conscience would not allow them to denounce James. Yet Buick Knox’s recent study on relationships between the Establishment and dissenters shows that William, often


with the assistance of his chaplain William Carstares (a founding member of the SSPCK), had worked for much of his reign towards toleration between Presbyterians and Episcopalians. Following his death, this policy was reinforced by the Union and a staunchly Anglican queen.

Today people generally tend to automatically associate Jacobitism with the Highlands because we are aware of the risings of 1715 and 1745. In 1709, however, the only history of Jacobite insurrection within Scotland since William and Mary’s assent to the throne was limited to the battle of Killiecrankie in 1689, in the central east of Scotland; the tardiness of an old Highland MacDonald chief in declaring his allegiance in 1692, which led to the massacre at Glencoe and condemnation from all sides towards the Establishment; and the attempted French invasion in 1708. W.C. Mackenzie notes that this last attempt took place during a period of “national indignation” over the Union, and therefore Lowlanders were as much a threat as Highlanders. In his study on the “kingdom within a kingdom” he notes that the adage “no man can serve two masters” was especially true in the Highlands, with regard to clan loyalties to chief or king. Hence James VI and I attempted to weaken the powers of the Highland chiefs with the Statutes of Iona in 1609, and divert their clansmen’s loyalties towards himself. Fleming’s study of St Kilda shows that it was evident, through the writings of Martin

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61 Mackenzie, Highlands and Isles of Scotland, 115.

Martin, that the inhabitants continued to practise traditions that contravened the Statutes. Hence in the west loyalties to the clan were strongest, and still placed before the interests of kings. If this is the case, then the Western Isles were the least of the eighteenth-century government’s problems. Rather Mackenzie notes the humiliation endured by the Duke of Atholl in the Rising of 1715, when his eastern Highlanders and his own son joined the Jacobite ranks. Thus it would appear then, contrary to popular perceptions at the time, that there was more danger of treachery in areas where assimilation had successfully weakened clan ties, as the clansmen did indeed seek to place their shifted loyalties with the king — but not necessarily the king which the Presbyterians had in mind.

All of the anomalies mentioned thus far, concerning real and perceived conditions in the Highlands, point to an identity crisis, if you will, that Scotland was experiencing at the time. Before the Union, certain longstanding national characteristics had been assumed. For centuries England had been the “Auld Enemy”, perhaps even before Scotland’s annexation by Edward I and the Scottish Wars of Independence that followed in the fourteenth century. Indeed, before the Reformation, Scotland had been more likely to side with France, the two kingdoms repeatedly renewing their “Auld Alliance”, a thorn in England’s side first drawn up in 1295. The Acts of Union, however, were confirmation that a change had taken place. Relations with France had begun to cool as early as 1513, with the senseless death of James IV as he honoured the Auld Alliance at the battle of Flodden; and the Reformation had effectively put an end to any further

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64 Mackenzie, *Highlands and Isles of Scotland*, 261.
friendship with the Catholic kingdom, instead drawing Scotland ever closer to Protestant England. Yet even under the Union of the Crowns many Scots had continued to pursue independent and often rival interests to those of the English. Within Scotland itself there was also the view, shared with pride on both sides of the Highland Line, that Highlanders and Lowlanders were different from each other. The Highland clans were often seen by Lowlanders as a backward race, divided and always feuding. On the other hand the Highlanders often regarded Lowlanders as too much like the English, to the point that they referred to them both as Sassunach — although in the sixteenth century many Highland lairds had begun to emulate their Lowland equivalent. Yet with the prospect of Union it was the Lowlanders who seemed most divided by the idea of sharing their identity with their southern fellow Britons.

While the majority of Scots had acquiesced to sharing their monarch with England since the death of Elizabeth I, many were uneasy with the Union Act of 1707, and uncertain as to where Scotland stood in relation to England and the rest of the world. Peter Sahlins writes that a nation’s boundaries help define that nation. When Edinburgh looked to Scotland’s borders in the West and far North, it was met with a vague and alien world where the inhabitants reportedly kept questionable allegiances, led ungodly lives and spoke in a foreign tongue. In this light, the various discrepancies between real


conditions in the Highlands and what was assumed by the SSPCK are about more than simply Lowland prejudices towards Highlanders, as focussing attention towards the West and North intrinsically involves drawing attention away from the South and East. The compulsion of gentlemen in Edinburgh to organise and send out schoolmasters to the far reaches of the Highlands, and to rally the south of Britain to their cause, was driven by more than the threat of the Catholicism and Jacobitism of others, but rather stemmed from a desire to redefine themselves and their country as loyal participants in a new united kingdom. Whether or not these gentlemen believed in the Catholic or Jacobite threat, there were other issues in the Highlands that may have influenced their judgement, such as remote location, foreign culture and mix of religious influences. These conditions may well have made the far reaches of the Highlands a strategic starting point.

Sources — Written and “Oral”

This thesis will make use of various written sources to examine the mentalities of those involved in and affected by the SSPCK; to explore their sense of themselves and of each other. An obvious source is the early minutes and correspondence of the Society.69

69 Minutes of the Committee Meetings of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, 1709-1714, Records of The Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), National Archives of Scotland (NAS), Edinburgh (hereafter cited as Committee Minutes vol. 1, SSPCK); Minutes of the Committee Meetings of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, 1714-1720, Records of the SSPCK, NAS (hereafter cited as Committee Minutes vol. 2, SSPCK); Minutes of the General Meetings of the SSPCK, 1709-1718, Records of the SSPCK, NAS (hereafter cited as General Minutes vol. 1, SSPCK); Minutes of the General Meetings of the SSPCK, 1718-1727, Records of the
There are also the Society’s annual sermons, although these are somewhat retrospective as the earliest surviving copies date from the 1730s. Even so, such sermons are still an important public expression of an organisation’s *mentalité*. These Society records provide insight into how the Society itself perceived its mission. However, to gain a

SSPCK, NAS (hereafter cited as General Minutes vol. 2, SSPCK); Proposals concerning the propagation of Christian knowledge in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and foreign parts of the world, Records of the SSPCK, NAS; Recommendation in favour of Alexander Durham [sic] 1709, Records of the SSPCK, NAS; Recommendation by the Society to those ministers and other Society members who are also members of the Commission of the General Assembly regarding popish priests and schools, and the state of affairs in the island of St. Kilda, 7 Nov 1717, Records of the SSPCK, NAS; Mr Shute, *Some considerations to induce the people of South Britain to contribute to the Design of propagating Christian knowledge in the Highlands and Isles of North Britain and of civilizing the barbarous inhabitants of these parts of the kingdom*, Sep 1708, Records of the SSPCK, NAS; Alexander Buchan to Moderator, Pappa, 10 January 1705, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1705, NAS; Alexander Buchan to presbytery of Edinburgh, Hirta, 24 June 1712, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1713, NAS; Instructions to Alexander Buchan when sent to St Kilda or Hirta, 1 August 1704, and overture anent Alex. Buchan, Church Papers 1703-1704, NAS; Daniel Campbell to George Meldrum, anent Catherine Campbell, spouse of Alexander Buchan, 25 February 1708, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1711, NAS; Letters from Alexander Buchan, 1705-1709, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1711, NAS; Nomination of Alexander Buchan to reside in island of Hirta or Saint Kilda to instruct and catechise inhabitants, 1 August 1704, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1705, NAS; Overture for furthering the design of propagating Christian Knowledge in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, 2 March 1710, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1710, NAS; Recommendation by presbytery of Edinburgh that Neil McVicar should be transported from Argyll to visit gaelic speakers in presbytery of Edinburgh, 19 April 1710, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1710, NAS; Report anent Irish bibles, General Assembly Papers, Main Series 1710, NAS.

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clearer image of the Highland communities that the Society hoped to engage with, and how they were interpreted by outsiders, one must also consider contemporary travelogues, essays and social and anthropological studies, which often provided as much speculation as they did fact, their content dependant on the tastes and expectations of their desired readership. Even maps of the period, usually by cartographers on the continent, were very much an interpretation of those places their creators considered to be important or were in vogue. Hence those islands that defined the outer limits of Scotland could appear and disappear depending on the interests of the day.

While written tradition helps us to access the attitudes of Lowlanders and other non-Highlanders, we are inhibited from attaining Highlanders’ perspective to a large degree

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71 Martin Martin, *A Late Voyage to St Kilda, The Remotest of all the Hebrides, or Western Isles of Scotland. With A History of the Island, Natural, Moral, and Topographical. Wherein is an Account of their Customs, Religion, Fish, Fowl, &c. As also a Relation of a late Impostor there, pretended to be sent by St. John Baptist,* (London, 1698); Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland,* 2nd ed. (London: A Bell, 1716); Edward Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to His Friend in London; containing The Description of a Capital Town in that Northern Country; with An Account of some uncommon Customs of the Inhabitants: Likewise An Account of the Highlands, with the Customs and Manners of the Highlanders. To which is added A Letter relating to the Military Ways among the Mountains, began in the Year 1726* (London: S. Birt, 1754); James Kirkwood, *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customes copied by Edward Lluyd from the manuscript of the Rev James Kirkwood (1650-1709) and annotated by him with the aid of the Rev John Beaton,* ed. J.L. Campbell (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1975); Hans Sloane, “Extracts of several Letters from Mr. Edward Llwyd, (M.A) late Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, to Dr Rich. Ricrdson, (M.D.) of North Bierly in Yorkshire; containing Observations in Natural History and Antiquities, made in his Travels thro’ Wales and Scotland. Communicated by Dr. Hans Sloane, R.S. Secr,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* 28 (1713): 93-101; Samuel Johnson, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (first published
because of their oral tradition. Proven methods of accessing the mentalité of a community, as adopted by Bourdieu or the Annales school of thought, rely heavily on written evidence. We need to remember, however, that the written evidence is about visualising the SSPCK’s world. It can do little to help us appreciate the world according to the Western Highlanders and Islanders. This raises the question of how one achieves a balanced view, when the written evidence for one group is virtually non-existent by the period in question and its oral evidence, if deemed credible at all by other historians, may be argued to be fading away. While much of the oral tradition in a spoken format may well have been lost, the point of view of the “uneducated” Highlander can still be found in those popular songs and poetry that survived long enough to be transferred into written media. However, as written tradition, the question must be asked whether those popular enough to survive did so as reliable representations of the Highlander’s perspective or as stereotypes appealing to Lowland interpretations of the Highlander. The voice of Highland women is particularly silent. This in itself is a reflection of the impact of written culture on Highland oral traditions. The SSPCK and Highland culture had very different concepts of the place of women in education and the passing on of ideas. There is a sense of their presence in the background of evidence left to us by those adhering to written tradition, and differing attitudes to that presence are touched on throughout the thesis.


One should not assume, as many eighteenth-century non-Highlanders did, that the Highlands were devoid of written culture.\textsuperscript{73} Enough Gaelic written tradition had survived to be cited by its defenders in the eighteenth-century debate over its existence.\textsuperscript{74} The upper echelons of the bard hierarchy, like the Highland nobility they served, had been well-read multi-linguists as well as gifted orators. However, the modern nobles’ rejection of the bard’s traditions of history and lore keeping, and of Gaelic as a language at court, meant that those written skills became redundant, no longer valued by their chiefs and never necessary amongst the illiterate majority of their clansfolk. As a result, while oral traditions of the Highlands interacting with written traditions were still prevalent enough in the mid seventeenth century for us to be able to capture the sentiment of a people aware of the decline of their own culture, by the early eighteenth century that decline had made enough of an impact so that it is virtually impossible to gain the common Highlanders’ perspective of his or her changing world.

Yet at the same time the changing world of the common Lowlander becomes more accessible in densely populated areas where the oral and the written were more likely to interact. Ironically, Highland protest does not become noticeably visible again until the second Jacobite Rising of 1745, when a new generation of bards had better access to the printed medium via the work of such organisations as the SSPCK. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that concern for the survival of Gaelic culture led to a concerted effort by individuals such as J.F. Campbell to actively record for the sake of

\textsuperscript{73} The early sixteenth-century \textit{Book of the Dean of Lismore} (Leabhar Deathan Lios Mòir) is a compilation of such works. The earliest known examples of written Scottish Gaelic are marginalia to be found in the tenth-century Latin \textit{Book of Deer}.

\textsuperscript{74} William Ferguson, “Samuel Johnson’s Views on Scottish Gaelic Culture,” \textit{The Scottish Historical
preservation what was left of Highland oral tradition. Even so, the result was a substantial collection of the region’s folklore and mythology, but very little in the way of history from the point of view of the Highlander. This was partly due to the fact that Campbell and others like him would have already had fixed ideas of what they would find before they began to look. After all, other Britons had already written “histories” of the Highlands, and any attempt to recover history from the clansmen and women themselves would be pointless as, to the educated literate man or woman, oral tradition by its very nature placed it within the genre of make-believe.\(^{75}\)

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\(^{75}\) Campbell’s *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* was first published 1860-1862. *Miscellanea Scotica: A collection of tracts relating to the history, antiquities, topography, and literature of Scotland* (Glasgow: Robert Chapman, 1818-1820) included early examples of Highland histories such as the anonymous *The History of the Feuds and Conflicts among the Clans, in the Northern Parts of Scotland, and in the Western Isles. From the year MXXXI unto MDCXIX*; and John Monipennie, *The Abridgement or Summarie of the Scots Chronicles*. See also James Wallace, *An Account of the Islands of Orkney* (London, 1700); John Walker, *An economical history of the Hebrides and Highlands of Scotland* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme; Edinburgh: for Guthrie & Anderson, 1812). There does appear to have been a resurgence in Highland histories in the later nineteenth century: James A. Robertson, *Concise historical proofs respecting the Gael of Alban; or, Highlanders of Scotland: with short notices of the Highland clans: and a dissertation on the Gaelic topography of Scotland: also explanatory notes, map, illustrations, and descriptions of the country of the Gael* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1866); Elizabeth Taylor, *The Braemar Highlands; their tales, traditions, and history* (Edinburgh: W.P. Nimmo, 1869); John S. Keltie, ed., *A history of the Scottish Highlands, Highland clans and Highland regiments: with an account of the Gaelic language, literature and music by Thomas Maclauchlan, and an essay on Highland scenery by John Wilson* (Edinburgh; London: Thomas C. Jack, 1883).
The period under consideration in this thesis takes place during the void in Gaelic written culture. Growing awareness of the extent of illiteracy in the Highlands coincided with the General Assembly’s need to assert a uniform Reformed religion throughout all of Scotland. The proposal for a system of charity schools in the Highlands was an opportunity to remedy two problems in one go. This thesis examines only the brief beginnings of the Highlands’ transition back into literacy, as it was initiated by the SSPCK, stemming from just before the Society’s inception to the aftermath of the 1715 Rising. However, it serves to gauge the movements of the Society as an initial response to the newly established Union of Scotland and England, before the events of 1715 caused the Society to refashion its policies. Various factors in the early 1700s contributed to the initial makeup of the Society and gave impetus to its founding. After the ‘15 there was a need to regroup, to reconsider the Society’s identity and reassess its goals. Still in its infancy, much like the Union itself, the organisation was wrestling with issues that for many of its members were still set in shades of grey, even points of religion, despite apparently having clear objectives laid down in their 1709 charter and in much of their propaganda. It was not until after the ’15 that such issues became more black and white.

Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 will look at the early workings of the SSPCK and problems within the Society itself, which contributed to the difficulties it faced. These problems were often a question of identity and purpose. While the founding members of the SSPCK appeared to have very set ideas as to the character of the Highlander, there was
confusion as to the purpose of the Society itself, and how it was to bring about desired change to the Highland identity. Tensions between members were often the result of differences in background and motivation between various groups associated with the Society, be they the Edinburgh based managing committee, Highland schoolmasters or British and continental subscribers. The Society’s relationship with the SPCK in England also raises issues regarding resistance to the recent Union and continued rivalry between England and Scotland, which was not only a legacy of age old grievances with the “auld enemy”, but also stemmed from the religious differences which had long been an intrinsic element of their separate national identities, now entrenched in separate halves of the one Great Britain under Union. Yet while the Union may have settled the question of religious supremacy within the kingdom itself, the Society’s long term goal of overseas missionary work hints that for the SSPCK the struggle to advance Calvinism was not over with regard to the new world, despite the head start of Episcopalian organisations such as the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG).

Although there were previous schemes for education in Scotland, the SSPCK’s may be regarded as the first serious attempts to educate children in the Highlands. The Society received its first royal charter in 1709, six years after the pamphlet *A Memorial concerning the Disorders of the Highlands* had identified rampant Catholicism and neglect as cause for concern.76 It was hoped that teaching poor children to read, using

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76 Anonymous, *A Memorial concerning the Disorders of the Highlands: especially the Northern Parts thereof, and the Isles of Scotland. With an Account of some Means by which the same may be Redressed and Prevented, and how Religion and Vertue may be promoted in these Parts*, (Edinburgh, 1703), 3 and 6.
texts such as the Shorter Catechism, would serve the dual purpose of driving out Catholics and instilling a sense of industrious discipline, to the benefit of both Church and State. Education of the common man and woman, so that they might learn the ways of the Scriptures, had long been an important tenet in Presbyterian doctrine, and with the restoration of Presbyterianism as the established Church of Scotland under William II and III, it did not take long for the Education Act to follow in 1696.

Neither Knox’s 1560 treatise nor any of the Acts that were to come after had any real effect on learning in the Highlands until the establishment of the SSPCK. Knox had placed the onus on parents to look to their children’s education, and the regimen he prescribed was much more involved than anything that the SSPCK would later endorse. As for the Act of 1696, like previous Acts concerning education, it had little effect in the Highlands, an area where geography and attitudes made it difficult for the appointed commissioners to enforce the stipulation that heritors, the local landowners, were legally bound to provide a school in every parish. According to Jones, the difference between the SSPCK’s program and its predecessors was that the Society was physically able to organise and provide an education network, thanks to financial support, maintained through subscriptions encouraged by the presbyteries, by order of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. There were also plenty of examples for the Society to consider when determining an appropriate model, in the form of the parish schools of the Lowlands; charity schools already established in England and Wales; and a school system on the continent (one of the Society’s personal favourites)

77 SSPCK, An Account, 6-7.
78 Jones, Charity School Movement, 166.
79 Jones, Charity School Movement, 177-178.
set up by the Pietist Francke in Halle, Germany, whose trainees were already setting out to India as missionaries.\textsuperscript{80} Yet despite these advantages, the SSPCK floundered for the first twenty years.

Many of the geographical impediments encountered by the Society were exacerbated by the Society itself. The SSPCK had conflicting policies regarding the location of schools. As already mentioned, it was Society policy that no charity school was to be set up in a parish where there was not already a school established by law.\textsuperscript{81} This was to ensure that the SSPCK did not take on the responsibility, and expense, that was the legal obligation of the local heritors. At the same time, however, it was also Society policy not to set up a charity school within close proximity to the parish schools.\textsuperscript{82} The effect was a network, loosely defined, of schools and their schoolmasters set in isolated pockets. Yet parishes were so large, especially in the West, that there was often no real danger of settling too close to a parish school. Some areas settled were so remote that it was the schoolmaster’s duty to virtually act as minister as well.\textsuperscript{83} As Mills notes, over time the schools of the SSPCK and its English equivalent the SPCK were generally strategically placed.\textsuperscript{84} Yet, when one considers the actual conditions in the Highlands disputed by historians, with regard to known Catholic or Jacobite areas and accessible terrain, the schools’ early locations in the far western and northern reaches do not seem


\textsuperscript{81} Jones, \textit{Charity School Movement}, 183.

\textsuperscript{82} Jones, \textit{Charity School Movement}, 183.

\textsuperscript{83} SSPCK, \textit{An Account}, 34.
particularly strategic. In fact, the majority of them were placed in the middle of nowhere, on the periphery (see Figure 1). Hirta, the main island of St Kilda, is a prime example of the remote areas sought out by the SSPCK. It was the site chosen for the first of the Society’s charity schools, and one that perhaps deserves particular attention.

The SSPCK’s fascination with remote areas such as Hirta ties in with ideas of difference and the various issues that arise from them, such as security, unity and foreignness. These will be considered in chapter 2. Martin Martin’s work placed St Kilda in the public eye. Before his _Late Voyage_ there was rarely any reference to its islands on Scottish land maps. Yet it is the first place where a catechist was sent by the SSPCK to “educate” the inhabitants. This poses the question of whether it was settled because it was unique, or rather because the Society believed it to be typical. After all, Martin’s is not just the first anthropological study of the Outer Hebrides, but of any part of the Highlands at all.

Differences between Highlands and Lowlands had been ingrained into the Scottish psyche over centuries. The language of the Highlanders was referred to as “Irish” by their southern neighbours. 85 Not only that, but the people themselves were considered to be as foreign and primitive as the Irish were supposed to be. 86 James Wallace, for example, went to great lengths to show how the people of the Highlands had from

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85 Even Samuel Johnson was confused by this use of the word “Irish to identify the language, taking Martin’s reference to Irish texts to literally mean texts written by the Irish instead of texts written in Highland Gaelic: Ferguson, “Samuel Johnson’s Views on Scottish Gaelic Culture,” 191.

antiquity been identified as a different breed to the rest of Britain: “these called Scoti by Claudian, are the very same people Eumenius calleth Hyberni soli Britanni the Irish of the British Soil: and Tacitus calleth Horesti, Highland men or Braemen.” While Wallace considered the Highlanders to be British in origin, he noted that it was “controverted by some late writers, whether they were Natives of Britain, or Irishes who from Ireland properly so called then invaded Britain.” In the later half of the eighteenth century, the inaccessible geography of the Highlands that separated their inhabitants from the rest of Great Britain would be excuse enough for the 1778 Catholic Relief Bill and its repeal of penal laws not to be extended to Scottish Catholics. The fact that the Highlands were the destination of several writers of popular travel journals well into the eighteenth century is testament to the outsider’s perceptions of their strangeness and novelty. Withers gives examples of mass evictions of Highlanders from Lowland towns in the mid-seventeenth century. He also points to the Gaelic

87 Wallace, Description of the Islands of Orkney, 173.

88 Wallace, Description of the Islands of Orkney, 165-166.


90 Apart from Johnson’s Journey to the Western Islands, and his travelling companion James Boswell’s The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides (1785), there were works such as Burt, Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland; Thomas Pennant, A Tour in Scotland in 1769 (Chester: John Monk, 1771); John Knox, A tour through the highlands of Scotland, and the Hebride Isles in MDCCCLXXXVI (London: Printed for J. Walter, 1787); R. Blamire, Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1776 (London, 1789); John Lane Buchanan, Travels in the Western Hebrides from 1782 to 1790 (London 1793); and Thomas Thornton, A Sporting Tour through the Northern Parts of England and Great Part of the Highlands of Scotland (London, 1804).
chapels and Highland societies that sprang up in Lowland cities during the eighteenth century as evidence of subculture. 91

This would tend to indicate a sense of difference on the part of the Highlanders themselves. Mackenzie’s study confirms this, showing that the Highlanders encouraged notions of difference, sometimes referring to themselves as the “ancient Scots”. 92 A sense of foreignness was particularly true of the Western Highlands and Islands. The inhabitants there had enjoyed a long, if at times turbulent, relationship with the people of the north of Ireland. It was, after all, only a short boat ride away. These ties had continued until the plantations in Ulster of the early seventeenth century put an end to their interaction. 93  Hence much of western Highland culture had more in common with that of Ireland than with the rest of Scotland, the mountainous terrain to the east proving more of a barrier to interaction than the sea to the west.

This notion of foreignness, which for so many members of and subscribers to the SSPCK typified their idea of the Highlands, becomes even more apparent when one considers an aspect of the SSPCK’s mission which, although it did not begin to come to fruition until the 1730s, was hinted at from the very start. The original proposals for an organisation such as the SSPCK all maintained that Christian knowledge should be brought to “Foreign Parts of the World”, as well as the Highlands and Islands of


92 Mackenzie, Highlands and Isles of Scotland, 114.

93 Mackenzie, Highlands and Isles of Scotland, 206.
Scotland. Indeed, the two were often discussed in the same breath. The Society’s Letters Patent as condoned by Queen Anne recognised that subscribers’ efforts were not only for the benefit of the Highlands, especially the “remote corners” thereof, but also “for propagating the same in Popish and Infidel Parts of the World.” The “remoteness” of the Highlands did indeed prove useful to the Society’s later missions to the New World, in that the conditions were similar.

Yet it would appear that the Society shared that sentiment expressed earlier by Martin in his *Late Voyage*, that “there are a Thousand things nearer us that may engage our thoughts to better purpose,” although he was referring to novelties from afar rather than the salvation of distant souls. Ironically, Martin’s comment was first published in 1698, at a time when Scots men and women were being encouraged by the Company of Scotland to invest in the Darien scheme, a doomed venture to the Caribbean devised to break the East India Company’s perceived monopoly on trade. When one considers how damaging was this attempt by Scotland to compete on the world stage, especially in an area where England already had interests (both temporal and spiritual), the Western Highlands and Islands were a safe “foreign” alternative, complete with “noble savage” as depicted by Martin, until the Society (and Scotland) grew more confident.

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95 SSPCK, *An Account*, 12.
96 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, preface.
97 Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies, *Edinburgh, the first of September, 1698*: whereas the court of directors, of the honourable African and Indian Company, have granted a permission to the right honourable George Viscount of Tarbat ... with any others of this kingdom, that shall joyn with them, to equip, fitt, and send out a ship to East India (Edinburgh, 1698).
98 Anonymous, *An Enquiry into the causes of the miscarriage of the Scots colony at Darien, or, An
Martin’s *Late Voyage* gives some fascinating insight into the lives of the villagers who dwelt on the islands of St Kilda in the 1690s. He portrays the inhabitants as Reformed Church, disciplined by hard work and their faith, not at all the idle papists which the SSPCK set out to educate, although their faith could easily be corrupted.\(^9^9\) However, there are several passages in the *Voyage* which those pro-Union gentlemen of the Society may have found disturbing. Certainly there were border security issues to be considered in such remote, unguarded areas, when countries such as France and Spain had openly declared their support for the heir of James VII and II. External influences, however, were perhaps deemed less of a threat to the new nation than internal influences. The hold of the chiefs over the clans was still considered strong in the early eighteenth century, and nowhere was the chief’s power more evident than the Western Islands. At a time when Scotland was coming to terms with the meaning of Union, it did not sit well that these petty lords continued to divide the loyalties of British subjects.

This was perhaps more of a motivation for the SSPCK than was the people’s poverty that the Society and others blamed on the Highland chiefs. Clans folk were indeed poor. However, Jones notes that Highland conditions as described by “travellers from the South” were not unlike those found in Wales or Ireland, or indeed in the Lowland slums.\(^1^0^0\) She blames the “clan relationships” as mainly responsible for these conditions, although the eyewitness accounts that she offers, as proof of the squalor and

\(^{9^9}\) Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 135-136, 154-156.

\(^{1^0^0}\) Jones, *Charity School Movement*, 170.
dejection endured by the Highland poor, date well after the ’45 rebellion, when the breakdown of the clan system was already under way, and were as much the result of government intervention as the cause. Industry was considered the means by which the poor could become more accepting of their poverty. Jones notes that it was never the intention of the charity schools to encourage the poor to look beyond their station. In the case of the Highlands, the poor had long accepted their lot and there was no foreseeable danger of that changing. They were far from idle but, due to the sudden change in geology north-west of the Highland Line and the nature of the soil which was adverse to successful arable farming, theirs was mainly pastoral farming. According to one report “the Quantity of Arable Land [was] exceeding small, and its Produce greatly lessened by the prodigious rains that [fell] upon that Coast. The Tops of the Mountains are craggy, and their Sides are steep, but they [produced] a Grass very proper for breeding small Black Cattle, and in some Places for feeding Sheep.” I. D. Whyte notes that traffic across the Highland-Lowland border was often to do with the exchange of agricultural goods — Highland livestock for Lowland grain. However, grazing livestock was not recognised as proper work by the SSPCK. It would appear that the “industrious” crop farming of the Lowlands was more acceptable, yet Smout notes that, during the period under consideration, Scotland was experiencing a glut in arable

101 Jones, Charity School Movement, 168.
102 Jones, Charity School Movement, 4-5.
105 Jones, Charity School Movement, 170-171.
produce after famine in the 1690s, which surely was not conducive to further agricultural development at the time.\footnote{T.C. Smout, “Where had the Scottish economy got to by the third quarter of the eighteenth century?” in \textit{Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment}, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 47.} Perhaps it was not so much the farming of cattle, sheep and geese that disturbed the founders of the SSPCK, but rather the idea that the best of the produce would go to the clan chief. It was claimed that such “slavish dependencies” were enforced by the chiefs themselves, by sustaining the Gaelic language, and by encouraging superstition.

In chapter 3 the popular beliefs of the Highlands and Islands will be examined more closely, particularly those beliefs and practices most objectionable to the SSPCK. Many Western Highland communities were Protestant.\footnote{Clotilde Prunier, \textit{Anti-Catholic Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Scotland} (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), 29-31.} Yet both Martin and James Kirkwood noted that they observed saints’ days such as St Columba’s, saints who were themselves not even typical of Roman Catholicism, but rather the Celtic Christianity that had gone before it. This was just one example of a belief system which for Lowland Presbyterians must have seemed confused and archaic. For many Lowlanders, their first introduction to the Western Highlands and Islands would be the work of Martin, Kirkwood, Robert Kirk, and Edward Lluyd. Before that, the little writing there is seems to be geographic and resource focused in nature — what could be mined, cultivated and so on. For the first time, Martin’s widely published work looked at the people, their culture, religion, political persuasions and economics. Even though some of these writers were themselves Highlanders, they brought their own interpretations to
that which they observed, occasionally tainted by the impression they wished to make, and they were all Episcopalian.

The “superstitions” that their contemporaries usually associated with the Highlands, and which the SSPCK endeavoured to alert fellow Britons to, tended to be of the popish variety. Yet, according to George Robb’s research into Highland popular religion, the “superstitions” that were actually rife throughout the Highlands and Islands were a more complicated mix of pagan, Catholic and Reformed religion. Folk ritual and Christian sacraments worked side by side. Examples offered by Robb show how the Christian sacraments were considered protection against negative aspects of faerie, while in turn pagan ritual was seen to bolster the power of the sacraments. Robb agrees with Larner that Christianity requires constant and repetitive instruction in order for it to take root. With the religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such constancy was lacking in the Highlands, hence unconventional religious practices grew prevalent. Within the Presbyterian community itself there were digressions, but Douglas Brackenridge finds that the Kirk was often far more tolerant than it is often given credit for, depending on the nature and severity of the crime committed. With regard to the crime of profaneness, the failure to observe the Sabbath, the elders’ actions showed they understood human weakness, often proving lenient, depending on the


person and the circumstances. However, Buick Knox found the General Assembly to be far less forgiving of “doctrinal deviations” from conventional faith, citing as evidence the uncompromising trial and execution of Thomas Aikenhead for atheism in 1696. Yet even the brutality of this case was, notes Michael Hunter, the exception rather than the norm, and at the time quite controversial. Even so, Robb asserts that heterodoxy was taken very seriously by the Established Church.

Indeed, Smout claims that it was Martin’s strange accounts of hybrid practices in St Kilda that prompted the Lowland based Presbyterian SSPCK to set up its first school there. However, for the Highland lay authorities, many of them Episcopalian, it was only the fanatical preachings in the 1690s of the false prophet, the “impostor” Roderick, claiming to receive instruction from John the Baptist himself, that had caused concern, and then only when they were made aware that he was providing “special” and private instruction to the women of the island. Once he was removed, the islanders were allowed to return to the same animistic and unconventional Christian rituals that they had been practising for generations. These differing responses to folk belief between Highland and Lowland are clearly illustrated in their different approaches to witches.

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113 Knox, “Establishment and Toleration,” 358.


117 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 151-152.
For the Lowlander a witch was a person in league with the Devil, who would have to be purged from the community, while for the Highlander witches were cunning folk with whom the community would simply have to contend. Attitudes toward belief in the supernatural also tended to differ depending on the observer’s Christian faith, with some Episcopalian intellects apparently more willing than Presbyterians to explore or even consider the credibility of such phenomena as “second sight”.

While the divide between cultures may have been the driving force behind the SSPCK’s mission to bring “true” religion to the Highlands, their mission almost failed, due to a gulf in understanding of another kind — that of language. As has already been mentioned, the main area of debate regarding the SSPCK has been concerned with its attitude towards the Gaelic language. Critics consider that distrust of Gaelic went hand in hand with distrust of the strangeness of all things Highland which lasted well after the 1745 Jacobite Rebellion. Withers notes that Highland migrants to the Lowlands were identified as outsiders, and a security risk, by their Gaelic language. Chapter 4, however, places the SSPCK’s pro-English policy in the context of attitudes towards the oral tradition of the Highlands versus the written tradition of the Lowlands. It is a context that is not usually considered. Non-Highlanders had long been under the


120 Withers, “Kirk, club and culture change,” 181.
misapprehension, and continued to be well into the eighteenth century, that there was no written Gaelic. Men of letters were dismissive of oral tradition as having any value in civilised society. This might explain the anomaly of the General Assembly seeking out Gaelic-speaking ministers while at the same time Gaelic was not to be used in education. However, while there was indeed a written tradition among the Highlanders, their oral culture was still important to them. Such culture is very much about the power of the word, the need to recite and remember, not to write down and forget, the communal telling rather than private reading. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the effect of the SSPCK was to diminish that power.

All the same, while spoken Gaelic seems to have posed little threat in the eyes of the General Assembly, it was still in their interests to keep it that way. The written voice could be a powerful vehicle for protest. Pittock’s detailed exploration of the Jacobite mentalité through eighteenth-century poetry shows how language and literary devices were themselves altered in order to express, and to some extent confront, Scotsmen and women’s grievances. By the time the SSPCK began settling schools, Jacobites and anti Unionists were already effectively writing in Lowland Scots and Latin verse (depending on their desired readership) to express their sense of nationalism, deliberately rejecting English as unpatriotic. In a society based on written tradition, their printed ballads were perhaps considered more of a threat than Highland songs in a “barbaric” tongue that theoretically only spread as far as the ears that heard them. In this light, the SSPCK’s policy was not so much about anglicisation, not so much an attempt to silence Gaelic, but rather to deny Gaelic speakers a printed medium for protest that was already being put to dubious use by other Scots.
For the Presbyterian SSPCK, the question of written Gaelic implied a challenge to spiritual as well as secular authority, as every initiative to introduce Gaelic religious texts to the Highlands had been proposed by Episcopalians. Efforts by the SSPCK to resist Episcopalian advances and thus avoid the risk of compromising the true faith in their hopes of building a united religious national identity were flawed from the start, however, when such unity could not be found even within the ranks of the Society itself. In the following chapter we shall explore the conditions that led to the desire to realise this homogenous identity, and the inevitable problems that the SSPCK faced in trying to make the ideal a reality.
Chapter One
The SSPCK:
negotiating Scottish identities under the Union

In the climate of the newly established Union, the efforts of the SSPCK were more to do with inter Protestant relations than with the threat of Catholicism. The treaties of Union in effect whitewashed past grievances, religious or otherwise, between the two kingdoms of England and Scotland. However, the veneer of unity promoted by pro Union organisations such as the SSPCK ignored very real differences that continued under Union. The Society itself had indeed been shaped by recent past struggles over such differences and these continued to affect its purpose, so that the Society, especially its managing Committee, found itself engaged in a delicate balancing act, endeavouring to give the impression of moderation and harmony while at the same time keen not to give Episcopalian interests an upper hand. The Society’s mission to educate the Highlands, attempting to bring together mainstream British Protestants, North and South, against a common “enemy”, served a dual purpose. Its focus on the “otherness” of the Highlands, from the nature of the inhabitants right down to the physical terrain itself, diverted attention away from differences within Protestant ranks, not only between Episcopaliens and Presbyterians, but also between mainstream Presbyterians and the more fundamentalist strains of Calvinism present in the Lowlands that were counter productive to the Union’s progress. At the same time, planting schools in the Highlands under the banner of defeating Catholics and Jacobites also provided the SSPCK with an opportunity to supplant widespread Episcopalian influences there. Hence Committee members in Edinburgh were not only motivated by the concept of
schools as a means of bringing order to the Highlands, but also as enforcing religious
unity to the whole of Scotland. Their renegotiation of Scotland’s identity made
deliberate assertions about Scotland’s religious and political makeup, not only in terms
of how Scots saw themselves, but how they perceived they were seen by others.

There was more to the makeup and direction of the SSPCK, however, than just the
desires of its managing Committee. The locally cultivated schoolmasters were keen to
use whatever means were available to them to provide learning in the hopes of
improving the situation of their fellow Highlanders. Presbyterian ministers, and heritors
of various religious and political persuasions, had differing views as to how and where
schools could best serve their communities, often affected by their own interests and
religious convictions. With these human variables in play, much that seemed sound
method in theory proved ineffectual when put into practice, and some of the Society’s
idealistic priorities were often lost in the reality of the Highlands. Indeed, Episcopalian
obstacles came not only from Scottish heritors or the English SPCK, but could also be
found within the Society’s own royal charter. Hence from the SSPCK’s inception, there
were conflicting ideas as to its aims and objectives and how it was to be managed;
symptomatic of a broader struggle with Scotland’s identity in the context of the recently
formed Union with England.

The first general meeting of the SSPCK was held in Edinburgh on 3rd November, 1709.
Members had been elected by the Lords of Session, from subscriptions received to set
up the Society. Before that, however, the Society had begun to take shape through the
efforts of members of a society for the reformation of manners in Edinburgh. As Jones
notes, such reform societies had more faith in “the rigours of the criminal law” than the
sway of Christianity as a cure for the vices and vulnerabilities of the poor.\textsuperscript{1} Several of the gentlemen from this society were elected onto the SSPCK’s managing Committee, bringing their interests in the law with them. The charity school society itself had been suggested to the reform society by James Kirkwood, a member of the SPCK in England and a nonjuring Episcopalian — that is, he had not taken the Oath of Abjuration which repudiated any claim of James VII and II and his heirs.

While members of the SSPCK in general represented a broad cross-section of middle and upper class Scottish society, including Episcopalian ministers such as Kirkwood, its managing Committee was more particular in makeup. Of the eighteen original committee members, nine were legal professionals. These were James Gellie and Walter Stewart, Advocates; Alexander McLeod, Advocate and brother of the young laird McLeod of Harris; Sir Walter Pringle, Advocate, and James Hamilton of Pancaitland, both of whom would later be Senators of the College of Justice and would sympathise with the leaders of the 1725 riots against the malt tax (considered by many a contravention of the Treaty of Union); Robert Alexander, a principal Clerk of the Session; William Brodie, Advocate and one of the Commissars of Edinburgh; John Dundas of Philpstoun, Advocate, procurator of the Church of Scotland and principal clerk of its General Assembly; and Sir Hugh Dalrymple, judge, politician and Lord President of the Session. Only three members had careers in the Presbyterian Church: William Carstares; Neil McVicar, Minister of the Gospel at St Cuthbert’s in West Kirk and proficient in Gaelic; and William Wishart, Minister of the Gospel at Edinburgh, later Principal of the University of Edinburgh and moderator of the General Assembly, and much despised by the Episcopalians of South Leith when he was minister there.

\textsuperscript{1} Jones, \textit{Charity School Movement}, 36.
The rest of the Committee included Alexander Dundas, Doctor of Medicine and later His Majesty’s Physician; Colonel John Erskine of Carnock; and the current and future Lord Provosts of Edinburgh, Sir Hugh Cunningham, Adam Brown and John Campbell. The majority of committee members were university educated, Presbyterian, pro-Union and connected with the General Assembly and some of its other projects such as the Highland Libraries Committee. The Society’s clerk was Nicol Spence, “Agent of the Church of Scotland”. Closer examination of some of the more prominent members of the Committee, and how they had been personally touched by shared recent events that effected the nation as a whole, provides insight into some of the motivating factors that would shape the Committee’s agenda, how the Society’s business was to be conducted, and its objectives achieved.

One significant figure of the SSPCK was William Carstares, Principle of the University of Edinburgh when elected to the Committee. He had also been elected moderator of the General Assembly four times and sat on the Assembly’s Highlands Libraries Committee. Like other older members of the SSPCK’s Committee, Carstares had spent time in exile before 1688. He had been William II and III's chaplain and a major influence in the establishment and maintenance of his government, and in securing Presbyterianism as the Established Church of Scotland. Yet despite this, Carstares was considered a moderate Presbyterian: he was tolerant of Episcopalians as long as they conformed by taking the Oath of Abjuration. He along with George Meldrum, another General Assembly Moderator, continually resisted attempts by the nonjuring Episcopalian Kirkwood to distribute Irish Gaelic bibles throughout the Highlands, and

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2 Withers, *Gaelic Scotland*, 137.

his arguments for teaching Highland children literacy in Gaelic.\textsuperscript{4} Carstares had also been instrumental in the General Assembly’s eventual support for the Bill of Union put to the Scottish parliament. While he continued as Anne’s chaplain after William’s death, being Presbyterian (no matter how moderate) his influence at court was nonetheless somewhat diminished. However, he was able to maintain a significant presence in Scottish politics through his involvement with various committees and campaigns of the General Assembly, arguably the most powerful body in Scotland once the Scottish parliament had been dissolved under the Union.

Another influential individual was Sir Hugh Dalrymple of North Berwick, Lord President of the Session at the time of his election to President of the SSPCK Committee. He had also been king’s advocate and dean of the Faculty of Advocates. His brilliant career in Law, however, was almost jeopardised in 1695 when he was censured by parliament for his \textit{Information for the master of Stair}, defending his brother’s involvement in the Glencoe massacre of 1692.\textsuperscript{5} The massacre and the fallout from it encapsulated long-held negative attitudes towards the Highlanders. Sir Hugh’s information argued that John Dalrymple had given orders for swift “justice” to be carried out against the MacIains of Glencoe when he was under the impression that their chief had failed to make a pledge of allegiance to William by the deadline of 1 January 1692, and that therefore his actions at the time were justified, since “Its known they were very ill Men, Rebells, Papists, Robbers and Theivs, which did not justifie any


Inhumanity in their Execution, but did expose them more to legal Severity than other Subjects.”

This “night of the long knives”, when thirty-seven (officially) men, women and children were slain at dawn by the same government-aligned troops they had been feeding and sheltering for several days, and moreover the public outcry that followed, was cause for many Lowlanders to pause and at least reconsider long held attitudes towards their Highland neighbours. Though William had been found blameless (despite having twice signed the order to “put all to the sword under seventy”), the anti-Highland mentality that had contributed to the decision to take such a course of action was condemned in both England and Scotland. North Berwick quickly realised it was politically expedient to distance himself from his brother, but another essay on the Master of Stair also written in 1695 shows that tainted views towards Highlanders were not isolated and were likely to continue:

As for the Glenco-men, . . . they . . . are all Papists, if they have any Religion; were always counted a People given to Rapine and Plunder, . . . and much a piece with your Highway-men in England: . . . and though I dare not approve of the method taken in January and February, 1692, by killing them under trust, and in cold Blood, yet at the same time they deserved the heavy hand of Justice, in a regular and legal manner, which would have made their Neighbours live in more peace and tranquility.

Such notions of an almost sub-human threat lurking in the mountains were the result of deep-seated prejudices that could not be dissolved overnight, although it may have been politic to down play them.

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As Lord President of the Session, Dalrymple had also represented the “Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies” in the aftermath that followed the ill-fated Darien scheme. One in four SSPCK members had been, or were closely related to, subscribers to the Company of Scotland.\textsuperscript{8} The Company had been an attempt by Scottish merchants to break through the monopoly on trade held by the English East India Company, and to expand Scottish interests into the international market. The Company had widespread support in Scotland with £400,000 Stirling (nearly half of the country’s entire capital) raised in subscriptions in 1697. One such financer, with subscriptions of £1000 by 1697, was an Edinburgh merchant who would later become Sir Hugh Cunningham, Lord Provost of Edinburgh as well as founding Treasurer of the SSPCK until his death in 1710.\textsuperscript{9} Despite popular financial backing at home, however, London and European investors had good reason to be discouraged. The protections assured the Company by an Act of the Scottish Parliament in 1695 not only outraged the English East India Company (as well as the Dutch), but also the English Parliament and the King himself. The end result was that around 2,000 Scots died in the Darien misadventure, from starvation, sickness and sea voyage, due to failure on their part to

\textsuperscript{8} Company of Scotland, \textit{A Perfect List of the several Persons Residenters in Scotland, Who have Subscribed as Adventurers in the Joynt Stock of the Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies}, Edinburgh: Heirs and Successors of Andrew Anderson (Printer to the King’s most Excellent Majesty), 1696; General Minutes, vol. 1, 3 November 1709, SSPCK, 18-19.

anticipate either the harsh natural conditions of Panama, or the hostilities they would encounter, as much from “friend” as from foe.\(^\text{10}\)

The Darien affair was a lesson in the futility of openly challenging accepted norms that were not only seen as being in England’s interests, but that had become a part of England’s national identity, in this case England’s prowess in trade on the open seas. Under the 1695 Act, the company was open to foreign (including English) as well as Scottish investors, on the proviso that sat least half the stocks were always to be allotted to Scots.\(^\text{11}\) However, as early as December of that year both Houses of the English Parliament addressed William with concerns about the newly endorsed company, at the instigation of the East India Company which petitioned that its “advantageous Trade to this Kingdom [England]” was “in Danger of being lost, by reason of the great Privileges granted to joint Stocks of neighbouring Nations.”\(^\text{12}\) Debate on the subject within the English parliament often fell under the heading of “State of the Nation”. The House of Commons even went so far as to impeach the company’s directors on charges of “High Crime and Misdemeanor”.\(^\text{13}\)

Indeed, England’s efforts to thwart Scotland’s plans for a colony at Darien took on a decidedly nationalistic tone. While the House of Lords protested against the move on


\(^\text{11}\) Scotland, Act for a company trading to Africa and the Indies, 1695, 6 William II c. 8.


the grounds that it would affect relations with Spain, other government bodies wondered why England had not thought of it before:

On intimation of the importance of Golden Island and of the Port upon the Main over against it, in case of any settlement by any nation on the Isthmus of Darien, a representation was ordered that a competent number of men should be sent from England or Jamaica to seize the Port and Island for the Crown of England.\(^\text{14}\)

When it looked as though Irish sympathisers might send a secret supply ship to assist the starving colony, equally secret moves were made to detain it.\(^\text{15}\) In turn, with the withdrawal of English support for the scheme in the initial stages of the company, the Scots had taken it upon themselves to transform what had started out as a joint-stock trading venture into a voyage of national significance. While free trade had been a major goal of the Company of Scotland, another attraction for its investors, signified by the move towards a Darien colony, was the idea of Scottish exploration and with that the spread of Scottish influences and the Scottish way of life, including Calvinism. Darien was referred to as Caledonia. The three supply ships that set out in 1698 were patriotically christened the \textit{St Andrew}, the \textit{Unicorn} and also the \textit{Caledonia}, and they were symbolically launched from Scotland’s capital, rather than the more practical port of Glasgow.\(^\text{16}\)

Although nationalist concerns in the case of Darien revolved mainly around the secular, it also raised the question of the advance of spiritually defined national identity.


\(^{15}\) Lord Galway to Mr Vernon, 4 May, 19 May, Dublin Castle. ‘William III: May 1699’, \textit{State Papers Domestic: 1699-1700}, 152-211.

\(^{16}\) Insh, \textit{Darien Scheme}, 13, 18.
 Included in this Scottish venture were the spiritual hopes for expansion of Scotland’s official faith. A letter of encouragement from the General Assembly reveals the sense of destiny assigned to the colony, in converting the indigenous inhabitants to Christianity:

not only is it the Interest of your Trade, and your Safety, to keep good measures with them, but ’tis your positive duty, for which the Lord seems in a peculiar manner to have designed your Plantation, as its most glorious End; To propagate the Light of his Gospel amongst them, . . . ’Tis by their consent, that God confirms your Right.\(^\text{17}\)

Over 2,800 Catechisms were included in the cargo for just such a purpose.\(^\text{18}\) The same letter stressed the urgency of fulfilling this duty before the native tribes fell prey to any other European influences. While the obvious candidate here is Catholic Spain, the ambiguous reference does not single out Catholicism as the only perceived religious threat in the area. After all, the English ports of Jamaica were not far from the site of the planned Scots colony. Expansion of the true Reformed religion was regarded by the General Assembly as the duty of every Scot, and their resolve to impart “Heavenly Wisdom” to the foreign “heathen” would not die with the starving, feverish victims of Darien. Once the Scottish Parliament was absorbed into Westminster by the Union, and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland became by default the most powerful authority in the country, Presbyterian tenets such as spreading the “true” religion through education took on national significance. However, the SSPCK’s scheme of

\(^\text{17}\) General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, A Letter, from the Commission, of the General Assembly, of the Church of Scotland; Met at Glasgow, July 21, 1699. To the Honourable Council, and Inhabitants, of the Scots Colony of Caledonia, in America (Edinburgh: George Mosman, 1699).

management clearly shows that the Presbyterian Kirk also still aspired to be influential on an international scale:

> The Societies care and concern for propagating Christian Knowledge is not to be confined to the Highlands and Islands and remote corners of Scotland but their Endeavours for advancing our Holy Religion are according to the designe of the Patent to be Extended to Infidell and popish parts of the World; for they are resolved so soon as they are enabled by the Charitable contributions of well disposed persons to give suteable Encouragement to Ministers to go unto fforreign parts to preach the Gospell, to Infidells and papists and for that end they will take care that some young men of pregnant Spirits be bred at the universities and be there Instructed in those parts of Learning that are most necessarie to Qualify them for the great and Important Work of propagating the Christian Reformed Religion in Infidell and popish Countries.\(^{19}\)

Throughout its early career, the Society would constantly remind itself of this obligation, although its commitment to the Union with England meant that in would have to tread carefully in territory where Episcopalians staked a claim. That included the Highlands.

The plight of the Darien expedition had played a major role in the Union debate, both for and against. When the Company of Scotland had been endorsed by an Act of the Scottish parliament in 1695, William II and III had declared himself “ill served in Scotland”, apparently surprised by the move when the Act was passed in his absence, despite there having been indications as early as 1681 that Scotland was heading down this path.\(^{20}\) William, however, like most of his predecessors since the Union of the Crowns, had been more interested in the richer of the two kingdoms, and the affair drew

\(^{19}\) General Minutes, vol. 1, 5 January 1710, SSPCK, 32.

\(^{20}\) Insh, *Darien Scheme*, 8.
into focus the very real problems of having two parliaments with rival interests presided over by one sovereign. The Company of Scotland’s move to settle a plantation at Darien within Spanish territory further exacerbated the situation, as it stood to mar England’s efforts regarding the question of the Spanish Succession, brewing in Europe at the time. William’s full displeasure was felt by Scotland when survivors of the first wave of settlement realised that no trade, and therefore no relief supplies, would be forthcoming from Jamaica or any other nearby English settlements. The strict orders of the King, although recognised as harsh by his representatives in the West Indies, were nevertheless followed to the letter. “I have published a proclamation forbidding any Trade or Correspondence in any kind with the Scotch at Darien,” wrote the Governor of Jamaica, adding regrettably:

and heartily wish I had leave to send vessels to bring away such of them as are willing to remove, for they begin to want provisions and necessaries, and that will make them start
and it will be much better they were here to strengthen this country than to go amongst the French or Dutch where they will be lost to His Majesty or his service.

Such proclamations demanded by England meant that any message the colonists might have wanted to send, to warn the second wave of Scots against making the journey, could not be conveyed home by any other ships.


22 Insh, Darien Scheme, 20; McLean and McMillan, State of the Union, 39.

The people of Scotland’s resentment at such a “betrayal” was felt for years to come. James Vernon, the northern secretary of state, reported rumours of Scottish unrest as early as October 1699, with “one Samuel Tuckey from Newcastle . . . [seeming] to have come lately in a great fright from Edinburgh, and [speaking] of the ferment they are in, now they begin to believe their expectations from Darien are vanished.”\(^2\) Indeed, as news of the disaster began to trickle through, suspicion that the Jacobites “[based] great hopes on the annoyance caused by the Darien affair” appeared to be well founded.\(^2\) By January 1700 a royal proclamation was offering £500 and £200 rewards respectively for the arrest of the author and printer of:

\[
\text{a false, scandalous and traiterous libel, intituled , An inquiry into the cause of the}
\]
\[
\text{miscarriage of the Scotch colony at Darien, . . . the design of which was to create a}
\]
\[
\text{misunderstanding between our subjects of England and Scotland, and to stir up sedition,}
\]
\[
\text{and reflects on the honour of both nations.}\(^2\)
\]

As late as 1705, an English captain Thomas Green and two of his men were hanged as pirates in Edinburgh for their alleged involvement in the confiscation of one of the Company of Scotland’s ships in Malacca.\(^2\) William and the English parliament, however, managed to use such discord to further advance his vision of a union between


the two kingdoms — although its fruition would be left to his successor. In fact, in his response to the House of Lords’ address in 1700 concerning the Darien Settlement, “the common Father of both Countries” made it clear that Union was the solution to such problems as Darien:

in relation to the Endeavours lately used by some of His Majesty’s Subjects of the Kingdom of Scotland towards making a Settlement at Darien; . . . He will never be wanting by all proper Means to promote the Advantage and Good of the Trade of England: At the same Time . . . He cannot but have a great Concern and Tenderness for His Kingdom of Scotland, and a Desire to advance their Welfare and Prosperity; . . . His Majesty does apprehend, that Difficulties may too often arise, with respect to the different Interests of Trade between His Two Kingdoms, unless some Way be found out to unite them more nearly and compleatly; and therefore His Majesty takes this Opportunity of putting the House of Peers in Mind of what He recommended to His Parliament soon after His Accession to the Throne, that they would consider of an Union between the Two Kingdoms. His Majesty is of Opinion, that nothing would more contribute to the Security and Happiness of both Kingdoms; and is inclined to hope, that, after they have lived near a Hundred Years under the same Head, some happy Expedient may be found for making them One People.28

For many Company of Scotland investors, including future members of the SSPCK, the terms of the Union offered them a way out of the financial ruin that they would otherwise have faced as a consequence of the failure at Darien.

One other founding Committee member who sheds some light on the motivation behind the SSPCK is the advocate John Dundas of Philpstoun, the Society’s Secretary. His publication *The method of procedure by Presbyteries, in settling of schools in every parish* indicates that, in the legally oriented minds of the Committee majority, there was

more to literacy than bringing religion to the Highlands. The schools in question in Dundas’s *method of procedure* were those parochial schools required by law under the Education Act of 1696. They seem to have very little to do with the rest of the book’s subject matter relating to “providing ministers with manses” or “repairing ruinous churches”, until one considers the closing chapter “in pursuance of the Acts of Parliament impowering them to these effects.” This was the crux of Dundas’s *method* — to ensure that objectives set out in these Acts became a reality. To achieve this it was necessary to formalise the contractual obligations of the various parties involved in maintaining Kirk infrastructure, be they parishioners, heritors or clergy; whether it be in the building of school premises, reallocation of vacant stipends, or collection of stents from parishioners; by transferring into print what had traditionally been very much verbal and visual processes of agreement.29 With literacy came the law, orderly and unambiguous. Dundas gave samples of forms to be written up, such as an Act of Admission, Act of the Presbytery and Act of the Commissioners of Supply. These were to be read from the pulpit in order that parishioners, heritors, and local tradespersons would meet and make arrangements concerning their legal obligation to provide a school in their parish. Once these Acts were warranted, any refusal or delay in complying with required payments or supply could result in legal action.30

Published in 1709, Dundas’s treatise is a sign of how the SSPCK hoped to conduct its business. They put great store in the power of paper, devising forms for subscription,


for the certification of schoolmasters, for the commission of schoolmasters, for the placement and circulation of schools, to name a few. The Royal Charter granted by Queen Anne gave the Society the right to “prosecute, pursue and defend” its interests “in as full and ample form and manner as any others Our Subjects”. Anne also commanded:

all Magistrates, Judges and Officers of the Law, within our Dominions, and others
our good Subjects in their respective Stations, to give all proper and needful Assistance and Encouragement to the said Society, and these imployed and
Intrusted by them in all Matters and Causes tending to the Furtherance of this pious Design, and that at all Times and upon all Occasions when required thereto,

as they will be answerable to us. [my emphasis]

The Society would take every opportunity to remind others of their obligation to comply with this charter and the several Acts passed by the General Assembly in relation to assisting the Society in its “pious designe”. All this seems to be an attempt to ensure the Society’s potency in the Highlands in a legal capacity. As has already been mentioned, the various education Acts of the past had been ineffectual there, due to the remote and hence inaccessible heritor’s ability to simply ignore them and the responsibilities that accompanied them. The SSPCK, a product of the “Church by law established”, now planned to bring education to the Highlands through the law, and vice versa. Those who had pledged subscriptions and not paid could be threatened with legal action. Rather than the age-old remedy of sending in troops, no longer a favourable option for dealing with remiss Highlanders after Glencoe, the Society could deal with those Catholics or Episcopalians who discouraged school attendance or were uncooperative in the construction of schools, through the issue of warrants to appear

31 SSPCK, An Account, 16.
32 SSPCK, An Account, 19.
before the next circuit.\textsuperscript{33} As several members of the Committee were well connected in Law, with at least one of them being a Commissar of Edinburgh, issuing such warrants should not have been difficult.

Yet the same royal charter that the Committee relied upon to empower the Society as a legal entity also limited the extent to which it could advance the Presbyterian cause. After all, as Defender of the Faith in both England and Scotland, it was important for Anne, herself an Anglican, not to appear biased one way or the other. The charter stipulated that the Society’s initial membership was to be decided by the “Lord President and other Lords of Our Council and Session in Scotland.”\textsuperscript{34} Perhaps a more obvious choice would have been the General Assembly, to which Anne had so often pressed the importance of ensuring a Protestant presence in the Highlands; and indeed the two organisations were often dependent on each other to further their respective causes in the Highlands. However, by placing the responsibility of the Society’s membership in the hands of the judiciary, Anne’s Charter lessened the potential for an overtly Presbyterian bias. The stipulation for promoting Christian Knowledge “especially in the Highlands, Islands, and remote Corners” of Scotland denied the Society any initiatives for schools in the Lowlands and their cities, even though there appears to have been a need. A school for Edinburgh was first proposed as early as November 1709 but was rejected on the grounds that it did not comply with the conditions of the royal charter.\textsuperscript{35} Likewise, “propagating the same in Popish and Infidel Parts of the World” excluded their schools from Episcopalian England and other

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] General Minutes, vol. 1, 6 November 1712, SSPCK, 172.
\item[34] SSPCK, \textit{An Account}, 13.
\item[35] Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 18 November 1709, SSPCK, 33.
\end{footnotes}
Protestant nations. Perhaps the most restricting element of Anne’s charter, however was with regard to funding. Even with willing contributors money was to be a constant obstacle to the Society’s progress, and the royal charter proved a hindrance. It granted the SSPCK “full Power to receive Subscriptions, Mortifications, Donations, Legacies, Sums of Money, Lands, Goods and Gear”. However, it also stressed that it was not lawful for the Society or its executive to spend this capital, “only to apply the Rents, Annual Rents, Profits and Emoluments, arising from the same.” As early attempts to invest in realty continually fell through, the Society relied more and more heavily on subscriptions and mortifications.

Despite their best efforts to promote the Society and its objectives as benevolent, the Committee continued to encounter resistance. For both Scotland and England, their respective Protestant faiths had long been a significant trait of their national identities. Indeed, many representatives of the Presbyterian Kirk had approved of Union only on the condition that theirs remained the official Church of Scotland, and a separate Act decreeing as much was passed at the same time as the Acts of Union. Yet ironically the association of religion with patriotism now tended to hinder efforts to strengthen bonds between the two kingdoms. Hence, when the SSPCK sought the advice and assistance of its southern counterpart on the best methods for setting up schools, the SPCK in England was slow to respond. In a curious and less than cooperative letter explaining why it had not yet congratulated the SSPCK on their formation, the SPCK used the excuse that the Scottish Society had a royal charter, while the English Society

36 SSPCK, An Account, 13.
37 SSPCK, An Account, 18-19.
38 McLean and McMillan, State of the Union, 51.
was self conscious of the fact that it did not have official royal backing, and that it would therefore be presumptuous to offer any sort of advice.\textsuperscript{39} Perhaps another reason lay behind the fact that the SSPCK was staunchly Presbyterian in its objectives, while members of the Anglican SPCK sympathised with their Episcopalian brothers and sisters in the north. The SPCK was perhaps also protective of its missionary organisation in the new world. The Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG) did have a Royal Charter, granted in 1701, which confined its movements to the English plantations in America.\textsuperscript{40} While the Union’s Treaties agreed to disagree on the subject of religion within the bounds of Great Britain, there were no such guarantees when it came to the rest of the world. The Episcopalian SPG may have had a head start, but the vague terms of the SSPCK’s Royal Charter regarding “Foreign Parts” might well have been cause for concern, as it gave the Scottish Society a freedom that the English Society was not allowed.

While the Presbyterian Kirk was reaffirmed as the Church of Scotland under the Union, Westminster had made certain that the Church of England would remain Anglican, and members of non episcopal denominations such as Presbyterianism were still classed as dissenters in England. By 1710, however, it was clear that Acts of Parliament were not enough to stem English paranoia concerning the designs of a whole nation of dissenters to their north. The only hint in the SSPCK’s Committee minutes, that all was not running as smoothly as the new Union promised, is a comment that Dundas’s efforts to organise lists of correspondents through a committee of churchmen in London had been hampered by “the Confusions that hapened of Late in that City and the Damage

\textsuperscript{39} General Minutes, vol. 1, 5 January 1710, SSPCK, 36.

\textsuperscript{40} Jones, \textit{Charity School Movement}, 39.
Sustained by some of the members of the said Committee in their meeting places for Worship”. 41 This “confusion” most likely refers to the riots that ensued in London and other parts of England after the impeachment of Dr Sacheverell, an Anglican minister whose sermon on the dangers of religious tolerance had led to him being tried in late 1709 by the Whig government, which in doing so had grossly misjudged the mood of the people. Public reaction in support of Sacheverell was such that any Whig was likely to be labelled “presbyterian”, and just as likely to be labelled “atheist”, “papist” or “republican”; dissenters were suspected of conspiring to bring down the Church; there were even fears that the Queen herself was virtually held captive; and the whole affair later lost the Whigs the 1710 election. 42

In such a provocative climate, the SSPCK’s pro-Union Committee was not only concerned with bringing law and order to the Highlands, but with creating an image of a progressive and lawful Scotland as a whole to be impressed upon the outside world, especially England. Episodes such as Glencoe and Darien may have sewn the seeds for the SSPCK — a growing awareness of the Highland condition stirred by one combined with a zeal for missionary achievement sparked by the other. However, such events had also provided ammunition for much anti-Union propaganda from England, which had painted the Scots as backward cousins in terms of trade and meting out justice. The SSPCK worked to counter this negativity. Indeed, the impetus behind the Society’s creation lay in its founding members’ commitment to making the Union a success.

With propaganda such as Some Considerations to induce the people of South Brittain to

41 Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 31 May 1710, SSPCK, 118.

42 Mary Ransome, “Church and Dissent in the Election of 1710”, The English Historical Review 56 (Jan 1941): 76-89.
Contribute to the Designe of propagating Christian knowledge in the Highlands and Isles of North Brittain they moved to give both countries a common cause by creating the sense of a common grievance:

for as much as a well Disposed and industrious Stock of people, are the true riches and Strength of any Countrey on the one hand, and that a Race of useless and Disaffected people tend to the Impoverishing and Exposeing the best settled Government in the world to the Greatest Danger on the other. 43

In doing so, however, they resorted to the reinforcement of age-old paranoia and stereotypes of the Highlands. Not only was the Highlanders’ assumed Catholicism and Jacobitism “in an Interest absolutely inconsistent with the Safety of the Government,” but they were portrayed as “always Idle and Sauntering at home and had rather Lurk in their haunts then remove to the most inviteing Settlements.”44 Hence any blame for past maltreatment towards the Highlanders was shifted back onto them. The claims of “backwardness” directed at Scottish society in general could be shown to exist “over there” as it were, and it became the duty of a united North and South Britain to act together and bring a misguided other into the fold:

how worthy and becoming it would be for Englishmen to engage in this designe, for me thinks it would be no wayes Suitable for those who Justly value themselves upon Contributeing so immensely to Restore preserve & propagate Religion & Liberty to all Europe and the remotest part of the world to overlook their next neighbours & fellow

43 Mr Shute, Some Considerations to induce the people of South Brittain to Contribute to the Designe of Propagating Christian Knowledge In the Highlands and Isles of North Brittain and of Civilizeing the Barbarous inhabitants of these parts of the Kingdome, 1708 (NAS ref. GD95/10/19), 1.

44 Shute, Some Considerations to induce the people of South Brittain, 1.
subjects whilst they profess a Compleat and entire union with Scotland absolutely necessary in order to make this Island safe and happy.\textsuperscript{45}

In effect, the Society sought to turn what had traditionally been a Lowlander concern into a problem that the whole of the new Great Britain could share in, focusing on appealing to Britons’ sense of duty to the Union rather than their expectations from it. However, this shared burden also implied the shared rewards of success, and the Society’s appeal for English assistance took pains to emphasise those potential resources in the Highlands which they thought most attractive to the South, from fisheries and factories to cottage industry, with an ample labour force just right for those harsh livelihoods the Union had to offer in such places as its foreign plantations, merchant navy or armed forces.\textsuperscript{46} In this and many other respects the Society appears to have identified itself as British rather than Scottish. Its membership consisted of philanthropists from both sides of the Anglo-Scottish border. Its minutes were recorded in English rather than Scots. Its propaganda often called on a united effort from both North and South Britain.

Ironically, however, the very impetus behind the SSPCK’s call for a cooperative British effort was its desire to convert the Highlands to Calvinism, that religion which had come to be associated with a distinctly Scottish national identity. The Society’s school curriculum itself was certainly designed to promote the Presbyterian faith, despite the unbiased instructions of the charter, “to teach to Read, especially the Holy Scriptures, any other good and pious Books so as also to teach Writing, Arithmetick, and such like:

\textsuperscript{45} Shute, \textit{Some Considerations to induce the people of South Brittain}, 2.

\textsuperscript{46} Shute, \textit{Some Considerations to induce the people of South Brittain}, 2.
degrees of Knowledge.” 47 The Society’s more specific rules insisted that schoolmasters were to “be careful to train up their Scholars in the Knowledge of the Principles of the Christian Reformed Religion, by catechising them at least twice a Week upon the shorter Catechism of this Church.” 48 Their progress was to be checked by the local Presbyterian ministers who were to catechise once a month. While schoolmasters were to ensure the “true spelling of Words” as well as pronunciation and punctuation, once the children were reading they were to give them appropriate passages from the Bible. Competent readers were then taught to write “a fair legible Hand” and elementary arithmetic, “that they may be thereby render’d more Useful in their several Stations in the World.” 49 However, the schoolmasters’ moral duties far outweighed the secular. They were to look to the manners and behaviour of students and “discourage and correct the Beginnings of Vice”. 50 Each school day was to include morning and evening prayer, and the students were to be instructed so that they could also pray privately in the mornings, evenings and at meal times. The schoolmasters were to make sure the children attended church on the Sabbath, and quiz them afterwards on the contents of the sermon. If the school was too far from the Church to be accessed during bad weather, then they were to spend the day with their students “praying, singing Psalms, reading the Holy Scriptures and catechising.” When not teaching at the school, they were to catechise to those poor who were too old to be students, and instruct them “in the Principles of Christian Reformed Religion.”

47 SSPCK, An Account, 14.


49 SSPCK, An Account, 35.

50 SSPCK, An Account, 33.
For some of the Society’s members, and the demographic at which the Society had levelled its own propaganda, this was all merely one mild way by which the threat of Catholicism could be driven out of Scotland. By contrast, one of the earliest submissions to the Society, from James Robertson, Minister of Glenmuik, appears to be more concerned with the dangers of a Catholic presence in the Highlands than with the settling of charity schools there. Instead, Robertson called for the establishment of “hospital schools”, to be “erected in the most Convenient places”, namely the first at Fort William the “centre” of the Western Highlands and Islands; to be followed by (as the funds allowed) Inverness to serve the North Highlands, Tarland in Cromar for Banff, Aberdeen and Angus shires, and either Dunkeld or Logierait in Athol for Perth and Stirling shires.\textsuperscript{51} Putting aside the fact that the only “convenience” in these locations was on the side of the Lowlanders administering and supplying the sites, Robertson considered them to have a distinct advantage over the parish schools model in that:

\begin{quote}
papists will not be prevailed on to send their Children to protestant Schools except they be allowed to continue Popish and read popish Books only, but by erecting such houses, the Children of Popish parents (enough of it self to recommend this Design) may according the act of parliament One Thousand Seven hundred be taken from them and put into these houses where free from their parents influence they might be brought up in the Knowledge and Love of the truth and be afterwards usefull for the Conversion of their Idolatrous parents and other Relations.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

Robertson was careful to add that this was not just his idea, but the desire of several wealthy subscribers who “by their Subscriptions testified their zeal”, and who were

\textsuperscript{51} Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 7 November 1709, SSPCK, 16-18.

\textsuperscript{52} Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 7 November 1709, SSPCK, 20.
willing to double their contributions on condition that this were the scheme to be adopted by the SSPCK.\textsuperscript{53}

Reports from two of the early schools settled, namely Auchintoul and Glenlivet, appeared to justify members fears of the Catholic inhabitants. John Clow at Auchintoul reported on “several priests that trafficque among the people and Labour to seduce them and to hinder them to send their children to school”.\textsuperscript{54} His claim was backed by a letter from the same James Robertson who had proposed the hospital schools, regarding the efforts of “Seminary priests and Jesuits there about to disappoint the success of [Clow’s] good work.” In 1714 George Lindsay the minister at Abertour reported that:

one priest Gordon in Glenlivet had brought into that Countrey a popish young woman to keep a Schooll in order to withdraw the Children of popish parents from the Societies Schooll, and that a great many of these Children had already left the same & entered to the popish Schooll, and the parents of the rest are threatened with Excommunication by the priests if they keep their children any longer at the Societies Schooll, which attempt if not discouraged will break the Societies good designe in that Countrey.\textsuperscript{55}

In both cases the Society responded with legal action, two of its more influential members, the Earl of Marr and Lord Justice Clerk, taking it upon themselves to deal with the problem at Auchintoul and “the abounding of popery” in other areas of Brae Marr, writing letters “for suppressing of popery, and encouragement of the Societies Schools”.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{53} Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 7 November 1709, SSPCK, 17, 22.  
\textsuperscript{54} General Minutes, vol. 1, 7 August 1712, SSPCK, 172.  
\textsuperscript{55} General Minutes, vol. 1, 12 August 1714, SSPCK, 241.  
\textsuperscript{56} General Minutes, vol. 1, 1 January 1713, SSPCK, 178.
Yet, while there were individuals such as Robertson who suggest that the role of the Society for some was clearly the suppression of Catholicism, the reaction of the majority of members towards the Catholic threat was more subdued. Occasionally presbyteries, in areas identified as Catholic by the 1704 survey “List of Popish Parents and their Children in various parts of Scotland”, recommended their parishes to the Society, such as Lochaber and Castletire “in the confines of Moydhart, Arrisaig and Morhir which [were] overgrown with popery for want of knowledge.” However, these were not given priority, but deferred to the Committee, just like any other proposal. They, like the “overrun” parishes of Glenlivet, Gairloch and Assint, would have to wait until the Society’s stock increased and “could bear the Charge”, despite repeated pleas from their presbyteries. McHugh notes that several of the known “Catholic enclaves” were only just having schools appointed to them in 1774. Meanwhile, the parish of Snizort, which had no Catholics at all, was one of the earliest settled, with the school at Erlish. Robertson’s hospital school proposal, although meeting some approval at committee level, was rejected by the Society. Again the excuse for choosing “free schools” instead was the idea that these were “the more reasonable project until the Stock of the Societie be furder increased.” This was despite Robertson’s reasoning that such schools would be for Protestant children only, as no Catholic parents would willingly “part with their children to have them bred protestants” unless it eased their own purse “by takeing the whole burden of cloathing

57 McHugh, “Religious Condition of the Highlands”, 12.
58 General Minutes, vol. 1, 1 November 1711, SSPCK, 130.
60 General Minutes, vol. 1, 7 June 1711, SSPCK, 114.
and maintenance of them.”61 By June 1713, Clow was still reporting on continued opposition from papists, however, his own approach for a resolution was not through legal warrants, but rather to request the purchase of books on the “evils” of popery for his students.62 By November 1714, Lindsay reported that the Catholic schoolmistress at Glenlivet had fled, “which is conjectured to have been occasioned by the Societies first Letters falling into some hands in that Countrey”.63 No further action was deemed necessary.

This lack of Catholic resistance seems to contradict the Society’s own assurances to subscribers that drastic action was needed and would be a top priority of the schools in order to correct the widespread “error” of Catholicism. Glenlivet and Auchintoul were the exception rather than the rule. Instead there were examples such as Abertarf where, despite an earlier experiment in schooling having resulted in the schoolmaster leaving after being “abused” by papists, the SSPCK’s schoolmaster Patrick Nicolson found the Catholics in that area to be willing participants in his work.64 His threats to leave in 1714 were due to the “great discouragements” arising from the local heritor Frazerdale’s continued failure to build a schoolhouse or bridge, rather than from any ill will from surrounding Catholic families.65 Frazerdale eventually showed his hand as a Jacobite in the 1715 Rising (although not one who inspired loyalty amongst his clansmen).

61 General Minutes, vol. 1, 7 June 1711, SSPCK, 113.

62 General Minutes, vol. 1, 4 June 1713, SSPCK, 191.

63 General Minutes, vol. 1, 4 November 1714, SSPCK, 247.

64 Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 2 March 1713, SSPCK, 301.

Jacobites, the other perceived threat to national security, brought into prominence again with the Union debate and the failed French attempt at invasion in 1708, were perhaps a more potent explanation for the Society’s preference for the Highlands’ periphery. The question of the royal succession had been a contentious one leading up to the Union. Many Scots were once again disillusioned when the monarch and Westminster failed to consult the Scottish parliament on matters that affected the Northern kingdom, in the debate preceding England’s Act of Settlement. This resulted in Edinburgh passing its own Act of Security, by which the Scottish throne reverted back to “being always of the Royal Line of Scotland and of the true Protestant Religion, providing always that the same be not successor to the crown of England.” Hence, as the principal argument of Jacobites was the restoration of the Stuart succession, the name became synonymous with anti-Unionism. At the time of the debate many Lowland and more radical Presbyterians had actually considered joining with the Jacobites in order to prevent the Union from going ahead, not only on nationalist grounds but also for religious reasons. One Jacobite laird recalled how:

 people of all ranks and persuasions were more and more chagrin’d and displeased, and resented the loss of soveraignty, . . . nay the Presbyterians and Cameronians were willing to pass over the objection of [James’s] being Papist; for, said they, (according to their predestinating principles) God may convert him, or he may have Protestant children, but the Union can never be good.

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66 Scotland, The Act for the security of the kingdom, 1704, 3 Anne c. 3.

The Cameronians continued their opposition to the Union well after the Acts were passed. They considered those mainstream Presbyterians represented in the General Assembly to be traitors to the memory and cause of past and present Covenanters. The Highlands provided an opportunity for Presbyterian Unionists like Carstares to distance their faith from any memories of possible collusion with traitors by placing the Jacobites outside their Lowland sphere. After all, it had been in the Highlands, especially their outskirts, where clan chiefs had held out the longest before pledging their allegiance to William, stalling in the hope that the French might come to the aid of the exiled James (a gamble that proved fatal for Maclain of Glencoe). Any commitment to the expulsion of Jacobitism, however, was as impossible to fulfil as the Jacobites were to detect. Despite the SSPCK’s assumptions to the contrary, Jacobites could be found at every level of society, including the Lowlands of Scotland and in England. Even within the Society’s own ranks, individuals who had actively sought to rout out Catholicism proved unreliable when it came to the question of the royal succession. An example is the Earl of Marr, so vocal in issuing warrants against trafficking papists in 1712, who would raise the rebel standard at the Braes of Marr initiating the 1715 Rising, and actually lead the Jacobite charge at Sheriffmuir.

The SSPCK soon found that reluctant heritors proved far more obstructive to its goals than recalcitrant Catholic parents. Prunier notes the contradiction of the SSPCK’s rhetoric, with talk of “freeing” the Highlanders from the “slavery” imposed by their chiefs and the Catholic faith, while at the same time insisting on the form their freedom should take. Yet if the Society was to have any success, these very chiefs were the

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people with whom it would need to negotiate, in order to ensure physical infrastructure, such as school buildings and bridges. When it sought suggestions for schools, often the heritors were not forthcoming, and it tended to rely on the advice of the local presbyteries. Delays in building could usually be laid at the doors of heritors, and the schoolmaster's treatment by these governing lairds could often determine the success or failure of a school. By July 1713, one of the schoolmasters in Skye had left and the other was leaving, due to lack of “encouragement”. One David Strang was to be moved from Glenlivet to Tomnavillan against the advice of the presbytery, due to the local heritor, the Marquess of Huntly, “having caused build an convenient house for a School at Tomnavillan”. In this instance, the Society gave way to the wishes of the laird, so long as Tomnavillan proved to be in keeping with the Society’s “designe”, but by 1714 Strang was still in Glenlivet.

Whether by interference or indifference, McHugh considers the fickleness of some heritors as a deliberate attempt by those with Catholic sympathies to thwart the efforts of the SSPCK. Many of the schools in question, however, were in parishes outside the Catholic belt identified by McHugh, and hence it is unlikely that the heritors themselves were Catholic — as Martin shows, the majority of clan members tended to follow the religion of their chief. Episcopalian heritors could just as easily take umbrage with encroaching Presbyterian indoctrination. These, however, were not the stereotypical Highland chiefs as portrayed in SSPCK propaganda, keen to keep their clans men and

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69 General Minutes, vol. 1, 7 January 1714, SSPCK, 216.


71 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 29, 52, 80, 82, 89, 99, 213, 271, 274.
women enslaved in the darkness of ignorance. The Society’s own rules stipulated that its schools could only be established in those parishes which already had parochial schools, by law the responsibility of local heritors. Hence past heritors at least, if not present ones, had not been adverse to providing for the education of their poor.

There does appear to be a decided difference in attitudes towards the SSPCK’s mission, depending on the generation of laird in question. While the school at Largg was one of the first, it was not due to any effort on the part of the Earl of Sutherland, who had not bothered responding to correspondence from the Society. Rather, his mother the Countess of Sutherland “being earnestly desirous to have this good work begun and carried on, to the Glory of God, and good of souls”, offered to free up 5,000 marks she had already pledged towards two schools proposed for the parishes of Sutherland and Strathnaver. Lord Prestownhall had advised that he would personally see to the building of a school house and a bridge for better access in Abertarf. His death the following year, however, resulted in unforeseen delays, as his successor the laird of Frazerdale was in no hurry to be philanthropic. Although schoolmaster Nicolson was eventually sent there towards the end of 1712, he reported months later that the school house and bridge were still being built, even though there were several papist families who wanted to send their children to school. Buchan at Hirta first approached the SSPCK in 1710 because the old laird McLeod had died and his son had not continued to pay the catechist’s salary. Hence those patrons from an older generation, still holding

72 General Minutes, vol. 1, 11 November 1711, SSPCK, 129.
73 General Minutes, vol. 1, 1 November 1711, SSPCK, 127.
75 Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 16 March 1710, SSPCK, 57.
to the principles of kinship were more willing to look to the welfare of their clansfolk than those from a younger generation educated in the Lowlands and adhering to a philosophy of self-interest.

This is in keeping with a rift between chief and clan that had been growing since the early seventeenth century. It was part of an overall shift in values in the Highlands, as noted by Schama, between “one based on the ancient obligations of honour and kinship, the other on the aggressive pursuit of interest and profit.”\textsuperscript{76} Essentially, the chiefs and Highland gentry, already seeking to identify more closely with the Scottish Crown, were gradually assimilated into the Scottish landed gentry, by such influences as the legislative reforms of central government, which prioritised proprietary interests over patriarchy, and the pressures of the Covenanting Movement, which emphasised Scottish rather than “pan-Gaelic” politics.\textsuperscript{77} The result was the “inexorable and convulsive shift” from traditionalist clanship to commercialism, characterised by absenteeism, accumulated debt and cultural alienation from the clan.\textsuperscript{78} This changing identity of the chiefs was not lost on their own people. The early modern bards who served them, for example, resisted by composing critical verse, often contrasting the present against that which was praise-worthy in the past. One such song by An Clàrsair Dall (the Blind Harper Roderick Morison), who served the MacLeods of Dunvegan, lay the blame for this growing rift between the new generation of chief and their clansfolk squarely on outside influences:

\textsuperscript{76} Schama, \textit{History of Britain}, 330.


\textsuperscript{78} Macinnes, \textit{Clanship}, 114.
ann an daor chúirt nan Gall, leading an expensive life at court among
southron strangers —
ged tha thoil fuireach ann ri bheò — what though his inclination is to remain there all
his life,
. . . . . . . . . .
Thig e mach as a’ bhùth He comes out of the shop
leis an fhasan as ùr bho’n Fhraing, with the latest fashion from France
. . . . . . . . . .
Air màl baile no dh’ “On the security of a townland or two,
glac am beana’ s cuir làmh ri bann.” take the pen and sign a bond.”

The song ends with a poignant reminder of the discipline and respect that stemmed from
clan focused leadership, as opposed to that focused on the individual:

An triath tighearnail theann, the chief lordly in authority,
is an cridhe gun fheall 'na chliabh — and the heart in his breast without guile —
gabh e tlachd dh’a thir fèin, he took pleasure in his own country,
’s cha do chleachd e Dùn-éideann riamh; and never cultivated Edinburgh society.
dh’fhàg e ‘m bannach gun bhearn, He left the bannock ungapped,
’s b’fhèarr gun aithriseadh cách a chiall. and it were well if others copied his good sense.

Ironically this very assimilation that the SSPCK hoped to encourage worked against
them in the case of younger heritors.

This lack of commitment was not only to be found in the Highlands. Subscribers also
proved uninspired after the initial zeal of the Society’s scheme had worn off. This
“zeal” was itself somewhat conservative when compared with the fervour that had
gripped the nation a decade earlier with the Darien scheme, the Society starting out with

79 An Clàrsair Dall, “Oran do Mhacleòid Dhùn Bheagain (Song to MacLeod of Dunvegan),” in Poetry of

just £1000 Sterling in subscriptions. Presbyteries and correspondents were slow to act on directives to raise collections, having to be reminded on several occasions of their duty. The Committee continually reported on the Society’s efforts to procure payments from “deficients”, those who failed to pay their promised subscription. This was despite the Society having correspondents throughout every shire of Scotland, the rest of Great Britain and parts of Europe, and published accounts of the Society’s progress assuring potential subscribers of “the Care that is taken to secure what Money the Society is intrusted with, so as the Ends for which it is given may be fully answered.”\textsuperscript{81} This may very well have been to do with the make up of the Society itself. While it accepted subscriptions from throughout the Protestant world, only those residing in Scotland were eligible for membership to the Society and the right to contribute to the direction and decision-making of the Society. There also appear to have been deliberate attempts to dissuade subscribers. In a letter to the presbyteries urging a concerted effort in the collection of contributions, the Committee added, “And we expect that the false reports and Calumnies of those who bear no good will to our establishment nor to this great designe, will engage you and others to the greater concern and diligence in this matter.”\textsuperscript{82} It is unclear, however, whether these slanders were the work of religious dissenters, Jacobites or influential contributors disgruntled with the adopted method of school settlement.

Mortifications given and funds raised often came with expectations as to how the money would be spent. The Society’s ability to settle schools relatively quickly in Duirness and Larg as early as 1712 was perhaps due to the Countess of Sutherland’s

\textsuperscript{81} SSPCK, \textit{An Account}, 20.

\textsuperscript{82} Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 6 September 1711, SSPCK, 220.
grants being exempted from the capital stock, but her funding came with “recommendations” as to where the schools were to be located. Such expectations were not just confined to the upper classes. The parishioners of Dumfries had raised enough money for a school with the express wish that one would be built in their parish. However, the Committee replied to their proposal by asking them to forward the money with no guarantee that it would be spent there unless the Society decided to do so. As Dumfrees is situated in the Lowlands, this was unlikely. While the North Isles were slow to offer proposals for schools, they were quick to offer suggestions as to how to spend Society money within their community, proposing £20 Scots “or some little more” for each parish, “which with any little thing that may be had in the paroch, would encourage a man to learn to read and write.” Their request for £200 Scots, to be divided equally between ten parishes, while more in keeping with the islanders’ sense of communal spirit, as observed by Martin in such places as the Orkneys or Hirta, had very little in common with the scheme set out by the SSPCK. Rather, local community control of locally raised funds was lost in favour of centralised control from Edinburgh which the Society hoped to establish and maintain.

While the Society’s Committee was made up of some of Edinburgh’s most influential men, its schoolmasters were of a very different ilk. They were themselves Highlanders, as not only was it a condition of the royal patent that they be known to the presbytery that recommended them, but it would be more likely that they could speak and

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83 General Minutes, vol. 1, 1 November 1711, SSPCK, 129.
84 Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 13 January 1710, SSPCK, 61-62.
85 General Minutes, vol. 1, 3 January 1712, SSPCK, 152-153.
understand the necessary “Irish”. In early 1710, the Society wrote to synods around the
country, requesting:

that for some time to come the Bursaries which are at the Disposall of
presbyteries or the synods may be bestowed on hopefull and pious Students
having the Irish language and that Presbyteries and Synods be desired to enquire
after such as may be fitt to be imployed by the Societie and transmit hither ane
account of their names.86

Generally these were students of Divinity. Not only did the Society continually stress
that they were to have qualities of “Piety, Loyalty, Prudence and Gravity”, but they
were also expected to be “well affected to the present Government in Church and
State” 87 Like the Committee, they were all men. As they were students of Divinity,
destined for the service of the Kirk, this was a given.

However, there was also a long history of mixed messages within the Kirk, regarding
the spiritual equality of women versus their temporal subordination, which contributed
to the decision to only hire men. Despite three female reigning monarchs since Knox’s
The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, Scotland
and its Church still maintained some of the negative, even misogynist, attitudes voiced
in that treatise concerning women in authority over men. The Society’s own policy to
teach both boys and girls in the same classroom recognised their equal right to
salvation. Some of their most generous subscribers were women of means, such as the
Countess of Sutherland or the Duchess of Hamilton. Yet there were still prevailing
attitudes that excluded women from the teaching profession. The Word itself, from
which Knox had drawn his argument, provided such passages as “I suffer not a woman

86 General Minutes, vol. 1, 13 April 1710, SSPCK, 67.
87 SSPCK, An Account, 29.
to teache, nether yet to usurpe authoritie above man” (1 Timothy 2:12). More recently, the Rev. John Anderson had advised, “No woman should be allowed to teach, or at least none but those who are known to understand syllabication. They are generally under no favourable character for their skill in spelling.” Even without prejudices regarding positions of power, or the problem of finding suitably qualified women, societal expectations, perpetuated by the Kirk, would have made it very difficult for a woman to embark on the career of schoolmistress of a Presbyterian charity school. Married women were expected to go wherever their husbands led them, and not vice versa. As for single women, in the cities there were regulations prohibiting them from living alone or together without male supervision, lest they became “either victims or agents of immorality, with an emphasis on the latter.” The main targets of these laws were women working in the behind-the-scenes world of domestic service. How much more endangered or dangerous, then, might respectable city based men of law consider the very public role of charity schoolmistress in a Highland community. The Society was sympathetic, however, to those women who accompanied their schoolmaster husbands into the field.

Those most affected by obstacles to funding were the Society’s schoolmasters, who found little incentive in their salaries to continue their work. While the schoolhouse and

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lodgings for the schoolmaster depended on the good will of the landowners, the schoolmasters’ salaries were the responsibility of the Society. These amounted to a mere 300 merks each (£16.13.4 sterling) per year for most schoolmasters, only 100 merks (£5.11.1 sterling) per annum for those schools proposed for the Orkneys and Shetland Islands. One presbytery hoped to have an extra schoolmaster by requesting that the salary of two be instead split into three, but their request was denied and they were instead instructed to wait until sufficient funding was available. Their hopes for a third schoolmaster would have to wait until the Society could afford it. However, the restrictions laid down by the royal charter and an overall lack of community interest meant they could be waiting at least a year. While the schools were free for the poor, schoolmasters were allowed to accept donations from any gentlemen whose children attended.\textsuperscript{91} However, often this was not enough, and the local ministers would write on behalf of the schoolmasters, requesting an increase in their salary for extra work they had performed or extraordinary hardships they had encountered. Such was the case with Alexander Moncrieff, who spent half his salary simply getting to Harray in the Orkneys.\textsuperscript{92} Even further afield at Walls in Shetland, Adam Marjorybanks had received only half his annual salary of £100 Scots when he died of a fever, all of which was spent on his voyage, prompting his sister to petition the Society for the other half to cover funeral costs and debts he had incurred while living on the island.\textsuperscript{93} Hence for those schoolmasters who did stay the distance, this was somewhat of a vocational calling.

\textsuperscript{91} SSPCK, \textit{An Account}, 35.

\textsuperscript{92} General Minutes, vol. 1, 6 November 1712, SSPCK, 172.

\textsuperscript{93} Committee Minutes, vol. 2, 5 April 1714, SSPCK, 7.
Potential schoolmasters were proposed by the local presbytery or laird, or occasionally by a member of the Society. Here was another aspect of the Society’s scheme where various parties vied for control. Several of the nobility and other subscribers with money and connection were under the impression that their subscriptions should be qualification enough for any candidates they deemed appropriate for the role of Highland schoolmaster. For example, the Society made token efforts to settle the somewhat under qualified John Hunter, simply to appease the Earl of Marr who had recommended him. However, as Hunter had no understanding of Gaelic at all, he was quietly forgotten. Meanwhile, the Duke of Athol, Anne’s appointed commissioner to the General Assembly, insisted on a personal interview with the amply qualified Clow before agreeing to his appointment at the Blair of Athol. However, it was Clow himself who declined the post, objecting to an Episcopalian born incumbent (although Athol was very much pro Presbyterianism), and instead took up the offer at Auchintoul in 1712, while Athol continued without a schoolmaster until 1716. Indeed, while Committee members and heritors might haggle over location, buildings and infrastructure, when it came to decisions regarding that most vital resource, the schoolmaster, a third party entered the equation, with the schoolmasters themselves bringing their own ideas of where and how they might best serve the Highland community and fulfil the SSPCK’s goals.

Nowhere was this more evident than in the debate between Committee and schoolmasters regarding the use of language in the schoolroom. The SSPCK policy that has received the most attention in recent years is that which instructed schoolmasters

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94 Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 27 November 1711, SSPCK, 236.
not to teach Latin or “Irish”. Language was a problem with which the SPCK in England did not have to contend. In the Highlands of Scotland, however, for those who understood it English was often a second language. Hence Gaelic-speaking schoolmasters were much sought after. Their task, however, was not only to bring literacy to areas steeped in oral tradition, but to do so through the essentially foreign language of English. Yet while the Committee appeared to discourage the use of what they considered a barbaric tongue, the schoolmasters themselves had no qualms about the use of Gaelic in their teaching, being themselves from Gaelic-speaking backgrounds, settled in Gaelic-speaking communities and, after all, selected for their fluency in the language. Although mindful of papists, Clow reported that he had asked a local minister to translate Allan’s catechism into “Irish, with the support of the synod of Aberdeen which had agreed to print the translation; and moreover the Society voiced no objection to this. In March 1713, William McKay also informed the Society of his desire to teach the children to read Irish books. John McPherson at Erlish (Erlisbeg) and Donald McLeod at Glenelg, both in the presbytery of Skye, had expressed a desire to teach Latin.

This resulted in a recommendation to remind all schoolmasters that they were not to let the children read “Irish”, although catechising, prayer and other forms of worship in that tongue were allowed. Yet four months later McKay advised the Society that he

95 SSPCK, An Account, 35.
96 General Minutes, vol. 1, 4 June 1713, SSPCK, 192.
97 General Minutes, vol. 1, 12 March 1713, SSPCK 183.
98 General Minutes, vol. 1, 12 March 1713, SSPCK, 182.
99 General Minutes, vol. 1, 12 March 1713, SSPCK, 184.
wanted Gaelic psalm books.\textsuperscript{100} The Society’s letter to all schoolmasters also included a reminder that Latin was forbidden, although several of the Committee, being university men, were themselves fluent in the language. When McPherson gave notice in 1713 he blamed, with the support of the presbytery of Skye, the SSPCK’s position on Latin as a major factor in the failure of his school, for “many are not able to keep their Children at Schooll, unless they were maintained as well as taught gratis — So the poor cannot have any benefite by the Schooll, and the richer sort will have their Children also taught Latine.”\textsuperscript{101} McLeod also resigned two years later, but those who argued for the use of Gaelic continued on. Withers notes that the SSPCK became more hard line in its pro-English policy after the 1715 rising, yet there is no guarantee that at this stage schoolmasters as persistent as McKay followed suit. For the early Highland schoolmaster, Gaelic did not raise the same doubts of Scottishness and loyalty that it did for Lowlanders. In 1720 resolutions were again being passed, and reminders not to teach Latin or “Irish” still being sent to schoolmasters.\textsuperscript{102} Yet the need for this repetition is itself an indication of such resolutions’ lack of effectiveness beyond the Highland line. It was a symptom of the same problem the General Assembly had encountered with heritors years earlier when trying to enforce education legislation in the seventeenth century.

The problem of control, evident in trying to regulate its pro-English policy, was one that the Society would encounter in many other respects when attempting to implement its charity schools in the Highlands. The difficulties of complying with its rigid rules once

\textsuperscript{100} General Minutes, vol. 1, 31 July 1713, SSPCK, 198.

\textsuperscript{101} Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 2 March 1713, SSPCK, 301.

\textsuperscript{102} Withers, “Education and Anglicisation,” 40.
out in the field soon became obvious when schoolmasters began settling in, and even before that. As early as June 1712, the Society decided that those potential schoolmasters living at a great distance from Edinburgh were not required to make the trip to be examined there. The journey to the capital would have cost them nearly half their yearly allowance, therefore examination at their local presbytery was deemed sufficient. Hence one of the proposed means of quality control was compromised before teaching was even begun. Practicality often interfered with the Society’s sense of order. Each child who could read was allowed a Bible of their own and a new pair of shoes. However, the scarcity of books led some schoolmasters to request these instead of shoes for their more gifted students. Vacations were against Society rules, but became a necessity in places such as Duirness in the far North, where McKay reported that from the start of June to mid July the local inhabitants took their cattle to the hills, and hence attendance was “very thinne”. Clow was also allowed vacation at this time for similar reasons. There were of course measures in place to ensure that Society rules were adhered to. Monthly visits by the local minister and quarterly inspections by the “presbytery of the Bounds” were not only meant to check on the progress and moral growth of the children, but also the methods and character of the schoolmaster, however, many of the schools did not receive adequate supervision due to the size of the parishes. At least one minister advised that he could only visit the school in his parish twice a year at the most “Because of the weight of his Charge and Largeness of his parish . . . and the distance of his house from the Schooll which [was] twenty miles.”

103 General Minutes, vol. 1, 5 June 1712, SSPCK, 160.

104 General Minutes, vol. 1, 31 July 1713, SSPCK, 198.

105 General Minutes, vol. 1, 31 July 1713, SSPCK 198.
With schoolmasters left unsupervised for most of the year, there was the risk of unorthodox teaching and preaching, or that the schoolmasters’ own religious and political beliefs might be corrupted. While the Society expected only the Presbyterian faith to be taught, schoolmasters such as Alexander Glass, who was eventually dismissed in 1716 for refusing to take the Westminster Confession of the Faith, could conceivably have been relaxed in their approach to “Reformed Religion”. John Clow, so adamantly anti Catholic when he received his initial post at Auchintoul, was eventually dismissed in 1716 for not only being found to have “continued too great an Intimacy with papists in that Countrey” but also for reading out the “Pretender’s” proclamation after Divine service. 106 These were men who had undergone and passed all the rigorous testing prescribed under the SSPCK’s rules. Yet they could not avoid the constant influences of their Catholic and Episcopalian neighbours, resulting in their assimilation with them. The Society would have had even less control in the case of their aides, some of the better educated SSPCK students, provided with an allowance so that they could assist the schoolmaster in his duties. These could then teach at the schools themselves, or return home to teach friends and neighbours. 107 However, they were not university educated like many of the schoolmasters were, their only required training or examination being that which was given by the schoolmaster himself.

The chances of students learning a corruption of the “true” faith were increased further by the Society’s policy of circulating schools. The schoolmasters were supposed to be itinerant rather than fixed, settling in one area for a year or two, then moving on to

106 Committee Minutes, vol. 2, 5 April 1716, SSPCK, 100; General Minutes, vol. 1, 7 June 1716, SSPCK, 298-299.

107 SSPCK, An Account, 36.
another and perhaps returning to their original location a year or two after that, depending on the changing needs of the parish. While this system was intended to make effective use of the thin supply of schoolmasters, it had its drawbacks. Some ministers suggested that schools be moved to locations that appear to have been more convenient for themselves than the local community. There were also those schools that would remain in the one place far longer than originally intended, the most obvious of these being Hirta, where Buchan catechised for nineteen years in the service of the SSPCK, until his death in 1729. When applied, however, the policy of itinerant schools may well have had the added bonus of preventing schoolmasters from becoming too attached to a community. Certainly the nest of schools around Callander post 1715 had a higher than average rate of turnaround. However, when schoolmasters did move away, it was at the expense of much of the work they had achieved. Without regular lessons their teachings were soon forgotten and their students often “lapsed” back into illiteracy. Hence, the Society was left with a situation similar to that which it had originally set out to curtail.

This was just another example of how the remoteness of the schools worked against many of the Society’s objectives. Yet the SSPCK was well aware of the distances involved and the challenges they raised. The rule that schools should not be fixed was one of several that acknowledged the need to accommodate for large areas within parish boundaries. By the same rationale, schoolmasters were also expected to assist the local ministers when required, by hosting prayer meetings on the Sabbath whenever bad weather or rough terrain might otherwise put their students at risk of profanity by preventing them from attending public worship. The schoolmaster Moncrieff at

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108 General Minutes, vol. 1, 1 November 1711, SSPCK, 136-137.
Harray, where there were over sixty students, filled in every second Sabbath for a grateful minister who would take the opportunity to preach elsewhere in the parish. Likewise, Clow at Auchintoul in the Aberdeen Highlands, reported that “on the Sabbath, not only his Schollars but the protestant people thereabout, [did] Conveen in the School house” for worship in both Irish and English, for want of a convenient minister. The problems of distance, however were somewhat self-inflicted, for although the Society knew of the difficulties, it continued to choose parishes on the outskirts of the Highlands, when there were plenty of parishes closer to home that required assistance. However, it was the very remoteness of these areas, the isolation it entailed and the otherness that logically followed, which attracted the Society to them, outweighing the needs of more central or eastern parishes.

The various suggestions put forward for the Society’s seal are themselves symbolic of members’ conflicting interpretations of the Highlands and the Society’s mission. In considering their design for the Highlands, it was necessary for the SSPCK to also consider its own self-image. One of its Committee’s earliest debates was over the creation of the official seal, not only a symbol of what they stood for amongst themselves, but one which would provide an initial impression in representations to others. The initial suggestion was that of:

the Embleme of the Gospell given in Apocalyps Chapter sixth verse second viz a white horse and his rider haveing a Bow in his hand and a Crown above his head reached by a hand from the Clouds and that the Inscription be the Last words of that verse with the quotation of the Chapter and verse subjoyned that so the meaning of the Seall and moto

109 General Minutes, vol. 1, 12 March 1713, SSPCK, 183.

110 General Minutes, vol. 1, 6 November 1712, SSPCK, 172.
While the white rider of the Apocalypse is often interpreted as Christ himself or as the Gospel, here it is also an indication of how some members of the Committee interpreted the role of the SSPCK and its relationship to the Highlands — a superior figure on horseback, his right to authority granted by God himself, signified by a crown gifted from Heaven above. The “last words of that verse” from Revelations translate as “and he went forth conquering and to conquer,” and the phrase leaves no doubt that the overall image expressed here is a product of the old attitudes towards the Highlands and how they should be dealt with.

A second unsuccessful idea for the Society’s seal was that of “a rising sun and the motto Dissinpantur umbrir”. While this motto “that which lay in shadow is scattered” may have been more in line with the way many members saw their mission, its rejection may have lay in the symbol of the rising sun, all too reminiscent of the rising sun that dominated the arms of the Company of Scotland. Even one of the ships in the Company’s second fleet to Darien had been named Rising Sun. Indeed, the idea of scattering shadows seems to share that spirit of discovery implied in the Company’s motto “qua panditur orbis...” — “as the world is opened...”

The third suggestion, and the one to be accepted by the Society, while more modest than the other two, encompassed succinctly what the Highlands meant to most members and what they considered to be the obvious remedy: “a hand holding an open Book with
these words written upon it The Holy Bible and this Inscription above it post Tenebras Lux”. Here the motto “after Darkness, Light” still implies a sense of the Highlands as a place bereft not only of physical light but mental and spiritual as well, and the key to enlightenment for both in the minds of these educated Lowlanders was to give Highlanders access to the written Word of God as they knew it.

To the Committee, the Highlanders’ tendency to prioritise cattle grazing above the orderly pursuits of reading or shoe wearing valued by the Society merely confirmed the darkness they had to conquer and the degree of difference between them. The SSPCK Committee’s vision of controlling the Highlanders was driven by its members’ desire to see the newly established Union succeed. The differences that it identified as existing beyond the Highland line contradicted this new order, partly due to the alleged enclaves of Catholicism and Jacobitism that the Society expected to find there, but also due to the areas’ sheer distance from centres that the Society regarded as pro-Union, such as Edinburgh. In the next chapter we explore the extent to which these long standing ideas of difference impressed on the Society’s Lowland imagining of the Highlands and affected its negotiation of their physical space.

113 Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 23 December 1709, SSPCK, 49.
Chapter Two

The Highlands and Islands:

realising the imagined outer spaces of Scotland

The SSPCK often described its difficulties in negotiating the Highlands in terms of overcoming a space — distant, vast and riddled with obstacles — the wildness of the landscape a reflection of the disposition of its inhabitants. The Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland had long been considered different by Lowlanders, who were influenced by accounts of their strangeness. This chapter will first explore the extent of ambiguity and foreignness associated with the Highlands and Western Islands which drew the SSPCK to them. It will then consider in detail the efforts of the SSPCK’s schoolmaster in its earliest and most remote outpost of Hirta (St Kilda). Publications that began to appear in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries tended to encourage notions of difference, apparently enough to stir into action such influences as the General Assembly and consequently the SSPCK. The popularly received work of Martin Martin in particular seems to have sparked interest. Throughout Martin’s writings there were hints of a border friendly to seafarers from France and Spain; open to outside influences from Ireland and Denmark; resistant to Lowland authorities and much neglected by Highland authorities, both past and present, to the point that its identity seemed unclear and unfamiliar. The ambiguity of these outer regions seemed confirmation of their foreignness, and contradicted ideas of unity that made up part of the discourse on Union. The inhabitants themselves, as depicted by Martin and other authors concentrating on their lifestyle and beliefs for the first time, appeared very alien indeed, particularly with regard to their religion and language. Martin’s writings,
although more empathetic than others, were still an expression of his own interpretations of what he saw. Hence he joined the ranks of previous writers who, whether through literature or cartography, tried to contextualise the Highlands for the outside world, in terms of what they knew or expected to find there, only to create in essence an imagined space. Of all the areas interpreted, perhaps the most confronting were the islands of Hirta, also known as St Kilda. While this chapter considers the SSPCK’s interest in these remote areas of Scotland in general, particular attention is given to Hirta. This is mainly due to the Society’s and the General Assembly’s preoccupation with these islands, in their efforts to clearly define the imagined as real and palpable space, in order to establish their own authority there.

The Royal Charter stipulated that the Society was to “Erect and Maintain Schools . . . in the Highlands, Islands, and remote Corners of Scotland, and other parts above-mentioned,” that being “Popish and Infidel Parts of the World.” Apart from this, no other guidelines were given as to where or how the schools were to be settled. The Society wrote to presbyteries, justices of the peace and burgh magistrates for suggestions, as well as the SPCK in England. Yet ascertaining where the schools were most needed proved to be one of their most difficult tasks. While they took into consideration those areas most under “threat”, those alleged by the local presbyteries to be overrun with Catholics, they tended to opt for areas that appear to have nothing more than geographical significance. Indeed, when one considers where those schools were being encouraged, however, suppression of popery does not appear to be as much of a priority as some members had hoped and believed.

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2 General Minutes, vol. 1, 5 January 1710, 7 February 1710, 2 March 1710, SSPCK, 36, 44, 51.
The island of Hirta, alias St Kilda, the furthest inhabited western point of Scotland, was the first claimed by the Society to have an SSPCK school in 1710, although its catechist-come-schoolmaster had been there since 1705 under orders from the General Assembly. In July 1711 the Committee put forward its first proposal for eleven other schools. These included one in Abertarf, reputedly a hotbed of popery but also identified by the Society as the centre of the Highlands. There were also to be two in the Highlands of Aberdeen; one each in Sutherland and Duirness in the far north, Skye and Glenelg on the West coast and the Duke of Athol's highlands; two in the Orkneys and one in Shetland. Most of these certainly took on the stipulation that “remote corners of Scotland” were to be educated (see Figure 1). Over a year later, the Committee was pleased to announce that six schools, including St Kilda, had actually been settled, with a seventh on the way for Glenelg and negotiations with heritors continuing for Abertarf, the perceived Highland centre. Of the six, four could be regarded as peripheral, the only inland parishes settled being Larggs and Auchintoul, the only school close to the Highland/Lowland line. Hence the Society’s perception of the areas in most need of their assistance was primarily those areas furthest away from the hub of Scottish civilisation as they knew it and accordingly the most different. Those areas further inland, considered a priority by their local presbyteries because of

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4 General Minutes, vol. 1, 31 July 1711, SSPCK, 119.

5 Committee Minutes, vol. 1, 6 September 1711, SSPCK, 220.

the perceived menace of Catholicism, appear to be regarded by the Committee as a secondary concern.

The SSPCK would continue to settle schools in areas where the threat of popery was minimal, despite urgent requests for assistance against the “Insolence of priests and papists”, from ministers in such places as Glenlivet and Castletoun in Brae Marr. Often claims of a Catholic threat were misplaced, with information received by the SSPCK subject to the perceptions and occasional paranoia of the presbytery elders. The SSPCK's “first” school in St Kilda had probably been due to such paranoia within the General Assembly, as its catechist Buchan's own recollections suggest.\(^7\) When instances of Catholic resistance did occur in parishes where their schools were set up, the SSPCK was prompt to act, but whether they actually settled in areas where such popery existed or not seemed a matter of chance (see Figure 2). One could argue that this was simply a case of trial and error, but as the survey of “Popish Parents and their Children” had been commissioned in 1704 by the General Assembly itself, it is difficult to conceive that the Society had no idea which areas would be the most strategic in converting Catholicism. Even without the survey, Martin’s published works on the Highlands and Western Islands gave ample advice as to where the Catholics were or, in most cases, were not. These non Catholic areas that Martin loosely referred to as “of the Reformed religion” appear to have been inhabited more by Episcopalians than Calvinists. However, just as Anne’s charter could not openly obstruct the progress of Calvinism in Scotland, so too the SSPCK could not be seen as deliberately targeting Episcopalians.

\(^7\) Alexander Buchan, *Description of Saint Kilda*, 45-49.
Jacobitism was never mentioned as a reason for requesting a school in early submissions from presbyteries, however the Society’s reaction immediately after the ‘15 indicates that in the Committee’s mind at least their mission was linked to the suppression of Jacobites. While the Society continued to strengthen its presence in outer areas of the Highlands, particularly in the remote and perhaps therefore vulnerable far reaches of the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland, its progress inland continued to be slow except for those parishes closest to the 1715 action at Sheriffmuir. In these parishes of Callander, Balquidder and Comrie eight schoolmasters were settled in 1717, while many larger parishes continued to go without (see Figure 3). However, Jacobitism often went hand in hand with Episcopacy, and the SSPCK’s strong presence here might also be an indication that those areas were heavily populated by Episcopalians. Balquidder and Aberfoyle, for example had been home to the quietly outspoken nonjuring Episcopalian minister Robert Kirk until his death in 1692.

The Society’s efforts in the Northern Isles would seem to confirm the presence of Episcopalians in an area as motive for the SSPCK to settle a school there. Before the “Glorious Revolution” the bishopric of Orkney had been one of the most powerful centres of religious administration in Scotland for centuries. Although the Presbyterian Kirk was now in favour, and despite the exodus of their nonjuring bishops, it is reasonable to assume that the ministers in such an established Episcopal seat did not simply disappear after 1688. Indeed, Lenman has shown that, despite laws to the contrary, Episcopalian pastors often continued their ministry, sheltered by their local laird and community.8 It was a fact not lost on at least one Presbyterian minister, who complained bitterly of Episcopalians: “these Men baffle the Authority of our Laws, by

8 Bruce Lenman, *The Jacobite Risings in Britain 1689-1746* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), 60-64.
the illegal Obtrusions and Encroachments they make, . . . they grasp at our Churches, Legal Stipends, and the sole Exercise of their Church Disciplines.”

As the Northern Isles were bereft of both Catholics and Jacobites, the only remaining factor that could have induced the SSPCK to settle fifteen schools there in the space of ten years must have been the Episcopacy. Unlike Catholics and Jacobites, however, the above minister’s frustrations indicate that the Presbyterian Kirk could not expect the same level of support from their sovereign when it came to openly Episcopalian Scottish subjects. Indeed, like her predecessor, Anne continually reminded the General Assembly of the importance of tolerance towards their fellow Protestants. The ensuing struggle then, between the Lowland SSPCK and Episcopalian Highlanders, remained an undeclared one.

The SSPCK’s overall progress in the Highlands was slowed by underlying expressions of Lowland patriotism. The Committee’s initial choices in settling schools give an indication of Lowlanders’ understanding of the Highlands as an entity and the role of the Society in correcting them. Jones has noted that one of several differences between the SSPCK and the SPCK was that management of the English Society was localised, while that of the SSPCK was centred in the Lowland city of Edinburgh. To have the Society’s headquarters based in Edinburgh seems logical in the sense that its chief organisers tended to congregate there, but in the context of overseeing a large scale Highland project there were other cities closer to the Highlands, even Lowland cities

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9 John Bannatyne, “A letter from a Presbyterian minister in the countrey, to A Member of Parliament: And also of the commission of the church concerning Toleration and Patronages” (Edinburgh (?), 1703), 4-5.

10 Jones, Charity School Movement, 41.
such as Glasgow or Aberdeen, which would have been more appropriate in terms of overcoming the major obstacle of distance. The early proposal for four major hospital schools around the Highlands, effectively acting as administrative as well as educational centres, was quickly quashed on the grounds that the idea did not comply with the Society’s royal charter. Edinburgh, as the kingdom’s capital, had symbolic status that the others lacked, and once again — as had been the case with the Darien fleet — patriotism won out over practicality.

Although the Society was well aware of the large distances within the bounds of many Highland parishes, it was keen to assert that its charity schools could be uniformly managed from this single point of control. Even potential Highland schoolmasters, once approved by their local presbyteries, had to make the long journey to Edinburgh to be approved a second time by the Committee. At the same time, although control was based in the capital, there were no SSPCK schools in Edinburgh itself until that of the Orphan Hospital in 1733 and the Poor-house in 1741.11 Again, this was contrary to the SPCK, where London schools had been part of the scheme from the very start, with great success. To approve of such a school would, after all, be an admission that the problems of poverty and ignorance were not confined to the wilds of the Highlands. Any necessity for schools in the Lowlands or localised Highland management was at odds with the Scotland imagined by the Lowland majority of the SSPCK’s Committee, who saw themselves as working to provide uniformity throughout the country, taking what they considered to be its positive attributes strongest at its Lowland “centre” and

11 “List of Schools maintained by the Society for propagating Christian Knowledge” (1748), affixed to title page of Register of schools maintained by the Society (in order of date of erection of each school), 1710-1761, Records of the SSPCK, NAS ref. GD95/9/1.
disseminating the same to its weaker Highland “perimeter”. To understand this “us and them” attitude to the outer Highlands it is necessary to consider examples of past and present influences on the eighteenth-century Lowland mentality.

Martin’s books were not the first works to consider St Kilda and other remote areas of Scotland’s periphery, although his were certainly some of the more comprehensive. He acknowledged several earlier authors in the preface to his Description, first published in 1703, but noted that “Perhaps it is peculiar to those Isles, that they have never been describ’d till now, by any Man that was a Native of the Country, or had travel’d them.”12 In short, the authors had nearly all been outsiders who had based their work on hearsay. That is to say that they were very much like their readers. A typical example of prior works was the seventeenth-century “Short Description of the Western Isles of Scotland” by Monipennie. This and his “True Description . . . of Scotland” were chapters in Monipennie’s grand project dealing with the lives and times of Scotland’s kings, The Abridgement or Summarie of the Scots Chronicles. A salute to James VI and I and his ancestry, the Scots Chronicles were perhaps also a gentle reminder that, despite all the attractions of James’s new wealthy kingdom of England, the old kingdom of Scotland still had much to offer, worthy of his attention: a matter of concern for many Scots up to and after the Union of 1707. While Monipennie included the islands in his list of Scotland’s assets, his very treatment of them is indication that he regarded them as separate from the rest of Scotland, and that he, a Scotsman, viewed them as an outsider. He even appears to have ranked them in the same league as plentiful game and “things rare and wonderful”, the only other aspects of Scotland he deemed worthy of their own chapters. While Monipennie’s “Short Description” of the isles is very like the

12 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, vi.
rest of his description of Scotland in terms of subject matter, dealing rather with “commodities” than with people, he did provide a short preface of the isles in general, in order to describe the inhabitants there to his fellow Scotsmen and other readers, thus marking them as different from the rest.

Although Monipennie noted there are over 300 islands, he made no effort to distinguish between communities, but rather made simplistic generalisations about the diet, dress and disposition of the islanders as a whole. His description is typical of the stereotypes that can still be seen as late as Samuel Johnson’s *Journey to the Western Islands* published in 1775. He drew an image of a primitive people who would occasionally “straine out the blood and eate the flesh raw” when hunting. This at a time when even the very poor south of the Highlands enjoyed cooked meat, much of it from Scotland. Their war craft was portrayed as brutal and archaic: barbed arrows designed to tear at the wound when removed, and the occasional broadsword or axe, but nothing as technologically advanced as firearms. They were seen as a people accustomed to a Spartan existence, “suffer[ing] the most cruell tempests that blow, in the open field, in such sort, that under a wryth of snow they sleep sound.” At the same time Monipennie attributed them with a rustic wisdom; the bracken and heather they used for bedding “much more wholesome” than the feather beds of civilised households, so that

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16 Monipennie, *Scots Chronicles*, 172.
“they who at evening goe to rest sore and weari, rise in the morning whole and ablee.”\textsuperscript{17}

Hence we have an early example of that train of thought which would develop more fully in the eighteenth century, the idea that despite the simplicity of “primitives”, rather because of it, they possessed an understanding of nature which more civilised men and women could no longer access.\textsuperscript{18}

When one compares Monipennie’s “Short Description” with Martin’s more comprehensive work, there is a definite change in approach towards these remote areas and the compiling and presentation of information relating to them. Monipennie’s dry and, for the most part, impersonal account identifies the islands’ assets in terms of their geographical attributes and natural resources: the extent of their forests, the quantity of fish and game, the quality of mineral deposits to be found. Indeed, one might be forgiven for thinking that most of the islands he described were uninhabited outcrops waiting to be shaped by civilised man. Martin, on the other hand, while remembering to comment on such material commodities as a matter of course, brought the islands to life with examples of the customs and habits, the social structures and religious beliefs of the inhabitants, the islands’ other valuable assets. A typical example is the island of Jura. The extent of Monipennie’s description of the island is thus: “Twelve miles from Gigaia lyes Jura, foure and twentie miles of length. The shore side of Jura is well manured, and inward part of the countrie is clad with wood, full of deere of sundrie kinds.”\textsuperscript{19} Martin, however, begins his description of Jura with a local legend of how the

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\textsuperscript{17} Monipennie, \textit{Scots Chronicles}, 173.


\textsuperscript{19} Monipennie, \textit{Scots Chronicles}, 176-177.
island was named after two warring brothers whose ashes still lie under two standing stones there. While he goes on to mention the deer and landscape, as Monipennie did, he tends to do so in a way that often relates to how these elements affect human lives on and around the island. The high peaks in Jura’s centre act as points of navigation for any sailing in those waters. The high altitude and wholesome springs attribute to the locals’ longevity and good health. He also writes about diet, clothing and religious observances, but at a localised level, so that the individual character of each island community becomes apparent. Martin was indeed more concerned with the every day lives of the common people, and he was not alone. Within the space of a decade other works were taking shape, such as Robert Kirk’s *The Secret Common-Wealth* and James Kirkwood’s *Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, all focused on the vulgar habits and beliefs of the Highlands and Islands.

This shift in focus indicates a change in attitude towards these inhabitants at least among some intellectuals, although it should not be mistaken for an early form of “people’s history”, but rather as recognition that the islanders were a significant part of a landscape under exploration. History was still reserved for “great men”, while the common people could find their place in geography. Hence, the only fault Martin found with Buchanan — the only previous author he identified as having received information from a reliable source — was that he “design’d the History, and not the Geography of his Country”, adding that “since his time there’s a great Change in the Humour of the World, and by consequence in the way of Writing . . . and therefore Descriptions of Countries, without the Natural History of ’em, are now justly reckon’d to be

20 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 231.
defective.” For indeed their very interest in the common people of these parts is
evidence of Martin and his fellow authors’ belief in that people’s value as a connection
to the land, as part of its natural history. Examples were available of men’s travels to
strange places as close as Cornwall or Ireland, or as far away as the Americas, with
commentary on what they found there including native fauna, flora and people. Occasionally these were a blatant attempt to ridicule the subject matter, as is the case
with Ward’s *Trip to Ireland*, however, in general they attempted to enlighten the reader
with regard to unfamiliar territory. Hence, one would be hard pressed to find at this
time any similar observations made regarding vulgar behaviour in the familiar
Lowlands of Scotland or the northern shires of England.

In this light, the Western Highlanders and Islanders of Scotland were as much objects of
study as the indigenous people of Virginia or New England. Interest in them was as
much in the name of science or philosophy as it was humanitarian or spiritual. Martin
himself had made some of his observations available to the London scientific
community before they were ever widely published. With this in mind, it is clear that

21 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, vii.

22 Richard Carew, *The Survey of Cornwall and An Epistle concerning the Excellencies of the English
Tongue* (1602), reprinted, ed. Hugh C, London: Printed for E. Law in Ave-Mary-Lane and J. Hewett at
Penzance (1764); Edward Ward, *A Trip to Ireland: being a description of the country, people and manner*
(London, 1699); George Gardyner, *A description of the new world, or, America, islands and continent: and by what people those regions are now inhabited, and what places are there desolate and without
inhabitants . . .* (London, 1651).

23 Martin Martin, “Several Observations in the North Islands of Scotland. Communicated to the Royal
Society by Mr Martin Martin,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London* 19 (Oct 1697):
727-729.
the inhabitants were considered as much a commodity as any listed by Monipennie. As such there was much discussion as to how they could be harnessed to serve the greater community. In Martin’s case, he was convinced that civilised society could learn from this illiterate people, “better vers’d in the Book of Nature, than many that have greater Opportunities of improvement,” especially with regard to alternative medicines and “the successful Practice of the Islanders in the Preservation of their Health, above what the Generality of Mankind enjoys.”

Others however, the SSPCK included, took the view, that the alternative and traditional should give way to conventional ideas of progress in keeping with the maxim that it was one’s “Duty to be industrious in Improvements.” These ideas were not dissimilar to those expressed regarding indigenous Americans, whose future generations would be the focus of the SSPCK’s overseas efforts.

Indeed, the extent to which remote Highlanders and Islanders were considered different to the point of being natives of a foreign land can be seen when one examines imagery used to describe their world. According to Pagden, sixteenth-century travellers had “precise ideas” as to the fantastic discoveries that awaited them in the Americas, including giants, pygmies, Amazons and the Fountain of Youth. Similarly, at the dawn of the eighteenth century we find Martin writing about a large stone in a hill which, “the Natives say, a Giant of a Month old was bury’d under.” Like Monro before him, he made note of the “Island of Pigmies”, where “many small Bones dug out of the Ground . . . resembling those of Human Kind . . . gave ground to a Tradition

24 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, x.

25 Anonymous, Memorial concerning the Disorders of the Highlands, 4.

26 Anthony Pagden, Fall of natural man, 10.

27 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 59.
which the Natives have of a very Low-statur’d People living once here.”

He described in detail the “Female Warrior’s Glen”, home to Hirta’s Amazon “famous in their Traditions.”

There were also numerous examples of springs with virtuous properties, such as the well on Gigha, “famous among the Islanders; who together with the Inhabitants use it as a Catholicon for Diseases.”

Hence the wondrous past expectations of the New World were transferred to the edge of the old. This is not to say that Martin expected his educated eighteenth-century readers to actually believe in giants or pygmies. However, his inclusion of them as part of the islanders’ local traditions implied that this was the sort of strange place that had allowed these men and women to think such creatures had existed in their past.

The inhabitants themselves had often been described, to an extent, in ways that drew an association with the “barbaric” nature of those “primitive” natives rumoured to live across the Atlantic, touching on an ingrained sense of trepidation that accompanied such accounts. The very use of the word “barbarian” implies “other”, someone outside the observer’s “civil” world. More specifically, “barbarians” were characterised by their “ceaseless aggression” and lawlessness, as opposed to Christian harmony and conformity. They were the “wild men . . . who lurked in woodlands and mountain passes ready to seize upon the unwary traveller”, haunting the minds of civilised men

28 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 19.

29 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 22-23.

30 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 229-230.

31 Pagden, Fall of natural man, 15.

32 Pagden, Fall of natural man, 20-21.
since classical times.\textsuperscript{33} Such descriptions typify the outsider’s view of the Highlander. What little island history Monipennie relates might easily have raised doubts as to the inhabitants’ loyalties. After all, according to him, their overlords had a history of foreignness and treachery. For 160 years the islands had been in the possession of Denmark and Norway; the result of negotiations by Malcolm III’s brother to “usurp” the Scottish throne. Even after these alien kings had relinquished the islands, the Lords of the Isles tended to opt for self-rule, “usurp[ing] the name of king”.\textsuperscript{34} An anonymous early seventeenth-century manuscript claimed that “all the islanders [were] of nature very suspicious, full of deceit and evil intention against their neighbours, by whatsoever way they may get them destroyed; besides this, they [were] so cruel in taking revenge, that neither [had] they regard to person, time, age, nor cause”.\textsuperscript{35} Earlier still, Monro had made reference to several islands with secluded places “guid for fostering of thieves and rebellis.”\textsuperscript{36}

While the Western Highlanders and Islanders may have been considered “barbaric” by Lowlanders, theirs was a different breed of barbarism to that of the natives of America. Earlier theories of “natural slavery” had dictated that the physical attributes of indigenous Americans had been evidence of their purpose to serve their supposedly mental superiors, the Europeans, while in return it was the duty of “civilised” man to

\textsuperscript{33} Pagden, \textit{Fall of natural man}, 21.

\textsuperscript{34} Monipennie, \textit{Scots Chronicles}, 171-172.

\textsuperscript{35} Anonymous, \textit{History of the Feuds and Conflicts among the Clans}, 28.

\textsuperscript{36} Donald Monro, \textit{A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland Called Hybrides} (1549), in \textit{Miscellanea Scotica}, vol. 2, 134-135, 141, 146.
lead his more unfortunate brothers into the light of Christianity.\textsuperscript{37} There were certainly reports of Scotland’s islanders’ physical advantages. The people of Orkney were described as “tall and strong of Body, and of a very fair Complexion, . . . being generally strongly built, and very beautiful and lovely;” and Martin was not the first to be impressed by the physical prowess of the young men of St Kilda in their cliff climbing exploits to gather eggs and fowl.\textsuperscript{38} Their human identity however was never brought into question, in the way that indigenous Americans’ humanity was still being questioned by explorers such as Wallace, who pondered the somewhat degrading notion that the native men of the Darien peninsula sheathed up their “yard”, “as Dogs and Horses do.”\textsuperscript{39} The difference in attitude was perhaps due to the fact that the Highlanders were at least recognised as Christians, albeit a tainted variety in the eyes of the SSPCK; or perhaps that they already lived within the bounds of a civilised Christian kingdom.

This may account as to why their “slavery” was seen not so much as an act of nature but as something artificial, believed to be imposed on them by their chiefs who, by denying them access to reformed religion and the English language, kept them in “unhappy

\textsuperscript{37} Pagden, \textit{Fall of Natural Man}, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{38} James Wallace (snr), \textit{An Account of the Islands of Orkney.} (London, 1700), 108; Robert Moray, “A Description of the Island Hirta,” \textit{Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society in London} xii (Jan-Feb 1677/8): 928.

dependence and alliance”, a theory that continued well into the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ Yet while well-meaning Protestant Lowlanders sought to free the Highlanders from these bonds, their rhetoric in promoting such a cause, improving the “usefulness of the Highlands”, removing the Highlander’s “aversion to an Industrious or Military life” was not so dissimilar to that which had previously supported arguments for “natural slavery”.⁴¹ Hence the Highlanders were still considered primitive enough for a life of service, but that service was to be redirected away from the benefit of their chiefs, towards that of the national interest.

While there had been plenty of conjecture in earlier works that the islands were a law unto themselves, filled with lurking hostility, their Highlanders loyal to clan and chief before king and country, the rest of Scotland had seemed hesitant to interfere in any significant way. Little had been done to counter any perceived acts of sedition, apart from the king occasionally stepping in to break up a dispute between lairds, usually after copious amounts of clansmen’s blood had already been shed, if the accounts given in the history of the Highland feuds are anything to go by.⁴² Even the Statutes of Iona, imposed on the Lords of the Isles by James VI to commandeer their allegiance, merely acted as a band-aid solution. Martin and his contemporaries’ detailed works, however, exposed the island world and its more lowly inhabitants to the scrutiny of Lowland society. Apprehension amongst Presbyterian Lowlanders in the General Assembly was


perhaps compounded by the fact that virtually all commentary on the region was presented and interpreted from the point of view of Episcopalian authors such as Martin, Kirk and Kirkwood.

Martin’s writing in particular revealed a cultural divide in ideas as he was himself an Islander, born and raised in Skye. Hence he was more inclined to view his fellow Islanders from a Highland perspective. While he set out to impress the literati of Edinburgh and London, he could not help but betray his roots, often empathising with the objects of his study. He was less inclined to challenge that which he observed, and would occasionally even embrace it. Monipennie had given special mention to the Island of Falingania because there “the governour of the isles usurping the name of king, was wont to dwell.” That behaviour of the Lords of the Isles which the appalled Monipennie labelled “usurpation” was not so offensive to Martin, who occasionally refers to the MacDonalds of Skye’s former title of “King of the Isles” without reservation, being himself a Skye-man. Where Wallace dismissed the herbal remedies of the Orkneys as the work of quacks and old wives, Martin was often willing to keep an open mind and commit them to paper. While Wallace considered their popular beliefs to be “ridiculous things” and “Idle Fables, not fit to be inserted here”, Martin often indulged his readers with detailed accounts. As a result of this non-judgemental tolerance for a culture he understood, many of the literati whom Martin was keen to

43 Monipennie, Scots Chronicles, 178.

44 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 89, 211

45 Wallace, Account of the Islands of Orkney, 66-67; Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 171-187.

46 Wallace, Account of the Islands of Orkney, 14, 59; Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 109-123.
emulate rejected his work on the grounds of credulity, especially with regard to his belief in Highland extra sensory perception known as “second sight”.47 Yet his work continued to be popular among the masses, enjoying several editions. Hence, with the extent of the Highlanders’ “barbarous” ways and their vulnerability to undesirable influences in full view of a broad readership, “civilised” men were now compelled to make a concerted effort to bring about change in these remote areas of Scotland. Nowhere was this more evident than Hirta, the main subject of one of Martin’s works.

When one considers its size and location, there at first appears to have been a surprising degree of interest in Hirta or St Kilda over the centuries. Today the islands of St Kilda are uninhabited and most atlases and road maps deem the place too small and remote to include in any close-up of Scotland and the Hebrides. In earlier maps of Scotland in circulation when the SSPCK was formed, it had a somewhat ambiguous identity. Occasionally its presence was over-exaggerated, as in the Italian maps from around the 1560s that featured an enormous “Hirtha”, larger than any of the Hebridean or Orcadean islands nearby, indeed larger than Lewis, Skye and Iona put together, and lying farther North than any of them (see Figure 4). In other cases, such as Mercator’s1595 map of Scotland, Hirta was left out all together. The very name “St Kilda” is thought to be a misnomer, assigned to the island by the outside world, as it was not used by the islanders themselves.48 It was possibly a case of mistaken identity that stuck when seventeenth-century Dutch cartographers confused the island with the less distant


“Skildar”. Indeed, it is difficult to decide which of these two islands is meant to be represented by “S. Kylder” in the 1573 map by Ortelius (see Figure 5). In any case, while it was important for seafarers that Hirta’s presence continue to be noted on (predominantly Dutch) marine charts, as the first point of safety (or shipwreck) when approaching Scotland from the west; the land maps by Scottish cartographer Robert Gordon, which early eighteenth-century Edinburgh society would have known from Blaue’s *Atlas of Scotland*, tended to leave out smaller islands such as Hirta (see Figure 6). Yet by 1710 it was once again an exaggerated mass, not far west of Lewis, the Isle de S. Quilda according to Pieter van Aa (see Figure 7). This was possibly thanks to the influence of Martin’s popular publications.

Yet despite its apparent insignificance, St Kilda seems to loom in the imagination of eighteenth-century mainland Scots, due to its very remoteness and what that signified for the inhabitants.18 While Monro skimmed over the details of many larger, closer islands, he appears to have given unwarranted attention to this tiny outcrop, the largest island being “maire nor ane mile lange”. This is perhaps not so much because of the uncommonly large sheep or the inhabitants’ low tolerance to alcohol that he documented, but rather that “McCloyd of Herray, his steward, or he quhom he deputs in sic office, sailes anes in the zear ther at midsummer, with some chaplaine to baptize bairnes ther, and if they want a chaplaine they baptize ther bairnes themselfes.”

Similarly, perhaps the only time Monipennie took note of the practices of common folk was to inform the reader that, “About the 17th day of June, the lord of this island [Hirta]

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50 Monro, *Description of the Western Isles*, 143.
51 Monro, *Description of the Western Isles*, 142.
sendeth his chamberlaine to gather his dueties, and with him a minister, who baptizeth all the children that are borne the year preceding; and if the minister come not, every man baptizeth his own child. With this haphazard cleansing of souls at stake then it is perhaps not so surprising that even before the SSPCK received its patent, there were proposals that “particular Notitice would be taken of the Isles of Hirta or St Kilda and other Islands.” Martin’s account of Hirta was itself the result of his accompanying a minister from Harris sent on a mission to rescue the islanders’ souls, from the influence of a false prophet, Roderick.

Though Martin was keen to show that these were humble and obedient subjects of the crown, who practised the Reformed religion, his portrayal of the islanders at Hirta, and elsewhere in the Hebrides and Orkneys, cast just as many misconceptions about them as had previous works. His dedication of his Description to Prince George of Denmark, consort to Queen Anne, merely served to remind other Scots of the islanders’ separate pasts, celebrating the idea that “They can now, without suspicion of infidelity to the Queen of England, pay their Duty to a Danish Prince to whose Predecessors all of them formerly belonged. Mixed messages concerning loyalty were enhanced by accounts of the islanders’ own ideas of difference. Monipennie had hinted that notions of difference worked both ways and were not only perceived by non-islanders towards islanders. Just as Lowlanders, and even mainland Highlanders, might feel threatened by the hardness of the Isles and their inhabitants, so too the islanders appeared careful to reject any softness they might encounter when travelling abroad, “lest that barbarous delicacy of

52 Monipennie, Scots Chronicles, 184.
53 Anonymous, Memorial concerning the Disorders of the Highlands, 9.
54 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, iv.
the maine land (as they terme[d] it,) corrupt their naturall and countrie hardnesse.”

This was, however, a Lowland perception of how they as outsiders were themselves seen by remote Highlanders. In contrast, the Welsh antiquarian and naturalist Edward Lhuyd during his travels to the Highlands “found the People everywhere civil enough; and had doubtless sped better as to our Enquiries, had we had the Language more perfect.”

Here, by placing the onus on himself to be proficient in Gaelic, Lhuyd shows an uncommon understanding of the need for conscious effort from both sides in order to overcome cultural differences. However, Martin’s accounts from the islanders themselves, recalling times when they had ventured forth onto the mainland, show how insular their world was, and how difficult it was for them to fathom anything beyond it. During a journey to the mainland east of Skye “they admired Glass Windows hugely, and a Looking-Glass to them was a prodigy, they were amazed when they saw Cloth Hangings put upon a thick Wall of Stone and Lime, and condemn’d it as a thing very Vain and Superfluous.” The size and distances of the outside world were almost incomprehensible to them. One “fancied he saw a great part of the World” standing on a hillock and surveying the surrounding landscape of Skye, while another mistook his


57 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 125-126.
first sight of Inverness-shire for the English border. Even trees were marvellous to them, as there were none on their islands. Yet it must be remembered that Martin deliberately wrote about these people as curiosities. He tended to emphasise examples of their quaintness, as evidence of their innocence, in order to back his theory that they and other islanders like them were better off with their simple, natural way of life than those more civilised men and women “loaded with superficial Knowledge, as the bare Names of famous Libraries, stately Edifices, fine Statues, curious Paintings, late Fashions, new Dishes, new Tunes, new Dances, painted Beauties, and the like.”

The divide between the islanders and Lowlanders was further confirmed by Martin’s descriptions of the ways in which Hirta inhabitants assessed and reacted to strangers visiting their island. His own arrival in tow of the minister John Campbell was cause for celebration, with the whole village turning out to receive them, “with all the demonstrations of joy and kindness they were able to express.” Island hospitality was extended to them for the entirety of their stay, with “a daily Maintenance” of all their food and fire generously supplied by the locals, “all which was to be given in at our Lodging Twice every day.” This was not without good reason, as it appears ministers were much revered by the St Kildans. They knew Campbell had come to remove the impostor Roderick from their community, and while the minister was there he also provided the extra service of marrying fifteen couples. Similar examples of hospitality

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58 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 127, 129.
59 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 128.
60 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, viii-ix.
61 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 10-11.
62 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 12.
were given in relation to shipwreck survivors and other visitors, although these also revealed degrees of tension dependent upon the extent of cultural difference between the two groups attempting to interact. According to Martin, “they [were] Charitable to Strangers in Distress, this they had opportunity to express to a Company of French and Spaniards who lost their Ship at Rokol in the Year 1686, and came in, in a Pinnace to St. Kilda.”

However, while these men were well supplied by the islanders, “both Seamen and Inhabitants were Barbarians one to another, the Inhabitants speaking only the Irish Tongue, to which the French and the Spaniards were altogether Strangers.” Language was such a barrier that the sailors had to resort to hand gestures and map pointing to try to communicate. The sailors’ efforts were further exacerbated when they began boat repairs on the Sabbath, “at which the Inhabitants were astonished, and being highly dissatisfied, plucked the Hatchets and other Instruments out of their Hands, and did not restore them till Monday Morning.” Hence there was an expectation from the islanders that outsiders would have the same values and habits as themselves. By contrast, a crew from the Hebridean island of South Uist, whose boat had been driven in to Hirta, were able to fully appreciate the assistance provided by fellow island Highlanders, sharing not only the language but also similar culture and mores, and could return the favour in the near future “with no less Civility and Kindness” than had been shown them.

The same, however, could not be said of Lowlanders:

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63 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 86.
64 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 86.
65 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 87.
66 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 87-88.
They told me of a Ship that dropp’d Anchor in the Mouth of the Bay the preceeding Year, and that the Lowlanders aboard her were not Christians; I enquired if their Interpreter, who they said spoke bad Irish, had owned this to be a Truth, they answered, not; but that they knew this by their Practices, and that in these Three particulars; the First was the Working upon Sunday, carrying several Boats full of Stones aboard for Ballast; the Second was the taking away some of their Cows without any return for them, except a few Irish Copper Pieces; and the Third was, the Attempt made by them to Ravish their Women, a practice altogether unknown in St. Kilda, where there has not been one instance of Fornication or Adultery for many Ages before this time; I remember they told me, that the Bribe offered for Debauching the poor Women, was a piece of Broad Money, than which there could be nothing less Charming in a place where the Inhabitants cannot distinguish a Guinea from a Sixpence.67

Although once again the language barrier was problematic, the main cause of conflict in this case was evidently the prior assumptions made by the Lowlanders regarding Highlanders, specifically the workings of their clan system and the morality of the island women. The steward’s annual visit to collect rents and produce from the islanders had been recorded by Monipennie and Monro. However, their basic accounts failed to recognise any acts of reciprocity, leaving the reader with the impression that the steward’s party simply took what they wanted. Whether because these sorts of reports led the Lowlanders to misunderstand the nature of the relationship between clan and chief, or because of an ingrained sense of superiority towards all Highlanders, the Lowlanders seem to have assumed that they were entitled to help themselves to the possessions of the St Kildans, including their women. It was customary in Hirta for both sexes to greet visitors en masse, and share in any gifts offered by or duties bestowed upon their guests. Yet it appears that their relative freedom and equality was misconstrued as wantonness on their part. It would not be the first or last time that

67 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 88-89.
“civilised” Europeans assumed promiscuity or took liberties when they encountered “primitive” societies in which women were more visibly interactive with men.68

In the case of Hirta, the offensive behaviour resulted in increased mistrust and alienation of Lowlanders. Even in the case of Roderick, a native of Hirta, the story that had developed among the islanders, no doubt encouraged by him, implied that his vice was the result of Lowland influences:

In the Eighteenth Year of his Age, he took the Liberty of going to Fish on a Sunday, (a practice altogether unknown in St. Kilda); and he asserts, That in his return homeward, a Man in Lowland Dress, i.e. a Cloak and Hat, appeared to him upon the Road; at this unexpected Meeting, Roderick falls flat on the Ground in great disorder; upon which this man desired him not to be surprized at his Presence, for he was John the Baptist immediately come from Heaven with good Tidings to the Inhabitants of that place.69

Similar motifs can be found elsewhere, whereby an individual’s moment of weakness, ie. Sabbath breaking, allows a foreign evil to enter the community.70 In Hirta hostility towards foreign Lowland influences had progressed to the extent that when Martin pointed out the potential of loose stones high above the only safe landing place, to act as a natural defence against intruders, the islanders were “resolved to make use of this for the future, to keep off the Lowlanders, against whom of late they have conceived Prejudices.”71 From this account it would seem that the islanders could be easily

68 Pagden, Fall of Natural Man, 52; Henry Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia (Melbourne: Penguin, 1982), 70-71.

69 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 137.

70 For example, the Lambton Worm in English folklore, again the product of fishing on a Sunday, cited in British Dragons, ed. Jacqueline Simpson (London: Wordsworth and FLS Books, 2001), 137.

71 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 19-20.
influenced by other Highlanders to the detriment of any Lowland interests. Hence Hirta and other isolated boundary communities were conceivably cause for concern to those promoting a united Protestant kingdom.

The islanders’ willingness to assist French and Spanish sailors in trouble was problematic from the point of view of security. Much of James VII and II’s court had fled to Spain, and the failure at Darien was partly due to Spain’s refusal to quit any of her territories there. As for France, not only had it harboured the exiled James VII and II and his court, but Louis XIV had recognised James’s Catholic son as rightful heir to the thrones of Scotland and England in 1701, and there was a failed attempt at invasion in 1708 by French forces supporting the Jacobite claim. Yet perhaps even more undesirable than the islanders’ tendency to fraternise with the enemy was their adverse treatment of some of their fellow countrymen. Due to short days and rough seas in Winter, Shetland was literally cut off from the rest of the world between October and April/May each year, so that “after the late Revolution: they had no account of the Prince of Orange’s late Landing in England, Coronation, &c. until a Fisherman happen’d to land in these Isles in May following: and he was not believed, but indicted for High Treason, for spreading such News.”

Evidently it was difficult for such distant islands as Hirta or Shetland to stay in touch with the affairs and moods of the rest of the country, and to know what it was to be a Scottish patriot under the Union. In this light the SSPCK’s objective to bring “true” religion to the Highlands was also an attempt to include these remote corners in its

73 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 372.
notion of Scotland’s new identity. Hence the Society was very specific as to what kind of men would provide the link between Highlands and Lowlands: the schoolmasters sent out to perform its “great Designe”. The request that presbyteries keep an eye out for students “having the Irish language” upon whom to bestow their bursaries makes clear that the ideal candidates were to be of Highland background educated in the Lowland tradition. Yet this combination did not always prove beneficial, as can be seen by the experiences of Alexander Buchan, catechist of Hirta, whose regular correspondence with the General Assembly, and then the SSPCK, provides detailed accounts of the struggles and obstacles he faced not only with the natives and their overlord, but with the SSPCK itself.

That Highlanders such as Martin or Buchan were themselves fascinated or bewildered respectively by the “commonwealth” of Hirta signifies that it was not to be taken as an example typical of Highland society. Rather its uniqueness was part of the attraction for the General Assembly and in turn the SSPCK. Even as early as Buchan’s and his family’s arrival in Hirta in November 1704, before the establishment of the SSPCK, a presence there was seen as an important strategic, or at least symbolic, gesture for the Presbyterian faith. While petitioning for better resources for Buchan, Daniel Campbell of the Synod of Argyle reminded the General Assembly that Hirta “is ane outfield of Gods vinyeard. As it will be for Gods glorie, so it will be for the Commenda[tio]n of the Presbyterian government, th[a]t in th[ei]r tyme and by th[ei]r means, this ignorant People neglected in former ages was brought in to Ch[ris]t.”74 The implication was that if they could conform Scotland’s most extreme and inaccessible point on the map,

74 Daniel Campbell to Moderator of the General Assembly, 29 March 1706, General Assembly Papers 1711, NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 477.
where Catholics and Episcopalians had failed before them (if indeed they had tried at all), then the rest of their mission was surely less daunting. In other areas of the Highlands, Society schoolmasters might come and go, but maintaining the catechist of St Kilda was a continual concern and one not lost on Buchan himself. Attempts by him and his petitioners to improve his situation on the island were often accompanied by the warning that “th[e]r[e] is lit[t]le hope, th[a]t anoth[e]r will expose himself to such povertie, & want & hardship as he has endured there to succeed him in his office.”

From his earliest correspondence on the island it is clear that Buchan could not empathise with island culture. His letters paint a very different picture to the idyllic images portrayed by Martin. Indeed, Martin’s somewhat romantic notions of Scotland’s very own “noble savages” were unceremoniously debunked by the graphic and earthy portrayal offered by Buchan’s experience. His commentary on their diet and living conditions rather reconfirmed earlier perceptions of Highlanders. The wholesome existence described by Martin was overpowered by the smell of the place as reported by Buchan: “they have the same wild smel that ther wild fouls on which they live hath so that I must go between them & the wind.” He complained that “he [could] not endure the smell of the foules nor people nor [could] he stay scaircely to prey within their house, because of the smell of their rotten unsalted foules and their guts.” He clearly considered their methods of preserving meat, by storing it in drying houses, to be crude

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75 Catherine Campbell to Moderator of the General Assembly “The Humble address of Cathrin Campbell spouse to Alexr Buchan Catechist of Hirta or St Kilda,” 1708, General Assembly Papers 1711, NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 481.

76 Alexander Buchan to Moderator of the General Assembly, Hirta 16 July 1705, General Assembly Papers 1711, NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 475.

77 Daniel Campbell to Moderator of the General Assembly, CH1/2/31, f. 477.
and inferior to the salting method that he was used to. As for the “giben” or fat from these geese, which the islanders ate with everything and which Martin had reported as medicinally beneficial when taken in moderation, Buchan “would [have] sooner to grease his shoes” with it.\(^7\) As for their health he reported that many of Roderick’s proselytes had become “leprous”, like their former teacher, which prevented him from visiting them.

Martin gave several examples of a society that, through necessity of surviving together on meagre resources, had developed an etiquette that combined communal needs with respect for the rights of the individual. Certain objects belonged to the community, such as rope, the use of which required “the general Consent of all.”\(^7\)\(^9\) Other privately owned objects exacted a tax for their public use: the Pot-Penny paid by inhabitants of the lesser isles to the owner of any pot brought there for their use, to cover damages; or, until Martin showed them how to strike fire from the local crystals, the Fire-Penny paid to the owner of the only steel and tinder box in the “commonwealth”.\(^8\)\(^0\) Use of the sole common kiln on the island was determined by lots, and “he whose Lot happens to be last does not resent it at all.”\(^8\)\(^1\) Any disputes amongst the islanders were likewise decided by lots, or by public oaths on the Crucifix. The one boat of St Kilda was:

> very curiously divided into Apartments proportionable to their Lands and Rocks; every Individual has his space distinguished to an Hair’s breadth, which his Neighbour cannot encroach so much as to lay an Egg upon it.

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\(^7\) Daniel Campbell to Moderator of the General Assembly, CH1/2/31, f. 477.

\(^9\) Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 105.

\(^0\) Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 116-118.

\(^1\) Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 102.
Every Partner in Summer provides a large Turf to cover his space of the Boat, thereby
defending it from the Violence of the Sun. 82

This arrangement was similar to that in the small remote island of Rona, where:
they covet no Wealth, being fully content and satisfy’d with Food and Raiment; tho at the
same time they are very precise in the matter of Property among themselves: for none of
them will by any means allow his Neighbour to fish within his Property; and every one
must exactly observe not to make any incroachment on his Neighbour. 83

Adhering to such strict “niceties” had been essential to maintain continued harmony on
the islands. However, Buchan belittled this aspect of island life by focussing on
seemingly more frivolous and unsavoury practices such as mixing urine with ashes to
make manure, whereby “they are so frugal in this point that if one be in his neighbours
house, he comes home to his own house apud exonerandam vesicam to mix with his
own ashes.” 84

Buchan’s contempt for Hirta society appears to have been reciprocated, his treatment by
the islanders being very different to the hospitality received by Martin and the minister
Campbell. While they had wanted for nothing, he found himself having to pay for the
barest necessities at an exorbitant rate, to the point that by July 1705 he was almost out
of money, and heavily in debt to the steward by August 1707 when his wife left to
petition the General Assembly for a regular maintenance. His plight was perhaps partly
due to the islanders’ perception that he had nothing to offer them in return. On the
contrary, they considered him to be indebted to them, the mother of the only boy he
taught apart from the officer’s son insisting on compensation, the long hours in the

82 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 115-116.

83 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 22.

84 Daniel Campbell to Moderator of the General Assembly, CH1/2/31, f. 477.
school room no doubt depriving her of a pair of hands in the field. Ministers who had come to the island in the past, somewhat haphazardly, as part of the steward’s yearly retinue, had been part of the “deal” as it were of the annual tributes, the islanders receiving spiritual as well as temporal supplies in exchange for the allowances they paid during the visit. As a mere catechist Buchan was decidedly lacking in those spiritual qualities of a minister that were sought after and respected by the people of Hirta, namely the authority to perform the sacraments.

While Buchan considered both the officer and the steward to be a burden to the island community because of the demands they exacted, he failed to comprehend the impact of his own family’s arrival and continued residence. In the past the islanders had successfully protested against the steward’s unprecedented and unreasonable demand for a sheep from each family, by “arming themselves with their Daggers and Fishing-Rods” against a party of men led by the steward’s brother sent to enforce the new tax, and taking to him with “some blows on the head.”

At the time of Martin’s visit they were engaged in a dispute with the steward over the correct size of the amir, used to measure grain, and were not content with the steward’s suggestion that Campbell and Martin could give objective advice, but rather had voted to send the officer with an envoy of observers (as his own annual payment “to maintain his character” was an amir of barley from each family), to see MacLeod himself, as they “would not alter that Measure if Mack-Leod did not expressly Command the same to be done.”

Hence it is not surprising that they were also resistant to the demands made on them and their fragile ecosystem by Buchan and his growing family, and any such resistance would be

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85 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 290.

86 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 98-99.
led by their spokesperson the officer, and also by the officer’s wife. Even after Buchan
was ordained, an event that he had hoped would settle his authority on the island, he
continued to meet with opposition.

Much of Buchan’s difficulties stemmed from an inability on his part to adjust to
conflicting ideas of authority. Even in his Highland home parish of Halkirk and other
Highland parishes on the mainland where he had served as catechist there had been a
supportive, accessible Presbyterian hierarchy. Testaments from several parishes in
favour of Buchan’s ordination are one example of how an individual, be they minister
or “private Christian”, might hope to be heard through an orderly and to an extent
democratic network ranging from local parish elders to the Moderator of the General
Assembly. In the far reaches of the Outer Hebrides, that network held little sway and
Buchan soon learnt that his endorsement by the General Assembly was virtually
worthless. The laird MacLeod’s tutor’s own brother was an active member of the
SSPCK, yet the Society was slow, perhaps even hesitant, to make even the vaguest of
demands on the laird regarding the welfare of their catechist. Buchan’s lack of respect
amongst the islanders stemmed not only from his failure to reciprocate in their society,
but also from his being uninvited by the officer or the steward, or more importantly

87 Testificat, Synod of Argyll[e] to Alex[ande]r Buchan Catechist of Hirta, Inverary 22 October 1709,
General Assembly Papers 1711, NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 488; Recommendation In favour of Alexander
Buchan, Inverary 22 October 1709, CH1/2/31, f. 495; Testimony, The Kirk Session of Halkirk to
Alex[ande]r Buchan, Halkirk 25 December 1709, CH1/2/31, f. 492; Testimony, The Kirk Session of
Thurso to Alexander Buchan, Thurso 27 December 1709, CH/1/2/31, f. 494.

88 General Assembly to tutor of MacLeod, Edinburgh 26 March 1708, General Assembly Papers 1711,
NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 472; General Assembly to MacLeod, undated, General Assembly Papers 1711,
NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 483; General Minutes, vol. 1, 16 March 1710, SSPCK, 57-58.
MacLeod whom the steward represented. According to Buchan, the reasons the islanders did not bother sending their children to him was, “they think I wil go away the next year because my money is exhausted & Macloud gave no order to see well to me & no man spoke or wrot to that effect & he can compell them to give me nothing but eldin and wild fouls.”

Martin and Campbell’s visit had been at the express request of MacLeod for the removal of Roderick, and all ministers before them had been part of the steward’s retinue. The laird’s lack of endorsement in Buchan’s case, however, meant that he would continue to be treated as an outsider by the people of Hirta.

Buchan’s first encounter with the authority of MacLeod, in the figure of his steward at Hirta, was over the use of milk. Although he had hoped to buy a milk cow to provide for his infants, he was informed by the inhabitants that all milk on the island was reserved for the steward during his Summer visit. It showed a continued belief in the superiority of the Lord of the Isles, as without his say so “though [Buchan] were the Duke of Hamiltoun he must not have his own cowes milk dureing the stuarts abode in Hirta.”

This was one of several episodes highlighting what for Buchan were askew concepts of authority. Another was the influence of the officer and his wife. The officer was a native of Hirta appointed by the steward as island representative, although he had been “anciently Chosen, or at least approved of by the People, before the Steward settled him in his Office.” As such, he and his wife enjoyed certain privileges. Apart from some acres of land awarded by the steward “for serving him and

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89 Buchan to Moderator of the General Assembly, CH1/2/31, f. 475.

90 Daniel Campbell to Moderator of the General Assembly, CH1/2/31, f. 477A.

91 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 100.
the Inhabitants”, the steward also gave him “the Bonnet worn by himself upon his going out of the Island; the Steward’s Wife [left] with the Officer’s Wife the Kerch, or Head-dress worn by her self, and she bestow[ed] likewise upon her an Ounce of Indigo.”

Yet with these privileges came certain responsibilities. Both Martin and Buchan took exception to the fact that the officer had much more livestock than his poor neighbours although, as it was his duty to play host during the summer visit, much of his mutton went to the steward. The active part of the officer’s wife in the running of the islands was another display of authority with which Buchan appears to have been unfamiliar. As officer’s wife she was mistress of Hirta by proxy, as symbolised by the giving of the steward’s wife’s headgear. If this was the same couple that had been in office at the time of Martin’s voyage, only seven years before Buchan’s arrival, then this was the “Heroically Virtuous” woman who had first exposed Roderick’s lechery by informing her husband of his “lewd Design”, who then arranged to be in the next room ready to confront him the next time he came calling. Thus she played an important role in representing the interests of women on the island.

Relations worsened thanks to Buchan’s refusal to work within the island’s system and his tendency to challenge the very validity of that system by seeking support elsewhere. His response to the lack of cooperation from the inhabitants was to write to the General Assembly and the SSPCK, requesting that they in turn write to MacLeod. In doing so, he inadvertently challenged not only the authority of MacLeod but the traditional methods of Hirta for airing grievances. It was not customary for an individual to take up issues insubordinately with the laird. Instead the officer was to approach the steward

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92 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 97.

93 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 146.
at the behest of the island community, and to press their case until he had been
cudgelled about the head at least three times by the steward, although according to the
steward interviewed by Martin there had been no cause for such an exchange in his own
time. If the islanders were still unsatisfied with the response of the steward, the
officer had the right to approach MacLeod himself, cap in hand and accompanied by an
island delegation. There was no higher source of appeal. Indeed Buchan appears to
have overestimated the influence of the General Assembly, or at least misjudged the
effects of its interference, admitting in one letter that MacLeod’s tutor “was angry the
last year for writing concerning me & [I] got no answer [from him]”, and no
reimbursement for receipts he had sent. Buchan’s actions had gone outside the clan
structure, and his continued failure to adjust to their ways only reinforced the Hirta
community’s perception of him as an outsider. After all, Buchan’s presence on the
island was at the instigation of the General Assembly rather than the laird or any of his
representatives. In this sense his posting was as much an assertion of authority by the
General Assembly as it was a mission to save souls. His very presence was a challenge
to MacLeod’s power, despite reassurance from the General Assembly that they “had
nothing in their view but the Glory of God and the Good of souls in sending him
thither.”

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94 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 96-97.
95 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 98-99.
96 Alexander Buchan to Moderator of the General Assembly, General Assembly Papers 1711, NAS ref.
CH1/2/31, f. 479A.
97 General Assembly to MacLeod of Harris, General Assembly Papers 1711, NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 483.
Reports from Buchan after his ordination, however, show that his new office brought him more than just spiritual authority:

where any breaks the Sabbath I cause them stand in sackcloth[d] dipped in the filthiest gutter in the toun & I exhort them as weel ass rebuke them & they pay the value of 1 half a merk every one to the poor if they have goods the fyn[e]s are sixteen pence . . . any that curs[e] or suear by the evil one or renting of the rocks pays a half merk and I parted the corn all I got for fyn[e]s this year with my own hand to the poor because of the scarcity of food I would not trust to any the parting.98

He seemed particularly keen to put the officer’s wife in her place:

The greatest fyn[e] I took was two merks from the officers wife and she gave a complaint to my wife to get the sackcloth clean . . . The officers wife commanded two women to kill a dog on the Lord’s day she being a delinquent formerly for sabbath breaking & twice or thrice for cursing & the most wicked I caused them both to stand in sackcloth dreeping doun black gutter & rebuk[ed] her publickly as weel as them & she payed the value of a merk for the tuo women to the poor.99

Although some of Buchan’s punishments may have been as humiliating as any prescribed by Roderick, they were the norm as sanctioned by Acts of Parliament, although specifically for the more serious crimes of blasphemy (including atheism), to be found in the minutes of kirk sessions all around Scotland.100 The law according to the General Assembly had come to Hirta. Even so, his behaviour was not necessarily in keeping with the desires of the General Assembly or the SSPCK, both of which on more than one occasion reminded Buchan to “be not morose or sullen, nor too familiar and open but kind and courteous of a wise and gaining conversation, that they may see you

98 Alexander Buchan to presbytery of Edinburgh, Hirta 21 June 1712, General Assembly Papers 1713, NAS ref. CH1/2/33/2, f. 141.
99 Buchan to Edinburgh, CH1/2/33/2, f. 141.
100 Hunter, “Aikenhead the Atheist,” 240-241; Scotland, Act against blasphemy, 1695, 7 Will. 2, c. 11.
are sent for their good and not your own profit nor any gain from them.” Hence the remoteness proved just as difficult for controlling the Society’s own men as it did for controlling Highlanders obedient to their chief.

Even so, the latter was still the General Assembly’s primary target. The officer and his wife maintained that Buchan’s power came not from the General Assembly, but from MacLeod himself, that “were it not for fear of mckloud I could not get a fyn[e] from delinquents to the poor.” Her orders to Buchan’s wife regarding the filthy sackcloth suggest a continued belief of the officer’s wife in her own authority as hostess of the island. Indeed the annual tributes described in detail by Martin, and the islanders’ great deference for MacLeod, had been proof that the Statutes of Iona meant little so far from central government, that the lairds of the Western Isles were still a governance unto themselves. Hence among Buchan’s initial instructions from the General Assembly was the direction, “Do what you can to remove any prejudice you may find among the people, against the present establishment of Church and State in this Nation and show the people their Duty to their Superiours.” As there was ample evidence that the people of Hirta were already well aware of their duty to MacLeod, it is fair to suggest that he was not one of the “superiors” the General Assembly had in mind. Rather their appointment of Buchan was a small step towards removing any unwarranted awe associated with MacLeod and other Highland chiefs.

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101 General Minutes, vol. 1, 13 April 1710, SSPCK, 64.
102 Buchan to Edinburgh, CH1/2/33/2, f. 142.
104 General Assembly, Instructions to Alexander Buchan when sent to St Kilda alias Hirta, Edinburgh 1 August 1704, Church Papers 1703-1704, NAS ref. CH1/2/4/2, f. 166.
The General Assembly’s aim to debunk the authority of Hirta’s Highland laird even appears to have taken precedence over their mission to offer salvation to the inhabitants. This was despite the fact that the General Assembly itself had identified a dire spiritual need there when it linked the plight of the people of Hirta, “deprived of the means of Christian knowledge,” to the lack of a minister on the island.\footnote{General Assembly, Instructions to Buchan, CH1/2/4/2, f. 166.} This need was soon confirmed by Buchan. While Martin had declared Hirta to be Reformed Church, Buchan initially saw little but heathenism. Martin had given several examples of their strict observance of the Sabbath. However, Buchan reported that, while there was certainly no work done on that day, “men & women & children wer[e] sporting and gaming when I came her[e] Sunday.”\footnote{Buchan to Moderator, CH1/2/31, f. 475.} According to Buchan the status quo, which Martin claimed had been restored with the removal of Roderick, maintained some very primitive religious beliefs: “they vent[ure] salvation on a litle morality some say thers two god others a great & litle . . .quis hominen crevit was the method was taught them when Roderick the impostour was deposed.”\footnote{Buchan to Moderator, CH1/2/31, f. 475.} Hence the only evidence Buchan could find of an understanding of reformed doctrine was a basic children’s version of the Shorter Catechism, with its simplified questions and answers (beginning with “Who made you?”), perhaps a band-aid solution given to them by Campbell before he left. Marriages were accompanied by superstitious swearing on the crucifix. Most distressing of all for Buchan was the superstitious ritual that accompanied baptisms on the island:
They goe thrice with the child about the fire and at each tyme Dippes the child thrice in the ashes and then a man that must not speak During the action fetches in water, in wh[i]ch salt and a knife is put w[i]t[h] wh[i]ch they baptise and then throwes the rest of the water about ane immoveable stone.  

Yet the General Assembly continued to treat the Hirtans’ spiritual well-being as a secondary concern, until it became obvious that this and authority over the island were inextricably linked. Despite Buchan’s need to be recognised as an authoritative figure before he could hope to succeed in his mission, the General Assembly had resisted requests to have him ordained, although it had been clear from the start that ministry was needed. Indeed, for Buchan one of the most problematic aspects of religious ritual as practised on the island was the fact that, in the absence of a minister, marriages and baptisms were performed by his rival, the officer: a practice which, in the eyes of the islanders, tended to make Buchan somewhat redundant. When he rebuked them for their superstitious and unorthodox baptism practices, “they desire[d] himself to administer baptisme to th[e]m or else not to find fault w[i]t[h] them.” It was Buchan’s impotence on the island from being forbidden to administer marriages and the sacrament of baptism, rather than abuse of the sacraments themselves, that was the crux of a recommendation to the General Assembly in 1710 that finally saw the way to Buchan being ordained.

The General Assembly’s hesitation to ordain Buchan, or for that matter to send a minister in the first place rather than a catechist, may also have been due to the

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108 Daniel Campbell to the General Assembly, Killmartin 13 September 1709, General Assembly Papers 1711, NAS ref. CH1/2/31, f. 497.

109 Campbell to General Assembly, CH1/2/31, f. 497.
islanders’ demonstrated awe of religious figures, to the extent that they became part of superstitious traditions. While previous examples such as Campbell had shown how Hirta’s community could respond to “holy” men in a positive way, the “reign” of the false prophet Roderick had demonstrated the danger of such esteem when exaggerated and unchecked. Hence, from his first appointment to Hirta Buchan was given specific instructions as to the limits of his own power: “But in all this you are to remember that you are not to be esteemed by yourself or others as doing this by Virtue of any pastorall office, and you are not to presume to Baptise or exercise any other part of the Ministeriall function.”

It was important for the General Assembly that they did not simply transfer from chief to preacher the islanders’ misguided regard for men of power, but rather to extinguish iconic regard altogether. This policy of demystifying the Highlands was not only applied to the way its inhabitants saw their men and women of authority. It can also be seen as being applied to the way the General Assembly and the SSPCK wanted the Highlands, as a physical space, to be viewed by Highlanders and non-Highlanders alike — as a clearly defined region of the newly established Union. In this sense the far flung western isles of Hirta, and the northern isles of Orkney and Shetland took on new dimensions that begin to explain their importance, for not only are they the physical extremes of the Union’s geographical space, but both occupied fantastic spaces in the minds of many Scots.

An example of the fabulous nature attributed to these places was recorded by Martin. He noted that when the Lewis men went fowling around the Flannan Islands, they observed strict taboos regarding names in relation to these islands and Hirta:

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110 General Assembly, Instructions to Buchan, CH1/2/4/2, f. 166.
It is absolutely unlawful to call the Island of St. Kilda (which lies thirty Leagues Southward) by its proper Irish Name Hirt, but only the high Country. They must not so much as once name the Islands in which they are fowling, by the ordinary name Flannan, but only the Country. There are several other things that must not be called by their common Names: e.g. Visk, which in the Language of the Natives signifies Water, they call Burn; a Rock, which in their Language is Creg, must be call’d Cruy, i.e. hard; Shore in their Language express’d by Claddach, must here be call’d Vah, i.e. a Cave; Sour in their language is express’d Gort, but must here be call’d Gaire, i.e. Sharp; Slippery, which is express’d Bog, must be call’d Soft; and several other things to this purpose.  

These customs may seem like nothing more than semantics until one considers them in relation to the islands’ place on the very edge of the Lewis men’s known physical world, and bordering on the realm of an imagined Otherworld, whether it be the afterlife of Celtic myth or the land of faerie implied by the rumoured inhabitants of the nearby Island of Little Men. Hence objects and sensations on these outer islands were not to be attributed their usual meaning. They became more or less of the things that they represented elsewhere in the world. To alter the name of that which one sees or feels is to alter its substance, and the islanders’ conscious effort to rename these things indicates a rethinking of their quality and that of the world that they define, a care not to take the essence of them for granted. By assuming an altered state once they set foot on these islands, the Lewis men acknowledged that they were venturing to tread on the threshold between worlds.

Just as St Kilda’s position as Scotland’s furthest western inhabited isles gave it special significance to both islanders and the SSPCK, so too a special place had been reserved for Scotland’s northern most islands, the Orkneys and Shetland, although their situation...

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111 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 17-18.
was very different to that in the west. Unlike Hirta there was little doubt concerning the religious leanings of their inhabitants. The Orkneys had long been predominantly Protestant. Formerly an important Bishop’s See, since the “Glorious Revolution” the Presbyterian Kirk had grown there to the point that an extra presbytery was formed in 1707 in order to ease demands on its more distant ministers.112 As for language, that other factor which has often been linked to the need for an SSPCK presence, neither Martin nor Wallace made any mention of the use of Gaelic. According to Martin, “the Inhabitants speak the English Tongue: several of the Vulgar speak the Danish or Norse Language,” or as Wallace called it “Norns”.113 Yet by 1719 there were ten SSPCK schools established in Orkney, roughly a quarter of the Society’s then total of forty-two, and more than it had settled in any one of the mainland shires. Geographically they were perhaps not as daunting as Hirta. Although their waters could be just as treacherous, beyond lay the certainty of Northern Europe, rather than the hundreds of miles of vast empty ocean that awaited any who ventured past Soa or Stack Narmin, the outermost of St Kilda’s lesser islands.

Yet like Hirta or the Flannan islands, the Orkneys and Shetland maintained an air of mystery, not through any association with a pagan afterlife but as candidates for the lost world of Thule, the fabled northernmost land of classical legend. By association with Thule these islands also assumed an otherworldly quality. The Greek explorer Pytheas had described the area where Thule was to be found as “those regions in which there was no longer any proper land nor sea nor air, but a sort of mixture of all three of the consistency of a jellyfish in which one can neither walk nor sail, holding everything


113 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 369; Wallace, Account of the Islands of Orkney, 106.
together, so to speak.”\textsuperscript{114} Since this description in the fourth century BC by Pytheas, albeit recognised as an unreliable source as early as Polybius, explorers and empires had hoped to rediscover Thule and claim it for their own, a symbol of their voyaging and conquering prowess.\textsuperscript{115} Robert Gordon had speculated in Blaeu’s \textit{Atlas} that the likely candidate was Lewis.\textsuperscript{116} In the early eighteenth century it appears to have still been considered a prize. Wallace closed his \textit{Account of the Islands of Orkney} with “An Essay concerning the Thule of the Ancients.” While he argued that Thule was in fact the whole of the North of Scotland — the most northern reach of Rome’s territories — there was some debate over whether it could instead be the Orkneys. Wallace’s claims were despite the fact that as the unknown world had grown smaller, speculation regarding the location of Thule had already moved further north to such candidates as Greenland or Iceland. His insistence on Thule as part of Northern Britain was an attempt to recapture for Britain’s own the land that had defined the outer reaches of the greatest of ancient empires. Again, his was a “scientific” approach, closely examining classical sources in order to deduce the exact whereabouts of the fabled land, and place it in a real and accessible setting.

Similarly, the SSPCK’s planting of schools in the furthest northern and western reaches of the kingdom can also be seen as an effort to turn these ambiguous regions into a clearly defined periphery and place them firmly within a real and tangible world that had only recently been redefined itself through the Acts of Union. These boundary areas had long been a source of haunting imagery for “civilised” Lowlanders and

\textsuperscript{114} Polybius, \textit{Histories}, 34.5.3.

\textsuperscript{115} Joanna Kavenna, \textit{The Ice Museum: In search of the lost land of Thule} (London: Viking, 2005), 4.

English. Whether it be the nightmarish ferocity of lurking barbarian clans, as described in previous centuries; or the romanticised innocents with their rumours of neighbouring mythical creatures, as portrayed by Episcopalian contemporaries like Martin; the effect of such accounts was that, for many eighteenth-century Britons, the Western Highlands and Islands were indeed “dark corners” on the verge of their imagination and their new Union. The SSPCK’s decision to first bring light to the very limits of the region — the darkest points of the Highlands, so far from civilised Edinburgh — was about containing the Highlands’ physical bounds, with a loyal Presbyterian presence, as the first step towards enlightening the people within them. The Society’s approach to civilising the Highland’s physical space via removal of the vague and mysterious also extended to the Highland’s spiritual and intellectual spaces, two other characteristics that for the SSPCK most defined the nation. The next chapter explores those religious practices in the Highlands which in the SSPCK’s eyes needed to be demystified, in spaces that they saw as having suffered spiritually due to both Catholic and Episcopalian occupation.

Chapter Three

Attitudes towards Gaelic Popular Belief:

demystifying religions in the Highlands

For the SSPCK, debunking superstition in the Highlands went hand in hand with
demystifying their physical boundaries. Toward the close of the seventeenth century
there was a surge of interest in the supernatural beliefs of the Highlands and Western
Isles of Scotland, as the new scientific approach to exploration of the physical world
also extended to that of the spiritual. Elements such as fairy belief, witchcraft and
pagan ritual came under scrutiny, as well as the specifically Highland phenomenon of
second sight, the “gift” of visions that allowed the seer to predict the future. Martin’s
work in particular laid bare the extent to which these traditions were still followed in the
Western Highlands and Islands. Other works beginning to emerge, if not yet in print
then at least in manuscript form, also showed a rich tapestry of superstitious popular
belief, and a growing intellectual curiosity towards it. These works’ varied approaches
to the supernatural in the Highlands reflected the different educational and cultural
backgrounds of their authors. One thing they did have in common, however, was an
Episcopalian commentary on what was observed. Their authors’ findings could only
add to the perceptions of Highland backwardness held by Lowland members of the
General Assembly. While the rest of Great Britain, for example, was confident that
belief in witchcraft had been dispelled, Martin’s Description showed that in the
Highlands there was still evidence to the contrary. The need of the General Assembly
and the SSPCK to rectify such beliefs was not only a question of modern progress, but
also in keeping with Calvinist rejection of both awe of the supernatural by the simple
masses and “scientific” pursuit thereof by educated Episcopalians. While much of the practices revealed were condemned by Presbyterians, perhaps their greatest criticism was directed at those practices that intermingled with Christian ritual to create what was for them an unacceptable heterodoxy, and those that attributed language with unwarranted supernatural power.

From the sixteenth-century, the rise of lawyers and ministers from outside the community, and a new elite growing ever more distant from it, provided conditions conducive to a need by the “godly state” to assert itself amongst those communities that did not appear to conform to its own mores.¹ In this climate ungodly crimes such as witchcraft were to be dealt with harshly. Indeed, 1697 not only saw the trial of twenty-five witches of Bargarran in Renfrewshire, but also the hanging of Thomas Aikenhead for blasphemy.² Now, in the early eighteenth century, lawyers and ministers came together under the banner of the SSPCK and once again cast a judgemental eye over the behaviour and beliefs of a large community of which they were clearly not a part — the Highlands. For several reasons, however, they were not about to resort to witch trials to impose their own version of the “true religion”. There was an increased awareness of the need for religious tolerance, or at least the appearance thereof, now that Presbyterian Scotland and Anglican England were joined by Union. Yet the SSPCK was very much about religious conformity. The very use of the Shorter and Longer Catechisms as the

central focus of the Society’s curriculum, with their set answers to set theological questions, shows that it saw little room for variation in beliefs.

Martin provides a glimpse of the extent to which such variations could exist in the Highlands, when he gives three examples of how a seer could be cured of the second sight, each very different from the others in delivery, and appealing to a different spiritual mindset. The first is a case involving the administering of Holy Water, albeit in a somewhat unorthodox fashion. A woman wishing to cure her maid of visions brought her along to a baptism, “and after Baptism before the Minister had concluded the last Prayer, she put her hand in the Basin, took up as much Water as she could, and threw it on the Maid’s Face; at which strange Action the Minister and the Congregation were equally surprised.” This example would be more likely to appeal to Martin’s Catholic readers. Indeed, the Protestant Martin is uncomfortable with the incident, suspecting some devilry at work: “I think it to have been one of Satan’s Devices, to make credulous People have an esteem for Holy Water.” The second example is that of a man who was cured of the sight by means of herbs sewn into the neck of his coat. This appears to be a traditional folk remedy that relies on the powers of natural “magic” and which, without reference to God or science, would perhaps have been the least satisfying to the educated mind. Even Martin, although totally accepting of the second sight, sought confirmation through closer examination of the collar, only to be denied it by the former seer. The third case was that of a young girl, troubled by the recurring vision of her own image, who was eventually cured through religious instruction, the

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3 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 315.
4 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 315.
5 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 334.
local minister recommending that her parents teach her the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord’s Prayer.\textsuperscript{6} This is the style of remedy prescribed by the SSPCK for the whole of the Highlands, to be encouraged as a cure for all manner of “superstition”, while the other two mentalities were to be discredited. Indeed the Society saw little difference between the two.

The General Assembly first made enquiry into paganism in the Highlands in 1706, when it recommended that its Commission “inquire into the state of the Highlands and Islands, how they are planted with ministers, and of the remaining Paganish customs among them, and of the increase of Popery.”\textsuperscript{7} Interestingly, this same recommendation links these nonconformist Highland beliefs with the questions of “how they are provided with schools, what places most need help in these matters, and what encouragement these may expect who incline o enter into a society for erecting and maintaining charity schools, for educating poor and indigent children.”\textsuperscript{8} Specific requests that the Commission carry out the 1706 instructions regarding Pagan beliefs (alongside those regarding the progress of libraries, Irish Bibles, psalm-books and catechisms) were repeatedly made each year until 1710. Coincidently, this was the year that the SSPCK began making regular representations to the General Assembly on its progress into the Highlands.

Martin maintained that heathenism had long since been abandoned by the inhabitants of the Western Isles, however, many of the beliefs and practices that he described were

\textsuperscript{6} Martin, \textit{Description of the Western Islands}, 316.


evidence to the contrary. When he wrote his *Description* it had only been thirty-two years since ministers from Lewis had managed, after several years’ work, to persuade the parishioners of St Mulvay’s on the island of Siant to stop making offerings of ale to the local sea-God, Shony.⁹ Martin also tells of calves, the *Corky-fyre*, which the locals on Skye believed were fathered by “a wild Bull, that comes from the Sea or fresh Lakes”.¹⁰ In South Uist, the inhabitants near the valley of Glenslyte still refused to enter with their cattle for pasture unless they first resigned themselves to the protection of “the great Men” who haunted the valley, for fear that they would otherwise send them mad.¹¹ Many of these rituals and beliefs are the remnants of a pre-Christian tradition, co-existing with post-Reformation ideas. Martin’s account of the Western Isles is saturated with details of standing stones, cairns and temple ruins. He gave several examples where the “ignorant Vulgar” still believed that certain stones were actually men trapped in an enchantment, or that a hill was the resting place of an infant giant, or an ancient cairn the home of an “Amazon” warrior.¹²

Examples given by Martin suggest that encounters with the supernatural were not as common as they used to be in the Highlands; a phenomenon often linked with encroaching Christianity. “There were spirits . . . that appear’d in the shape of Women, Horses, Swine, Cats, and some like fiery Balls, which follow Men in the Fields, but there has been but few instances of these for forty Years past.”¹³ This is in keeping with

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⁹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 28-29.

¹⁰ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 157.

¹¹ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 85-86.

¹² Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 9, 59; Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 22-23.

¹³ Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 334.
Thomas’s observation that faerie accounts are always given as an experience from the past. Similarly, the household spirit, Browny, had been “seen but rarely” for the last twenty or thirty years, when Martin was writing. Tales of Browny’s disappearance often tied in with the rise of Christian practices. There was the account from a minister of a man who was warned by an old kinswoman “that Browny was much displeas’d at his reading in that Book [the Bible]”, and would no longer serve him unless he gave it up. Sure enough, as was the case with a “Lady in Unst, who refus’d to give Sacrifice to Browny”, his next two brewings of ale failed, but the third “prov’d good, and Browny got no more Sacrifice from him”. Hence the Highlanders were themselves aware that old religion had given way to the new, and had found over time their own expressions to represent this change. In this way the encounter and transition between Pagan and Christian became folklore in itself. Similar development can be seen in the traditions that negotiated the Gaelic mythical heroes the Fianna into the Christian world. One well known tale that survives in the sixteenth century Book of the Dean of Lismore, relates the meeting of St Patrick and Ossian, the last of the Fianna and their bard. Patrick’s attempt at conversion is not successful, but Ossian is willing to keep his company, singing songs celebrating his lost warrior band and the life that used to be. Hence while Patrick went about bringing Christianity to Ireland, the echo of the pagan past could always be heard in the background. Such folklore revealed a culture


15 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 334.

16 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 391-392.

17 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 392.
unwilling to completely let go of its Pagan past, even centuries on, but rather continuing its existence by incorporating it into the life of the new religion.

Highland Christianity, however, had perhaps never been conventional. The Highlanders’ first taste of Christianity came not from the Church of Rome, but that of Iona, established in 563 by the Irish exile Columkil, literally “dove of the church”, also known as Columba. From the start this Celtic Church, which thrived in the early medieval kingdoms of northern Britain, had brought with it unaccredited traditions that had seeped into Ireland over time, such as a more liberal and egalitarian view of women participating in the monastic community. Celtic Christianity had also accommodated concepts which to the Roman Church were heretical, the most persistent being Pelagianism. Principal beliefs of Pelagius and his disciples had denied the existence of original sin or grace, and consequently regarded individuals as responsible for their own sins and choices of redemption. Markale attributes such individualistic features of Celtic Christianity as having made it more compatible with druidic cultures, and hence more successful than the Roman tradition, especially in townless, sparsely populated areas. Likewise, the wilds of the Highlands would have well suited the Celtic Christian sense of ascetic *peregrinatio*, of pilgrimage as a means of seeking personal perfection.

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19 Markale, *Celts*, 139, 142.

However compatible Celtic Christianity may or may not have been with Highland culture, repeated attempts over the centuries to either correct or expel it completely continually failed. Although its advocates were defeated at the Synod of Whitby in 664, elements of the Celtic Church, especially their ascetic clerics, the culdee, continued to survive in the north of Britain, including the far reaches of the Highlands.\textsuperscript{21} 
Ecclesiastical reform in the twelfth century is thought to have signalled the definitive end to Celtic Christianity in Scotland, when Kings Alexander and David set out to intensify Roman Catholic authority, initiated by their Anglo-Saxon mother St Margaret queen of Scotland.\textsuperscript{22} Yet, even at the end of the seventeenth century, six miles radius from Iona was still considered sanctuary, because of its link to St Columba.\textsuperscript{23} Also, while the physical and structural trappings of the Celtic Church may have fallen away, less visible doctrinal elements such as Pelagianism continued to resurface. Indeed, only seventy years after David I’s death the Roman Catholic church was once again condemning the teachings of Pelagius.\textsuperscript{24} Many of the saints whom the Highlanders and Islanders revered in the early eighteenth century were a legacy of the Iona tradition. There were, of course, such icons as Mary and St Michael, who had been esteemed by both Roman and Celtic traditions. However, there were also home-grown favourites such as the popular St Columba and his disciple St Aidan, the founder of Lindisfarne.

\textsuperscript{22} Derek Baker, “‘A Nursery of Saints’: St Margaret of Scotland Reconsidered,” in \textit{Medieval Women}, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 137, 139-140.
\textsuperscript{24} Wessels, \textit{Europe: Was it Ever Really Christian?}, 62.
Although the majority of the Highland inhabitants described by Kirkwood or Martin were Protestant, they still recognised certain saints’ days, “in Saints names unknown in other Languages”. 25 Thursday itself was widely recognised as belonging to St Columba and thence, like Friday, Saturday and Sunday (Christ’s, Mary’s and the Lord’s days respectively), safe from fairies. 26

One’s reaction to faerie lore and associated supernatural beliefs, which by Martin’s accounts were obviously still alive and well in the Highlands, depended on one’s background. The Islander Martin saw little harm in examples still to be found of Browny showing a bystander the winning move at a game of Tables, or of libations of milk or ale being poured through the hole of a stone in order to prevent Browny from spoiling the churning or brewing. 27 He was less comfortable, however, with reports of parties of men actively seeking out audience with spirits in order to gain foresight. 28 Like Martin, the Highland born Episcopalian minister Robert Kirk, although educated in Edinburgh, did not doubt the existence of the sith, his manuscript The Secret Common-Wealth . . . of Elves, Faunes and Fairies claiming that such faerie folk were held responsible for incidents of second sight and were not necessarily malevolent. However, another Episcopalian clergyman, the Lowlander James Kirkwood himself, the impetus behind the SSPCK, classed any desired interaction with the supernatural as no different than a compact with the devil, in his Collection of Highland Rites and

25 Kirkwood, Highland Rites and Customes, 17.


27 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 320, 391.

28 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 110-113.
Kirk and Kirkwood’s works were not published until much later, unlike Martin’s, although copies of their manuscripts were evidently in circulation amongst friends and intellectual associates. J.L. Campbell was convinced that Kirkwood wrote the “3 sheets of the customs and Rites of the Highlands” which Edward Lhuyd claimed to have in his possession in 1699, courtesy of Robert Boyle. In the mean time, Mrs Stillingfleet, whose husband the Bishop of Worcester had debated the nature of second sight with Kirk over several dinners, had been given a copy of Kirk’s The Secret Common-Wealth not long after his death in 1692, his theories on the relationship between the sith and second sight of particular interest to the Stillingfleets ever since the birth of their seventh son of a seventh son, with all its supernatural connotations.

These men were conscious that they were writing in a new age of scientific endeavour. Martin made the observation in his Preface that with the “great Change in the Humour of the World” the writing of “Natural and Experimental Philosophy has been much improved.” Hence Kirk backed his arguments not by mere rumours or old wives tales, but with observations that he himself had made regarding his own parishioners at Aberfoyle. He also claimed that some of his informants were themselves seers. The quantity of occurrences registered was an important factor in the proof of their existence. Equally, the number of accurate predictions was evidence of the benevolent nature of those sith, or “co-walkers”, who attached themselves to individual humans.

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29 Kirkwood, Highland Rites and Customes, 36.

30 J.L. Campbell, introduction to Highland Rites and Customes, 1.

31 Stewart Sanderson (ed.), commentary on The Secret Common-Wealth, 16.

32 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, vii.

These empirical methods of “scientific” investigation were shared by Kirkwood and Martin, hence the large number of examples of second sight provided by Martin as evidence. The credibility of their sources, usually ministers or educated lairds, was also considered proof of the verity of accounts given. At the same time, however, it was important for men like Kirk to maintain that these were spiritual forces under investigation. Their writings were part of a line of enquiry sparked by Boyle in direct response to sadducism, the denial of a supernatural world, that had been put forward by the atheist “wits” of London.  

The approach of Episcopalians such as Kirk and Boyle in disputing the claims of Sadducees and atheists was somewhat different to that of the Presbyterian General Assembly. For the General Assembly, both the superstitious beliefs of the peasantry and the atheistic suppositions of intellectuals were degrees of religious error, fallen from the true path. It was important, however, to find a balance between the godless who ridiculed anyone in awe of the spiritual and those who were too readily accepting of it. For the God-fearing Presbyterian, there was a fine line between devotion and superstition. While pagan-based folk belief was to be dispelled, and for that matter any theology lacking in scriptural foundation, proper awe for the Lord was still to be encouraged. Parishioners of all ranks were expected to “forbear bowing, and other expressions of civil respect, and entertaining one another with discourses, while divine worship is performing, and holy ordinances are dispensing,” “considering the great reverence and holy fear that is owing to the infinitely glorious and holy God by his

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rational creatures.” At the same time, however, the “private use” of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, by the sick or housebound, was condemned in order to discourage situations where “in pretended cases of necessity, the superstitious opinion is nourished that they are necessary to salvation, not only as commanded duties, but as means without which salvation cannot be attained.” The answer to supernatural encounters was prayer and fasting. They were certainly not to be promoted, endorsed or understood, no matter how benevolent some might consider them, or how “scientifically” they addressed them. “Proof” of the spiritual lay only in man’s understanding of God through His Word.

Both atheism and idolatry could be brought to the attention of the local kirk-session, and were considered serious enough to warrant transferral to the presbytery for correction. However, in order to prevent rather than simply cure such error, the solution was to provide the correct version of religion through the supply and teaching of doctrinal texts; hence the General Assembly’s interest in libraries, Irish Bibles, catechisms and schools for the Highlands. The SSPCK was designed to supply such a service. Hence in 1711, instead of the General Assembly making the usual request that its Commission follow the 1706 directive “to use all means in their power for extirpating idolatrous and superstitious practices,” it asked that they do so only “in so far as what is therein appointed is not already done.” Like the Episcopalian SPCK in England, the General

37 Larner, Witchcraft and Religion, 138; Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, 593.
Assembly saw knowledge of the Gospel as a weapon against any attempts by atheists to sway the masses to godlessness. Indeed, Thomas Bray had identified this as one of the primary motivations behind the English charity schools. In their campaign against atheism, however, the Presbyterians do not appear to have adopted that strategy favoured by Episcopalians such as Boyle and his associates of investigating popular belief in the hope of finding evidence to counteract the arguments of the non-believers.

The Episcopalians’ “research” was specifically interested in “second sight” as proof of a benevolent spirit world and the existence of God. According to Hunter, the second sight was “discovered” by non-Highlanders in the late 1670s. Enquiry into the phenomenon was initially encouraged by Boyle, a member of the Royal Society, who had been intrigued by accounts given by Lord Tarbat of his years in the Highlands during the Interregnum. As part of a continuing campaign against atheism, it is no surprise that the cause to prove the existence of a spiritual world, through the evidence of second sight and other such paranormal phenomena, was taken up by clergymen such as Kirkwood and Kirk. Indeed, Kirk regarded the overall benevolent qualities of second sight as proof in itself of a higher design:

Sinc the things seen by the Seers are Real Entities, the presages and predictions found true, But a few endued with this sight, and those not of bad lives, or addictd to malefices; the true solution of the phaenomenon seems rather to be, The courteous endeavours of our fellow creatures in the invisible world to convince us (in opposition to Sadducees, Socinians and Atheists) of a Dietie, of Spirits; of a possible and harmless method of correspondence betwixt men and them, even in this Lyfe; of their operations for our Caution and Warning; of the orders, and degrees of Angels . . . A knowledge (belike reserved for these last

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Atheistic Ages, Wherin the profanity of mens lives, hath debauched and Blinded their understandings, as to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets.\textsuperscript{42}

The many “quietly unnerving” accounts of second sight also had the advantage of being less sensational, and therefore more believable, than stories of witchcraft, and hence more likely to combat atheism.\textsuperscript{43}

Indeed growing interest in scientific investigation may partly explain declining interest in the “threat” of witchcraft in Scotland. There was a sense that continued belief in such phenomena was stuff of the peasantry, beneath the consideration of intellectual classes. In England, Addison’s friend Sir Roger informed him that the local crone Moll White “had been often brought before him for making Children spit Pins, and giving Maids the Night-Mare; and that the Country People would be tossing her into a Pond and trying Experiments with her every Day, if it was not for him and his Chaplain.”\textsuperscript{44} There is also the argument that the Scots were desirous of the good opinion of the English, but Wasser suggests that such sensibilities towards the “auld enemy” were easily overcome.\textsuperscript{45} Scotland’s reputation for persecuting witches, especially with regard to the scale of the hunts, was indeed yet another point where the English felt superior. On dispatch from England in the 1730s, Edward Burt’s early letters still betray preconceived ideas of the barbarity of the Highlands. He took pride in the fact “that the Notion of Witches is pretty well worn out among People of any tolerable Sense and Education in England; but here [in Scotland] it remains even among some that sit

\textsuperscript{42} Kirk, \textit{The Secret Common-Wealth}, 82-83.

\textsuperscript{43} Hunter, “Discovery of Second Sight,” 50-51.

\textsuperscript{44} Joseph Addison, \textit{The Spectator} 117 (Saturday, 14 July 1711).

\textsuperscript{45} Wasser, “The western witch-hunt of 1697-1700,” 147.
judicially”. Addison’s commentary on the subject reflects the opinion of his fellow English intellectuals, sceptical of superstition but at the same time not ready to admit to sadducism:

In short, when I consider the Question, whether there are such Persons in the World as those we call Witches? my Mind is divided between the two opposite Opinions; or rather (to speak my Thoughts freely) I believe in general that there is, and has been such a thing as Witch-craft; but at the same time can give no Credit to any particular Instance of it.  

However, attitudes towards witchcraft in Scotland itself were also changing. The last official witch trials in Fife in 1704-1705, with all of the accused escaping death but for one who was lynched by a dissatisfied mob, are an example of a growing trend amongst the legal profession, not necessarily of doubts in the existence of witches but at least in the ability of the courts to prove that someone was actually a witch, for example, through evidence of a pact with the Devil. The results of these trials also show a growing lack of interest from the point of view of central government, while localised beliefs were still strong. Approaches to witchcraft were not just affected by the scientific revolution. Goodare sees a direct link between witch-hunts and the rise of the “godly state”: “When the state began to stop persecuting people for having the wrong version of Christian religion, it lost the imperative need to persecute witches.” The General Assembly certainly makes no mention of witchcraft after 1707, although this


47 Addison, Spectator 117.

48 Goodare, introduction, 11; Stuart Macdonald, “In search of the Devil in Fife witchcraft cases, 1560-1705,” in The Scottish witch-hunt in context, 44.

49 Goodare, introduction, 12.
last entry on the subject does list it as a serious scandal, along with the likes of adultery, murder, charming and heresy, dangerous enough to warrant that it be dealt with at presbytery rather than kirk session level. In any case, when it came to the Highlands it was apparent that any focus on witchcraft in order to bring about desired change would have been aiming at the wrong target.

In its prime, witch-hunting had been a predominantly Lowland affair. Highlanders tended to blame the *sith* rather than witches for any misfortunes. Even in Lowland cases, the accused’s descriptions of their meetings with the supposed Devil smacked more of faerie lore than traditional diabolical encounters — with dancing and piping and a central figure with an aversion to certain metals — but were interpreted as devilry by the authorities. While Martin and Kirk rarely mention witchcraft by name, there is still a fair degree of what could be considered witchlike behaviour going on in their works. Martin mentions a doctor more confident in his own herbal remedies than officially endorsed medicines, whose success rate was such that some accused him of having a “compact with the Devil”. He also mentions various charms and rituals used by the Islanders to heal the sick, sway the heart, and improve the weather. Both Martin and Kirk describe women who have the ability to steal away the milk essence of their neighbours’ cows or wet nurses. Even so, Burt’s later letters complained to his correspondent in the South that Martin’s *Description* “mentions only two or three slight

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51 Goodare, introduction, 3.
52 Macdonald, “In search of the Devil,” 46-47.
53 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 198-199.
Suspicions of *Witchcraft*, but not one Fact of that Nature throughout his whole Book”, as opposed to thirty-six pages on second sight.\(^{55}\)

One aspect of the second sight, which interested Boyle and his Lowland and English associates, was the idea that the phenomenon was peculiar to the Highlands. This was based on several accounts of Highland seers who had immigrated to America and lost the sight. Further accounts of these men and women retrieving it upon their return to Scotland seemed to confirm the theory.\(^{56}\) Lord Tarbat speculated that there was something unique about the Highlands, “a quality in the eyes of some people in those parts, concurring with a quality in the air also”.\(^{57}\) Again this appears to be a Lowland insistence on Highland difference. Kirk refuted the claim. His theory of a fellow faerie realm could not support the idea that such creatures were confined to the geographical boundaries that separated the North and West of Scotland from the rest of the world.\(^{58}\) The opening lines of his essay make the point that the Lowlands have their own version of supernatural spirits, “heirtofor going under the names of Elves. Faunes. and Fairies. or the like, among the Low-Countrey Scots.”\(^{59}\) Martin also disagreed with the idea of a supernatural power exclusive to his homeland. He quotes several examples of prescience in Wales, Holland and the Isle of Man, to disprove this Lowland concept of

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Highland quaintness.\textsuperscript{60} It was perhaps the idea of the virtues of the primitive over the civilised, that fed this concept of a specifically highland proof of the supernatural. However, that which attracted Episcopalian interest in the Highlands as “evidence” of the spiritual rather appears to have attracted Presbyterians as evidence of the ungodly.

Hence attempts by Episcopalian intellectuals to prove the existence of a spirit world were something of a two-edged sword for the subjects of their investigations. Like Martin, Kirk saw a connection between lack of Christian knowledge and the presence of the lower sort of \textit{sith} known as brownies, who “of old befor the Gospel dispell’d paganism, and in som Barbarous places as yett, enter houses after all are at rest, and set the kitchins in order, cleansing all the vessells.”\textsuperscript{61} However, any proof of a belief in these supernatural beings, whether it was receding or not, raised serious doubts concerning the virtue of the humans who interacted with them, whether willingly or otherwise. The ungodliness of its people was occasionally held to be the cause of calamities that befell Scotland at the turn of the century. One poem blamed the country’s failed endeavours on the profanity of Scots men and women and their neglect of the Presbyterian faith.\textsuperscript{62} Similarly, the author of a broadside circulating in 1700 linked a severe fire in Edinburgh that year with the Darien disaster, regarding it as punishment for Scotland’s vanity and greed for earthly goods, of which “Jamaica lately

\textsuperscript{60} Martin, \textit{Description of the Western Islands}, 312-313.

\textsuperscript{61} Kirk, \textit{The Secret Common-Wealth}, 50.

was a dreadful scheme”. What punishment, then, for the ungodly act of fraternising with spirits?

Therefore it was important for Kirk to establish that these Highland spirits were not necessarily diabolical, and that human interaction with the *sith* in the form of second sight should not be confused with witchcraft. He argued that there were “intelligent Studious Spirits” and that the *sith* were referred to by Highlanders as “the good people”, although admitting that this was “to prevent the dint of their ill attempts: for the Irish use to bless all they fear harme of.” Kirk also identified the majority of those gifted with the sight as men (although Martin gives examples of female seers), thus placing them outside the traditionally female realm of witches; and argued that:

> yet this Sight, falling to som persons by accident, and it being connatural to others from their Birth, the derivation of it cannot aways be Wicked. A too great Curiositie indeed, to acquire an unnecessary art, may be blameworthy; But diverse of that Secret Common-Wealth may by permission discover themselves as innocently to us who are in another State, as some of us men do to Fishes which are in another Element.

This logic is not unlike that of a sermon in 1697 which distinguished between an accidental act of Devilry and one sprung from a compact with the Devil: “in a company of witches when a person falls among them acidentally and is surprized and they say ‘up

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and away’ or ‘mount & flee’ and he saes that too and he flies with the rest . . . , this person is not a witch.”

Many educated non-Highlanders would have found these explanations unsatisfactory, either due to scepticism of the existence of such creatures at all, or due to the traditional view that no such beings could possibly be benign. There were elements of Kirk’s own description of the *sith* that would have confirmed to Lowlanders and the English that the spirits in question were in fact demons. They were “Subterranean (and for the most part) Invisible people”, with “bodies of congealed air” who “enter in anie Cranie or cleft of the Earth . . . to their ordinary dwellings”, all of which were phrases that would have been just as much at home in demonologies from Agrippa to Aquinas to the *Malleus maleficarum*. Kirk even stated that they were “of a midle nature betwixt man and Angell (as were daemons thought to be of old).”

Episcopalian endeavours to prove the spiritual may also have brought into question the faith of the investigators themselves, viewed by some as at best nothing more than Episcopalian superstition, at worst treading dangerously towards heresy. Any exercise of providing proof of the spiritual brought into question the power of faith alone in delivering salvation. Indeed, a scientific approach might lead down the path to Deism, the belief that understanding of God could only be achieved through reason and

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observation of nature, and not through revelations, miracles or an unwavering belief in the truth of the Scriptures. Ironically, the Deists’ belief in “asserting that there must be a mathematical evidence for each purpose, before we can be obliged to assent to any proposition thereanent” was one of the tenets that brought them dangerously close to Atheism in the eyes of the General Assembly.\(^6\) Alternatively, the subject matter of the Episcopalian writers’ scientific explorations — second sight, the *sith*, charms — might encourage debate on mysticism, at a time when the General Assembly was already at pains to combat the “dangerous, impious, blasphemous and damnable errors” of Bourignianism, with its denial of original sin and predestination, and its assertion of man’s own ability to find unity with God and attain perfection in this life, by way of “some infinite quality” within.\(^7\) Indeed, according to Lenman, Episcopalians in the north-east of Scotland in particular were influenced by quietism.\(^7\) Those ministers who openly extolled the virtues of this mysticism ran the risk of being deposed, as was the case with Dr George Garden when he published *An Apology for M. Antonia Bourignon*.\(^7\)

These occasional displays of resistance from Episcopalians hint at another reason why they were attracted to stories of second sight. Second sight in the Highlands had political implications to be considered. Feibel has shown how reports of second sight


\(^7\) Lenman, *Jacobite Risings in Britain*, 131.

were often used as a means of commenting on political unrest.\textsuperscript{73} One of the many anecdotes of second sight provided by Martin was just such an account. It told of a vision that he himself had heard of in September 1688, where a stranger “in a red Coat lin’d with blue” was seen “kissing a comely Maid in the Village where the Seer dwelt” in the isle of Eigg.\textsuperscript{74} The seer had concluded that the stranger either “would certainly debauch or marry” the woman. Due to the lack of visits by strangers to Eigg, the vision had been dismissed by all and sundry, until 1690, when 600 Williamite troops under the command of a Major Ferguson raped and pillaged their way through any of the Western Isles suspected of harbouring Jacobite sympathisers. Sure enough, during their attack on Eigg, “the Maid above mention’d being very handsom, was then forcibly carried on board one of the Vessels, by some of the Soldiers, where she was kept above twenty four Hours, and ravish’d, and brutishly robb’d at the same time of her fine Head of Hair.”\textsuperscript{75} In his account, Martin quietly implied not only the innocence of the young woman — who was “since married in the Isle, and in good Reputation; her Misfortune being pitied, and not reckon’d her Crime” — but also the innocence of the Eigg community in general, and the injustice of Williamite overreactions such as Ferguson’s:

and perhaps the small Isle of Egg had never been regarded, tho some of the Inhabitants had been at the Battle of Kelicranky, but by a mere Accident, . . . which was this: A Boat’s Crew of the Isle of Egg, happen’d to be in the Isle of Skie, and kill’d one of Major Ferguson’s Soldiers there; upon notice of which the Major directed his Course to the Isle of Egg, where he was sufficiently reveng’d of the Natives.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} Feibel, “Highland Histories,” 62.

\textsuperscript{74} Martin, \textit{Description of the Western Islands}, 331.

\textsuperscript{75} Martin, \textit{Description of the Western Islands}, 332.

\textsuperscript{76} Martin, \textit{Description of the Western Islands}, 332.
Martin also noted that the same Ferguson had since been promoted to colonel and was still serving under Anne as he wrote.

When connected with such examples of outsider oppression, it was perhaps no coincidence that most investigations into the phenomenon of second sight were made by non-jurors. The recollection of a vision that had, in hindsight, accurately predicted a contentious event opened the way to allude to that which might otherwise be off limits, through discussion of the accuracy of the prophecy said to have been fulfilled by that event. Proof of second sight’s accuracy consequently validated any new predictions of what was yet to come. In this way second sight joined the ranks of a long tradition of prophecy as the voice of opposition. Hence the argument as to whether or not second sight was exclusive to the Highlands may also be seen as implicitly a debate on whether political resistance from below was confined to the Highlands.

Resistance to the Establishment was, of course, not confined to the Highlands, or the Episcopalians. At its very first meeting after being endorsed by William and Mary, the General Assembly took back into the fold three leading Lowland covenanting ministers — Thomas Lining, Alexander Shield and William Boyd — who in their shorter address to the Assembly had agreed to “equally oppose schism and defection.” The reading of their larger address was refused on the grounds that it contained “several peremptory and gross mistakes, unseasonable and impracticable proposals, and uncharitable and

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77 Feibel, “Highland Histories,” 60.


injurious reflections, tending rather to kindle contentions than to compose divisions.”80

However, this was not the last that the General Assembly heard from the Cameronian movement in the Lowlands, which had split from the main Kirk, opposed to the Assembly’s endorsement of the current Crown on the grounds that it was a betrayal of the Covenant. In 1704, a particularly busy year for the General Assembly in terms of Acts ensuring that the Presbyterian faith remained uncorrupted and the preaching thereof remained uniform, an “Act against Schism and Disorders and anent Mr John M’Millan and Mr John Hepburn” specifically targeted leaders of these fundamentalist Covenanters. Other matters put to the General Assembly that year included a “Recommendation against Protestants Marrying with Papists” and Acts “anent Commissioners to the General Assembly, and their Subscribing the Confession of Faith”, and “anent Preaching or Disseminating Erroneous Doctrine”.

The spread of “erroneous doctrine” was a particular concern. From the time of the Presbyterian Kirk’s re-establishment, the General Assembly was constantly en garde to ensure that its own remained the dominant, incorruptible faith in Scotland, and control of doctrine was essential to this. However, the Assembly’s constant reiteration on the importance of purity of doctrine belies continued efforts to resist or challenge that doctrine. In 1700 the General Assembly passed an Act to ensure that “all schoolmasters, chaplains, governors, and pedagogues, of youth within [all presbyteries’] respective bounds” were obliged “to subscribe the Confession of Faith of [the Presbyterian] Church as the confession of their faith.”81 Continued teaching contrary to the Protestant Reformed religion could end in the teacher’s dismissal. Ministers and


“ruling elders” were also expected to subscribe to the “correct” Confession of Faith. The 1707 “Act anent Ministers publishing of Books, &c.” sought to stamp out anything “contrary to the doctrine, worship, discipline, or government, or prejudicial to the rights, privileges, or unity of this Church.”

Moves to collect and prepare scriptural songs for public use were accompanied by instructions for Presbyteries to buy up any printed copies to be checked against the approved version “both as to the translation and metre, keeping always to the original text.”[my emphasis] Despite these efforts, the General Assembly found itself repeatedly addressing “innovations” and “irregularities” in the worship of God. By 1710 the Assembly ruled that “purity of doctrine” was at risk because “in some places, some expressions [were] used, and opinions as to some points of religion vented, which [were] not agreeable to [their] Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and the known sentiments of the greatest lights and most famous Gospel ministers wherewith [their] Church [had] been blessed.”

It sought to curb any such free thinking by insisting that none of the Kirk’s ministers or members “presume to print or disperse in writing any Catechism” without the approval of their presbytery and the General Assembly’s Commission.

The culprits of many of these irregularities were, on the surface, often nameless. In 1696 the Assembly warned against “vagrant unfixed ministers, many of whom [were] lying under ecclesiastical censure.” Those who promoted “innovations” in “public Assemblies” were described in 1707 simply as “persons of known disaffection to the

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present Establishment both of Church and State." Yet several Acts imply that the
General Assembly had its suspicions as to whence these deviances might originate.
Often the threat of “error” was linked with “intruders”. This was a general term that
applied to any minister who “[took] upon him[Self] to preach in any vacant
congregation, not within the bounds of his own Presbytery, without an invitation” from
the vacant church’s presbytery itself or a minister within it. The Cameronian,
Hepburn, had had just such a charge laid against him. However, there were also those
ministers “irregularly licensed or Ordained”, who had received “either licence or
ordination from any of the late Prelates, or any others not allowed by the authority of
the Church.” These “late Prelates”, of course, were the Episcopalians.

Despite notions of tolerance encouraged under Union, it appears many Episcopalians
were unwilling to submit to Presbyterian supremacy, and may Presbyterians felt
threatened by Anglican obstinacy. Only a year after Anne’s accession to the throne,
the General Assembly had submitted to her an address in which they complained:

of the disorders of some of the Episcopal clergy, who, with a few of their abettors that have
given as little evidence of their affection to your Majesty’s Government as to the
Established Church, transgress your laws by preaching, though not qualified to your
Majesty’s Government — by despising sentences of deprivation by the Privy Council, and
deposition by Church judicatories — by invading settled churches — by intruding into
vacant churches — and by irregular baptizings and clandestine marriages, and several other
gross abuses; all which tend to the weakening and frustrating the good ends of discipline,

the *increase of licentiousness and irreligion*, and the spread of error and doctrine contrary to our Confession of Faith, ratified in Parliament.\(^9\) [my emphasis]

Similar sentiments were expressed in the General Assembly’s protests against the Bill before Westminster in 1712 “to prevent the disturbing those of the Episcopal Communion in that Part of Great-Britain called Scotland, in the Exercise of their religious Worship, and in the Use of the Liturgy of the Church of England; and for repealing the Act passed in the Parliament of Scotland, entitled, An Act against irregular Baptisms and Marriages”. Fearing the “sad alterations and innovations” that this Toleration Bill might bring to the Church of Scotland, the Assembly maintained the right of Presbyterian ministers and elders to “watch over the flock, and to guard against all usurpers and intruders,” and quoted, amongst others, the 1695 Act of Scottish Parliament — the “Act against intruding into Churches without a legal Call and Admission thereto”.\(^9\)

In such an atmosphere, news of Episcopalians, especially clergymen such as Kirk or Kirkwood, penetrating the Highlands, that same “vacant” space which the General Assembly hoped to plant with the “Reformed Protestant religion”, would not have been received favourably. The impetus behind the General Assembly’s debate on how best to bring “pure religion” to the North and Western Highlands and Islands may well have been the knowledge that many in Highland communities still harboured Episcopalian sentiment. As the previous chapter suggests, it certainly appears to have been a factor in decisions made by the SSPCK, the General Assembly’s main agent when it came to introducing correct doctrine to Highland children. The SSPCK and its supporters


certainly blamed much of the continued presence of animist and pagan beliefs among the Highlanders on the assimilation policies of former and current ministry there. In its propaganda it was particularly critical of the Jesuit “Doctrine of directing the Intention” that allowed “Converts in the East Indies, and China, to give External worship to their Idols, . . . If they had in the mean time an Image of Christ under their Coat, and in their Intention, did direct their Worship thereto”. Yet while the early SSPCK targeted Catholics on paper, in reality the areas rife with examples of these popular superstitions on which it focused actually had little or no Catholic activity. Areas of particular interest, such as the Hebrides and Orkneys as described by Martin, and the glens surrounding Robert Kirk’s parish of Aberfoyle, were actually Protestant, and yet rich in idolatrous and pagan superstitions.

It may be that these choices for schools were simply because, through Presbyterian eyes, these superstitions easily passed as popery. On the other hand, it may be that the General Assembly and its affiliates were dissatisfied with the allowance of such practices to continue by the local Protestant ministers, which we can only assume to be Episcopalians. Robert Kirk was a prime example of an Episcopalian minister tolerating the popular beliefs of his parishioners. However, whether the areas in question were predominantly Episcopalian is difficult to say. Martin is somewhat unhelpful in this regard. He rarely made the distinction between Episcopalian and Presbyterian when describing Protestants in the Western Islands. He does, however, inadvertently hint that they are Episcopalian, when throughout his Description he continually refers to local or neighbouring ministers either as participants in the many anecdotes he provides or as

92 Anonymous, Proposals concerning the propagating of Christian Knowledge, in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and Forraign Parts of the World (Edinburgh, 1707), 2.
witnesses to them, yet at the same time the General Assembly was constantly debating how to fill all these “vacant” parishes to the North and West. On occasions when Martin did refer to communities as being “of the Reform’d Religion” it appears to have been a term used loosely by him to describe anyone other than Roman Catholics. He described the St Kildans as such, however, the Presbyterian catechist Buchan had serious doubts “as for what kind of a reformed religion, and what kind of primitive Christian temper Mr Martin means”, even going so far as to brand what Martin considered “primitive christian” as rather “antichristian temper”. 93 Hence the state of Christian beliefs, or lack thereof, amongst clansfolk in areas where one can assume Episcopalians continued to offer ministry was as much of a concern as their possible Jacobite sentiments, if not more so.

Hirta, the setting for the first of the SSPCK schools, provided clear evidence of this. With Roderick’s “defeat” by the minister Campbell, and with “the Light of the Gospel restored to them, as it was at first delivered to their Ancestors by the first Christian Monks,” the island was allowed to return to life as it had been before. 94 This meant they would also no doubt continue their beliefs that the cuckoo was the harbinger of death, that the Sun was “the eye of God”, and that spirits inhabited the local rocks and hills, just to name a few. Their faith would continue to be “Protestant”, so long as the Steward was Protestant, just like so many other island communities mentioned by Martin, whose faith depended on the preference of the proprietor of their lands, usually with one family or individual prepared to defy the status quo. Roderick’s experiment had shown how easy it was for one of their own to sway the beliefs of the peasantry

93 Buchan, Description of Saint Kilda, 42, 48-49.

94 Martin, Late Voyage to St Kilda, 156.
towards whatever they were told was “true” Christianity; that they simply took whatever faith was prescribed to them by one they assumed had authority, while continuing to hold dear their animist beliefs. Larner suggested that the assimilation of their animist beliefs was one of two essential steps to be taken in order to successfully impose an organised religion on the peasantry. 95 Yet the Presbyterian Kirk, due to its constant vigilance against innovation, rejected any form of assimilation, and thereby ran the risk of being rejected itself by the Highland communities, as evidenced by Buchan’s long and somewhat fruitless struggle with the natives of Hirta.

The second essential ingredient for conversion, as identified by Larner, is constant and vivid instruction. 96 Often this could not be maintained in the Highlands by any denomination, as Christian pastoral zeal for the region waxed and waned, often dependant on the political climate of the Lowlands. When Irish missionaries arrived in the seventeenth century as part of the Propaganda Fide, an assertive Catholic presence had not been seen in the Highlands since the Middle Ages. The Reformation had made some progress into the Highlands, however, the power struggle between Prelacy and Presbytery had not been conducive to steady, uninterrupted instruction, especially in remote or isolated areas, where the ministers’ efforts were indeed hindered by distance and terrain.

Nowhere was the importance of vigilance more evident than the islands of Hirta, where ministerial neglect had left the parishioners and their religious practices open to abuse. Martin’s account of the false prophet Roderick showed how superficial any

95 Larner, Witchcraft and Religion, 136.

96 Larner, Witchcraft and Religion, 136.
manifestations of Christian faith could be in the Western Islands, as he managed to dominate their Christianity with his own rituals into in only a matter of years. The only thing Roderick could not persuade the islanders of Hirta to do, was to alter the burial of their dead so that their faces were turned to the south instead of the east. With its obvious reference to the rising Sun, this tradition was perhaps one of deep-rooted pre-Christian origins. As a rite that was intrinsically linked to life in the hereafter, people had been and continued to be unwilling to alter it. However, those religious rituals successfully introduced by Roderick, in the minds of the inhabitants, were about their well being in the present life. The secret hymn administered to the women was supposed to be a protection against death during child-birth. Roderick’s “commandments” were obeyed in order to avoid harsh penance such as standing in cold water “during his pleasure” and pouring cold water over the head of any other penitent present; or perhaps an even worse penance of shunning from “the Society of his Fraternity” which appears to have been most of the Island community. 97 When the islanders gradually began to realise that no calamity would befall them for disobeying Roderick’s laws or for refusing to pay his fines, they began to question the need to follow Roderick’s orders. 98 After all, they had willingly complied with his doctrines in the first place only because they were under the impression that it would not upset the status quo of their “Laws of Neighbourhood.” 99

However, even in areas not as neglected as Hirta there was evidence of unchecked and corrupted ritual. The Catholic Church had partly achieved assimilation by “directing

97 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 139-140.

98 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 150-151.

99 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 156.
the intention” in Scotland with an emphasis on converting sacred space, hence the prolific number of early churches erected next to ancient wells, or the presence of a church right by the spot where the inhabitants happened to make their offerings to a sea-god. Kirkwood observed, “They have wells dedicat to certain Saints to which [sick] people resort as Straphyllan in Perthshire.”¹⁰⁰ Water from the well of St Cowstan’s Church in the Isles of Lewis would never boil meat “tho it be kept on fire a whole day”; while a wooden dish placed on the well of St Andrew at Shadar would tell whether someone would recover or die from distemper, depending on which way it spun.¹⁰¹ Such places of veneration throughout Scotland, with their possibly pagan origins, were not regarded favourably by the Established Church. In Lothian, for example, they insisted upon the destruction of St Traduna’s shrine, where many sought relief from weak eyes.¹⁰² Yet the examples of well lore provided by Kirkwood and Martin were still being practised in post-Reformation Highland communities, identified as Protestant by Martin.¹⁰³

There were many revered places in the Highlands, the awe of which had pagan religious origins. The outer islands themselves held a mystique amongst the Islanders that harkened back to pre-Christian beliefs. The care taken using names on the Flannan islands has been mentioned in the previous chapter. When questioned, one of the Lewis fowlers admitted that they were far more devotional when visiting these than when they

¹⁰⁰ Kirkwood, Highland Rites and Customes, 93.
¹⁰¹ Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 7.
were on their home island, with the explanation that “these remote islands were places of inherent sanctity”. This might especially be true of Hirta, which was the last “safe” port before the emptiness of the Atlantic, and the deceptive currents of the Gulf Stream. Again, this deep devotion might be explained by the connection between such islands and their supposed effect on Highlanders in the hereafter. These small outcrops of rock that drifted up out of the wild seas, floating on the threshold between the familiar and the vast unknown, had an otherworldly quality about them, which featured in Celtic folklore and would not be lost on those who lived by the sea. After all, Tir nan Og, the mythical “land of youth” was a Celtic afterlife in the form of a far off Western island.

This veneration for sacred places, however, had evolved to the point where church buildings themselves became objects to be revered. Although ministers were not always present in the Highlands, Christian ceremonies continued to take place in a church. It would seem that the physical structure itself was deemed a tangible source of sacred or supernatural power, necessary for the words of the sacrament to take effect. Martin gives several examples of the “bowing stone”, a standing stone which marked the spot where the church first came into view. This could easily be a mile away from the chapel itself, but it was still the custom for parishioners to bow to the church at this

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103 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 29.

104 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 19.

105 In the south, the legendary Avalon, as the resting place of the king who would one day return, had held similar promise for the English — Marion Bowman, “Arthur and Bridget in Avalon: Celtic Myth, Vernacular Religion and Contemporary Spirituality in Glastonbury,” *Fabula* 48 (2007): 19.
point, and recite the Lord’s Prayer. At the centre of this physical experience lay the church altar. Whether a minister was present or not, the couples of St Kilda would “ratify” their exchange of vows by swearing with their right hands on the somewhat idolatrous crucifix that always lay on the altar at Christ’s Chapel, described by Martin as “not exceeding a Foot in length, the Body . . . compleatly done, distended, and having a Crown on, all in the Crucified Posture.” He was quick to add that, although greatly revered, it was not worshipped. However, the focal point on the altar was not necessarily a crucifix. At St Columba’s chapel on Fladda-Chuan, a round blue stone “which [was] always moist” sat on the altar, to be washed with water “when any of the Fishermen [were] detain’d in the Isle, by contrary Winds, . . . expecting thereby to procure a favourable Wind.” Like the crucifix at St Kilda, the stone was also used for swearing “decisive oaths”.

Outward displays of veneration towards chapels practised in some areas had a distinctly non Protestant feel to them. For example, at the ruins of St Flannan’s Chapel on the largest of the Flannan Islands, where the visiting Lewis men would first pay homage before beginning the annual fowling, “when they are come within about 20 Paces of the Altar, they all strip themselves of their upper Garments at once; . . . they say the first Prayer, advancing towards the Chappel upon their Knees; the second Prayer is said as they go round the Chappel; the third is said hard by or at the Chappel”. Such unconventional behaviour would have seemed like superstitious popery to the average

106 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 88.
107 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 84.
108 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 166.
109 Martin, *Description of the Western Islands*, 17.
Presbyterian gentleman in Edinburgh. By contrast, the SSPCK encouraged its schoolmasters to use the schoolroom as a place of song and catechism when bad weather or long distance prevented their students from attending church services. The schoolmaster was also to visit local families regularly and catechise to them. Thus any emphasis on the sacred power of a physical space was removed. The Assembly’s apparent concerns about some ministers already serving in the Highlands was surely hardened by the idolatrous behaviour of their parishioners around churches, coupled with a continued pagan belief allowed to coexist with Christianity, as evident from accounts of second sight and means of protection from faerie, such as charms or iron objects.

If the Presbyterian Church found the coexistence of Christian and pre-Christian practices unpalatable, the thought that the two might interact to the point of corrupting Christian sacrament was anathema. The idolisation of church spaces, as mentioned above, was an example of this, especially with regard to those innovations to the altar that embraced popular belief. There was often no minister to perform the marriage ceremony. The lack of a minister for most of the year in St Kilda meant that John Campbell from Harris had to performed fifteen marriages in one day, just over a fortnight after his and Martin’s arrival in 1697.\(^{110}\) However, had he not come at all then the service would just as likely have been celebrated by the steward’s officer on the island. Ministers were also not required for burials. Hence the minister of St Mary’s in Skye, on returning to Chapel Uge after two or three weeks, was not surprised to find that a corpse had been buried in his absence, only that the local seer’s prediction of a

\(^{110}\) Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 90.
corpse had come true. As for the actual burial services themselves, the “hideous lamentation” of women at funerals, the ritual coronach, was considered so “unseemly . . . in a true Christian kirk” that it was forbidden by the Synod of Argyll in 1642.

However, the most common and most serious occurrences of corruption were with regard to the sacrament of baptism. As with marriages and funerals, in many cases there was no minister present. Instead, “the Midwife or any one that [could] read” would dip the child in water, accompanied by “some Form of Words”. Many children would be rebaptised by a minister once they reached their teens. To many Highlanders, baptism was essential, not only for the washing away of sins, but for protection against faerie abduction. Indeed, the latter was often more significant to them. Hence, like the rituals adopted by the islanders of Hirta while under Roderick’s reign, baptism was as much about self-preservation for the present as it was salvation for eternity. Newborn children and their mothers were considered particularly vulnerable to faerie. Hence iron, bread or the Bible would be placed in the bed of a woman in labour. Similar precautions were also taken with the child: “They put a piece of iron on the bottom of the Cradle, that no evil eye wrong the Child.” When a baby was on its way to be baptised, one of the party would “cast a litle Fire after them” such as a coal. On returning home from the baptism, the baby would be placed in a

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111 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 329-330.
112 Campbell, “Editor’s Notes,” Highland Rites and Customes, 86.
113 Kirkwood, Highland Rites and Customes, 77.
115 Kirkwood, Highland Rites and Customes, 77.
116 Kirkwood, Highland Rites and Customes, 77.
basket of bread and cheese, which would then be eaten by those present.\textsuperscript{117} Possibly it was hoped that this act would allow the whole of the party to benefit from the mystery of baptism.

For all the discussion on second sight and faerie belief, instigated by notable Episcopalian figures such as Boyle and Bishop Stillingfleet, the SSPCK and General Assembly remained decidedly silent on the subject. While they talked in general terms of idolatry and superstition, the only practice the SSPCK took any particular notice of was charming, which it specifically discouraged. When the Society gave Alexander Buchan instructions before sending him back to Hirta in 1710, they specifically urged that he should teach his school children about “the evil of using Charming or other Superstitious customs”.\textsuperscript{118} For non-Highlanders, the concept of using words as power, that is “spells”, was again the domain of witchcraft. It was said of the “witch” Moll White, encountered by Addison, “that her Lips were observed to be always in Motion.”\textsuperscript{119} One of Martin’s anecdotes tells of a seer who informed his kinsman that the reason for his sudden illness and violent attacks of vomiting was “an illnatur’d Woman” from the next village, “her Countenance full of Passion, and her Mouth full of Reproaches,” because the man was unlikely to marry her.\textsuperscript{120} Indeed, Larner speculated that the reason women tended to make up the majority of witches was that their expressions of violence or outrage tended to be verbal rather than physical.\textsuperscript{121} Like the

\begin{enumerate}
\item Kirkwood, \textit{Highland Rites and Customes}, 77.
\item General Minutes, vol. 1, 13 April 1710, SSPCK, 64.
\item Addison, \textit{Spectator} 117.
\item Martin, \textit{Description of the Western Islands}, 317-318.
\item Larner, \textit{Witchcraft and Religion}, 75-76, Ronald Hutton, “The global context of the Scottish witch-
second sight, the nature of charms, whether divine or diabolical, was a matter for debate amongst Episcopalians. Kirk defended charms as a tradition stemming from Christian religion, “a continued Miracle, which by Heavens compassion to mens infirmities, convey virtue from all the hands they passe thorow.” In the same argument, however, he admitted that “the words notwithstanding are much corrupted in the process of time”, so that often they were spoken by rote, without the charmer understanding their meaning.

For the Highlander, charms were about healing, and also (like baptism) about protection. These two objectives, however, were one and the same, when one considers that the supernatural was often blamed for illnesses. The very few instances that Martin gives of suspected witchcraft were all to do with health, whether they be attacks or, in the case of the island doctor Neil Beaton, remedies. One incredible account was that of the sudden appearance and disappearance of a cat on Vaila, coinciding with the torment and death of the Proprietor of that isle, where “no Cat will live . . . , and if any Cat be brought to it, they will rather venture to Sea, than stay in the Isle”. With such causes of illness to be found, the concept of the “cherished charmer”, transferring a sickness from the sufferer to the first living creature to enter a room after the charming, was quite logical, the transfer acting more like an exorcism than a remedy.

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124 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 381-382.
The use of charms to heal the sick was also “unscientific”. There were many strange objects to be found in a “modern” medicine man’s kit. Larner gives the example of the University of Glasgow’s pharmacopoeia in 1751, complete with “spider’s web, ants eggs, snakes skin, extract of wood lice, extract of foxglove, beetles blood” and so on.\textsuperscript{126} Charms, written or otherwise, were not included, though no doubt the power of prayer was still an agent encouraged among the family and friends gathered around the seriously ill.\textsuperscript{127} However, Larner notes that the only real distinction between official and unofficial medical practice was that the former was recognised as such by an emerging class of urban professionals, and taught at university level. Hence Martin’s “illiterate Empirick Neil Beaton” pretended to have been educated by his father in order to avoid the rumours that he was in league with the Devil, even though his remedies were purely herbal, with no hint of incantations involved.\textsuperscript{128} Robert Kirk perhaps hoped to attempt a more in depth scientific treatment of “Irish Charms”, as he had for second sight, as “part of a larger discourse, of the Ancient customs of the Scotish-Irish”, but this magnum opus never came to fruition.\textsuperscript{129}

Potential witchcraft or malpractice aside, charm culture in the Highlands, along with attitudes towards baptism there and motives behind adopting any rituals, Christian or otherwise, raised serious doctrinal questions that conflicted with that which the SSPCK and General Assembly regarded as acceptable. One supernatural explanation given by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} Larner, \textit{Witchcraft and Religion}, 142.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Joyce Miller, “Devices and directions: folk healing aspects of witchcraft practice in seventeenth-century Scotland,” in \textit{The Scottish Witch-hunt in context}, 104.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Martin, \textit{Description of the Western Islands}, 197-199.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Sanderson, commentary, 37-38.
\end{itemize}
Highlanders, for unusually long and harsh illnesses, was that the sufferer was deliberately “put on that Pennance by Almighty God, that the Body itself (which only sins say they) may suffer and satisfy for its own sins, and so purg’d purely go to Heaven.”\textsuperscript{130} Not only did this reasoning deny the Presbyterian doctrine of predestination, but the idea that only the body sins, and that these sins could be redeemed through present suffering, also echoed the ancient Pelagian tenet that there was no Original Sin.\textsuperscript{131} There was even the implication that such penance could be removed by others, indicated by belief in the cherished charmer or the belief that chronic illnesses could be cured by charming on the first Sunday of the quarter.\textsuperscript{132} Similarly many examples of baptism in the Highlands revealed it to be a means of protection from supernatural forces in the present life, and not for the washing away of Original Sin. Hence a repeated instruction to Buchan was to teach the children about “our Souls, our sin, misery, and redemption by Jesus Christ, . . . what Baptism is, and signifieth, the Covenant of Grace, the evill of Sin, and anent Death, Judgment, and the State of men and women after this in heaven or hell”.\textsuperscript{133}

When one considers the examples of charms provided by Kirk, one begins to understand further the Society’s objections to charming. There was something “popish” about those charms that venerated saints, such as the “Spel to expel the unbeast”, where the “order of St Bennet at the appoyntment of Inachus [was] to be set about the neck of

\textsuperscript{130} Kirkwood, \textit{Highland Rites and Customes}, 70.

\textsuperscript{131} Markale, \textit{Celts}, 139.

\textsuperscript{132} Kirkwood, \textit{Highland Rites and Customes}, 67.

\textsuperscript{133} General Assembly, Instructions to Buchan, CH1/2/4/2, f. 166.
the infirm” before charming commenced. Kirkwood noted that “for several Diseases they have sevl. Stones called by Saints names: the principal is St Marie’s nut.” Some charms empowered the Virgin Mary. In the case of the pater noster charm, “Mary is first placed, The Pater Noster of Mary, one, the P.N or prayer of my King. two, of Mary, 3. of the King 4” and so on. The “charm spoke in a Napkin . . . to be ty’d about a Childs open-head to lift it up” began “I will lift up thy bones as Mary lift up her hands, . . . as the priest lifts up the upright Mass”. Most charms were enmeshed with Christian phrases. For “every remarkabl charm” the pater noster (Seachd phaidir) was recited before and after. Charms often made use of Latin and other classical languages, as well as the vernacular which, of course, was Gaelic. One written charm, to be worn around the neck of a palsy sufferer, began with various Latin phrases, “in nomine patris, et Fili et spiritus sancti, amen. dirupisti Domine vincula mea, tibi sacrificabo Hostiam Laudis sed nomen Domini invocabo”, etc., and ended with a “hocus-pocus of liturgical phrases” in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, interspersed with a drawn symbol of the cross. The effect was an air of mystery to the uneducated and illiterate peasant, not unlike that achieved at a Latin mass, so objectionable to the Reformed Church. It is perhaps not surprising then, that the SSPCK held reservations about teaching written Gaelic or Latin in the Highlands, not simply because of the association of these languages with the Jacobite cause, but also because of the mystical

135 Kirkwood, Highland Rites and Customes, 67.
qualities assigned to these tongues by Highlanders. For the SSPCK and General Assembly, on constant alert against innovation of doctrine, the most troubling aspect of charms may well have been the corruption of words with time suggested by Kirk. Latin aside, what had perhaps first been introduced to the Highlands as prayer had degenerated into something meaningless.

Like the General Assembly and the SSPCK, Kirkwood and Kirk believed that the Bible was the solution to charms and other continued pagan practices and simple ignorance in the Highlands. After all, by the highlanders’ own accounts reading of the Scriptures had dispelled Browny in the past. Hence, with the help of Boyle, they had both attempted to distribute Gaelic Bibles to the Highlanders, but the General Assembly had been slow to act on their initiative. While it has been suggested that their Presbyterian associates’ apparent lack of momentum, when embracing this Episcopalian plan to bring light to the Highlands through the vernacular Word, may have been due to suspicion of an Episcopalian plot, misuse of the Book once in the Highlands was perhaps another concern. There were examples of the Bible itself, not only the words within it but the physical book, being revered for its supernatural power, as protection against faerie and a cure for illness. Highlanders would sometimes place the Bible in the bed of a woman in labour to prevent the *sith* from stealing her away to nurse their own children.\(^{140}\) Kirkwood wrote of how Highlanders would “clap a Bible frequently”, that is “let the leaves fly with their thumbs”, on the faces of people who suffered fits or night terrors, seen as symptoms of them being unbaptised.\(^{141}\) Martin gave a first hand account of a similar practice in Colonsay:


\(^{141}\) Kirkwood, *Highland Rites and Customes*, 66.
My Landlord having one of his Family sick of a Fever, ask’d my Book, as a singular Favour, for a few moments. I was not a little surpriz’d at the honest Man’s Request, he being illiterate; and when he told me the reason of it, I was no less amaz’d, for it was to fan the Patient’s Face with the Leaves of the Book; and this he did at Night. He sought the Book next Morning, and again in the Evening, and then thank’d me for so great a Favour: And told me, the sick Person was much better by it, and thus I understood that they had an antient Custom of fanning the Face of the Sick with the Leaves of the Bible. 142

Hence the Bible itself had become a magical object, in a similar class as a book known as “the Red Book of Appin”, especially amongst the illiterate. This legendary book is believed to have originally been a medicinal “recipe” book of charms and remedies against illnesses in cattle. Like other books of medicine, while valued by the literate for the practical knowledge within, the Red Book’s supernatural reputation increased with the loss of a reading class. Awe surrounding the book’s curative powers had grown to the point that it was believed the original owner had tricked the Devil into giving it up, and that the current custodian could only open it under the protection of an iron hoop placed around their head. 143 Of course, the origins of the Bible were seen as quite the opposite. Nevertheless, the above examples show that with the decline of literacy in the Highlands the Bible, like the Red Book, had become a thing of charm lore, revered for its amuletic qualities.

In the constructs of the Highlands as an age-old oral culture, simple words both spoken and written could take on a power of their own in Gaelic popular belief. Of course, the

142 Martin, Description of the Western Islands, 248.

most common use of words as power was charming. However, there were also times and places where and when Highlanders took great care as to what words they used. Hence the Lewis fowlers were particularly cautious with how they named things connected to those outer islands that stood between this world and the next. Kirkwood observed the care taken in calling people by their names after dark: “they will not call upon children by their name, least the Devil get power over them. When persons of elder years are called on in the night by their name, they’l not answer unlesse they be called 3 times, fearing that it is a Spirit.” The idea of the Bible or any part thereof taking on mystical proportions was again anathema for Presbyterians. Common man and woman’s access to and understanding of the Word of God in their own language was an essential element of their faith. Hence, for the distribution of Bibles to have any effect in replacing pagan with Christian, one would first need to dispel the association of words with the supernatural. The SSPCK’s tactics in its scheme to settle schools in the Highlands can be seen as a move to achieve this.

The continued practice of popular beliefs in the Highlands, evident in works such as Martin’s, made it necessary for the General Assembly to attempt to demystify the heterodoxy that existed there under the guise of “reformed religion”. Traditions such as second sight, faerie belief and charming entailed interaction between man and the supernatural in order to predict or even affect one’s destiny, even to intervene in and manipulate correction of one’s sins. The pagan and Celtic overtones of these beliefs, and their propensity to adapt and dilute “true” religion, were at odds with the SSPCK’s vision of a modern Presbyterian Scotland. Most damning was evidence that, while under the pastoral care of Episcopalians as well as Catholics, assimilation between

144 Kirkwood, *Highland Rites and Customes*, 75.
popular and Christian practices had allowed the corruption and innovation of the “pure religion”, so valued by Presbyterian authorities. Ordinarily Protestants, both Episcopalian and Presbyterian, had faith in the Bible as the fundamental means to enlightenment amongst the vulgar classes. However, reports from the Highlands showed that the Word itself, due to its very nature, had become a part of popular culture. Therefore it was not only necessary to debunk popular belief but also to demystify the very medium through which belief was maintained. The SSPCK’s schools were not only a means of providing spiritual texts for the Highlands but of also ensuring that these were treated in a manner befitting the nation’s Presbyterian identity. The next chapter will consider how the Society hoped to achieve this through its literacy campaign.
Chapter Four

Written versus Oral Media:

controlling the power of words in the Highlands

Language was a key factor which Lowlanders identified as a significant obstacle to the progress of the Highlanders and instilling correct loyalties toward the Establishment. Hence historians such as Withers and Leneman deduce that the decline in the use of Highland Gaelic was the result of a deliberate agenda of the SSPCK to anglicise the Highlands by refusing to include the native tongue in the education process. Certainly language was often linked to identity, especially in terms of pronouncing one’s loyalties. Yet an important ingredient often missing from the language debate is the media by which the languages involved existed. The Gaelic language’s decline, to the point of near extinction by the late eighteenth century, does tend to coincide with the spread of the SSPCK’s charity schools. However, to understand why one language gave way to another one must consider Gaelic and English in the context of the two different cultures to which they belonged, namely one grounded in oral tradition and the other in written. Members from each society held prejudices as to the value or reliability of the other’s tradition, considering their own to be the more effective vehicle for ideas. There are many examples of prejudice against the “Irish” tongue that lend support to the idea of deliberate anglicisation. However, there is also much in the policies of the General Assembly to contradict the idea. Rather, a more important consideration for the Assembly was the potency of Gaelic, depending on its mode of delivery. The power of words in the promotion of ideas, whether spoken or in print, was not lost on Highlanders or Lowlanders, be they Jacobites or anti-Unionists or the
SSPCK and General Assembly; whether they spoke Gaelic, Lowland Scots or English. Song and written verse were often used to express ideas of patriotism and identity, many of them very different from those valued by the SSPCK. The ability to monitor and correct these ideas was a constant preoccupation of the Establishment, not dissimilar to the General Assembly’s continued guard against innovation. Hence, it was not so much any notion of continued slavery enforced by spoken Gaelic that determined its fate, but rather the potential freedom of expression of Gaelic in written form, causing the SSPCK to deny Highland children access to Gaelic text, which in an increasingly literate world contributed to the demise of the language.

As examples throughout this thesis have indicated, the attitude of many Lowlanders towards Highland Gaelic was one of derision and distain. The indiscriminate use of the word “Irish” or “Erse” to describe all forms of Gaelic shows a continued failure or refusal to acknowledge any difference between the two Celtic cultures, and to set them apart from the rest of Scotland. Even Robert Kirk, while he had argued that the *sith* were universal, could not help but treat the Highlanders themselves as separate from their fellow Scots because of their language. They were “the Tramontaines or Scotish-Irish”, who gave unpronounceable “Irish” names to their faerie.¹ The term “Irish” especially had derogatory overtones. Not only did it imply that Highlanders were not fellow Scots, but for many it also labelled them as part of a subspecies of thieves and paupers burdening the economy and abusing the charity of others:

> We must also spare a roome in this Suruey, to the poore . . . Ireland prescribeth to be the nurserie, which sendeth ouer [to Cornwall] yeerely, yea and dayly whole Ship-loades of these crooked slips, and the dishabited townes afford them rooting: . . . yet those peeuish

charitable cannot be ignorant, that herethrough . . . they maintaine idlenes, drunkennesse, theft, lecherie, blasphemie, Atheisme, and in a word, all impietie: for a worse kind of people then these vagabonds, the realme is not pestered withal.² Images like these from the sixteenth century, still being reprinted mid-eighteenth century, continued to feed the prejudices of readers. Ward shrewdly observed that it was “more acceptable to the Reader to make Enquiries into the imperfections of the People . . . than to search after their Excellencies and survey their Beauties,” in his introduction to a treatise on Ireland that openly pandered to such bigotries.³ These prejudices aside, the SSPCK also recognised that the Highlanders’ continued use of the “Irish” tongue on its own isolated them from the rest of the country. A Mr Shute’s appeal to the south to support the SSPCK argued that “by reason of their barbarous Languages [they] can have noe manner of Communication with others.”⁴ Likewise a much later letter in Gentleman’s Magazine, again attempting to stir up interest for the SSPCK, echoed the point that “the poorer sort have only the Irish Tongue, and little Correspondence with the Civilized Parts of the Nation”.⁵ In this case, English was seen as a means of bringing them into contact with their fellow Scots.

Gaelic, however, was not the only language “targeted” by the SSPCK, although it was often the only language spoken n the Western Highlands and Islands. A third language existed in Scotland, that being Lowland Scots or Lallans. In 1646 the General Assembly, considering ways to solve the problem of a lack of Christian knowledge in the Highlands (“whereof the land hath smarted in the late troubles”), had approved a

² Carew, Survey of Cornwall, 67-68.
³ Ward, preface to Trip to Ireland.
⁴ Shute, Some Considerations to induce the people of South Brittain, 2.
recommendation “That Scots schools be erected in all parishes there, according to the Act of Parliament, where conveniently they can be had.” The Burgh of Glasgow was still approving licences for school keepers of Scots schools in the Lowlands in 1663. Yet the SSPCK made no mention of teaching Scots to Highland children in either its promotional material or its minutes, despite being a Lowland based organisation. That English was the SSPCK’s language of choice, rather than Lowland Scots, indicates that it did identify itself as British rather than Scottish. From early modern times, the conscious decision to use English rather than a Scot’s native tongue, whether that be Gaelic or Lallans, was a decision about inclusion.

During the seventeenth century we see the rise of the genre of “genealogical histories”, an early example of union between the two kingdoms prompting change, although in this case it was the less pronounced Union of the Crowns. These “histories” signalled the Highland nobles’ rejection of the traditional bardic methods of preserving their past; and were the result of their desire to be accepted by, and to emulate the prestige of, their southern and European counterparts, as well as confirm their families’ loyalty to the British crown. The upper classes were no longer content with those oral recitals in Gaelic, delivered by their custodian of the clan’s history and genealogy, the bard known as the seanchaidh, at clan gatherings for special occasions, recitals that reminded those present of the great deeds of their line which defined them and had led them to that point in space and time, celebrating why they were there and where they had come from. Instead, Gaelic nobles began to put forward their own versions of their histories.

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While they consulted a variety of sources, both written and oral, including material provided by the learned orders themselves, the resulting “evidence” of their nobility was in written form and mainly in English, even though the authors themselves spoke Gaelic. English was seen as the appropriate language for this written transmission of information, especially when these genealogies were intended for an English-speaking readership. Indeed, those snippets of Gaelic that do make it into the genealogies tend to be examples of direct speech, where something would have otherwise been lost in the English translation. It would appear then that the long trusted oral methods of maintaining tradition were no longer deemed adequate by the Gaelic upper class, who now gave preference to a foreign literary genre as the more “reliable” method to safely transmit information from one generation to the next, as they steadily assimilated with their Lowland peers.

Arguments against the use of Gaelic were supported by the prevailing myth that the language was a purely oral one. It is a myth that has been believed by both contemporaries and historians alike.

Samuel Johnson was confident that:

After what has been lately talked of Highland bards and Highland genius, many will startle when they are told, that the Earse never was a written language; that there is not in the world an Earse manuscript a hundred years old; and that the sounds of the highlanders were

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never expressed by letters, till some little books of piety were translated and a metrical version of the Psalms was made by the Synod of Argyle. Whoever therefore now writes in this language, spells according to his own perception of the sound, and his own idea of the power of the letters. . . . The Welsh, two hundred years ago, insulted their English neighbours for the instability of their Orthography; while the Erse merely floated in the breath of the people, and could therefore receive little improvement.10

Although he was writing in the 1770s, his opinions on the “Erse” language, and of those who spoke it, are not unlike the opinions of Monipennie, and hence illustrate the prevailing misconceptions that had continued throughout for well over a century as his claims were no revelation to the majority of eighteenth-century readers. Rather he was dismissing somewhat sarcastically the recent revolutionary claims of others, namely James Macpherson, that there was evidence of an ancient written tradition in Gaelic.11 Macpherson failed to satisfactorily prove that he had found authentic fragments of ancient Gaelic heroic poetry. However, evidence does exist of a written Gaelic culture living hand in hand with oral culture. Classical Gaelic had been used in Scotland’s monasteries since the sixth century, and was used in a secular capacity from c.1200 to c.1600 by the bards, the “learned orders” of professionals and artisans who served Gaelic nobility.12


Contrary to popular belief, these bards were literate and much of their material was written. The more knowledgeable bards, the *filidh*, wrote in Classical Gaelic to serve their Highland nobles, who could read Gaelic while of course many of the lower classes were illiterate. However, from the mid sixteenth century on, within decades of the death of the last Gaelic-speaking king of Scotland, the *filidh* and the less learned *aos-dàna* regularly used vernacular Gaelic, adapting semi-bardic verse, drawing more and more on folk tradition from below. Yet even during the height of the Classical bardic tradition their tales would filter down through various avenues to reach the masses in oral form. Indeed, many of the written works were fashioned in a style best appreciated when read aloud. Hence they were designed to be shared amongst an audience rather than for private study. Religious texts were of course numerous. Monk scribes had written Gaelic manuscripts from the early days of Iona in the sixth century, up until the Reformation.

However, in the modern age of the Reformation, when spreading the Word was one’s fundamental Christian duty, the slow and limited process of written manuscript could not compete with the far reaching, relatively easily manufactured products of the printing press. While there was a rich history of manuscripts, Gaelic did not come into print until 1567, when John Carswell published *The Book of Common Order*. The progress of Gaelic print, however, was decidedly slower than that of English, with less

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13 Fox and Woolf, introduction to *The spoken word*, 19.


than seventy titles by 1800.\textsuperscript{17} This failure to produce written material in the modern printed form may have contributed to the idea that Gaelic had no written culture and was therefore not a “polished” language. Indeed, the efforts of Boyle, Kirkwood and Robert Kirk to prepare and distribute a Gaelic Bible may have worked to Gaelic’s detriment, as the fact that the only religious works readily available were those just decades old was confirmation enough that nothing older existed, in the minds of intellectuals such as Johnson: “We were a while told, that they had an old translation of the Scriptures; . . . Yet by continued accumulation of questions we found, that the translation meant, if any meaning there were, was nothing else than the Irish Bible.”\textsuperscript{18}

As an oral culture, the \textit{Gaidhealtachd} was diminished further, from the point of view of learned men, by the fact that traditional oral tales and lore tended to fall under the custodianship of women, passed down by mothers and wet nurses at bedtime or fireside. They were literally old wives’ tales. Even Martin, so careful to document charms, accounts of second sight and herbal concoctions, did not bother much with the women’s business of Hirta, noting only that “they commonly sing all the time” when fulling or waulking cloth, “one of their Number acting the part of a Prime Chantress, whom all the rest follow and Obey.”\textsuperscript{19} Women, however, do appear to have been denied access to literate education. There were of course exceptions. One of the earliest examples of Gaelic text is a few lines of charms jotted into \textit{The Murthly Hours}, a medieval book of hours most likely belonging to a Highland noblewoman.\textsuperscript{20} For the most part, however,

\textsuperscript{17} Fox and Woolf, introduction, 25.
\textsuperscript{18} Johnson, \textit{Journey to the Western Islands}, 118.
\textsuperscript{19} Martin, \textit{Late Voyage to St Kilda}, 111.
\textsuperscript{20} John Higgitt, “The Murthly Hours: The Story,” National Library of Scotland,
as was common throughout Europe, early literary tradition in the Gaidhealtachd had been dominated by men. This included membership to the “learned orders” of the bards.

It was not until the seventeenth century, when the literate bards’ traditions were in decline, that prominent women poets really began to be noticed. Even then, the contributions of talented but illiterate female bards were not always appreciated. Mairi Nighean Alasdair Ruaidh (Mary MacLeod) personally felt the full effect of this changing world, banished from the house of the MacLeods of Dunvegan by a laird no longer tolerant of the songs of bards. She continued to compose, however, one of her songs recalling better days in the halls of Rory Mór, one of the laird’s more appreciative predecessors:

’S ann ’na thigh mór In whose great house
A fhuair me am macnas, I got sporting,

Danns’ le sunnd air Happy dancing
Urlar farsaing, on broad flooring,

An fhidhleireachd ‘gam Violins my
Chur a chadal, bedtime music,

A’ phiobaireachd Piper’s tune
Mo dhùsgadh maidne. my morning waking.²¹


The perception of oral traditions as women’s business, and the increasingly active role of women in bard culture, would have made it especially impractical to the SSPCK, with the Society’s insistence on an all male corps of schoolmasters. However, there were other aspects of oral Gaelic that contributed to the SSPCK’s rejection of it.

Authorities such as the General Assembly failed to fully comprehend the power of the spoken word in the Highlands, or the interaction between spoken and written traditions in an oral community. Ironically, the Highland nobles’ rejection of their oral culture had instead effectively brought about an end to Highland Gaelic’s traditional written culture. The lower classes, on the other hand, had continued to value and practise the oral traditions of their forefathers, as well as appreciate the literate among them. Thomson compares the style of composition of poets in this period to that which resulted from the old bardic discipline of composing in the dark. However, in this instance it was the darkness of illiteracy between the decline of the bards and the rise of the schoolmaster. In hindsight the importance of their oral tradition is obvious. The high regard for their more prominent, often illiterate, seventeenth-century poets ensured that their verse was recited often enough to survive well into the eighteenth century, when it was finally committed to paper. The oral recital of Highland genealogies also continued to hold meaning. Alistair Moffat notes that, according to an oral history passed down since the mid eighteenth century to the twentieth, many of the clansmen


waiting for the charge at Culloden, assembled in family groups, recited their
genealogies, “remembering why they had come to fight.”

The General Assembly’s and SSPCK’s reaction to the oral culture of the highlanders
continued a tradition by of misinterpretation non-Highlanders, even among intellectual
Lowlanders. The important role these oral traditions played, in defining the identity of
both orator and audience, was often lost on such observers. Monipennie only
commented that:

They delight much in musick, but chiefly in harpes and clairschoes of their own fashion... They take great pleasure to deck their harps and clairschoes with silver and precious stones; and the poore ones that cannot attain heereunto, deck them with christall. They sing verses prettily compounded, contayning (for the most part) praises of valiant men. There is not
almost any other argument whereof their rimes intreat.

After two whole pages emphasising the harsh barbarity of the Islanders’ lives, their
precious bejewelled musical instruments stand out in contradiction, hinting at an aspect
of Highland culture much revered and loved by its participants, which Monipennie
failed to comprehend. His treatment instead trivialised their oral culture. By
simplifying the content of their songs to nothing more than the “praises of valiant men”
he reinforced the image of a single-minded warlike race. Hero worship was certainly a
part of Highland oral culture, and battle incitement, brosnachadh catha, was a valued
form of composition. However there were several other defining genres that
completed the Highlander’s self image. While “praise-poetry” was the most common

poetic genre of Gaelic oral culture, it was in no way restricted to glorifying “valiant men”. Hearth and home were an important central theme, as was courtesy owed to the lady of the house.\footnote{Thomson, \textit{Introduction to Gaelic Poetry}, 44-45.} There were also the historical and genealogical genres inherited from the \textit{seanchaidh}; as well as mythological works, and even courtly love poetry.

While later observers like Lhuyd and Kirkwood understood that there was more to Gaelic song culture than Monipennie’s simplistic portrayal, they were still hampered by their own ideas of what constituted culture. In his letter to the Reverend James Fraser, outlining the kind of information he wanted for his research into the Gaelic language, Lhuyd made a specific request for “A catalogue of the Highland Poets of note, and of \textit{all the other writers} on what subject soever in the Ersh or Scottish Irish. When they \textit{flourish'd}: what they \textit{writ}: how large their works; with the three or four initial and final words; and where their works \textit{may be seen at present}”\footnote{Edward Lhuyd, “Part of the Letter to the Revd Mr James Fraser Minister of Kirkhill in the Aird near Invernes”, cited in \textit{Highland Rites and Customes}, 12.} [my emphasis] Here his referral to Highland poets in the past tense hints that he was under the impression they were a thing of yesteryear. His unsuccessful search reaffirmed the idea that, if there had been a literate culture, it was no more. The resulting description of bards provided by Kirkwood, and accepted without alteration by Lhuyd, made a clear distinction between their past and present roles that in reality was never as pronounced:

\begin{quote}
The Bardi of old were men of Acute Spirits skilfull in Genealogies and poesy whose office was to record in poesy the Acts of Valorous men and their Genealogies: and for this they had a portion of Land assign'd them. Now they are such whom we call jockies which go up and down using Rythmes and Satyrs and are plentifully rewarded.\footnote{Kirkwood, \textit{Highland Rites and Customes}, 40.}
\end{quote}
Unfortunately, their own education from within a literacy oriented society, hindered their investigations. They were unable to disassociate intellect, learning, record-keeping, even poetry from literacy, or to associate anything more than fancy or trivial banality with orality. The stability and permanency they associated with literacy is reflected in the above example, the security of fixed property assigned to “bardi” no doubt favourable to the nomadic existence of “jockies”. Hence Lhuyd and Kirkwood were unable to recognise, or even go in search of, any transferral between the bardic culture, whether real or imagined, that had served the court, and that of the lower ranks of the bardic hierarchy which continued to serve the common clansfolk. It was possible to collect manuscripts, as the Dean of Lismore had done in the sixteenth century, but if Lhuyd wanted to “view” what works of “poets of note” could still be “seen” he had only to look to those communities where their works were still remembered and recited word for word.30

Likewise, the founding members of the SSPCK, and members of the General Assembly, considered the “plight” of the oral Highlands quite literally through the eyes of men of letters. As such, theirs was a world filled with books, pamphlets and all manner of the visible aspects of a written culture, physical evidence of the achievements of the English and Lowland Scots languages. Hence they might be forgiven for their apparent snobbery when confronted with the relatively paperless world of the Western Highlands and Islands. Indeed, while there were few places in Scotland that might be considered as completely untouched by literacy, the Outer Hebrides may well have been one of

them. For the people of Hirta, “above all, Writing was the most astonishing to them; they cannot conceive how it is possible for any Mortal to express the Conceptions of his Mind in such Black Characters upon White Paper.” Hence when eighteenth-century intellectuals lamented the “barbarous” language of the Highlands one must place this in the context of how a language might have been considered “civilised” in their eyes:

> When a language begins to teem with books, it is tending to refinement; as those who undertake to teach others must have undergone some labour in improving themselves, they set a proportionate value on their own thoughts, and wish to enforce them by efficacious expressions; speech becomes embodied and permanent; different modes and phrases are compared and the best obtains an establishment. . . . There may possibly be books without a polished language, but there can be no polished language without books.

With such a reverence for books, they were unable to comprehend a system where literacy played a secondary or supporting role to orality. In part this was due to the devaluing of oral tradition which had occurred in their own culture over a matter of centuries. Oral tradition had become associated with superstitions, and Catholic trickery. It was considered fickle and changeable. Hence Wallace had been dismissive of local remedies and traditions in the Orkneys not only because of their content but perhaps also because of their mode of delivery.

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31 Fox and Woolf, introduction, 11.
32 Martin, _Late Voyage to St Kilda_, 124.
33 Johnson, _Journey to the Western Islands_, 116.
35 Alexandra Walsham, “Reformed folklore?” 175-177.
Yet the SSPCK, whose schools Shute and the Gentleman’s Magazine correspondent saw as championing the cause to bring English to the Highlands, was also associated with a movement to improve Highlanders’ access to spiritual guidance in their own language. As a Presbyterian driven organisation, with close links to the General Assembly, one of its primary tenets was that the Scriptures must be available in one’s vernacular. Hence it was important that the Society’s schoolmasters should speak Highland Gaelic. This was not just so that they could survive within the community in which they would teach, but so that members of that community could hear and understand the Scriptures in their own tongue, as schoolmasters were often called upon to visit students’ families in order to catechise. In this way the superstitious mysticism associated with an incomprehensible Latin mass was not merely transferred to an equally incomprehensible service in English or Lowland Scots. These schoolmasters were part of an ongoing process to provide Gaelic spiritual instruction to the Highlanders. As early as 1643 Gaelic speaking students were the preferred recipients of bursaries with the aim that they should become Highland preachers and teachers. With many of these destined to become SSPCK schoolmasters, it was hoped that in turn some of their own more gifted students would go on to become bursars, propagating growing numbers of Gaelic speaking ministers.

This very system implies a necessary bilingualism within the schools themselves, rather than one language giving way wholly to another, although that may have been the

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ultimate goal for some.\textsuperscript{37} Its success also demonstrates that methods other than those officially approved by the SSPCK had to have been employed to produce scholars talented enough to have an understanding of English, rather than to have merely learnt it by rote. The SSPCK’s management committee was surely aware of this. With his links to the London based Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Kirkwood was able to inform the moderator of the General Assembly as early as 1704 that similar rote methods had not worked elsewhere, “having found by long experience that their teaching [the Welsh] to read English at school does not at all answer the end, to extirpate the Welsh language.”\textsuperscript{38} As he so bluntly put it:

\begin{quote}
Everybody knows that to learne a Language there must be another sorte of Schools to wit, where they are taught to decline and conjugat to get the particles of speech by heart, and to compose and joine together words and sentences; for which end Books necessary for learning must be provided, for example, Gramers, Vocabularies, Dictionaries &c: Besyds all which, care must be taken that they who learn the language converse only with those who speake the same, avoyding all other company for a considerable time.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

Several of the SSPCK’s management committee would have known this already from personal experience. Being university educated, usually in Divinity or Law, they would have had at least one classical language under their belts, and at least one other modern language for those who were exiled in Europe before 1688. It would appear then that they turned a blind eye to the practices of their schoolmasters, except when a teacher’s open admittance made it necessary to caution them.

\textsuperscript{37} Durkacz, \textit{Decline of the Celtic Languages}, 58.

Certainly there were calls from various bodies to extirpate the Gaelic language and, from their minutes and various correspondence, some members of the SSPCK were no exception. For example, an incentive offered by petitioners in 1721, for the SSPCK’s schools to adopt a system of “simultaneous translation” using both Gaelic and English, was the suggestion that “the parents having once understood English, the Babes from the knees would receive the same as their mother tongue, which would be the only finishing stroak to the Irish language.” Yet it was still understood that the children would translate at home for their parents and elderly relatives and neighbours. However, perhaps an ulterior motive for these ministers themselves was the notion that “so soon as [English] is understood, the minister will embrace the favourable opportunity of being relieved from the most unsupportable burden of preaching and teaching in Irish.” One assumes this “burden” was only felt by those ministers who themselves were inept in Gaelic and therefore fell short in their duty to provide vernacular worship. In effect they were attracted to an inverted form of that fundamental ideal where, by children learning to understand English in order to read the Scriptures, English might become the vernacular. The episode is telling in that it shows a ministry and administration still unprepared and ill equipped for dealing with a Gaelic-speaking (let alone a Gaelic-writing) community. However, in practice the organisation appears to be as committed to the objective of extirpating spoken Gaelic as

39 James Kirkwood, An Answer to the Objection against Printing the Bible in Irish, as being Prejudicial to the Design of Extirpating the Irish Language out of the Highlands of Scotland, cited in Durkacz, Decline of the Celtic Languages, 25.
30 General Minutes, vol. 2, 1 June 1721, SSPCK, 171.
31 Committee Minutes vol. 2, 15 Jan 1720, SSPCK, 342.
it was to the settling of early schools in known Catholic areas. Rather, the fate of Gaelic was a side effect of their primary objective to bring the written Word to the Highlands. That it was the written Word which the SSPCK taught, was crucial to the General Assembly in its campaign against innovation.

The library movement, in conjunction with the charity schools movement shows a desire amongst educated Lowlanders to introduce written tradition to the predominantly oral culture of the Highlands. The library scheme was yet another ambitious initiative put forward by Kirkwood. His original plan published in 1699 was to set up a library in every parish of Scotland, principally made up initially of the local minister’s own personal collection, who would receive remuneration. The librarian, possibly the parish schoolmaster, would only lend the books to local heritors, ministers and “such residents in the parish as should find sufficient caution.” This would hardly extend to the average cattle herder or fowler and their families. Kirkwood also envisaged that each presbytery would accommodate a book binder and that a printing press could be established which would network with all other presses throughout Europe. Hence his scheme was not so much concerned with propagating a particular language but rather a particular medium of communication — print. His later “little design” for erecting libraries in the Highlands was a much more modest (and achievable) proposal. It was eventually adopted by the General Assembly in the 1704 “Act anent libraries in the Highlands”, which declared that thirty-one libraries were to be established, including one each in Orkney and Shetland, and “Twelve in the Synod of Argyle, Including the

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43 Aitken, History of the Public Library Movement, 7-8.
Western Isles, in such places as the Respective Synods and Presbytries of these Bounds shall agree upon.”

The main purpose of these libraries, however, was the intellectual and spiritual stimulation of their ministers: “they look upon it as absolutely necessary for ministers to have Books of all parties, even of such as they esteem to be heretical.”

It was not until an Act in 1709 that the General Assembly “consider[ed] how much it might tend to the Advancement of Learning, that publick Libraries were settled.”

It must be remembered, however, that the books that stocked these libraries would have all been in English, many of them donated by the SPCK in England. The myth that there were no Gaelic texts of any kind in the Highlands may well have contributed to this aspect of the library scheme. Withers correctly draws links between key members of the SSPCK and members of the General Assembly’s Library Committee, the objective of which was to make written texts available in the Highlands. However his conclusion that this is evidence of an agenda to extirpate spoken Gaelic from the Highlands does not necessarily follow. Rather, if it was assumed that Gaelic, as the cornerstone of an oral culture, had no written tradition, then it followed that Gaelic had no place in the mission to bring literacy to the Highlands. One might then conclude that the libraries were only of use to those Highlanders who could read English, but relatively recent reassessment of the nature of literary tradition within an oral culture has shown this would not necessarily have been the case.

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45 Kirkwood, “An Answer to the objections against our list of books,” cited in Aitken, History of the Public Library Movement, 10.

In the Highlands, there was already a bicultural form of communication in progress that the SSPCK failed to identify. The merging of bardic and folk culture had not only meant that the bardic genres translated into folk, but also that a continued regard for those who could read and write, as the bards had done, had also been transferred. In some areas this took on an almost mystical reverence, possibly a remnant of that associated with the priestly role of ancient bards, hence the power associated with written charms, or the idea that baptisms could be performed by anyone who could read. Generally, however, the literate amongst them (or visiting) were respected for their ability to contribute news and fresh ideas to the community through the simple act of reading aloud. The full potential of itinerant bards was not recognised by Kirkwood. He merely noted that “the Cler Sheanchan were a Company of itinerant poets who went along Gentlemen’s Houses, giving Account of their Genealogies [sic], and as they were rewarded return’d either a Satyr or Panegryric [sic].” Again he referred to them as though they were a spent force, yet they continued to tour between villages, the very wandering minstrels he had dismissed as “jockies”, and were as welcome as any local song smiths. Sìleas na Ceapaich (Cicely of Keppoch) reminisced upon the important social and communal role such bards still played in her youth when she lamented the loss of a much beloved harper:

\begin{verbatim}
Gheibhinn sgeula uat gu cinnteach
You brought me news, concisely told,

Air gach aon ni bh’ anns an aite;
of old friends living there; and then

Gheibhinn sgeul air Mac Mhic Ailein,
spoke of the great Clanranald, and

’S air na dh’fharraidinn de m’ chàirdibh;
gave tidings of my friends again.

Gheibhinn sgeul air Moir ’s air Seònaid,
Marion and Janet, though they live
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{47} Kirkwood, *Highland Rites and Customes*, 55.
From the second half of the seventeenth century these travelling bards were joined by a growing number of their literary equivalent, one might say, who regularly made their way into the Highlands — the chapmen. Many of the popular tales printed in their chapbooks had previously existed as oral traditions. Their written forms would be peddled to those who could read, however there was every likelihood they would be adapted and reabsorbed into oral tradition through the act of public recital. Although chapbooks were usually written in English or occasionally Lowland Scots, this same process of adaptation ensured that it would not take long for their contents to reach the Gaelic communities in their own vernacular oral form. Again the value of this written tradition was its contribution to the spoken culture. Like those bardic verses put to paper of old, they were preserved in a way that allowed for easy conversion back into oral form. Indeed, the tunes intended to accompany chapbook lyrics were often well known airs, thus eliminating a need to print them, providing a familiar medium through which the song experience could be more readily shared. Hence a century later, when

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the poet James Hogg’s mother complained, “ye prentit them yoursel’, an’ ye hae spoilt them awthegither”, in response to Walter Scott’s compilation of Highland songs, she was not only bemoaning the loss of their orality, but also their removal from the context of spoken-written reciprocity within the Highland community.53

Thus while Gaelic society valued written traditions, this tended to be in the context of how these might serve oral culture. While bardic works had often been dictated into manuscript form, original oral composition and recitation took precedence.54 Johnson’s attempts to see Gaelic writing for himself led him to conclude that there was none: “We heard of manuscripts that were, or that had been in the hands of somebody’s father, or grandfather; but at last we had no reason to believe they were other than Irish.”55 What he did not appreciate was that these were obviously valued enough by their owners to have been passed down father to son. This may have meant that they were reluctant to show them to strangers; or alternatively that they hoped to show just how much they were valued by displaying them in the best way they knew how — by faithful recitation from memory.56 Similarly, Meek hypothesises that the reason for a decided lack of printed Gaelic sermons was that Highlanders understood “real Gaelic preaching” to be fundamentally an “oral art.”57 A “minister of paper” (ministear pàipeir) was deemed far less suited to the role than those Gaelic preachers who could at least appear to


55 Johnson, *Journey to the Western Islands*, 118.

56 J. F. Campbell, introduction to *Popular Tales of the West Highlands: orally collected with a translation by the late J. F. Campbell*, vol. 1 (1890), iv-vii.

deliver an oral sermon spontaneously, without notes, as though inspired by the Holy Spirit itself.\textsuperscript{58} Hence education that focussed only on literacy would have been seen by Highlanders as inadequate. Conversely, this preference for spontaneous oral expression opened the way to unchecked interpretations that might lead to the sort of innovations that were so undesirable to the General Assembly.

The difficulties of the General Assembly, and thence the SSPCK, in adapting to the expectations of Highland culture, with its interactive and reciprocal approach to media, becomes clearer when one considers several overtures in the 1690s dealing with planting the Presbyterian faith in the Highlands, culminating in the 1699 Act:

1. That ministers and probationers who have the Irish language be sent to the Highland parishes, and that none of them settled in the Low Country till the Highland places be first provided.

2. That ministers and ruling elders who have the Irish language be appointed to visit these parts.

3. That where in any Highland congregation many understand English, and there used once a day to be a sermon in English, Presbyteries be careful to supply them sometimes by preaching in English; and that they catechize them who understand not, by an interpreter, when they cannot get one to preach to them in Irish; and that those, whether ministers or probationers, who have somewhat of the Irish language, but not a facility to preach in it, be sent to these places for the ends forsaid, that by converse they may learn more of the language, and ability to instruct therein.

4. That English schoolmasters be erected in all Highland parishes, according to former Acts of Parliament and General Assemblies; and for this end, the General Assembly recommends to their commission to address the King and Parliament, to take such course for this, and other pious uses, in the more northern Highland places, as is granted to these of Argyle [ie. collections to support Highland boys in schools], and that as they shall think fit.

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\textsuperscript{58} Meek, “The pulpit and the pen”, 102.
5. That it be recommended to Presbyteries and Universities to have a special regard in the disposal of their bursaries for educating such as it is hoped may be useful to preach the Gospel in the Highlands [i.e. speak Gaelic].

The Acts reveal the perception that the two languages play two distinct roles. English was only to be used “sometimes in preaching” in those areas where it was widely understood. Otherwise it was confined to the schoolroom, where the main purpose of the eighteenth century parish schoolroom was to teach literacy.

When preaching to those with little or no understanding of English, the General Assembly actually encouraged preaching in Gaelic, even when it meant transfer of a Gaelic-deficient minister to an area where “by converse” his Gaelic, and the ability to preach in Gaelic, improved. Alternatively there was the option for translation of the minister’s spoken Word from English to Gaelic by an interpreter, but again there was the danger here of interpretation leading to innovation. Hence in Gaelic-speaking areas of the Highlands English was to be reserved for written instruction, unless it was already widely understood, and Gaelic for oral instruction.

Access to spiritual texts in one’s own language was considered by Calvinists to be a fundamental right of every Christian. Yet its importance, and the General Assembly’s commitment to seeing it fulfilled, is sometimes lost in the anglicisation argument. From the late 1640s onwards various schemes were tried to teach Gaelic-speaking boys “divinity and letters” so that they would become Gaelic speaking ministers.

Historians such as Withers, however, consider even this to be a deliberate ploy in a long

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60 Jones, Charity School Movement, 186.


62 Withers, Gaelic Scotland, 115.
term anglicisation strategy. Withers claims that the early bursars schemes, where Gaelic boys were taught in Lowland schools, “were not intended to benefit the Highland populations but rather designed to recruit a body of men educated in the Lowlands whose concern was the spiritual use of Gaelic as an initial stage in the secular advancement of English.” 63 This theory essentially turns on its head the whole purpose of anglicisation as far as the General Assembly was concerned, making the “true religion” of Presbyterianism the means by which the English language was the desired end. However, English was merely seen as an effective way of spreading the Presbyterian Word. It is not the planting of English that is the crux of the 1699 Act anent Planting of the Highlands, as Withers implies, but the effective use of both English and Gaelic to plant the “correct” form of worship. The provision of Gaelic speaking ministers may actually have been a saving grace for Gaelic in the Highlands, when one considers Houston’s point that the eventual extinction of Cornish may have been linked to the fact that it was not a “medium of worship”.64 Durkacz also considers the General Assembly’s decision to use the native tongue for worship as a positive step for the spread of Protestantism in the Highlands, giving Scotland the advantage over Ireland or Wales where no such policy was pursued by the Established Church.65 However, such was the General Assembly’s commitment to this basic principle that steps were taken to ensure that it was not merely confined to spoken spiritual instruction, Acts being passed in 1690 and 1694 for the publication and recommended use of a Gaelic Psalter and Shorter Catechism.66 Before this the Assembly had agreed

63 Withers, Gaelic Scotland, 115.

64 Houston, Scottish Literacy and the Scottish Identity, 82.

65 Durkacz, Decline of the Celtic Languages, 6.

66 Durkacz, Decline of the Celtic Languages, 10.
to distribute the 2,000 Irish Old Testaments donated by Boyle. However, the little progress made in this direction is often seen as evidence of their agenda for anglicisation.

There were various reasons as to why earlier projects to print Gaelic Scriptures had failed. The attempts by the Synod of Argyle in the mid seventeenth century were thwarted by the religious and political uncertainty of the time, with ecclesiastical power seesawing back and forth between the Episcopalian and Presbyterian Church. With their paranoia over keeping doctrine pure, it is not surprising that translation of any kind presented problems for the General Assembly, especially when the translators tended to be Episcopalian. The first complete Gaelic Psalter had been produced by none other than Robert Kirk. James Kirkwood’s efforts to have Irish bibles distributed to the Highlands often appear to have fallen on deaf ears. Durkacz hints that Kirkwood’s attempts were deliberately thwarted by the General Assembly, since in the space of a decade only half the bibles donated by Boyle had passed on to the Highlands. This slow response of the General Assembly to Kirkwood’s efforts, insisting that the final text be scrutinised by divines before its release, shows more concern for a possible hidden Episcopalian agenda through “erroneous doctrine” than it does for the effect the bibles would have in prolonging the Gaelic language. Constant encouragement for the scheme, from the Anglican monarch Queen Anne, may even have acted as a deterrent.

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67 Durkacz, Decline of the Celtic Languages, 16.


69 Durkacz, Decline of the Celtic Languages, 19.

70 Durkacz, Decline of the Celtic Languages, 19.
There was also the perception that Gaelic dialects were so altered from one region to the next that no single version of a biblical text would suffice. Hence objections to the Irish Old Testament provided by Boyle and Kirkwood, over the use of a classical Gaelic typeset, were also genuine concerns about the comprehension of the congregations who would receive it, and the ability of the General Assembly to deliver the Word faithfully.71 This was despite the fact that in reality the same could still be said of the various English dialects. The General Assembly’s reining in of variations in scriptural songs in 1706, with the aim of releasing a standardised, “correct” version back into the community, shows a failure to understand the interaction between written and spoken media and the processes of transferral that could quite easily alter their printed songs as they made their way back into oral settings. Perhaps due to its long history in print and the extent to which it had spread as a written medium, English was seen as a standardised language to which all its speakers could have access. By this time it was also the common language of the General Assembly, as well as the Union, and therefore it was assumed that texts could be easily monitored and controlled against the threat of innovation. The same could not be said of Gaelic.

One cannot ignore that early SSPCK management came to place great emphasis on the importance of learning to read and write in English only. However, the desire to teach written English did not automatically translate to a desire to wipe out spoken Gaelic. Kirkwood’s point, on effectively immersing oneself in a language in order to learn it, was never fully adhered to. The hospital proposal whereby, the children could be removed from the undesirable influences of home, was never revisited, and each day

71 Meek, “The pulpit and the pen,” 94-95.
children returned to the familiar surrounds of Gaelic-speaking households. It was not until 1723 that pupils were sent to Lowland schools, and then only when they could read and speak English.\textsuperscript{72} There was no directive for the schoolmaster to speak only English in class and have his pupils speak only English in return until 1720. This directive, however, was an attempt to overcome the problem of a lack of comprehension that is inherent in learning another language by rote. Hence to ensure that students understood English as well as read it, the SSPCK recommended that “the masters do only converse with them and cause them converse amongst themselves as much as possible in that Language.”\textsuperscript{73} Just one year later, however, an alternative plan was put forward in a petition led by three ministers and including several schoolmasters, which proposed “a thorough scheme of simultaneous translation”.\textsuperscript{74} This was also an attempt to remedy rote learning, in response to the problem of children returning home who could read the Bible to their parents in English “but understand not even the plainest historical part of what they read.”\textsuperscript{75} Again the “isolation”, that came from only knowing Gaelic, was a motivation:

so it will make them capable to instruct their Ignorant parents at home, who are themselves fond of knowledge and are sensible that their Ignorance of the English language is their great Loss, by being thereby excluded from all Commerce, Conversation and Correspondence with the rest of the nation.\textsuperscript{76}

Also in 1720 the Gaelic speaking Rev. James Robertson of Balquhidder requested on his parishioners’ behalf that their children learn to read Gaelic psalms once they knew

\textsuperscript{72} Withers, Gaelic Scotland, 124.

\textsuperscript{73} Committee Minutes vol. 2, 15 Jan 1720, SSPCK, 346.

\textsuperscript{74} Durkacz, Decline of the Celtic Languages, 63-64.

\textsuperscript{75} General Minutes, vol. 2, 1 June 1721, 170-171.

\textsuperscript{76} General Minutes, vol. 2, 1 June 1721, 171.
the English Bible, as it “would be good use in families who have nothing but Irish.”

He was simply advised that neither “Irish” nor Latin reading were taught in the SSPCK schools, only English.

When one considers the importance of oratory skill in the traditional bardic ideals of learning, the complaints of Highland parishioners, concerning their children’s inability to read aloud in a way that their listeners would understand and relate to, take on new meaning. By traditional standards their children’s education would have seemed incomplete. Interestingly this aspect of the SSPCK’s learning system appears to be of greater concern to Highland parents than the rote learning that helped to produce it, identified by SSPCK officials as the major problem. Learning by repetition was actually an important element of the bardic system and in the everyday lives of clansfolk, in terms of memory skills and the need to faithfully pass on lore from one generation to the next; hence the excellent memories of the St Kildans noticed by Martin.

The early SSPCK’s insistence on using only English and teaching by rote perhaps says more about their attitude towards the texts in use than it does their attitude toward learning in languages other than English. All the texts prescribed for their students’ education were valued doctrinal works. They included the Shorter and Longer Catechisms, Vincent’s *Catechism*, the Bible, New Testament, Confession of the Faith, and Guthrie’s *Trial of a Saving Interest*. Their Gaelic speaking schoolmasters would no doubt use Gaelic when addressing the remote community they served, in order to

77 Durkacz, *Decline of the Celtic Languages*, 61.

78 Martin, *Late Voyage to St Kilda*, 73.
provide for them in the vernacular, whether it be “reading the Scriptures, praying, singing of psalms [or] catechising . . in the places of public worship.” The act of learning to read, however, was not simply taught in English because that was the perceived language of written culture, but taught in English and by rote because, at a time when the only written translations into Gaelic were by “intruding” Episcopalians, this was the only way to protect the prescribed texts and the doctrine they represented from innovation.

In so doing, the SSPCK’s methods of learning were at odds with what was valued amongst common Highlanders in terms of the necessary skills involved in continuing on the oral traditions. The women’s waulking songs mentioned by Martin, the *orain luadhaidh*, give insight into these skills. The last line of one waulking verse was often the first line of the next, and a constant metre was kept by the steady beating of the cloth. Usually the eldest of the group would play the lead “Chantress”, while the rest took up the chorus. Until the day when she would be too old to keep up with the physically tiring day-long kneading, the lead would have to have learnt a large store of songs, as it was considered bad luck to repeat a song during the waulking session which would last all day. Hence memory and learning by repetition were important elements in oral culture. However, while the SSPCK’s insistence on rote learning stemmed from a culture focused on preserving text against changing ideas, for the remote Highlanders, such a system was worthless if it did not allow for growth and change within the community that it represented, if effectively the songs no longer spoke to the people. Memory retention may have been an important skill in the preservation of tradition, but adaptability and invention were just as highly prized. For example, the lead singer of

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the *oran luadhaidh* needed the initiative to know when to leave out or add verses depending on the progress of the work. While her repertoire included many old songs of their history and past heroes, there would also be more recent topical compositions. After all, the very essence of the communal telling at the heart of oral culture is the concept that it is a living culture, their history and family ties not only kept alive by word of mouth but constantly growing and continuing through the participation of and interaction between orator and listener, lead and chorus.

Indeed, the century preceding the Act of Union and the SSPCK’s first royal charter had been particularly fruitful when it came to Gaelic poets gifted in the art of making social and political comment about current events that affected them and their fellow Highlanders. These modern bards were no threat to the purity of doctrine cherished by the General Assembly. However, along with publishers of Lallans material in the early eighteenth century, they resisted the changes that came with union, or for that matter with any coser associations with the South. Both groups promoted old value systems, and added their own voices to histories and national affairs; their point of view often challenging the ideas of a united national identity put forward by the SSPCK, and the stereotypes their own identities.

The modern Highland bards continued to reinforce the traditional value of ancestral pride, often employing traditional methods such as praise-poetry. For example, Eachann Bacach’s “*A’ Chnò Shmhna*”, celebrating the deep roots of Sir Lachlan Maclean’s Gaelic ancestry, defied the conventions of the genealogical histories aspired to by the modern lairds: “*Thriall ar bunadh gu Paras; . . . Craobh a thuinich re aimsir; / 'Fhriamhich bun ann an Albinn*” (Your stock went back to King Pharaoh; . . . A
tree that lasted an age,/ that put roots down in Scotland).”\footnote{Eachann Bacach, “A’Chnò Shamhna (The Hallowe’en Nut),” in \textit{The Gaelic bards from 1411 to 1715}, ed. A. Maclean Sinclair (Charlottetown: Haszard, 1890), 45-46; trans. Thomson in \textit{Introduction to Gaelic Poetry}, 129.} Mairearad Nighean Lachainn attributed the demise of her beloved Macleans to a shift in values; their downfall brought about by their refusal to give up the old ways of loyalty and duty, and embrace the less honourable ways adopted by their enemies: “the law has brought them down; / alas for those whose loyalty / is paid to king or prince. // Ingenious guile pays better, / as your spiteful foemen found”.\footnote{Mairearad Nighean Lachainn, “Oran do Shir Iain MacGill-Eathain (A Song to Sir John Maclean),” in \textit{Introduction to Gaelic Poetry}, trans. Thomson, 145.} Similar anguish can be found in such songs as Iain Lom’s “\textit{Murt na Ceapaich}”, which questioned in disbelief a world where the chief and his brother could be murdered by lesser members of their own clan, a concept that flew in the face of all things held dear by Highland tradition.\footnote{Iain Lom, “\textit{Murt na Ceapaich} (The Keppoch Murder),” in \textit{Orain Iain Luim: Songs of John MacDonald, Bard of Keppoch}, ed. Annie M. Mackenzie (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 86; trans. Thomson in \textit{Introduction to Gaelic Poetry}, 125-126.} Such examples spoke out against the increasing dilution of Highland values resulting from continued contact with the outside. Hence, although they were not Jacobite, there was an air of separatism about them.

In their concerns regarding the preservation of identity, modern Highland bards were not alone. There were also Lowlanders, especially with the advent of Union, who lobbied for the appreciation and continuation of their own threatened culture. One early eighteenth-century attempt at defiance in Lowland Scots was James Watson’s \textit{Choice Eachann Bacach}, \texttildelow\textit{A’Chnò Shamhna (The Hallowe’en Nut),” in \textit{The Gaelic bards from 1411 to 1715}, ed. A. Maclean Sinclair (Charlottetown: Haszard, 1890), 45-46; trans. Thomson in \textit{Introduction to Gaelic Poetry}, 129.\footnote{Eachann Bacach, “A’Chnò Shamhna (The Hallowe’en Nut),” in \textit{The Gaelic bards from 1411 to 1715}, ed. A. Maclean Sinclair (Charlottetown: Haszard, 1890), 45-46; trans. Thomson in \textit{Introduction to Gaelic Poetry}, 129.}
The idea of language as a source of national pride was certainly not lost on Watson:

As the frequency of Publishing Collections of Miscellaneous Poems in our Neighbouring Kingdoms and States, may in a great measure, justify an Undertaking of this kind with us; so ’tis hoped, that this being the first of its Nature which has been publish’d in our own Native Scots Dialect, the Candid Reader may be the more easily induced, through the Consideration thereof, to give some Charitable Grains of Allowance.

The majority of the poems throughout the Collection, and we can assume throughout the wider community that it attempted to represent, were non-political in nature. They were popular ballads selected from hundreds that were published as broadsides and in chapbooks. Like the majority of Gaelic poetry, these and many other Scots poems were a celebration of the society that produced them, its history and culture.

Highland and Lowland histories, however, could be very different to that put forward by the Establishment. The modern Highland bards’ personal take on great matters tended to shift focus back to the level that really mattered as far as they were concerned, emphasising the impact on the individual or clan rather than on the State. Hence Iain Lom’s narration of the Battle of Inverlochy turns it from a decisive episode of the Scottish Civil War, where Montrose led the royalist army to victory against the Covenanters, into a personal moment of revenge in the age old feud between clans.

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Donald and Campbell, witnessed and savoured by Iain Lom himself after leading
Montrose’s men to the Campbells who had attacked his homeland:

\[
\begin{align*}
&D\text{ìreadh a mach glùn Chùil Eachaidh,} \\
&Dh’\text{aithnich mi oirbh sûrd bhur tapaidh;} \\
&Ged bha mo dhùthaich ’na lasair, \\
&S éirig air a’ chùis mar thachair.
\end{align*}
\]

As you climbed the spur of Col Eachaidh,
I recognized your high mettle;
though my country had been left ablaze
what has happened now repays the score.\textsuperscript{85}

In another poem, while Iain Lom castigates Charles II for inaction during the
Interregnum, the young exiled king is merely an aside, the true subject of the poem
being the loyal and therefore beheaded Marquis of Huntly.\textsuperscript{86} Similarly, Mairearad
Nighean Lachainn’s anti-Jacobite lament over Sir John Maclean’s death in 1716 shifts
the focus of the ’15 Rising and the battle at Sherifmuir to their consequences at home:

the West has been broken,
the heir’s not come to wisdom,
this year brought destruction,
sore our loss from Mar’s sudden rising.\textsuperscript{87}

Lowlanders also had a sense of their own version of history, very different to that
remembered by the English. In Part 2 of Watson’s \textit{Collection} of poems, Robert III of
Scotland’s assertion, that the ancient Scottish throne had far more legitimacy than the
throne of England usurped by Henry IV, was no doubt meant to raise questions
regarding the current dynasty’s validity:

\textsuperscript{85} Iain Lom, “\textit{La Inbhir Lochaidh} (The Battle of Inverlochy),” in \textit{Poetry of Scotland}, trans. Thomson, 220-221.

\textsuperscript{86} Iain Lom, “\textit{Cumha Morair Hunndaidh} (A Lament for the Marquis of Huntly),” in \textit{Orain Iain Luim}, 50-52.

\textsuperscript{87} Mairearad Nighean Lachainn, “\textit{Gaoir nam Ban Muileach} (The Mull Women’s Cry of Woe),” in \textit{Introduction to Gaelic Poetry}, trans. Thomson, 144.

218
To thee Hary of Lancaster,
Thy 'Pystle I have considered well.
Duke of that Ilk thou should be cal’d
It was thy righteous Style of auld,
But nae King I will call thee,
For hurting of Kings Majestie;
For I will take nae heeding
Of thy unrighteous Invading;
For what was right (as is well knawn)
Ye all defould within your awn.

As Robert III’s reply becomes increasingly patriotic the more Lowland Scots enters his vocabulary, as he recalls the history of an independent Scotland compared to that of an ever conquered England.

This potential for language to be used as an expression of identity, especially with regard to Jacobite and anti-Union sentiment, was another reason for the SSPCK to take a pro-English stance. The power of language was not lost on Watson, for instance, who saw his publication as a way to preserve what he considered to be the Scottish identity, against a growing number of neighbouring expressions of patriotism. Part 1 of his Collection was published in 1706 amidst the heat of the Union debate, followed by a second and third part in 1709 and 1711. While many of the poems are harmless enough, on closer inspection some of them reveal a sense of national identity at odds with the Establishment’s ideals. The “Lintoun Address”, for example, although its Prologue and Epilogue pay respect to the Prince of Orange, fails to address William as

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king, while its main argument is a complaint against the hardships felt by Scottish subjects under his government’s economic policies.

Watson’s *Collection* includes English as well as Lallans poems, and indeed English was of course as much a voice of protest as any other. Subversive English texts for or against the Stuart dynasty had been in existence since the civil war at least, and various methods were employed to effectively (and safely) deliver Jacobite or anti Union written forms of protest to the public. A published letter from afar might hint at the miraculous healing powers of a displaced king. A fictitious ghost might speculate as to why lesser lairds were dispossessed, it was up to the reader to take that logic a step further and consider the dispossession of a king. Much of the Jacobite poetry in England talked in code, often with reference to Aeneas, Vergil’s hero of Troy in exile, or using Jacobite symbols such as oak signalling royalty, blackbirds pertaining to exile, and Messianic stars pointing toward the true heir apparent. On occasion such imagery even crept into children’s learning material undetected, like the alphabet sentences of an early primer that taught “K. King Charles the good./ No man of blood . . . O. The royal Oak/ Our king did save/ From fatal stroke/ Of rebel slave.” However, the advantage of English and other written languages, as far as the Establishment was concerned, was that despite all the attempts at code and ambiguity, the law could quite easily act against

89 Anonymous, *The Kings Maiesties last speech in the Isle of Weight [sic]. Concerning a hot game to bee plaid in the moneth of May; and a declaration of his Majesties proceedings at Carisbrooke castle, touching the present affairs of the kingdom of England...* (London: Printed by J. C. for R. G., 1648), 2.


the perpetrators of subversive texts and regularly did so. For example, Watson had experienced the displeasure of the authorities in 1700 when he had been briefly imprisoned in the Tollbooth and then exiled from Edinburgh for a year and a day for his part in publishing controversial pamphlets. This was not uncommon. One broadside, a conversation between the pillory and Defoe, is a disgruntled commentary on how the justice system had become obsessed with punishing people whose only offence was to put their criticism of the State into print, while real criminals escaped unscathed.92

English, however, tended not to be the weapon of choice of many literate Scottish Jacobites and anti-Unionists, preferring to express their patriotism in print through either Latin and Lowland Scots, depending on the demographic they wished to address. For example, the Latin text by James Philip, *The Grameid*, a celebration of Viscount Dundee’s victory at Killiecrankie, the first of the Jacobite risings, might appeal to the more high-brow members of society. Many Lowland Jacobites without the benefit of a classical education, however, turned instead to their own native Lallans as a means of expressing their own notions of allegiance. The poem “Lochnaben Gate”, written around the time of the ’15, clearly demonstrates how much people had come to appreciate the way in which choice of voice could define one’s allegiances when the meaning of words themselves, such as “traitor” and “king”, had become ambiguous, dependant on one’s point of view:

I asked a man what meant the fray, I look’d the traitor in the face,  
‘Good sir’, said he, ‘you seem a stranger: Drew out my brand, and ettled at him:  
‘This is the twenty-ninth of may; ‘Deil send a’ the whiggit race  
‘Far better had you shun the danger. ‘Downward to the dad that gat ’em!’

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‘These are rebels to the throne, Right sair he gloom’d, but naething said,
‘Reason have we all to know it; While my heart was like to sunner.
‘Popish knaves and dogs each one. Cowards are they, born and bred
‘Pray pass on, or you shall rue it.’ Ilka whinging, praying sinner.\(^93\)

Note that the Lallans in this poem does not unleash its full potency until the Jacobite begins to speak it directly.\(^94\) Only then are his true sentiments revealed.

Apart from the danger of prosecution, these written forms of protest also ran the risk of being adopted by advocates of the very Establishment that they rallied against, and effectively backfiring on them. For example, in “A Dialogue between Whigg and Whigg” the Lallans voice of a Scottish peer is the voice of a sincere Presbyterian Whig, addressing “Tom Double”, the fictitious embodiment of the corrupt Whig first brought to life in 1701:

What Deels come ower our English-Men, I think their aw gen wood, Sir,
Caunt they let auld Friendship staun, and Kindness whare it stood, Sir.

…. ….

Ye ken right weel when ye cam here, ye solemnly Protests, Sir,
Gin we wou’d furnish ye with Gear, yeud tak awa the Test, Sir.

And gatt na yee Ten Thousan Puns to gang and seek for Voatts, Sir,
And now our Kirks a pulling doune, Odds Wouns yeve cut our Throats, Sir.\(^95\)

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\(^{94}\) Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics*, 140.

\(^{95}\) Anonymous, “A Dialogue between Whigg and Whigg: or, Tom Double’s Rogueries Discovered” (Dublin: John Haite at the Back of Dick’s-Coffee-House in Skinner Row, c.1710 (?))
While the Lowlander’s voice here is again the voice of protest, it has been adopted by one who still considers himself loyal to the Establishment while maintaining his Scottishness. All for tolerance between his fellow Scotsmen and their Englishmen, he is not so much critical of the promise of Union, but disillusioned by the inability of those in Westminster to fulfil that promise. There were other poems, however, in which the Scots language was nothing short of lampooned in order to ridicule any sense of patriotism associated with it.  

“The pretended Prince of Wales’s New Exercise of the Scotch Lang Goon”, for example, with its use of double entendre mixed with Lowland Scots, was a deliberately bawdy sounding poem, as it ridiculed an apparently inexperienced James Francis Edward when it came to the use of firearms:

Caust a Cogle intull her Wem.

Tak the Lunt from your Bonnit.

Stop it in her Moo.

Grip your Lang Wond.

Lug him owte.

Hod him up, Sir...  

Such attacks, by deliberately portraying their language as vulgar gibberish, attempted to remove the validity of any argument made by Lowlanders in their subaltern voice. In another example a description of Edinburgh using an exaggerated Lowland Scots accent in a babbling non sequitur is described as “the true northern dialect, hardly intelligible by any but natives of that country,” the English author thus painting both Lowlander

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96 Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite politics*, 140.

and Highlander with the same dullard brush. However, there was also a very practical reason why Highlanders were depicted in Lowland voices, namely that their attackers were unable to do so in Gaelic.

Unlike written forms of protest, those expressed in Gaelic were resistant to popular forms of pro-Establishment propaganda and riposte, such as the broadside, due to the fact that it was not a language of the Lowlands or the South, and that it was considered a purely oral language. This also meant that the composers of such works were resistant to legal prosecution. The same zealous censorship does not seem to have applied to the Gaelic bards as it did for the likes of Watson or Defoe. Iain Lom (John “the Blunt” MacDonald) provides us with two excellent examples of anti-Union and pro-Jacobite song that appear to have escaped any form of punishment or public challenge. Late in his career, he launched a scathing attack on the alleged corruption of those Scottish peers who voted-in the Union, abandoning their constituents:

\[
\begin{align*}
Mhorair Duplin gun fhuireach & \quad \text{Lord Dupplin, without delay} \\
Dh’hosgail ainneag do sgòrnain, & \quad \text{the vent to your throat opened,} \\
Dh’èirich rosgal ad chridhe & \quad \text{a turbulence rose in your heart} \\
’N uair chual’ thu tìghinn an t-òr ud; & \quad \text{when you heard the gold coming;} \\
Shluig thu ’n aileag de’n gheanach, & \quad \text{you swallowed the hiccoughs of avarice,} \\
Dh’at do sgamhan is bhòc e, & \quad \text{your lungs inflated and swelled,} \\
Dh’hosgail teannsgal do ghoile & \quad \text{control over your gullet was relaxed,} \\
’S lasaich greallag do thòna. & \quad \text{and the traces of your arse were unloosed.}
\end{align*}
\]


99 Iain Lom, “Oran an Aghaidh an Aonaidh (Song Against the Union),” in Poetry of Scotland, 226; trans. Thomson in Introduction to Gaelic Poetry, 127.
His earlier address to William and Mary was even more vindictive, portraying the couple’s behaviour as a betrayal of the close ties of blood valued by Highlanders, as wayward offspring in a conniving and almost unnatural alliance against father and uncle:

‘N uair a thàinig thu Shasann
'S tu rinn aiseag a’ bhreamais,
Sheilbh chòir thoirt air éiginn
O’n athair-chéile thug bean duit;

When you came to England
what mischief you brought in your train,
to deprive by force of his rightful possession
the father-in-law who gave you a wife.

Is mairg Rìgh a rinn cleamhnas
Rì Duitseach sanntach gun tròcair,
Ghabh e t'oighreachd ad anntoil,
Thar do cheann is thu 'd bheòshlaint.
Pity the King who made an alliance in marriage
with a covetous and merciless Dutchman.
he seized your inheritance in your despite, over
your head while you were still alive and well.\(^{100}\)

His bitterest curses were aimed at Mary for having turned her back on her direct family:

Ach seun gun tuisle air Màiri,
Is olc an làn tha 'na togsaid;
Nar fhaisear laogh càrraid
Nuas gu lèir as a poca.
But may there be a disabling spell without
fall upon Mary, evil is that which fills her
hogshead; may offspring beloved by father
and mother never be brought forth by her.\(^{101}\)

Yet while Iain Lom blatantly expressed his Jacobite sympathies in his tirade against William and Mary, they were shrouded by his use of the Gaelic language and oral

\(^{100}\) Iain Lom, “Oran air Rìgh Uilleam agus Banrigh Mairi (A Song to King William and Queen Mary),” in Orain Iain Luim, trans. Mackenzie, 202-207.

\(^{101}\) Iain Lom, “Oran air Rìgh Uilleam agus Banrigh Mairi,” 208-211.
transmission. Hence even today “Oran air Righ Uilleam agus Banrigh Mairi” is still misinterpreted by some as a genuine tribute to the royal couple’s accession.\(^\text{102}\)

While the lyrics of Iain Lom and his contemporaries could be quite provocative, one needs to consider them in the context of how they might be received by non-Gaelic speaking men and women of the literate world. The majority of their work continued to be directed at a local and clan oriented audience, composed and delivered within an oral setting, the artists often illiterate themselves.\(^\text{103}\) While their poems remained in oral format they apparently continued to be considered safe and non-threatening by those men of authority used to living in a literacy-oriented society, unfamiliar with the conventions of an oral community. Their content would have been regarded as trivial and their audience confined, whereas written works such as those circulated by Watson were a source of constant vigilance in the eyes of the authorities. Hence, by denying Gaelic a literary medium, in their minds the SSPCK helped to deny it of any potency, and in so doing deprived Jacobites and anti-Unionists of yet another non-English weapon to add to their written arsenal. Even when the subject matter of Gaelic poetry was not Jacobite or separatist, comment from the modern bards was still a confirmation of their perceived Highland identity. It made sense then, not to add Gaelic voices to the cacophony of published ideas that were circulating on the streets of Edinburgh and glued to the walls of public houses throughout the Lowlands; ideas that were not necessarily antiestablishment, but at the same time were not in keeping with the pro-Unionists of the General Assembly’s notions of a united Britain.


It has been suggested that the hardening of the SSPCK’s pro-English stance in the 1720s was a response to the Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1718; that the Society linked the continued use of Gaelic with the spread of insurrection and concluded that extirpation would bring about submission. Yet in the aftermath of the ’45, seen as a much greater threat to the Establishment than earlier risings, the SSPCK’s policy began to soften as they made moves for the production of a new Gaelic Bible. While celebrating the spread of English into the Highlands, the 1727 General Assembly also congratulated itself on the increase in the number of “Irish” speaking candidates for the role of schoolmaster, thanks to the work of the SSPCK. Hence, by 1745 the number of literate Gaelic speaking Highlanders, educated in the principles of Calvinism, would have been such that, not only were there those who could write Jacobite propaganda in Gaelic, but there were also now those who could aid the General Assembly in monitoring whatever Gaelic was written. The wayward SSPCK schoolmaster, Alastair mac Mhaighstir Alastair, was case in point. He wrote Jacobite songs celebrating the coming of Bonnie Prince Charlie, and was reprimanded by the SSPCK for deserting his post during the 1745 rebellion. Yet only a few years earlier he had produced the first Gaelic-English vocabulary for the benefit of the SSPCK. He published a Gaelic book of verse in 1751, the title of which provocatively translated as *The Resurrection of the*

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105 Meek, “The pulpit and the pen,” 94.


107 Durkacz, *Decline of the Celtic Languages*, 65.

108 Durkacz, *Decline of the Celtic Languages*, 64.
Ancient Scottish Language, or New Gaelic Songster, and in response the authorities could confidently have it publicly burnt by the hangman as seditious. ¹⁰⁹

The majority of the SSPCK’s managing committee, and many of the General Assembly’s moderators, were not only men of letters but also men of law. For them, the power of words was measured not only by their ability to persuade but also their utility in prosecuting; and the Assembly’s desire for control of the spiritual word carried over to control of the secular as well. The many forms devised by the SSPCK’s Secretary, John Dundas, were all about transferring unruly verbal agreements into manageable written agreements, amenable to legal process. The way to deal with misleading, dangerous or heretical texts was to first examine that text, in order to determine the extent of the danger, the degree of transgression from doctrine “by law established” or from officially accepted versions of events; and then to censure or destroy said text, often by public burning, and reprimand or punish its author. Such were the methods used against the subversive writings of the likes of the Cameronian Hepburn or the mystic Bourignon, or the Master of Stair’s young and outspoken brother Dalrymple. The failure of the printing press to find a footing in the Highlands had meant that, unlike the prolific amount of oral tradition in Lowland Scots that had found its way into print, the transfer of vernacular Gaelic verse from the spoken to the written medium had stalled. It made no sense then, to provide Highlanders with the weapon of written Gaelic, until the General Assembly and its judicatory hierarchy were sufficiently armed against it.

The SSPCK’s refusal to teach Gaelic literacy did not necessarily stem from a desire to extirpate the language. Despite the insistence of some of their contemporaries that there was a need to extinguish it altogether, the SSPCK was actually only concerned with restricting Gaelic as a written form of communication until the General Assembly, through the progress of the SSPCK, was able to understand and control it, as the Assembly tried to do with all other written languages within its sphere. Neglect and discouragement from an anglicised Highland nobility towards those responsible for the preservation and propagation of Gaelic as a written language, and failure to embrace the printing phenomenon, had rendered any moves to teach Gaelic literacy superfluous. In the eyes of men of learning from the literacy-oriented Lowlands, English equalled written and Gaelic equalled spoken, and therefore English was considered the superior in terms of commerce and communication with the rest of the kingdom. While “Irish” automatically labelled Highlanders with otherness, lack of access to written English was seen as the main cause of their isolation. Those efforts to remove spoken Gaelic from the classroom were only made in terms of improving students’ understanding of written English.

The SSPCK’s motives were not so much the promotion of a particular language, but rather a particular mode of delivery of language, as part of the General Assembly’s vision of a progressive Presbyterian Scotland under the Union, driven by the written Word. The amount of emphasis placed on the importance of providing a Gaelic speaking ministry to the Highlands reveals an appreciation of how useful the language could be in the General Assembly’s mission to spread Presbyterianism throughout Scotland. This was despite the fact that there was a strong and growing Gaelic oral tradition of social and political criticism at grass roots level, occasionally even verging
on the treasonable. Also, the keen interest of Episcopalians in bringing Gaelic translations of religious texts to the Highlands had not helped its cause. However, subversive Gaelic was considered less threatening than has been assumed, so long as it remained in an oral context, as oral compositions tended to be dismissed as powerless. Fears that political protest or Episcopalian dogma could gain potency by being transferred into Gaelic print may well have been a consideration in the decision not to teach written Gaelic in the early SSPCK schools, as it was only later, with the growing ranks of Gaelic speaking students sympathetic to the General Assembly’s cause, that the SSPCK allowed Gaelic translations of doctrine to enter the curriculum. It is true that the SSPCK was willing to risk teaching literacy in English, a language which had proved so prolific in the spread of challenging ideas, but then the ability of the General Assembly and other authorities to counter attacks written in English had long been established. Hence it was in the best interests of the Establishment to confine Gaelic to a purely oral existence until such time that it had the means to effectively prosecute any use of written Gaelic that transgressed the law, whether religious or political.
Conclusion

Through an analysis of the early SSPCK in terms of asserting its idea of the new Scottish identity under Union, this thesis has questioned some of the more general stereotypes surrounding the Society, namely that it was predominantly an actively anti-Catholic, anti-Gaelic, united force in an anglicisation agenda for the Highlands devised by the General Assembly. Yet the composition of the SSPCK, with members representing every echelon of British society, including Episcopalian subscribers, meant that the Society was often factional, with objectives and rules agreed to on paper never fully adhered to in practice, especially with regard to the location of schools, the treatment of papist children and the use of Gaelic in the classroom. While the Society’s official aim was to educate Catholic children in the principles of the Reformed religion in the hope of conversion, the parishes to be targeted tended to be determined by the degree of Episcopalian rather than Catholic activity in the area. The General Assembly’s continued encouragement of spoken Gaelic in the delivery of the Gospel, and of Gaelic-speaking schoolmasters for the classroom, shows a tolerance for the language in oral format, despite whatever official stance the SSPCK took on printed Gaelic. Both Catholicism and Gaelic were essentially obstacles to anglicisation. The General Assembly’s and the SSPCK’s somewhat relaxed attitude towards both therefore suggests that anglicisation was not the driving force it is often considered to be in motivating the SSPCK. Of greater concern for the General Assembly was the importance of Scotland sharing a united identity with England under Union, while still maintaining the dominance and jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Faith which for the Assembly most defined Scotland as a nation.
“Now there’s ane end of an old song,” were the pragmatic words of the chancellor of Scotland when he signed the Act of Union before the last Scottish Parliament to sit for nearly the next 300 years. The composition of a new song, however, of Scotland in harmony with England under the partnership of Union, was not as simple as the passing of the Acts of Union, even with the added assurance of separate acts passed specifically to protect the interests of both countries’ respective Established Churches. Many of the voices raised in trepidation over the new arrangement came from the Lowlands. Their complaint was the perception of Union as a threat to Scotland’s independent identity, although that identity was as varied as the number of groups that clamoured to be heard. Watson’s *Choice Collection* was only a sample of the many songs that identified Scotland through their Lowland heritage and the language that came with it, suddenly seen as threatened under Union from the constant exchange with English songs and ideas from across the border, although in reality this exchange had been happening for centuries. There were also the Lowland fundamentalist Calvinists, especially around Dumfries and the South-West, who identified Scotland in terms of its duty under the Covenant to spread the Reformed religion throughout the world. For them the terms of Union, whereby Scotland was to tolerate the continued dominance of Prelacy south of the border, betrayed Scotland’s identity as champion for the Calvinist cause. Indeed, tracts published by some of their more prominent leaders often portrayed members of the General Assembly and its Church as traitors against Christ and the Covenant for

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their complaisance and compliance, compromised by the Union just as they had been compromised by every other negotiation with the Government since 1688.²

As for that identity envisioned by the General Assembly, and embodied in the SSPCK, it was one of a moderate, mainstream Presbyterian Scotland, leading North and South Britons in a united cause for the safety and prosperity of the new Union. The Assembly’s and the Society’s focus on the Highlands, and call on the new Great Britain to do likewise, deliberately drew attention away from continuing disgruntled voices in the South and the East. Conflicting notions of unity while maintaining difference, especially with regard to identity, are most typified in examples of Lowlanders considering Scotland’s relationship with the Highlands. The SSPCK was no exception in this regard. The “otherness” of the Highlands, from their ancient origins to their modern day allegiances, continued to be a source of curiosity and concern for their Lowland neighbours. The treatment of the Glencoe “rebels” and the debate that followed reveal divisions between Lowland and Highland cultures that were still fresh at the time of Union. The point of Union had been to consolidate otherwise irreconcilable differences between Scotland and England. Episodes such as Darien had

² Gavin Mitchell, Humble pleadings: For the good old-way or a plain representation of the rise, grounds and manner of several contendings of the Reverend Mr. John Hepburn (minister of the Gospel at Orr in Galloway) and his adherents ... against many sins and defections in the establishment and proceedings of the church and state of Scotland, about and since the revolution, [Edinburgh?]: 1713; Anonymous, A true coppie of the declaration [of a poor, wasted, misrepresented Remnant, of the suffering, Anti-popish, Anti-prelatic, Anti-erastian, Anti-sectarian, true Presbyterian church of Christ, in Scotland, united together in a general correspondence] published at Sanqhair upon the tenth day of August 1692, Edinburgh: 1693; Colin Kidd, “Conditional Britons: The Scots Covenanting Tradition and the Eighteenth-century British State.” *English Historical Review* 117 (November 2002): 1150, 1155 and 1157.
highlighted how Scotland would always take second place to England in affairs of trade and exploration so long as it entered into such ventures as England’s competitor. Had Darien been successful then the relationship between the two kingdoms might have evolved differently.³ On the other hand, the failure of Darien had made an incorporated Union necessary for Scotland, if anything simply to recoup the kingdom’s losses in the scheme. However it was the strong sense of patriotic separatism that had accompanied the Darien venture, more so than any sense of competition, that had spelt its downfall.

During the Union debate, and once it was established, Union supporters in the General Assembly used differences within Scotland, between Highlanders and the rest, as a means to promote the benefits of union throughout Britain.

It may have backed the Union of 1707, but even the General Assembly was somewhat disgruntled with the outcome, especially with regard to the liberties blatantly exercised by some Episcopalian ministers within Scotland’s borders. In this regard, the SSPCK was part of the General Assembly’s overall goal to assert a homogenous religious identity for the whole of Scotland, by steadily occupying those areas of the country where a strong Episcopalian presence could be found, namely the Highlands.

Throughout this thesis there has been a sense of this underlying presence of Episcopalians, occasionally trickling to the surface whenever their actions tried the General Assembly’s patience. From the authors of Highland commentaries like Martin, to apologists of Highland popular belief like Robert Kirk, to Highland reformers like Kirkwood, the impetus for action in the Highlands by the General Assembly was constantly being provided by Episcopalians. They were also a constant reminder of

Episcopalian interests there. This was a particular concern to the General Assembly when the religious identity of Scotland as a nation, prescribed by law under the treaties of Union, was supposed to be Presbyterian. While Episcopalians in Scotland were to be tolerated under Union, non-jurors were still seen as a threat not only to the Presbyterian backed Government but also to the preservation of the purity of doctrine of the Reformed religion, which that Government was in turn supposed to support.

Episcopalian’s propensity to investigate the supernatural for the sake of debate, and to produce their own Gaelic translations of religious text, could only add to the General Assembly’s anxiety of Episcopalian driven innovation in doctrine. Also, the decades of Episcopalian ministry pre-Glorious Revolution had proved apparently ineffectual in the suppression of Catholicism and heathenism, according to the above mentioned Episcopalian authors’ accounts of the Highlands, making it necessary for the General Assembly to remedy such “errors” through organisations such as the SSPCK. While the Society’s mission was of course to convert Catholics and dissuade pagan practices, its early tendency to place schools in Episcopalian rather than Catholic areas shows perhaps a more pressing goal to ensure that the “correct” form of Protestant religion was being delivered to those in need of salvation. There were already ample laws in place to ensure that the movements of Catholics could be controlled. The early SSPCK seems more interested in ensuring that these controls were governed and administered by the Established Church rather than by any local Episcopalian incumbents.

While maintaining Scotland’s religious identity was a primary concern for the SSPCK, another important goal was support for the regime that endorsed that identity. To this end, it was necessary to secure those “dark corners” of the kingdom where the allegiances of the inhabitants were as ambiguous as the very borders that contained
them — namely the Western Highlands and Islands, and the far North. By bringing its own brand of Christian light to these regions it was also hoped that the SSPCK would instil the correct loyalties towards its preferred version of the State. Jacobitism was always a greater threat to the General Assembly than Catholicism, as its consequences could once again mean an end to Presbyterian ecclesiastical supremacy in Scotland. Even so, the Society’s concentration in the West when Jacobitism was more potent in the East again seems to confirm that its main concern was the establishment of a Presbyterian presence over that of an Episcopalian one. Defining the Highlands’ physical borders, working from their outermost Western and Northern points inwards, in a sense claimed them as part of the overall identity of Scotland and thence Great Britain. Through their schools the SSPCK hoped to kindle the proper sense of work ethic and duty amongst Highlanders, for the good of the new nation rather than for clan and chief. However, Highlanders now included under the banner of Union brought with them their own expressions of national identity and sense of place within the kingdom, which had the potential to muddy the General Assembly’s design of Scotland as much as their popular beliefs threatened to muddy pure Doctrine.

Hence, while keen to bring the Highlands into the fold of Union, the SSPCK was at the same time still determined to maintain distinctions between Highlander and Lowlander. Students were expected to serve the Union without leaving their station, their instruction in the Reformed religion removing “their aversion to Industry”, even inducing them to “take themselves to some honest Imployment for their Subsistance”; their Highlands envisioned as “a Nursery of Seamen bred for Ships of Trade and War, and also of Men to serve by Land when Occasion requires it.”

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4 SSPCK, An Account, 7.
schoolmasters, while receiving the finishing touches in a Lowland environment, were not expected to teach in the Lowlands, but were sent back into the Highlands to continue the cycle of planting the Presbyterian faith as prescribed by the General Assembly. The trials and errors of Alexander Buchan show how difficult it was for the stricter kind of Presbyterian schoolmasters to make any progress across the cultural divide in the more extreme Highlands. In more accommodating areas the Society’s itinerant schools system effectively kept schoolmasters aloof from the communities they were sent to serve, thus forestalling any undesirable effects of assimilation, so that the Assembly’s policy on the preservation of the pure religion extended into the socio-political as well.

Perhaps the most confounding element of Highland identity for the General Assembly was its mode of delivery. The idea of a totally paperless expression of identity, defining not only oneself but one’s people through nothing more than song and oral history, was incomprehensible to educated Lowlanders. Yet for the Highlanders, not only was their place in space and time confirmed by the genealogies of their clan or the praise poetry of their chiefs, maintained by word of mouth by the seanchaidh and other bards, but even those stories recalled by physical presences in the landscape, such as Finn MacCumhaill’s meat cauldron or the stone where he would tie his faithful hound Bran, held a place in defining who they were. The ancient warrior race of the Fianna were not just seen as myths but as a part of the Highlanders’ past, connected by the visual “evidence” of their existence that still remained in the form of standing stones and giants’ caves. There was also the assignment of otherworldly qualities to words — bound up in faerie-, folk- and charm-lore — in order to define the Highlanders’ place in a spiritual context, affirming both the vulnerability of humans in connection with the
supernatural but also their ability to control it to some extent. The Lowlanders’ solution was to apply their own interpretation of the Highland identity, based on what their literacy-oriented minds could fathom from the evidence before them — data which frankly did not compute. The only explanation available to them was: “barbarian”, “heathen”. Similar thoughts no doubt crossed the minds of Highlanders with regard to the “incomplete” education of their children when taught only the reading of spiritual texts in the SSPCK schools, in a fashion that could not translate into oratory skills.

Though language played an important role in establishing Scotland’s new identity, the SSPCK’s agenda was not about simply replacing one language with another. Although “Irish” identified the speaker as “foreign”, the language of the Gaidhealtachd was not the real problem for the SSPCK. There were educated British subjects, such as Robert Kirk and Edward Lhuyd, as open to learning Gaelic as they were any other language. Its use as protest or criticism of other identities jockeying for position did not mark it for extinction, but merely postponed its re-entry into the written medium. As for the language of those Lowland voices that differed from and contradicted the General Assembly’s, the Society simply ignored it. The promotion or denial of the Lowland Scots tongue never once entered the SSPCK language debate, even though many Lowlanders would have seen it as a valid and Scottish written language suitable for teaching literacy to Scottish children. Instead, like all things Highland, the General Assembly’s approach to Gaelic was about putting it to good use in the service of the Union, as a means of spreading the Reformed religion governed by the General Assembly. However, the only Lowland voice that the SSPCK sought to make audible was that of the General Assembly, and in the language it identified with — English.
English was the written language of the new Union, used on both sides of the border. It was also the language of Law.

For the many legally minded decision makers of the General Assembly, defining the identity of Scotland in the new Union was best done through the application of the law. Hence the Society took issue with the oral medium that supported Gaelic, not only because the language’s orality rather than its foreignness alienated its speakers from the rest of the Union community, but because the perceived lack of paper in the Highlands was confirmation to the General Assembly that this was a lawless society, an image further supported by the failure of previous laws such as the 1696 Education Act to have any real bearing past the Highland line. The General Assembly’s preoccupation with forms and the transfer of verbal and visual processes into written ones were the efforts of an organisation committed to correcting the Highlands’ neglect and ignorance of the law. Hence it was necessary for an organisation like the SSPCK to bring literacy to an otherwise void and indefinable people of Scotland as far as the law was concerned. Yet although education was a means to enhancing the law, and vice versa, the fundamental purpose of both in the hands of the General Assembly was the maintenance and propagation of the true Reformed religion, be it through kirk sessions or charity schools.

As an extension of the General Assembly, the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge sought to affect the geography, religion and language of the Highlands in order to reflect an image of a homogenous Scotland amenable to the new Union. Its mission was to promote the General Assembly’s brand of religion, patriotism, law and government. It was about instilling the correct version of these things according to the General Assembly. Religion was to be moderate Presbyterian.
The correct patriotism was a Lowlands version, still superior to the Highlands but which also saw itself on equal footing with the English. The law was there to empower the General Assembly in all things touching on the spiritual and, due to members’ links to high positions in the legal system and government, often those touching on the temporal. The Government to be obeyed was that of the Union, which further empowered the Assembly by drawing secular authority away to the South and manipulating the line of its monarchy so as to never again be a threat. There was of course opposition to the General Assembly, both in the Highlands and the Lowlands, not only by Catholics or Episcopalians but also by other Presbyterians. However, through the skilful manipulation of representations of these other identities within Scotland, the SSPCK was able to diminish or vilify these in order to successfully project the General Assembly’s own vision of Scotland to the rest of the Union.

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5 J. C. D. Clark, “Great Britain and Ireland,” in Brown and Tackett, 68.
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