

Historic Scotland podcast: Series 2, Episode 1 transcript

Chapter 1

Sarah's intro:

Hey, it's Sarah.

Thanks so much for being an Historic Scotland member. This member-only version includes some additional behind-the-scenes content at the end, where Adam and I chat about the story behind the story, why we chose the locations we did this season, and maybe the odd deleted scene too.

Welcome back. We're so happy to have you here.

Okay, here's episode one. Enjoy.

Hello, and welcome to the Historic Scotland podcast. My name's Sarah MacGillivray. I'm an actor and writer with a passion for people, place and story.

Each episode we visit a different site to uncover its meaning both past and present.

Today, we're off to Dirleton Castle and Gardens. Nestled in a quiet village, this fortress once housed noble families and later became a prison for people accused of witchcraft during one of Scotland's darkest chapters.

Chapter 2

01:00

Morvern:

So in Scotland, we know that almost 4,000 people were accused during the whole time the Witchcraft Act was in existence. So almost 200 years.

Sarah:

That's Dr Morvern French, a properties historian and interpreter at Historic Scotland. We're also hearing from the University of Edinburgh's Emeritus Professor of History, Julian Goodare.

Julian:

And they probably, because they're not experts in interrogation, they are not realising how far they're leading her on.

Chapter 3

01:36

Sarah:

Built to impress, Dirleton Castle was once a space of status and spectacle where noble families ate, talked politics, entertained guests and demonstrated their power. But Dirleton's story is much more than what's visible at eye level. Beneath these rooms of privilege and prayer lies something far darker. And what happened here wasn't hidden away. Throughout its history, everything unfolded in full view of everyday life.

To understand the story of Dirleton Castle, you have to hold all of that at once. Power and punishment, faith and fear, belief and brutality. But let's start at the start.

Morvern:

The castle itself, we don't know the exact date that it was started construction, but we think it possibly dates back to the 13th century, to the 1200s. And the first owners were a family called de Vaux, which are an Anglo-Norman family. So they started out in what's now France, and then they came to England, and then they came up here, as lots of high-status families did at that time, around the time of the Norman Conquest of England. So they came up here and they had quite high status in Scotland as well. One of them was the steward of the Queen, Marie de Coucy, who was the Queen of Alexander II. So we think that around that time they were establishing themselves here in East Lothian and they started the

building of this castle. And so part of the castle that you can still see today, if you're facing the castle from the drawbridge, it's on your left. It's called the De Vaux Towers.

Sarah:

Oh, nice.

Morvern:

So there are two round towers. And then, where we are standing now, in the Haliburton range, underneath this range is the remains of two further towers.

Sarah:

So that would have been the first parts of the castle, the two De Vaux Towers over there and under where we're standing as well.

Morvern:

Yep, so the whole structure would have been almost as big as it is now. But then the Wars of Independence happened. Robert I had this policy of, it's called slighting castles. So once he captures a castle, he makes it indefensible. He tells his soldiers to destroy parts of it. So he had the two towers that are underneath the Haliburton range destroyed, left the two remaining towers that we can still see today. And this was to make it harder for his enemies to hold a castle against him in the future. So, for example, the English or any of his Scottish enemies couldn't use it to defend this location any more.

Sarah:

Okay, so it was too much for him to try and run it and take it over himself. So instead he makes it sort of indefensible so that an opposing army couldn't take it over and use it for themselves.

Morvern:

Yeah. And it takes a lot of resources, as you suggested, to run a castle. So it saves him the bother of spending his own resources doing it as well. So it's sort of strategic destruction.

Sarah:

That's interesting because I always wondered because you see so many of these castles and so many are in quite a lot of a ruined state. And then so part of that was maybe his destruction of them at the time. And then they obviously went through different phases then afterwards.

Morvern:

Yeah. So a lot of castles like Dirleton, they have later phases added on to what had been destroyed in Bruce's time. And then still a lot of those later phases are ruinous, like the Great Hall that we're standing in now. Part of that is because of later events, like, for example, Dirleton was besieged in 1650. And part of that is just the stone was reused by local people for other structures.

Sarah:

For houses or farms...

Morvern:

Yeah, exactly. So before the time when we were more conscious of preserving things like we are now, they would just go, 'oh, here's this stone sitting doing nothing. We might as well. You said it's a good stone'.

Sarah:

That's quite interesting, just repurposing it for something else that was more essential to them at the time. And so then the Haliburtons. So were they another family?

Morvern:

The de Vauxs held it until the middle of the 14th century. One of the daughters of William de Vaux, whose name we don't know, unfortunately, she was the heiress and she married a guy called John Haliburton. So it's very sort of male-centred, the naming of the different ranges. So the Haliburtons owned the castle from that point onwards, and they developed this quite large range that we're standing in just now. So it's got the Great Hall, which is quite sizable. Underneath, there are massive cellars for storage and servants. And then we've got, at this other end, underneath, we've got the chapel and then underneath that the prison.

So there's quite a lot surviving, even though the room we're in now doesn't have a roof or walls. There's quite a lot still that you can see a lot of the original features.

The castle changed hands again around the beginning of the 16th century. So another heiress, Janet Haliburton, she married William Ruthven, who was Lord Ruthven, and that family, they later became the Earls of Gowrie. And again, it was like these prominent families that had high positions at court and they had this amazing castle.

Over across the way there, you can see that building there dates from the 16th century and it's called the Ruthven Lodging because it was built around the time that the Ruthvens were owners of the castle. In 1584, the 1st Earl of Gowrie, he was actually executed for treason. And his widow, Dorothea, she lived out the rest of her days here. She probably died about 20 years later or something. And then after that, the property sort of reverted to the crown because of the treason.

And then in the 17th century, it changed hands a few times. So it was owned first by a guy called Thomas Erskine, who was a courtier. And you'll notice with the dates that this was quite soon after the Union of the Crowns. So lots of the courtiers who used to be based in and around Edinburgh now spent a lot of their time in London. So a lot of the castles up here fell out of regular use by their owners.

And then, in 1631, it was owned by a guy called John Maxwell of Innerwick. He got the title Earl of Dirleton. And it was actually during his time that the whole witch accusations happened. Although he personally doesn't seem to have been involved. So he was quite often away as well. He had other property in East Lothian and he also spent a lot of time at London as well. So by that point, I think he wasn't actually living here. It was just one of his several properties.

Chapter 4

08:58

Sarah:

Probably quite a good time to move on to talking about the witch trials.

Morvern:

Let's go to the present.

Sarah:

The present, okay.

Morvern:

Yeah, there's present stuff in and there's stuff in...

Sarah:

Present stuff, witch stuff. There's so much stuff!

With a solid understanding of the history of Dirleton Castle under our belt, Morvern and I descended into its belly, down some steep steps.

Morvern:

This is the chapel and then underneath us is the prison.

Sarah:

Both of these locations, the godly sanctuary of the chapel and the prison below it, and a third location, the village green just outside the castle grounds, are vital to the story that we're about to tell. Dirleton is famous for many things, including its witchcraft trials.

Morvern:

So in 1563, Parliament outlawed witchcraft. And this was just coming just a few years after the Reformation Parliament, where Parliament said everyone must now be Protestant. So there were concerns around that time, a lot to do with morality, and there was sort of a belief that individual morality and acts could affect wider consequences for everyone.

In Dirleton, the parish church actually used to be at Gullane, but it got moved to Dirleton because the one at Gullane was sort of in disrepair. They said, oh, we'll build a new one at Dirleton where all the people live.

In 1631, the estate was owned by John Maxwell of Innerwick. The minister of Dirleton from 1639 was a guy called John Makghie. So he was the minister of Dirleton while this specific witch hunt was happening in 1649-50.

So around the time that John Makghie became the minister, there was a lot of conflict going on between Presbyterians, who at that time were the radical Protestants, and the monarchy and also, of course, you'll know about the civil wars that were happening between the monarchy and the English Parliament, so that everything was sort of tumultuous at that time and the Scottish politicians were concerned about the survival of Presbyterianism. They didn't like that the monarchy was trying to impose a more Episcopalian form of worship, which is more ruled by bishops and more hierarchical, whereas the Church of Scotland, which is Presbyterian, was designed to be more flat hierarchy.

And in 1638 there was the National Covenant, which many people have heard of. It was signed at Greyfriars in Edinburgh and that was them saying no to bishops, no to anything except Church of Scotland. So there was a lot of concern by 1649, which played a part in the appearance of this panic period where they were targeting more witches than usual. So there were periods like 1649 to 50 where there was extra attention paid and more people than usual were accused and at one time. And in East Lothian area was especially a hot spot for this, so as Dirleton is in East Lothian it was one of the main places where this happened.

And what usually happened was that the local churches, so the local ministers like John Makghie here, would say, 'Do you lot know about any witches?' or 'Do you know any suspicious people?' and then people would come forward with accusations. The church would get together with the local officials who could investigate the supposed witches. Once they felt they had enough evidence, they would appeal to the central authorities and say,

‘Are we allowed to try this person?’. Parliament would say yes or no. They would try them. If they were found guilty, they would be executed.

Chapter 5

12:55

Sarah:

We’re going to come back to Morvern, but first I need you to meet Julian.

Over a period of about 200 years, almost 4,000 people in Scotland were accused of witchcraft. Julian has dedicated much of his life to researching witches throughout the ages and piecing together some of their stories.

I began by asking him, what exactly makes a witch?

Julian:

So the village idea of witchcraft is that somebody has got special powers and uses them to harm their neighbours. But the elite idea or the demonic idea of witchcraft is the pact with the devil. And so that’s a kind of thought crime. It’s not about practising witchcraft or committing an act on a particular occasion. You know, it’s about a sort of identity. You know, you have the identity of a witch. Because the village idea is that people have these powers, but they don’t necessarily have to use them. You know, if you steal someone’s goods, that doesn’t make you a thief, that doesn’t give you the identity of a thief for the rest of your life. You know, you can be rehabilitated.

Sarah:

Yeah, yeah. That was something you did. It’s not who you are.

Julian:

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. But once you’ve made a pact with the devil, that is who you are.

Sarah:

Right. So then you are...

Julian:

And you know, the common folk believe in the devil too, so it's not an entirely strange idea to them, but it's not a sort of everyday thing. But this period in European history, it's the time of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in Catholic countries. Scotland becomes Protestant, so we've got a Protestant witch hunt, but you know the Catholics are doing it with their versions in Catholic countries too.

Sarah:

So it's no coincidence that's happening at the same time?

Julian:

No, no, no, it's not a coincidence because both of them, they're trying to reform their countries. They're trying to enforce their correct version of Christianity. They're trying to prove that they're more godly than the other lot. From time to time, they're actually fighting each other. There are religious wars. They are really trying to use the authority of the state and the authority of the church, because the church is part of the state. The church has got courts, it's got power. And they're trying to use it to make everyone godly and to eradicate ungodliness. And most of the ungodliness is pretty minor, sort of minor sins. And they're mostly trying to do it in a sort of constructive way. But witchcraft is pretty serious and it's recognised as a capital offence and you need to be burnt.

Sarah:

And Scotland seems to have a really intense, am I right...?

Julian:

Yes, it does.

Sarah:

...with the witch trials. I mean, from its starting in, what, the 16th century?

Julian:

Yeah.

Sarah:

And that was during the Reformation. You said that Scotland executed five times more witches per capita.

Julian:

Yeah, that's right. It's sort of a simple, broad-burst statistic. And it means something, I think. It happens all over Europe, but it happens unevenly. It's a bit random. You know, why Scotland is more intense is very hard to say. One thing about East Lothian is it's not far from the capital and so, you know, it's relatively easy to go to the capital and get authorisation to hold a witchcraft trial. But, you know, once you learn to do it, you keep on doing it.

Chapter 6

16:38

Sarah:

Records of people that were accused and tried aren't complete. Many have been lost to time. And, in a lot of cases, we don't know exactly what happened to the accused. It's fair to guess that many, including the people we're about to hear about at Dirleton, were executed. Because Dirleton, as a village just a stone's throw away from the capital, had its own witchcraft trials.

The year is 1649. And this is the story of Agnes Clarkson.

Julian:

So the Witches of Dirleton...

Morvern:

The first character, so to speak, that we know about is called Agnes Clarkson.

Julian:

The first one who seems to have been accused is Agnes Clarkson. How did she come to the attention of authorities? Probably because she's been named by a previous confessing witch in Longniddry, which is a bit to the west of here.

Morvern:

She appears in the record in June 1649. She is held prisoner in Dirleton Castle at that time. and it said that in the presence of John Makghie, the minister, and various secular officials, she makes a statement. It's as close to her words as we can get, but filtered through...

Sarah:

Someone writing it down...

Morvern:

Filtered through someone completely separate, who was not really on her side, so to speak. So the account does say that our sundry particulars of malefice offer to be made good against the said Agnes Clarkson by witnesses. She is accused of having caused harm to people, but it doesn't say what those acts are or who they are. The main point of the witchcraft that these people are concerned about is the pact with the devil that she made.

Sarah:

The rest of this episode contains sexual themes and descriptions of torture that may be inappropriate for some audiences.

Morvern:

It's quite prurient as well. It's quite sexual as well.

Sarah:

Is that often the case? That it comes out as that?

Julian:

The devil does seem to have a lot of sex with the female witches. That does seem to be a sort of unestablished Scottish thing. And it doesn't happen everywhere.

Morvern:

It says that the Piper's mother from Longniddry, lately burnt for a witch, came to Agnes's house. So someone who's already been executed for witchcraft. And tries to prompt her to become the devil's servant, which is another way of saying become a witch.

Julian:

Presumably, Agnes is giving this confession in this way because she's being asked about this. She knows that there's a connection between her and this other woman. And she does say this other woman has already been burnt as a witch. So, this other woman clearly, you know, she has been tried. She has been interrogated. Almost certainly she has named Agnes and that's why the interrogators are asking. So she tells some kind of fantasised story of how she met the devil.

Morvern:

Agnes says, 'The next day came in the devil in the likeness of a black dun dog and went up and down the house and seized upon the said Agnes her clothes and thereafter, turning into the likeness of a black man, had carnal copulation with her.'

So the devil appears as a dog, runs around the house, then he turns into a man. And it's not clear what it means by black man. In those days, if someone had dark hair, they could be described as black. So it doesn't mean they had African heritage. It's unclear what exactly it means.

Julian:

Some of it is obviously pretty stereotyped and the interrogators are obviously asking standard questions because she's talking about the same kind of thing that I've seen in dozens or more confessions than I care to mention. Did you have sex with the devil, carnal copulation as it's called?

Morvern:

The pair of them have sex together and it says she did find his nature cold.

Julian:

And she found his nature to be cold.

Morvern:

Which means his semen, because he's not a real human, so he doesn't have any warmth; he's completely frozen.

Julian:

This is something that they can work out rationally because the devil is a spirit, he doesn't have flesh, he doesn't have blood and so he doesn't have heat, and so they're expecting the witches to notice when they have sex with the devil that his body is cold. So they ask about

that and so she says yes his nature was cold. Ah yes, you see this proves that it must be true because she can give the correct answer.

Morvern:

And then he says, you will become my servant, renounce your baptism. Eventually she says okay.

Julian:

So they're pretty convinced that she's guilty and they just want her to tell her story and so, you know, they feed her with the details. But she also has the opportunity to, you know, make it idiosyncratic and to bring in her own details.

Morvern:

And it says he gave her a mark at that time in the backside of her left arm beneath the elbow. So he gives her the devil's mark, which was one of the ways that interrogators would physically search accused people. So if they find any part of your body that's weird in some way or seems suspicious to them, they say, 'oh, the devil put this there when you made the pact'.

Sarah:

So is this part of that 'witch-pricker' thing where the witch-pricker would be looking for the devil's mark on you, which could be anything?

Morvern:

Yeah, so there's no record of Agnes being pricked but she might have offered up this mark on her arm as the devil's mark because when witches were pricked, it was a very invasive process, but it's possible that she didn't want to be stripped in front of all these men and to have them search for the mark.

Sarah:

That's horrific.

Morvern:

And then it says about 14 days ago there was a meeting of the devil and sundry others with him upon the green of Dirleton, which is just outside the castle, in the twilight, so she hears this noise and comes out and they're all dancing together, the devil with all of his people.

Julian:

One thing that struck me, they ask, 'When did the meeting with the devil happen?' is that she says it was at twilight, and I thought I've not seen that in a confession before. That's intriguing. Midnight I've often seen or just in the night. Twilight is an interesting time because it's a sort of in between – it's not really night, it's not really day, but, you know, in between times, boundaries and, you know, there are times when something particularly magical might happen. So that seems to be an idea that she's got. She'd probably be very confused, what is it that they want from me? But, you know, when she comes out with that, they find it convincing and so they write it down.

Sarah:

Why is it always dancing with the devil?

Julian:

They've got to somehow reconstruct the idea of how witches worship the devil. Because this is all imaginary, none of this really happens. Nobody says to themselves, 'I'm a witch'. And nobody really gets together and does this. So they're thinking that this is some kind of anti-religion or underground demonic religion. What do witches actually do? They're going to work it out. Some of it comes from actually ancient accusations against medieval heretics, or even going further back, ancient accusations against the early Christians by the pagan authorities in the Roman Empire. The idea that there's a sort of underground or secret meeting and they have some kind of festivity or some kind of...

Sarah:

Like sort of debauchery, like dancing.

Julian:

Yeah, and in some versions of this, there are sort of indiscriminate sexual orgies, for example.

Sarah:

Okay, so it's all of that sort of hedonistic type ideas.

Julian:

Yeah, or there aren't, but you know, it's all imaginary. You know, there's a sort of, that sort of imagining, you know, what would wicked people get up to? I think they probably, the mainstream view would be, look, well, dancing itself is okay, but it gets out of hand sometimes. It encourages people to lose their inhibitions and to have extramarital sex, which they definitely disapprove of.

Sarah:

Right, so that's a massive part of it.

Julian:

And then there are drunken brawls, which they don't approve of either.

Morvern:

And it says again, he appeared in the likeness of a black man with a staff in his hand. And Agnes says she recognises people she knows at that dance. So she says, Patrik Watson from West Fenton, which is a small settlement just outside Dirlerton, his wife, Manie

Halieburton, and another woman called Bess or Bessie Hogge. So she recognises them dancing with the devil.

One of the things that the interrogators would be looking for was for Agnes to name other witches to try and root out all of the problematic people that were part of the community. So she says, then she went to West Fenton and she saw these three people and she said, look, we are going to be tried for witchcraft. And she says they just made fun of her. They thought it was hilarious. That sort of implicates them in it.

Julian:

They also want to know further names because they think this is a conspiracy. You know, this is what they've seen from other places. There isn't just one witch. There's a whole group of them. She gives them three names and then she says, well there were other people there but I didn't recognise them, so trying to maybe limit the damage or maybe those are the only names she can think of, but, you know, trying to limit the damage I think is quite common.

Sarah:

Oh wow! To like try not to say too many names.

Julian:

Yeah, yeah. But equally, she's got to give these three names, and she's clearly not in custody at this point, unless the whole thing is a fantasy, because she says that she then went to these people and warned them. I find this very hard to work out. Is that whole thing a fantasy or did she really go to them, and they laugh, to say, you know...? I'm really not sure.

Morvern:

And then at the end of the record, because she's confessed, it says there's sufficient ground for supplicating a commission to sit upon and try the said Agnes. So that means they're going to appeal to Parliament to be able to formally try her, even though it's obvious from what's already been said that she's not going to come out of this with anything good happening.

Sarah:

So this is all pre going and doing it officially?

Morvern:

Yeah.

Sarah:

Wow.

Chapter 7

27:13

Morvern:

So now we've got these new characters coming in, Patrik Watson and his wife, Manie Halieburton. And there's an account by a guy called John Kincaid, who was a famous witch-pricker. He would go around and be paid for finding witches by pricking them. And the pins that he used to prick them were not little tacks that you put in your drawing board, they were big, massive pins, about the size of your hand. Really big pins. And some people actually bled to death from being pricked. So it's not... the word prick is so innocuous it covers up the horrible torture that was happening.

Sarah:

Yeah, and probably could be infected as well, you know, something going that deep into you.

Morvern:

Exactly, exactly. So he was trying to find... if he couldn't see a visible mark, like a weird birthmark or a mole or something, he would start pricking to try and find a place that was

insensible to pain. So if the person didn't react when he shoved this massive pin in, he would go 'oh this is the place'.

So he gives an account. This is also around the same time, sort of summer 1649. He says that Patrik and Manie, long suspected of witchcraft, 'of their own free will, uncompelled, hearing that I, John Kincaid was in the town of Dirleton and had some skill and dexterity in trying of the devil's mark, came to the broad hall in the castle of Dirleton and desired me to use my trial of them as I had done on others'. So he's saying that Patrik and Manie asked him to prick them. Which...

Sarah:

What do we think? Do we think John's telling the truth?

Morvern:

Well, he doesn't come out of any of this well. Even in his own time, people thought he was a bit dodgy.

Sarah:

Yeah, he's getting paid to find. It's in his best interest to find some people to prick, so he's getting paid for doing his job.

Morvern:

Yeah, yeah, exactly. They're in the Great Hall at the castle. And imagine this is happening in front of a collection of local officials. They're all men. They're all fully clothed. And Patrik or Manie are getting their clothes taken off to be searched for these marks. And he says he found the devil's mark upon the backside of the said Patrik Watson. So on his back, a little under the point of his left shoulder. And upon the left side of the said Manie Haliburton, her neck a little above her left shoulder.

So Patrik at least has had his top stripped off. Possibly once they found the mark near Manie's neck, maybe she was saved from that sort of public humiliation. But it's not clear. And he says these places weren't sensible. So there was no pain or anything when he pricked them. So he's found the devil's mark on them.

And in another account from around the same time, it mentions that Manie was also a prisoner in Dirleton Castle. It's possible that some of the other witches involved here were also kept prisoner – it just doesn't say, so maybe Patrik was as well.

Chapter 8

30:33

Sarah:

So we're going down into the prison. We're going down some really steep stone steps and you really get a sense that you're actually going, I mean, you're not going underground, but you feel like you're definitely going into sort of a confined space, one tiny slitted window, and you have to be careful going down the steps into a very low-roofed, stone-cold, quite small room. You feel the confinement. I mean, it is a prison, but you definitely feel that. It's very miserable, and it's a bright day today, but a tiny window and you're not getting much light. We've all got our phone torches on.

Morvern:

And you make a good point about the light as well, because you see there's one small window there. It's not going to do very much. At the opposite end, we've got a fireplace there. But that is it. There's no comfort at all.

Sarah:

Nothing.

Morvern:

This is the prison. Down that hole was the pit prison. So that was even worse. So we can't go down it now, but down there there's no window and no fireplace. If you were put down there, you would have literally none of these comforts that you get up here. Trying to make the suspect as confused as possible and really make things as difficult as possible makes me think possibly Agnes and Manie were held down in the pit prison. Because if they couldn't see the light, they would lose all sense of what day it was. And imagine you're down

there and then you get suddenly hauled up here and brought up into the Great Hall of the castle. Your eyes would have to adjust.

Sarah:

Completely confuse you.

Morvern:

Yeah, and with guards, not on their own. So there would have been guards in this top room to watch them and keep them awake.

Sarah:

I can't imagine sitting here on my own or with other people with no, like, we've got our torchlight. But I can't imagine sitting here on my own or just sitting here for an hour. Let alone, like, through nights and kept awake.

Chapter 9

32:30

Sarah's intro:

Alongside Agnes, Manie and Patrik were other accused people. Bess Hogge, Marione Meik and Margaret Goodfellow. Their words haven't survived, but Bess and Marione are recorded as having confessed. In June 1649, Agnes and Patrik were described as having already suffered for the crime of witchcraft, suggesting that they had been executed.

In August, Parliament formally allowed the execution of certain persons guilty of the crime of witchcraft within the parishes of Haddington and Dirleton. It doesn't name them, but as most of the remaining Dirleton witches confessed, it seems highly likely that they were among them.

People found guilty of witchcraft were strangled to death and their bodies then burned. The so-called witches' belongings were typically seized to pay for their own trial and their own imprisonment. Torture was common in the extraction of their confessions.

Sarah:

We've heard their confessions, should we say, of witchcraft. But then obviously there's a lot of torture that would have taken place.

Julian:

Yes, they don't usually write anything down about that. We don't know the details, but we've got sort of general statements that torture is common. You don't just, you know, unprompted think, oh, well, I guess I'll just invent a crime of witchcraft and confess to it and get myself burnt.

Sarah:

Yeah, yeah, without some sort of prompting.

Julian:

Without some sort of prompting. Yeah. So, yeah, what they usually seem to have done is sleep deprivation. So they have a rota to keep the person awake around the clock for three, five nights. And this is a very effective method of torture. You know, you think at the beginning, you know, you're going to resist, you're not going to cooperate. But in the end, you do cooperate. You have to talk. That's what happens. That's what torture does. And sleep deprivation also has a couple of additional effects. It doesn't just make you talk and make you cooperate. It also may cause you to hallucinate and have strange experiences. So when they're asking about meeting the devil, some of those experiences may actually be influencing the stories that they tell.

And the other thing it does is it makes you lose confidence in your own memory and your own identity. And so, you know, you may have thought when it started, well, obviously I'm innocent, you know, this won't be a true confession. But after five days of it, you may think, well, maybe the interrogators are right.

You know, they're confident.

Sarah:

Yeah, they seem so convinced.

Julian:

Yeah, they're convinced. And some of them do seem to continue, even after the torture has presumably stopped. These people were different from us in some ways, but the same as us in some ways. And if we understand some of these unusual things that they've done, we can also think about how would we cope in those times?

Sarah:

Yeah.

Julian:

One of the more challenging questions I occasionally used to ask my students or still ask myself is, if we really believed today that the devil was active in the world, the devil could manipulate the physical world to make things appear and disappear, could actually play with our own sense perceptions to make us see things that weren't there. If we really believed that could happen and that there were other humans who were in league with the devil, you know, what would we do? Really, what would we do?

Chapter 10

36:53

Sarah:

On International Women's Day 2022, then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon issued a formal apology for the Scottish witchcraft trials, acknowledging the injustice they caused and the thousands of otherwise innocent people who were executed. The story of the witch hunt has lessons for us all. It is so easy to lose sight of our common humanity.

Within the walls of Dirleton Castle, noble families lived and partied, soldiers defended it, and innocent people suffered. For some, their final fate was cruelly decided within sight of its stones.

Once you know what has been endured here, it's impossible to see it in the same way again.

This has been the Historic Scotland podcast.

It was produced and edited by Adam Stoner. I'm Sarah MacGillivray.

Next time, I'm heading to Holyrood Park.

Situated right in the heart of Scotland's capital, we're heading back in time to uncover its iconic geology, including the famous Arthur's Seat. Its archaeology and how the site has been used by people just like you and I for millennia.

See you then.

Chapter 11

38:33

Adam

Hi, my name's Adam. I'm the producer of the Historic Scotland podcast. And every single episode, we're taking you, Historic Scotland members, behind the scenes to understand the story behind the stories that we've chosen to tell.

And this story has a great story, because this episode idea came about on day one of recording season one of the podcast. We were at Edinburgh Castle, about to record an episode about the One O'Clock Gun, and as we were approaching the castle we saw this monument to the witches of Scotland, to the witches of Edinburgh, burned at the stake on a location near where that drinking fountain, near where that monument is.

I knew immediately that we had to cover something to do with the witchcraft trials and, luckily for us, Dirleton was the perfect place. Lots of really tricky stories to try and get tonally correct as we kind of put together this episode, but Sarah, what was it for you that really hit home?

Sarah:

I think as well what probably struck home about this place was, I mean, that prison was so cold and dark and I can't actually even begin to imagine how just brutal that would have been. And then that's such a massive contrast around this place because the gardens there are so well looked after and they're just lovely to be in. Like, we walked around a lot. We kept walking, didn't we, with Julian.

Walking and talking always feels like a really good way to speak to people and to have a lovely conversation and to hear lots of information. It's just really a lovely way to do it.

So we spent ages with Julian just walking around these beautiful gardens. But just the juxtaposition of that sort of loveliness of the gardens with some of the history in that castle was just quite astounding, the difference there.

But it's just such a lovely place to be and it's such an interesting place as well. I mean, it's pretty famous. I think a lot of people do know about it and maybe don't know the sort of the varying history over the years. So it's incredible, like the work that Morvern's doing as well with the Interpretation Team, and they've got a new interpretation board there, don't they, about the witch trials? So, I mean, it's great to see that work being done.

And I think that's a big merit to Historic Scotland as well, the work they do in keeping looking, keeping searching. I don't think it ever ends, does it? There's always more to uncover. There's always stories that are missing. And they seem very active in trying always to be open and to look.

What did you think? What did you take from Dirlerton Castle? What was your main takeaways? Because you were with us walking those gardens. I mean, how did that feel for you?

Adam:

Yeah, I mean, the gardens are absolutely gorgeous. The castle itself is absolutely gorgeous. Do you know what I love? I love the fact that I can visit these places now. And, you know, with the help of Morvern, we recorded some with her last season. With the help of experts like Morvern, I can now see the different layers of history that are in these places, in like the windows and, you know, the different brickwork. So that's been a real education for me personally.

But yeah, there's this really interesting sort of duality in all of these places in that they are stunning. They are so beautiful and they are so worth visiting. And they also hold these

incredibly dark stories, which is something that we're kind of finding in a lot of the places that we go.

It's not all doom and gloom, though. We have some absolutely amazing episodes coming up this season. This one, though, really impactful. And it just had to be the first that we told.