



THE WITCHES OF BO'NESS

CAST

NARRATOR / WILLIAM DUNDAS *the Bo'ness Witchsmeller*

ROBERT HAMILTON *Laird of Dechmont*

WITCH 1 Annaple Thomson

WITCH 2 Bessie Vickers

WITCH 3 Margaret Hamilton

WARLOCK William Crow

TOLBOOTH JAILER

Note: There were five wiches in 1679 but we had only three when the play was put together so the script was adjusted to suit! The others could be added in as required.

THE TOLBOOTH South Street Bo'ness

DECEMBER 1679

THE NARRATOR SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE. HE TELLS THEM ABOUT EARLY WITCHY EVENTS IN BO'NESS AND DISTRICT AND THEN DESCRIBES THE BACKGROUND TO THE EVENTS OF 1679. AS HE REACHES THE END OF THIS HE BEGINS TO PUT ON VARIOUS BITS OF COSTUME, CLOAK ETC. TO BECOME WILLIAM DUNDAS HE CONCLUDES HIS PIECE WITH THE WORDS:

“Having confessed their guilt they waited in the Tolbooth for the arrival of the man who would judge them innocent or guilty.”

ENTER HAMILTON WHO MOVES OVER TO HIS CHAIR AND SETTLES DOWN OVER A BUNDLE OF PAPERS.

Dundas This grumpy old man here is Robert Hamilton the Laird o' Dechmont. He's the Baron Bailie for the Regality of Borrowstounness. He's come this morning from Kinneil House where he's spent a few days as guest of the Duch-ess Anne Hamilton his kinswomen.

He thinks he's here tae decide if the puir halfwits in the Tolbooth are witches or no - and if they should burn or no. That's whit he thinks, but I've already decided. They burn on Tuesday!

. . . . Oh by the by, I'm William Dundas, the Bo'ness witch smeller. I sniff them oot, confess them and then burn them! Its a nasty job but somebody has tae dae it.

Guid morning tae you my Lord!

Hamilton Whits guid aboot it? Dae ye ken that the road frae Kinneil tae the Ness is flooded at Capies Point. We had tae paddle through the water tae get tae Corbihall. And whit a dirty dump Bo'ness is noo - it must be the filthiest toon in Scotland

Dundas ASIDE He's obviously no been tae Fa'kirk recently. Aye Sir its dirty a' right. Dirty salt pans and dirty coal pits.

Hamilton An'dirty people! Whit a Godforsaken hole.

Dundas Aye but its God's business that brings ye here my Lord.

Hamilton I hae nae confidence that burnin' a few mair o' the devil's hand-maidens will restore this toon tae the favour o' God but we hae tae try. Whaur are they onyway?

Dundas They lie below in the Tolbooth jail - waitin' for your honours attention.

Hamilton How mony are there?

Dundas Five auld dames an a miserable apology fur a man - every last yin a confessed servant o' Satan. Here are their confessions. (HANDS OVER A BUNDLE OF BLOODSTAINED PAPERS)

Hamilton Well get them in here ... the sooner we get through it the sooner I'll be safe and sound back in Kinneil. Nae witches in Kinneil Mr Dundas .. the Lord's presence is great ower there and its as clean as your toon is clarty

Dundas Clarty, but cosy, my Lord. Clarty but cosy.

Hamilton Bring them up!

Dundas Aye aye sir ...Bring in the Prisoners!

ENTER THE GUARD WITH THREE WITCHES IN CHAINS FOLLOWED BY THE MAN BLOODIED, LIMPING AND STOOPED LOCKED INTO THE NECK BRACE

WITCH 1 (Annaple Thomson) STRUGGLING AND SHOUTING

WITCH 2 (Bessie Vickers) CRYING, PLEADING FOR MERCY

WITCH 3 (Margaret Hamilton) SPACED OUT AND SILENT

Hamilton SILENCE WOMEN! Whit's wrang wi' this man?

Dundas He's been helpig us wi' oor enquiries. He fell against a wall

Witch 1 Liar! liar! He's been pit tae the torture.

Hamilton SILENCE! Whit have you done tae him?

Dundas Only the boot and the thumbscrews it is permitted in the Lord's business.

Hamilton Release him frae that brace Mr Dundas . . . he'll no run awa!

Witch 2 Oh God forgie me! Dinna burn me my Lord. My bairns, my bairns.

Witch 1 Shut up ye auld fool

Witch 2 Aye, I'm an auld fool but no a witch. Spare me.

Hamilton If I'm no mistaken there are twa women missing - you did say five did ye no?

Dundas Aye my Lord - one o' them got haud o' a whisky bottle by black magic and shes too drunk tae stand up.

Hamilton An the ither yin?

Witch 1 She's hauf deid frae the torture - he's nearly killt her (POINTS TO DUNDAS)

Dundas That's jist yer freend Satan talkin! Shut yer mooth.

Hamilton Whaur is she?

Dundas Eh .. indisposed my Lord. We hae sent fur a doctor.

Hamilton We cannae wait. Read oot the charges.

Dundas READS Ik ane o you are indytted and accused that whereas notwithstanding be the law of God set doon in Leviticus and Deuteronomie and be the laws and Acts of Parliament the cryme of witchcraftyt is declaired tae be ane horid abominable and capital crime punishable by the paines of death - you hae entered into a paction wi' the devil the enemy of your salvation and have renounced your Saviour and your baptism and have given yourself tae the devil body and soul.

And you Annaple Thomson. You had a meeting with the devil during your widowhood betwixt Linlithgow and Borrowstounness. He cam in the likeness of a large dark and hairy man wha telt you that you were a puir puddled body wi an evil lyfe and that if you followed him you would have a better lyfe. You met him again on the coal hill o' Borrowstoun at seven in the mornin where he had his wicked will o' you in the shape o' a large black dog.

Hamilton How do you plead?

Witch 1 Lies ...all lies

Dundas And you Bessie Vickers. You did eat and drink wi¹ the devil and William Crow here brought the devil and the ale tae your house and you drank seven gallons. An another time the devil invited you tae drink wi him in Grangepannes. An the devil gave you a five merk piece o' gold which later turned itae a slate stane.

How do you plead?

Witch 2 God forgie me! I meant nae harm. It was his fault.

Dundas And you Margaret Hamilton. The devil appeared tae you at the toon well o' Borrowstounness and took you by the hand and had his will of you and that hand wis grievously pained for eight weeks. And you met wi him in yer ain hoose and did drink many choppins o ale in his company and swore tae follow him and be his servant.

Hamilton How do you plead?

NO ANSWER BUT A LONG LOOK

Hamilton How do you plead? Answer the charge!

Witch 1 She's lost her mind...can ye no see that?

Dundas And you William Crow. You are the devils friend and agent in chief. You took these witches here and ithers tae the cross o Murestane aboon Kinneil on 13th October last where you all danced and drank and the Devil acted as the pyper. You endeavoured to destroy by witchcraft Andrew Mitchell, son to John Mitchell elder in Dean o Kinneil. How dae you plead?

Crow Guilty guilty! When you burn me Mr Hamilton my master Satan will visit you and yours and you'll curse the day ye were born. I call down upon you ...

Hamilton Silence! You are condemned frae yer ain miserable mouth.

Witch 1 He's mad mad! Dinnae listen tae him.

Witch 2 He made me dae it! Spare me. FALLS TO HER KNEES

Dundas I hae here Sir signed confession frae all six declaring their guilt in all the charges. Ye need dae nae mair than cast an eye over them. ‘

Witch 1 I signed nothing .. I cannae write.

Witch 2 Nor I!

Dundas They made their marks my Lord that is enough. They are guilty and the Kirk demands in God's holy name that they pay the price laid down in the law of Scotland.

PERUSING THE DOCUMENTS

Hamilton They are in order. All the evidence is here. You four and the ither twa are found guilty o' all the charges. READS

“Forasmeikle as(ilk ane)named in these charges,jprisoners in the Tollbooth o' Borrowstounnessjare fund guilty by this assize of the abominable crime of witchcraft, they are tae be taken to the west end of Borrowstouness the ordinary place of execution on Tuesday 23rd day of December current betwixt two and four o'clock in the afternoon and there tae be wired at a stake till they be dead and thereafter to have their bodies burnt to ashes.

Pronounced for doom by me Robert Hamilton, 19th December Sixteen hundred and Seventy Nine.

God forgive ye and hae mercy on your miserable souls.

Dundas Amen tae that! Amen. Oh no Sir no no no!

Witch 1 This is Bo'ness justice! I dinna want tae die in Bo'ness. Send me tae Canriden or Kinneil... aye even tae Lithgae. I'll die there if ye please.

Hamilton You'll die whaur I decide! The people here hae suffered your wicked acts so you will die at their hands their toon . It is decided!

SIGNS THE PAPER – LOUD ROARS AND PROTESTS ETC FROM THE WITCHES

Take them away!

EXIT THE WICHES

Dundas Thank you my Lord. A wise decision. They die on Tuesday...

ASIDE whit did a' tell ye?

Hamilton Man, man if the devil is so clever as the Kirk declares why does he pick such an ignorant rabble as his agents?

Dundas Dinna think on it my Lord. Think only that you have done good work for the Duchess Anne, for King Charles II and for God Almighty and his kingdom on earth.

Hamilton And fur you Mr Dundas?

Dundas Just my job Sir. Burnin' witches is whit they pay me fur. Will you bide here fur the execution?

Hamilton No me Sir. I want tae escape frae Bo'ness as soon as I can Dae ye think we hae rooted oo a' the witches o Bo'ness noo?

Dundas Naw, naw Sir. I doot it. (PEERS AT THE AUDIENCE) Just look at this lot here. Look at their faces. Dae ye see a band o kirk goin' psalm singin angels ...or dae ye see the secret drinkers and gamblers and cursers and fornicators?

Hamilton Ay, aye ... I can see that there's work enough for mony a year yet. I'll be back! Good day tae ye Sir

EXITS

Dundas And tae you my Lord just leave the rest tae me.

TAKES OFF THE HAT AND COAT.

And that was that. Four days later the six were taken to the flat land to the west of the village on Corbiehall and strangled with wire before the fires were lit. They were the last witches to burn in Bo'ness but in Scotland the persecution went on for another fifty years. Altogether 4,000 people, mostly silly old women died altogether. It is a black part of our history and maybe best forgotten now.

But as you pass along Corbiehall in the dark days of winter listen for the voices whispering in the air and hear the cries of agony from the Tollbooth. They are saying REMEMBER ME! REMEMBER ME!

EXIT