

The Johnes of Glasgow: Searching, Plague and Early Modern Municipal Power

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Summary. Recent scholarship highlights the importance of public health policy in the early modern era. Long before the arrival of the plague, municipal governments instituted a range of policies to protect the health of the commonweal. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, town councils in both Glasgow and London approved searching during outbreaks. Searchers could view residents for signs of sickness, and tabulate infections and cause of death. Previous studies describe the unique position of female searchers in London, who enjoyed increased economic security without commensurate legal or political power. Glasgow's burgh records reveal a different model of searching, first recorded in 1574, conducted by men of economic and political influence who were imbued with significant legal power. Searchers were vital to ongoing municipal efforts to slow plague outbreaks in the British Isles, but the nature of their work and the extent of their power was a matter of gender.

Keywords: plague; searchers; gender; Scotland; public health

The prouest, baillies and counsale, vnderstandand the contagious seiknes
callit the pest to be newlie rissin within this realme ...

—29 October 1574, Glasgow, Scotland (SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v)

In the fall of 1574, Glaswegian officials learned that the plague was on the move again.¹ When the rumours arrived overland, a messenger carried the news to the bailies (constables) and other officials mingling at the 'tolbooth' in the town centre.² Not yet in neighbouring hamlets, the disease was killing folks within a day's ride, just close enough to be foreboding. When the newly appointed town council convened in October, they called Johne Spreull, Johne Fultoun, Cuthbert Herberstone and David Wylie to search

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¹Plague is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. Ann G. Carmichael, 'Plague, Historical,' in Moselio Schaechter, ed., *Encyclopedia of Microbiology* (Oxford, Elsevier, 2009), 58–72; Monica H. Green, 'The Four Black Deaths,' *American Historical Review*, 2020, 125, 5, 1600–31.

²Elizabeth Ewan, "'Hamperit in Ane Hony Came': Sights, Sounds and Smells in the Medieval Town', in Edward J. Cowan and Lizanne Henderson, eds,

A History of Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 109–44; Bailies were some of the most senior municipal officers in Glasgow (alongside the provost, the members of the town council, and the treasurer) and tasked with law enforcement and maintaining public order. See *ibid.*, and James McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', 2 vols (unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Glasgow, 1986).

Rattounraw, Drygate and 'around Wyndheid'; morning and evening for 15 days, the searchers went door to door, inquiring after new cases of plague.³

Since the sixteenth century, physicians, demographers, social commentators and politicians have attacked searchers as corrupt, money-hungry deceivers who profited from death.⁴ However, starting in the mid-twentieth century, historians began to examine searchers alongside other community health workers active during plague outbreaks, including cleaners, gravediggers and nurses.⁵ In 1999, Richelle Munkhoff's germinal study on the female searchers of London active between 1574 and 1665 demonstrated that their contemporaries did not so revile them, nor did they shirk their duties.⁶ Following Munkhoff, scholars continued to study females searching in England during and between epidemics.⁷ Karen Jillings's research on plague policy in Aberdeen offers the most recent commentary on searchers within Scotland and in Aberdeen specifically, where the Reformed Kirk (church) guided plague efforts and searchers were less central to local plague policy.⁸ Still unexplored in the literature on searching are the male searchers of Glasgow—their importance as burgh officials, their recurring role in plague prevention, and their status compared to female searchers operating during the same period in London.⁹

This article considers searching in two cities within the British Isles beginning in the late sixteenth century. My central focus is searching in Glasgow as executed by men of political and economic standing, although I also discuss searching in London, performed almost entirely by women with some economic but no political power. Studying early modern searchers allows us to compare the *who* of plague surveillance and the ways in which civil authorities made divergent choices regarding local public health workers. While the female searchers of London were accused of many failures, including sexual immorality, the male searchers of Glasgow were not associated with promiscuity or

³Strathclyde Regional Archives, which includes the Glasgow City Archives and is henceforth (SRA MS C) 1/1/1 f32v. The C1/1 series includes the Glasgow Burgh Council Act Books from 1574–1630. I primarily use C1/1/1, 2, and 6. C1/1/1 covers 19 January 1574 through 12 May 1581 and C1/1/2 16 May 1581 through 27 April 1586, while C1/1/6 includes records from 13 June 1605 through 4 June 1610. To date, James McGrath's unpublished dissertation entitled, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586' offers the only extensive investigation of the SRA MS volumes C1/1/1 and C1/1/2. These two volumes (C1/1/1, 2) overlap with the first volume of the Marwick editions of the *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow, A.D. 1573–164* 2. See Geo. Neilson, 'Scottish Burgh Records', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 2011, 8, 264–75. Throughout the text, I modernise names and spellings where appropriate.

⁴Alan McKinley, 'Foucault, Plague, Defoe', *Culture and Organization*, 2009, 15, 167–84; Richelle Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead: Authority, Marginality, and the Interpretation of Plague in England, 1574–1665', *Gender & History*, 1999, 11, 1–29.

⁵Charles F. Mullett, 'Plague Policy in Scotland, 16th–17th Centuries', *Osiris*, 1950, 9, 435–56.

⁶Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', 20.

⁷Deborah Harkness, 'A View from the Streets: Women and Medical Work in Elizabethan London', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 2008, 82, 52–85; Kira L. S. Newman, 'Shutt Up: Bubonic Plague and Quarantine in Early Modern England', *Journal of Social History*, 2012, 45, 809–34; Kevin Siena, 'Searchers of the Dead in Long Eighteenth-Century London', in Barbara J. Todd, Kim Kippen, and Lori Woods, eds, *Worth and Repute: Valuing Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Essays and Studies 25 (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 123–52; Craig Spence, '"I Told My Neighbours, Who Sent for the Searchers": From Personal Trauma to Public Knowledge', in Craig Spence, Tim Harris, Stephen Taylor and Andy Wood, eds, *Accidents and Violent Death in Early Modern London: 1650–1750* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 42–62.

⁸Karen Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague: Socio-Economic, Political and Medical Impacts in a Scottish Community, 1500–1650*, Perspectives in Economic and Social History 52 (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 85–87, 120, 130.

⁹McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', 452–57.

dishonesty. I refer to them as the ‘Johnes of Glasgow’ because ‘Johns’ is shorthand for men and ‘Johnne’ is the most popular name among the 28 male searchers listed in 1574. The respectability of male searchers in Glasgow is significant when juxtaposed with the female searchers of London, who faced suspicion and disparagement for centuries.

With vast differences in population size and density, and in economic, political and religious cultures, I am not suggesting London and Glasgow are comparable locations. However, to date, the literature on searchers focuses on London and its environs, and so comparing the role and status of searchers in these locations reveals the diversity of searching in the British Isles in the early modern period. Further, the differences between these locations, and the particularities of their plague policies, highlight the importance of gender in shaping the ways in which searchers performed their work, and the social, economic, and political benefits they did or did not accrue as a result. Common in both locations is a nuanced and complex early modern public health apparatus, as well as the centrality of searchers for tracking and containing plague outbreaks. In both cities, searching demonstrates the mechanisms of civic surveillance used to prevent the arrival and spread of plague, long before microscopes and antibiotics conquered the disease.

In what follows, I explore the broad nature of European plague prevention in the early modern period, including the use of searchers and other community workers to protect public health. Then I examine the historiography on the searchers of London, a literature that provides a unique perspective on early modern epidemic prevention but that defines searchers as overwhelmingly female and politically powerless. Next, I offer a historical overview of the national Scottish plague policy beginning in 1456, before examining the unique form of searching in Glasgow. Finally, I consider how distinct versions of searching help us better understand the complexity and richness of early modern plague policy and, by extension, challenge popular assumptions about the history of plague response.

Early Modern Community Health and Plague Response

Whether or not Glasgow's inhabitants accepted the twice-daily visits from searchers, stopped travelling to infected towns, limited the sale of banned goods, cleaned the streets or penned up their animals, the creation and use of plague policies by civic authorities demonstrate the range of approaches to plague prevention in urban centres in the centuries following the Great Pestilence or the “Black Death” (1348–51). By the sixteenth century, recurrent plague outbreaks prompted European cities to enact preventive policies based merely on reports of outbreaks elsewhere.

After more than two centuries of periodic plague outbreaks in Europe, there were some widespread attitudes regarding death, infection and contagion.¹⁰ Broadly, pre-modern and

¹⁰Alexandra Bamji, ‘Marginalia and Mortality in Early Modern Venice’, *Renaissance Studies*, 2019, 33, 808–31; Ann G. Carmichael, ‘Registering Deaths and Causes of Death in Late Medieval Milan’, in Joelle Rollo-Koster, ed, *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed* (London: Routledge, 2017), 209–36; Ewan, ‘“Hamperit in Ane Hony Came”’ 117, 129–30; J. F. Merritt, ‘Poverty, Plague and the Politics of Communal Responsibility’, in Barbara J. Todd, Kim Kippen and Lori Woods, eds, *The Social World of Early Modern Westminster: Abbey*

Court and Community, 1525–1640 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 257–307; Mullett, ‘Plague Policy in Scotland’; Richard D. Oram, ‘Disease, Death and the Hereafter in Medieval Scotland’, in Edward J. Cowan and Lizanne Henderson, eds, *A History of Everyday Life in Medieval Scotland, 1000 to 1600* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 196–225; Terence Osborne Ranger and Paul Slack, eds, *Epidemics and Ideas: Essays on the Historical Perception of Pestilence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4, 17, 103–106.

early modern communities provided monetary support for the sick and indigent, but the poor and the infirm were also associated with filth, sickness, contagion and spiritual pollution.¹¹ In Christian communities, church edicts and teaching, vernacular poetry, medical treatises, and popular songs and folktales underscored these associations, which were also prevalent throughout Scotland in the sixteenth century.¹² Municipal governments routinely monitored people and activities understood as sinful or polluting as a tool to promote health and prevent sickness and epidemic disease.¹³

By the late 1500s, tracking epidemic disease was part of a nexus of policies utilised by both municipal governments and ecclesiastical hierarchies in Europe.¹⁴ Abigail Agresta suggests that recurring plague outbreaks shifted prevention tactics across Europe 'from cleaning to protection from external threat'.¹⁵ The pivot from a preoccupation with one's moral impurity to protection from outside contagion (through goods, animals or persons) prompted additional policies to monitor trade and travel, control the importation of goods, and limit the number of outsiders (including 'foreign' vagabonds and troubadours) to prevent the spread of the plague. Plague policies intersected with pre-modern and early modern public health ordinances, which outlined best practices for trade and travel, waste disposal, the provision of pure water, the construction of public latrines, and aid to the sick and poor.¹⁶

However, the disconnection between spiritual purity and epidemic disease that Agresta observed came much later to Scotland. The Reformation and the ensuing political and religious upheavals of the 1560s and 1570s ensured that Scottish burghs enacted a series of policies to encourage a salubrious urban environment and prevent epidemic disease, alongside the Kirk, which monitored the spiritual health of both individuals and the broader community, enforced religious codes, and instituted fasting and other forms of repentance during outbreaks.¹⁷

¹¹Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 129–30; John McCallum, *Poor Relief and the Church in Scotland, 1560–1650* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 192–93; Oram, 'Disease, Death and the Hereafter in Medieval Scotland', 196, 203, 207–208.

¹²Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 129–30; Mullett, 'Plague Policy in Scotland', 455; Oram, 'Disease, Death and the Hereafter in Medieval Scotland', 207–11.

¹³Guy Geltner, *Roads to Health: Infrastructure and Urban Wellbeing in Later Medieval Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 85.

¹⁴Bamji, 'Marginalia and Mortality in Early Modern Venice', 808–10; Carmichael, 'Registering Deaths and Causes of Death in Late Medieval Milan', 212–17; Jane Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals: Public Health for the City in Early Modern Venice* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012), 110–18; Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead' 13–17; Richard D. Oram, '"It Cannot Be Decernit Quha Are Clean and Quha Are Foule": Responses to Epidemic Disease in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Scotland', *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Reforme*, 2006, 30, 13–39; Spence, '"I Told My Neighbours, Who Sent for the Searchers"', 42, 44. Each of these authors addresses what I term *community health workers*,

who aided municipal governments either in tracking or preventing plague deaths.

¹⁵Abigail Agresta, 'From Purification to Protection: Plague Response in Late Medieval Valencia', *Speculum*, 2020, 95, 372, 395.

¹⁶Geltner, *Roads to Health*, 131–165; McCallum, *Poor Relief and the Church in Scotland, 1560–1650*, 187–205; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 79–131; Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), 127–48.

¹⁷Michelle Brock, 'Plague, Covenants, and Confession: The Strange Case of Plague in Ayr, 1674–8', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 2018, 97, 129–52; Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 13–14, 57, 129–142; John McCallum, '"Nurseries of the Poore": Hospitals and Almshouses in Early Modern Scotland', *Journal of Social History*, 2014, 48, 427–49; McCallum, *Poor Relief and the Church in Scotland, 1560–1650*, 117–18. In '"Nurseries of the Poore"', McCallum notes that the Reformation "played a major role in providing both the stimulus and mechanisms of significant developments in hospital provision" (p. 429) demonstrating one way in which religious reform reshaped Scottish health institutions.

By the sixteenth century, municipalities were practised at crafting what Guy Geltner refers to as 'prophylactic communal health' practices.¹⁸ In terms of plague prevention, prophylactic measures included surveillance as well as a reliance on community health workers who cared for the ill, removed and buried the dead, enforced quarantine, and cleaned contaminated spaces. The restrictions on products, travel and trade, and the types of community health workers who engaged in plague work reflected local needs, and were shaped in part by the regularity and severity of outbreaks.

In Kira Newman's exploration of plague regulations and quarantine in London, the labour of community health workers is central to urban plague response.¹⁹ In 1636, one parish 'recruited nurses, doorkeepers, bearers and searchers', demonstrating the range of non-ecclesiastical workers involved in community care.²⁰ Jane Crawshaw examined Venice's public health system, which utilised *lazarettos* during plague outbreaks.²¹ Similar to quarantine hospitals, *lazarettos* employed body clearers, guards, cooks, washerwomen, barbers, bakers, kitchen porters and even wet nurses.²² J.F. Merritt lists 'searchers of dead bodies, bearers of corpses, waterbearers, and gravediggers', as well as watchmen and doorkeepers, all of which were local positions paid through parish funds.²³

In the British Isles, cleaners worked during and between plagues, albeit in varying capacities at different times.²⁴ While residents remained responsible for cleaning the area outside their homes, cleaners were hired to clear the city's portion of the streets and remove refuse left behind after regional fairs or in preparation for royal visits.²⁵ During plague outbreaks, these activities intensified, but cleaners were also employed to fumigate houses after plague deaths or when families were quarantined elsewhere.²⁶

Some of the cleaning practices in early modern Scotland are recorded in Gilbert Skeyne's *Ane Breve Description of the Pest*, the only surviving medical treatise from the period, penned in Aberdeen and published in 1568.²⁷ His work reflected the predominant humoral theory of the time, including cleaning of pestilential air by fumigation with a host of plants, herbs and spices, including saffron, juniper, mint, oregano and hyssop.²⁸ With fumigation, cleaners dispelled the polluted air that allowed for epidemic plague.

In Scottish burghs, the cleaners' work confirmed deaths during outbreaks, but also heralded the crest of epidemics, readying homes for the return of survivors. The 'clengeris' of Edinburgh sometimes lived apart (e.g. in lean-tos in kirk yards), were often men, and either carried or wore white symbols denoting their role.²⁹ In 1500, Edinburgh residents

¹⁸Geltner, *Roads to Health*, 171. In Glasgow, this 'tailoring' included attempts to balance the claims of the powerful, be they merchants, representatives of the crown, ecclesiastical leaders or guild representatives. McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 1, 62–63, 218, 291–92; *ibid.*, v. 2, 279.

¹⁹Newman, 'Shutt Up', 809–10, 819, 824.

²⁰*ibid.*, 819.

²¹Crawshaw, *Plague Hospitals*, 109–10.

²²*ibid.*, 114.

²³Merritt, 'Poverty, Plague and the Politics of Communal Responsibility', 298.

²⁴Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain*, 62–64, 81, 88.

²⁵*ibid.*, 66–67, 81–82.

²⁶Ewan, "'Hamperit in Ane Hony Came'", 128; Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 100, 129, 144–45, 166–67; Oram, "'It Cannot Be Decernit Quha Are Clean and Quha Are Fouille'" 28–31.

²⁷Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, xiii; Oram, "'It Cannot Be Decernit Quha Are Clean and Quha Are Fouille'", 14.

²⁸Gilbert Skeyne, *Ane Breve Description of the Pest* (Edinburgh: Robert Lekprevik, 1568), 19.

²⁹J. D. Marwick, ed, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 2, A.D. 1403–1528. (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Record Society, 1869), 77; J. D. Marwick, ed, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 5, A.D. 1573–1589 (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Record Society, 1872), 415, 419.

were given 8 days to clean and purge their homes of contaminated goods, swelling the ranks of the city's cleaners.³⁰ At other times, burgh officials hired regional cleaners or sent cleaners to meet travellers arriving from infected areas (e.g. Flanders in 1580).³¹ The pay for cleaning varied as well. In May of 1585, Edinburgh officials, who contracted the cleaner Alexander Fraynche from Fife, urged him to be 'trew and diligent' in his work on the muir, pledging him rent-free habitation and a pension in Edinburgh, for life, should he perform his job well.³² In other instances, officials offered 10 pounds per month for a 'clene clinger' to direct the work of two other cleaners categorised as 'clene.'³³ Like other types of community health work, the practice of cleaning in early modern Scottish burghs reflected local community needs and like searching, changed over time.³⁴

As we now understand, plague prevention and response did not arise as a reaction to the Black Death and ensuing outbreaks. Rather, the varying forms of cleaning, quarantine and control of the marketplace, trade and travel were already standard in the maintenance of urban health.³⁵ The types of public health workers and the status they enjoyed (or lacked) reflect the particularities of local politics, economies and even religious regimes. Searchers and gravediggers, guards, and others represent a coordinated and strategic local response to the threat of plague, whether the workers were well-liked by their neighbours or not.

Searching was an integral community health role in the British Isles because searchers tracked the outbreak locally and instituted quarantine. The searchers' efficacy could impact the extent of outbreaks, the success of quarantine measures and the length of lockdowns. In short, their work could impact how many of their neighbours died. Thus, the searchers have a chequered reputation in the pantheon of community health workers, both in archival sources and historiography.

Next, I review the available historiography on searchers in the British Isles, and then, by examining Glaswegian burgh records, present a distinct model of searching by men of status. Comparing the gendered aspects of searching in the British Isles extends the work of Guy Geltner, Leona Skelton and others, who resist the theoretical division between pre-modern and modern public health systems. This division obfuscates the ways in which early modern cities relied on well-established methods to protect the health of inhabitants.³⁶ Geltner notes the absence of historiography 'meant explicitly to unearth

³⁰Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 2, A.D. 1403–1528, 77.

³¹Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 5, A.D. 1573–1589, 179.

³²*Ibid.*, 417.

³³Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 5, A.D. 1573–1589, 419. The distinction between 'clene' and 'foull' cleaners in the records from Edinburgh is one of many enticing distinctions future scholars could pursue.

³⁴There are similarities between searchers in London and Glasgow and cleaners in Edinburgh, but there are clear distinctions as well, including the nature of the work and the timing of the duties, which I discuss in the conclusion. As such, adequate discussion of the vagaries of Scottish cleaning practices deserves its own treatment.

³⁵Geltner, *Roads to Health*; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*. 27–30.

³⁶Geltner, *Roads to Health*, 17. Geltner's exploration of what he terms 'healthscaping' in Italy between 1200 and 1500 concludes with a discussion of 'healthscaping' elsewhere, including the British Isles. Geltner notes that Leona Skelton, Carol Rawcliffe and Tom Crook explore public health lineages that transcend the pre-modern/modern divide. Tom Crook, *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, 1830–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*.

a more multidirectional negotiation of power, benefiting or indeed enabling the state itself'.³⁷ My findings suggest that searching in early modern Glasgow exemplifies these multidirectional negotiations, given that searchers were both reliant on and constitutive of municipal governance during plague outbreaks.

Searching in London: 'Two Sober Ancient Women'

Searching is a curious role, as it appears sporadically (if at all) in municipal records, although the work was commonplace for centuries. Much of what scholars know about searchers and searching in the British Isles comes from parish fiscal records in London; surviving texts describe searchers as women physically set apart during outbreaks, called on to view and categorise the dead for a fee. In 1662, demographer John Graunt's statistical analysis of the London publication the *Bills of Mortality* framed searchers as inept, unethical, lacking in character and universally female.³⁸ Current scholarship underscores that the overwhelming majority of searchers in London were women.³⁹

In one surviving seventeenth-century London broadsheet, a pair of women walk with red staffs to visually demarcate their status as searchers.⁴⁰ Sometimes appointed and at other times elected by their peers, searchers kept to specific pathways and lived in housing provided by the parish to keep contagion at bay during plague outbreaks.⁴¹ These women were often elderly, some were widows and many engaged in other types of health work, such as general nursing, childcare and eldercare.⁴² Called upon to examine the deceased for the cause of death, these searchers entered homes in their local parish, discussed the recent illness with caregivers, and then categorised and recorded the death.⁴³ While they likely began searching during a plague outbreak, London searchers eventually worked between plague outbreaks and contributed death tabulations to the *Bills of Mortality*, an early and essential source of public health data.⁴⁴

³⁷Geltner, *Roads to Health*, 16.

³⁸John Graunt, 'General Observations upon the Casualties,' in Walter F. Willcox, ed, *Natural and Political Observations Made upon the Bills of Mortality* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939), 28, 37.

³⁹Thomas R. Forbes, 'The Searchers', *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 1974, 50, 1031–38; Harkness, 'A View from the Streets'; Munkhoff, 'Reckoning Death', in *Rhetorics of Bodily Disease and Health in Medieval and Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 119–34. Forbes refers to two male searchers in 1625 in London but notes that their pay was significantly less than that of the female searchers. Both Harkness and Munkhoff mention one or two male searchers, noting their rarity in the position.

⁴⁰Munkhoff shows an image of the broadsheet, which includes three vertical panels, sourced from the Pepys Library of Magdalene College. The author is unknown, and the date is 1665. Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', 5.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 1, 23. Munkhoff notes that the use of the phrase 'Twoe ancient sober women' can be found

in the *Orders to Be Used in the Tyme of Infection of the Plague within the Cittie and Liberties of London* (London: 1592). A later version, printed by Isaac laagard in 1625 in London, contains the phrasing, 'two sober ancient women,' and a digitised transcript is available through the University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ebo/A06241.0001.001/1:1?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>. According to Munkhoff, the requirement that parishes chose searchers from the older, respected local women is reflective of connections between women and witchcraft in the early modern era. Many of the eldest women in the community were already supported at some level through parish funds, increasingly the likelihood of institutional oversight and thus, control.

⁴²Harkness, 'A View from the Streets', 64–65, 69; Munkhoff, 'Reckoning Death', 131–32; Spence, "'I Told My Neighbours, Who Sent for the Searchers'", 43, 46, 48.

⁴³Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', 12–18; Munkhoff, 'Reckoning Death', 119–20.

⁴⁴Munkhoff, 'Reckoning Death', 121–23.

Richelle Munkhoff's ground-breaking study on female searchers in London recounts the social context of John Graunt's seventeenth-century charges against the searchers. Her exploration of searching in London reveals the importance of the role in a city that relied on a coterie of plague workers to nurse the sick, clean infected neighbourhoods and homes, uphold quarantine, transport the dead, dig graves, and intern corpses during outbreaks. Central to Munkhoff's argument is the conclusion that searchers were integral community members and known medical practitioners. Scholars studying searching after Munkhoff's 1999 publication universally cite her work and conclude that although female searchers' social status was tenuous, their presence was ubiquitous for centuries.

Munkhoff notes that searchers appeared in London parish records as early as 1574, with payment remitted per body searched.⁴⁵ Although described as impoverished, elderly, and ignorant, female searchers in London did not always submit to expectations. The plague orders from 1592 formalised the loss of parish support for refusal to search, suggesting that some women felt the risks outweighed the threat of losing their livelihood.⁴⁶

Contemporary English commentators expressed repulsion over the interactions between searchers and diseased or dead bodies, which, commingled with religious and social concerns around female sexuality, reflected the intersecting imaginaries of sexuality, witchcraft and the medical arts.⁴⁷ Were female bodies disorderly due to their presence at birth and death, or did the foreordained spiritual failings of femininity taint the medical labour of women?⁴⁸ Considering the anxieties about women's bodies and spiritual pollution, it follows that within early modern public health regimes, municipalities might limit the tasks open to female health workers. Searching in London was a task that fell within medical work common to women (e.g. palliative care, laying out the dead) paired with social surveillance (e.g. codifying death, tracking new plague cases).⁴⁹ This ensured women were both watching and watched.⁵⁰

Previous scholarship on searching in London, alongside the Glaswegian burgh records, suggests that an individual's gender was a salient factor shaping what searchers could do and how they were perceived in their communities. In Glasgow in 1574 (and potentially earlier), searching was assigned to men, without remuneration and in addition to their other work. While searching, these men were imbued with power commensurate with the highest officials in the burgh, providing them with a level of influence and prestige foreign to and never attained by the female searchers in London. These distinctions prompt us to consider the varied ways in which municipalities created and implemented

⁴⁵Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', 2.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 1. The claims of ignorance belie the reality that some searchers were literate, as well as experienced community health workers who practiced in other capacities. See Siena, 'Searchers of the Dead in Long Eighteenth-Century London', 142–43.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', 21–23; Munkhoff, 'Reckoning Death', 131.

⁴⁹Harkness, 'A View from the Streets' 67–69; Siena, 'Searchers of the Dead in Long Eighteenth-Century London', 127–29; Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', 4–8; Munkhoff, 'Reckoning Death', 127–30.

⁵⁰Siena, 'Searchers of the Dead in Long Eighteenth-Century London', 144–46. Siena's work is particularly helpful for considering the complex position occupied by female searchers in London. As individuals called to give sworn testimony in murder trials, searchers were both expert witnesses whose conclusions informed untimely death cases, and individuals whose very testimony was suspect because of their social position.

plague statutes in the early modern era, and more specifically, how these diverse policies reflected local hierarchies of power.

Public Health and Municipal Power in Early Modern Glasgow

Early modern Glasgow is characterised as an 'inherently atypical' Scottish burgh.⁵¹ By the twelfth century, the city enjoyed trading privileges, including the right to hold a weekly market and annual fair. In contrast to some other burghs, the bishop (and eventually archbishop) held the largest landholdings in the city and appointed town councillors and bailies.⁵² In some regards, the ruling structure of Glasgow was similar to Edinburgh and other early modern Scottish burghs, wherein a council managed burgh affairs through a provost, two or three bailies, and a body of elected councillors drawn from the burghs.⁵³ Yet the economic and political privileges afforded Glasgow paralleled burghs with greater status and importance in the realm, such as Aberdeen or Edinburgh, the capital.

In 1490, a royal charter allowed Glasgow to engage in international export and by 1546 the city had become sufficiently prosperous to send a representative to the Scottish parliament.⁵⁴ In 1560, the total population was only around 4,500 and by 1600, the population had risen to around 7,000, reflecting significant and sustained migration between plague lockdowns.⁵⁵ The late sixteenth century brought continued success for merchants and artisans, but Glasgow was not yet a 'first rank' burgh like Aberdeen or Edinburgh in terms of population size or economic performance.⁵⁶ Prior to 1611, Glasgow was a '*de facto* royal burgh', or a bishop's burgh 'with royal privileges'.⁵⁷ Still, that *de facto* status provided Glasgow with membership in the Convention of Burghs in July of 1552.⁵⁸ Comprised of representatives of royal burghs, the Convention could veto monarchical urban policy.⁵⁹

Although Glasgow enjoyed a relatively straight trajectory of economic and demographic growth into the 1560s, religious developments in post-Reformation Glasgow were not so linear.⁶⁰ The doctrinal conflagration of the late 1560s and early 1570s

⁵¹Allan Kennedy, 'The Urban Community of Restoration Scotland: Government, Society and Economy in Inverness 1660–c.1688', *Northern Scotland*, 2014, 5, 26. The other 'inherently atypical' burghs are Edinburgh, Dundee, and Aberdeen (*ibid.*, 26–27). Kennedy's work provides additional information on the oligarchic nature of municipal government in post-Reformation burghs, which James McGrath quantified for Glasgow between 1574 and 1586. McGrath notes that, on average, '66% of a council would be reappointed the next year, either as magistrates or councillors', but that this number rises to 85% if future appointments are considered. McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 2, 140.

⁵²Irene Maver, 'Glasgow Prior to 1690', in *Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 7.

⁵³Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 70–71; McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 1, vii–ix.

⁵⁴Maver, 'Glasgow Prior to 1690', 7.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 7, 9; McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 1, 54.

⁵⁶Maver, 'Glasgow Prior to 1690', 8.

⁵⁷McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 1, 14; Maver, 'Glasgow Prior to 1690', 10.

⁵⁸Convention of the Royal Burghs, *Records of the Convention of the Royal Burghs of Scotland, 1297–1597* (Edinburgh: W. Paterson for the Convention of Royal Burghs, 1880), 469–70; McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 1, 14; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 66–70.

⁵⁹Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 67.

⁶⁰Maver, 'Glasgow Prior to 1690', 10.

hampered Glasgow's municipal rulers, which in turn impacted urban order. Similar to Aberdeen, some city leadership accepted the Reformed faith slowly and grudgingly; Glasgow's Catholic rulers supported Mary Stuart until her defeat in 1568.⁶¹ When the 1574 council, which served at the pleasure of the new archbishop convened in October, the members did so in an economically thriving, demographically expanding burgh with the structure of ecclesiastical power intact, if reflecting new clerical loyalties.

Tasked with upholding the commonweal of the burgh, council members engaged in the maintenance of public health as part and parcel of their work.⁶² For late medieval and early modern Scottish populations, serious and significant childhood illnesses, chronic illnesses, and epidemic diseases kept life expectancy low. Surviving skeletons exhibit the tell-tale signs of 'metabolic insults', including 'enamel hypoplasia', a form of dental damage suggestive of caloric deficits.⁶³ By the 1500s, the plague was one of many epidemic diseases infecting Scottish populations (c.f. leprosy, yaws, typhoid) which likely exacerbated its impact. To combat outbreaks, burghs relied on a host of well-developed and timeworn prophylactic measures, including street and gutter cleaning (e.g. removal of middens); fumigation and cleaning of infected spaces (e.g. scrubbing, airing, application of lime); destruction of suspected carrier products, such as wool; strict dietary practices; and the culling of local dog and cat populations.⁶⁴ The additional measures of piety through prayer, supplication and fasting continued well into the seventeenth century in Scotland. Altogether, these typify the mix of collective and individual methods used alongside curative therapies.⁶⁵

As in many early modern urban locales, the Glaswegian town council set standards for and maintained food and water purity, inspected the purveyors and goods of the marketplace, and enforced council sanitation policy (e.g. proper disposal of carcasses, human waste, refuse) to maintain public health. Whether or not these methods extended life expectancy for the entire populace, the efforts to combat disease reflect similar prophylactic measures used throughout the British Isles in the early modern era.⁶⁶ By 1574, 'long-established and well-considered processes were already in place', such as cleaning (e.g. streets, privies, gutters and sewers) and maintenance (e.g. regular sweeping and washing of the forefronts of Glaswegian homes and businesses). When participating in these processes, inhabitants consciously engaged in epidemic prophylaxis by dispersing the miasmatic filth that fostered and spread disease. By the early seventeenth century, this included honouring Convention sanitation requirements for urban spaces, which Glaswegian officials thought particularly important in 'tyme of plaige and pestilence'.⁶⁷

⁶¹Ibid.; Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 17.

⁶²Ibid.; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*.

⁶³Oram, 'Disease, Death and the Hereafter in Medieval Scotland', 198.

⁶⁴SRA MS C1/1/6 f97v. For more on domestic animals and the plague, see Oram, 'Disease, Death and the Hereafter in Medieval Scotland', 212; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 99.

⁶⁵T. C. Smout, 'Coping with Plague in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland', *Scotia*, 1978, 2, 19–33.

⁶⁶Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 85, 115, 124.

⁶⁷J. D. Marwick, ed, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow*, v. 1, A.D. 1573–1642 (Glasgow: Scottish Burgh Record Society, 1876), 285; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 68. Skelton recounts that Glaswegian representative and baillie James Ingis met with council members in July of 1608 to deliver directives on street cleaning. As the burgh records note, foul material laid on the streets is 'verie dangerus in tyme of plaig and pestilence', illustrating the ways in which burgh sanitation was conceptually tied to plague and other outbreaks (Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*, 285).

As a city engaged in local and regional trade, it is tempting to assume that Glasgow's rulers and officials knew the specifics of epidemic prevention abroad, given that the burgh's 1574 policies are similar to those practised in London and Italy.⁶⁸ However, considering Glasgow's small population and insignificant yet rising national economic standing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is unclear how well versed city officials were on the specifics of disease tracking, death tabulation and quarantine maintenance in other parts of Europe.⁶⁹ Even if Glaswegian officials were familiar with plague policy elsewhere, there is evidence that by 1574, Glaswegian policies reflected long-standing practices mandated across Scotland.

Decreed by the Crown as early as 1456, the Rule of Pestilence guides the quarantine of goods and housing for infected inhabitants, but leaves the punishment of policy violations to burgh leaders.⁷⁰ In January of 1513, a letter written by James IV authorised burgh leaders to announce plague statutes in the central square and enforce them on behalf of the Crown.⁷¹ Further, no burgh need accept travellers or even inhabitants arriving from places of known infection; the provost, bailies, or other upper-level officials could institute quarantine in homes or 'places that they ar or sal happin to be...nicht or day' for 40 days.⁷² Again in 1513, the King directed burghs to combat the spread of the pestilence by restricting trade and travel, cleaning infected spaces, and punishing those who endangered the community's health by disobeying the rules. These regulations exemplify the ways in which local municipalities instituted the will of the Crown, while additions to these broad guidelines reflect the freedom maintained by burghs to craft policies tailored to the local populace.⁷³

By the sixteenth century, some Scots practised what we might term 'early modern contact tracing'. Penned by an anonymous writer in the sixteenth century, *A Diurnal of Occurents in Scotland* communicates plague sources as rumoured in Edinburgh.⁷⁴ In May of 1529, the household of a craftsman named William Mure fell ill, and provost Adame Otterburne made 'greit labouris' to prevent an epidemic.⁷⁵ In September of 1568, James Dalgleissche, a merchant, reportedly brought the disease from abroad.⁷⁶

⁶⁸Jane Stevens Crawshaw, 'The Renaissance Invention of Quarantine,' in Linda Clarke and Carole Rawcliffe, eds, *Society in an Age of Plague*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 162-164; Merritt, 'Poverty, Plague and the Politics of Communal Responsibility', 295-98.
⁶⁹Maver, 'Glasgow Prior to 1690', 7; Martin Rorke, 'English and Scottish Overseas Trade, 1300-1600', *The Economic History Review*, 2006, 59, 265-88; Cathryn [R.] Spence, 'Women and Business in Sixteenth-Century Edinburgh: Evidence from Their Testaments', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 2008, 28, 1-19; Cathryn R. Spence, 'Negotiating the Economy: Gender, Status, and Debt Litigation in the Burgh Courts of Early Modern Scotland', in Sara Butler and K. J. Kesselring, eds, *Crossing Borders: Boundaries and Margins in Medieval and Early Modern Britain; Essays in Honour of Cynthia J. Neville*, Later Medieval Europe 17 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 174-92.

⁷⁰*The Laws and Acts of Parliament Made by King James the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Queen Mary, King James the Sixth, King Charles the First, King Charles the Second Who Now Presently Reigns, Kings and Queen of Scotland [1424-1621, 1633-1681]* (Edinburgh: David Lindsay, 1681), 43.

⁷¹Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 2, A.D. 1403-1528, 140-41.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 140.

⁷³Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 53; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560-1700*, 66-69.

⁷⁴*A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurents That Have Passed within the Country of Scotland since the Death of King James the Fourth till the Year M.D.LXXV* (Edinburgh, n.d.). *A Diurnal of Occurents in Scotland* was transcribed from a sixteenth-century manuscript and found in the possession of Sir John Maxwell. Comprising one volume and printed and bound in Edinburgh in 1833 under the auspices of The Bannatyne Club, the final text is 406 pages. Many of the events in this book are based on hearsay from decades later, so while these dates and 'patient zeros' are not reliable facts, they reveal that by at least the sixteenth-century Scottish burghs sought the source of plague outbreaks as a matter of public health.

⁷⁵*A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurents*, 14.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 138.

In 1574, when Glaswegian officials reported cases 'newlie rissin within [the] realme', the *Diurnal* blamed the daughter of Maluis Curll, said to have brought the plague from Kirkcaldy to Edinburgh.⁷⁷ Incredibly, the Glaswegian burgh records amend this rumour. Underneath the first page of the October 1574 plague statutes is a faded note labelled with '1580' and text identifying 'John Doune', thought to have brought the plague 'in his ship'.⁷⁸ Like the other outbreak sources recorded in the *Diurnal*, this claim cannot be verified. The burgh records did not narrate a plague outbreak in 1580, so this later notation might demonstrate official efforts to trace the source of plague between outbreaks and thus, decipher patterns of plague infection and spread as a preventative tool. In a city thus invested, the searchers were community health workers of last resort, called when city officials feared an outbreak could surface at any moment.

Beyond this rare postscript, Glasgow's burgh records offer a predictably institutional account of plague policy. For example, they do not provide an account of interactions between those quarantined on the 'foulle muir' (a set of ramshackle dwellings a few miles outside of the city, where infected individuals and their families were quarantined) or individuals' reactions to groups of local leaders searching their neighbourhood for new plague cases.⁷⁹ Yet they do offer ample evidence of the ways in which Glasgow relied on men with social status to enforce prophylactic public health measures thought to protect burghers from epidemic disease.

'In Tyme of Plaig and Pestilence'

On 29 October 1574, the provost, bailies and council convened to keep the plague from reaching Glasgow.⁸⁰ Rumours of the disease moving ever closer to the burgh cast a pall over town activities. While the burgh records do not record new cases or plague deaths during that outbreak, we should not assume that these edicts failed to alter burgh life. The plague dictates mandated 15 days of service by searchers, to begin immediately. Other statutes resulted in discharges from the burgh coffers, which is reflected in the fiscal accounts for that year, including payments to artisans making goods for the poor and for securing and upkeeping the city's defences when the plague threatened.⁸¹ Searching and spending aside, Glaswegians were not infected until 1606.⁸² However, plague outbreaks in Edinburgh or lowland Scottish townships such as Paisley prompted municipal leadership to revive the 1574 statutes periodically. Burgh records are explicit: the plague acts were for 'preventing... the plaige'.⁸³

It is helpful to explore the plague statutes of 1574 to understand the forms of prophylaxis preferred by Glaswegian magistrates and council members. The city was a magnet for local artisans and goods purveyors, and the choice to restrict travel, expel strangers, and select 28 searchers to look for plague cases indicates the seriousness with which city leadership viewed an outbreak. Controlling the movement of people was critically important during this time, when the migration of rural workers kept medieval cities working, literally and figuratively.⁸⁴ Most of the traffic in and out of Glasgow was local

⁷⁷SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v; A *Diurnal of Remarkable Occurents*, 342.

⁷⁸SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v.

⁷⁹Oram, "'It Cannot Be Decernit Quha Are Clean and Quha Are Foulle'", 25. For a description of the muir during plague, see SRA MS C1/1/6 f97r.

⁸⁰SRA MS C1/1/1 f88r, f87v.

⁸¹SRA MS C1/1/1 f87v–f88r.

⁸²SRA MS C1/1/6 f96v–f97r.

⁸³SRA MS C1/1/6 f93r.

⁸⁴Ewan, "'Hamperit in Ane Hony Came'", 111.

and concentrated in the lowlands, meaning travel restrictions directly impacted those bringing goods to sell at the weekly market. As expected, burgh records show repeated efforts by the council to control regional traffic in response to rumours of an outbreak.⁸⁵

Although Glasgow cannot boast as extensive a bureaucratic archive from the period as London can, by the late sixteenth century, formal documentation became another tool for both monitoring cases of the plague and preventing its spread.⁸⁶ The plague edicts set out the conditions under which commerce and travel could occur (if at all) during an outbreak. With the plague already present in the lowlands, the 1574 council required travellers to carry a testimonial of their health, a tool also used in Aberdeen and other burghs.⁸⁷ Travellers from safe areas carried a document signed by the 'principall minister' of their home city or hamlet, which outlined the purpose for travel and included an itemised list of the people, animals and goods in tow.⁸⁸ If inhabitants came from a suspect location, their goods could be confiscated and placed in quarantine, if not destroyed.⁸⁹ Municipal leaders relied on bailies in other cities to provide these records, rather than formally trained physicians, who were few in Scotland during the period. Thus, municipal policing included producing medical records that maintained safe entry during an outbreak.

After restricting travel, the plague edicts address non-residents of all backgrounds, from burgesses to beggars. In a departure from the hospitality norms of early modern Scottish society, Glasgow's 1574 plague policy restricted welcome for the sake of public health, barring individuals from hosting strangers without the paperwork approved by the appointed 'deputtis'.⁹⁰ Pipers, fiddlers and minstrels (or any other 'vagabundis'), who were used to travelling year-round to entertain, seek work or engage in credentialed begging, had to remain in the town until the outbreak was over unless given special leave by the provost. Particularly during epidemics, burghs gave preferential treatment to individuals who had resided in the town from birth; beggars from outside Glasgow had one day after the plague edicts' release to leave or chance facial branding.⁹¹

Inside the burgh, male community members defended the city from infection in numerous ways. All town officials were male, and they subdivided plague work by city neighbourhoods. Glasgow officials monitored seven 'portis', or entry points; David Lion, William Watt and Johne Gilmour assisted Archibald Lion, a bailie, in checking and approving travel documents at the main bridge.⁹² From October 1574 until the early spring of 1575, bailies locked structures that protected common funds and vital documents.⁹³ A male archbishop appointed the bailies and the town council; the council called up the searchers, key holders, bridge officials and others tasked with preventing an outbreak.

⁸⁵Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 121–26; McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', 288; Oram, "'It Cannot Be Decernit Quha Are Clean and Quha Are Foule'" 23–26.

⁸⁶Ewan, "'Hamperit in Ane Hony Came'", 115.

⁸⁷Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 175–78; Mullett, 'Plague Policy in Scotland', 442; Oram, "'It Cannot Be Decernit Quha Are Clean and Quha Are Foule'", 24–30.

⁸⁸SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v.

⁸⁹SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v.

⁹⁰SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v; Oram, "'It Cannot Be Decernit Quha Are Clean and Quha Are Foule'", 24–30.

⁹¹SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v; SRA MS C1/1/6 f97r.

⁹²SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v.

⁹³SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v. See also McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 2, 149–51.

While the edicts begin with prophylactic plague measures, subsequent regulations describe a populace going into lockdown. Council members advised those in the city centre to close their yards, including posterior access to gardens, cowsheds, kilns and dovecots.⁹⁴ The statutes mandate that port-side properties close the 'narrow burgage rigs' used for waste disposal, housing livestock and floating gardens.⁹⁵ The statutes also bar individuals from accepting guests. Harboursing guests or strangers could result in a 40-day enclosure with said foreigners. Together, these policies ensured avoidance of outsiders who arrived 'att thair backyardis'; residents who broke these rules risked losing the privileges associated with Glaswegian nativity.⁹⁶ In rare cases, officials sentenced citizens who violated these rules to home quarantine as punishment. In 1605, the merchant Williame Adame, accused of endangering his neighbours through illicit travel, was put in irons at home, if and until it 'pleis the Lord to restoir him to his helthe againe.'⁹⁷

Despite extensive efforts to forestall the plague's arrival, officials planned for an epidemic. Again, while royal edicts mandated broad measures to halt plague threats, they were not comprehensive, and allowed local authorities a fair amount of leeway in their implementation, including methods of case tracking and reporting, the location of quarantine facilities, and punishments for plague policy violation. In Glasgow, which was neither a true port city nor a walled medieval stronghold, preventing illicit commerce or travel during plague threats proved a demanding endeavour. Plague workers in Glasgow had to obey the plague edicts and enforce them, becoming the eyes and ears of both the council and the Crown in their neighbourhoods. If an individual fell sick, the statutes compelled the 'maister of the house' to find searchers to view them; banishment and branding threatened those who failed to report.⁹⁸ Of course, searchers were not impervious to infection, and occupants could also view the searchers at their door for signs of the pestilence.

Within this nexus of watching, Glaswegian searchers monitored the health of fellow citizens and tracked new cases. In sections assigned near their living quarters, searchers would traverse their appointed area to visit each domicile morning and evening.⁹⁹ At each home, searchers confirmed the health of the inhabitants.¹⁰⁰ If there was any doubt, the inhabitants would be shown to the searchers.¹⁰¹ While searchers were mandated to perform twice-daily checks, in Glasgow, 'visitouris' were designated to check the bodies of the deceased for signs of plague.¹⁰² The work of the 'visitors' more closely aligns with searching in London, where female searchers examined the dead. The only woman mentioned in the plague edicts in Glasgow in 1574 is Besse Wrycht, a visitor.¹⁰³ There is no language to suggest that the searchers entered living quarters; bodies were 'read' by the searchers, and visible health allowed residents to avoid quarantine at home or outside the city. Again, residents also viewed the searchers, but the power to separate the healthy from the ill was not a discourse—only the searchers' sight held the weight of municipal authority.

⁹⁴SRA MS C1/1/1f32v. Ewan, "'Hamperit in Ane Hony Came'", 111.

⁹⁵SRA MS C1/1/1f32v, 111.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷SRA MS C1/1/6 f18v; SRA MS C1/1/6 f96v.

⁹⁸SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v.

⁹⁹SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v.

¹⁰⁰SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v. Despite the lack of cases, the statutes call for searchers to immediately begin their

duties 'to begyn thairto... ilk twa thair xv dayis', or that their duties would 'begin thereto... for [15] days' following the edict.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*

¹⁰²SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v.

¹⁰³SRA MS C1/1/1 f33r.

Given this power, it is helpful to ask, who were these searchers, and what was their role in the community? Among the searchers were eleven 'Johnes', a popular name at the time. In terms of their legal power, the plague statutes required residents to obey their searchers. Failure to obey meant punishment commensurate 'as thai disobeyit the prouest or baillies'.¹⁰⁴ Hence, municipal power was manifest in the searchers during the 'tyme of pest.' With the power to enforce plague policies based on sight, searchers in Glasgow were not simply the eyes of the law—they were the law.

Table 1 shows the searchers organised by area and suggests neighbourhood population distribution at the time. Alongside the Johnes were 17 other men, for a total of 28 burgesses called to act as preventative public health officials. Many of the searchers from 1574 were community leaders who served in a range of capacities—sometimes simultaneously. Importantly, searchers were members of the 1574 town council, including Williame Rowat (a tailor), David Lindsay, Johne Fleming, Johne Wilson (a 'pewdarar', or lead and tin artisan) and George Young (a baker).¹⁰⁵ Other searchers upheld standards in other sectors: Johne Arbuckle and Johne Fleming acted as 'lynaris', or individuals appointed to 'measure out and so fix the boundaries of holdings in the burgh'.¹⁰⁶ The keepers of keys, who protected official paperwork and the city purse, included searchers Johne Fleming (also a council member and a lynar) and David Lindsay (council member).¹⁰⁷

Some of the searchers were already engaged in prophylactic public health roles by maintaining urban spaces and monitoring the purity of food and drink sold in the marketplace. In 1574, Johne Wyse was appointed as 'visitouri' of the corn market, which ensured corn stocks complied with market regulations. Johne Dalrumpill, Johne Spreull, Cuthbert Herberstone, Williame Rowat, Archibald Muir, Johne Woodrop, Matthew Wilson and Johne Arbuckle were appointed as ale tasters and so monitored one of the most important food staples in the burgh.¹⁰⁸ Each of these tasters worked in the area they searched, be it Drygate, Wyndheid, the Blakfreris, the Crosses, Troynghait, Gallogate, or the Brig.¹⁰⁹

In all, 13 of the 28 appointed searchers already enforced municipal order and oversaw local community health practices. Others went on to serve in more powerful capacities in the years ahead. Some searchers (e.g. Johne Fleming, Johne Wilson, Matthew Wilson) were nominated for coveted positions like 'master of work', the individual who oversaw construction and improvement projects throughout Glasgow.¹¹⁰ Other searchers served on the council later; some oversaw special inquests for inheritance proceedings, or investigations and punishments for serious infractions such as mob uprisings.¹¹¹ For example,

¹⁰⁴SRA MS C1/1/1 f33r.

¹⁰⁵SRA MS C1/1/1 f29r. 'Pewdarar', in Dictionary of the Scots Language, accessed 16 February 2020, <https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/pewdarar>.

¹⁰⁶SRA MS C1/1/1 f29r. 'Linar', in Dictionary of the Scots Language, accessed 16 February 2020, <https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/linar>.

¹⁰⁷Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Glasgow*, v. 1, A.D. 1573–1642, 24.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 1:27; Elizabeth Ewan, "'For Whatever Ales Ye'", in Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle, eds, *Women in Scotland: C. 1100—C. 1750*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), 125–35.

¹⁰⁹SRA MS C1/1/1 f29r–f32v. John Dalrymple is the only exception and was appointed to taste ale and search in abutting neighbourhoods. McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v. 2, 202.

¹¹⁰SRA MS C1/1/1 f103v. Nominations or 'leets' were submitted to the provost, who made annual appointments.

¹¹¹For more on the nature of Glasgow's council composition between 1574 and 1586 see McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v.2, 98–148.

Table 1. Searchers called by geographic area. Names in parentheses offer alternate or modernised spellings.¹

Individuals	Number	Area
Johne Spreull	4	
Johne Fultoun		Rattounraw
Cutherbert Herberstone (Cutherbert)		Drygate
Dauid Wylie (David)		Around Wyndheid
Johne Darumple (Dalrymple)	4	From the Wyndheid to the Blakfreiris
Gilbert Hall		
Williame Rowat (William)		
Johne Lourie		
Johne Flemyng (Fleming)	4	From the Blakfreiris to the Cross
Andro Heriot		
Archibald Muir		
Johne Wys (Wise)		
Dauid Lyndsay (David Lindsay)	6	Troyngeit and Gallogate
Johne Wilsoun (Wilson)		
Johne Woddrup		
Williame Maxuell (William Maxwell)		
Quintene Kay (Quintin Kay; Qwenten Kaye)		
Thomas Normocht		
Mathow Wilsoun (Matthew Wilson)	4	From the Cross to the Barrasyett
James Braidoud (the younger) (Braidwood)		
George Young		
Petir Lymburner (Peter Lymburner)		
Patrik Howe	4	From the Barrasyett to the Brig (Bridge)
Johne Arbuckle		
Johne Luff		
Niniane Syarvn		
Dauid Moresoun (David Morrison)	2	Stockwell and 'About'
Johne Johnsoun (Johnson)		

¹ SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v–f33r.

John Woodrop, Johne Wilson, Matthew Wilson and William Rowat served on an heirship inquest a month after their work as searchers.¹¹² In 1574, the significant overlap between municipal leadership, economic power and searching reflected the decision to call on known leaders to prevent a plague-based crisis.

The 'watch and ward' policies for trade and travel were reinstituted in 1584, 1588, 1605 and 1606.¹¹³ In 1584, pest policy first references a 'quartermaster', a person tasked with the general oversight of the quarter under his administrative jurisdiction; now quartermasters were ordered to record the names of any departing Glaswegians.¹¹⁴ These travel registers contained entries against which officials checked returning inhabitants, who were barred re-entry when appropriate.¹¹⁵

Despite the high status of the searchers in 1574, the work was dangerous, and Glaswegian men might have resisted searching as regional outbreaks worsened. In

¹¹²SRA MS C1/1/1 f35v. In 1582, Johne Woodrup, along with searchers Cuthbert Herberstone and Quintin Kay, served on another inquisition (SRA MS C1/1/2 f29r).

¹¹³SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v–f33r; f158v, f196r–v; SRA MS C1/1/6 f9v, f14r. In Marwick, *Extracts from the*

Records of the Burgh of Glasgow, v. 1, A.D. 1573–1642, 1:110, 119, 231, 251, 252, 254.

¹¹⁴SRA MS C1/1/2 f155v.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

1606, if quartermasters avoided their duties, they did so at the risk of being fined or having their 'freidome cryd downe'.¹¹⁶ So, while the searchers were the law, they were not above the law; male searchers could be searched. The case of Glaswegian burgess Archibald Muir is instructive here. Muir repeatedly resurfaces in the burgh records, as a guild representative (1570s), a plague searcher in October 1574, and, potentially, a short-lived member of the town council (1580s).¹¹⁷ It is possible this same Archibald Muir suffered from the plague in September 1606, when officials practised contact tracing with his mother Marioune Walker, another infectious resident.¹¹⁸ Walker was asked to provide an account of her recent contacts and the names of the searchers who organised her removal to the 'foulle muir'.¹¹⁹ Did Archibald Muir or Marioune Walker die there? The record does not say.

If, as the evidence suggests, Muir served in various capacities and then, during the 1606 outbreak, spent time in the quarantine encampment outside Glasgow, one's circumstances could change quickly. Social status did not fully insulate families from the social and economic consequences of plague infection. Yet as men, burgesses were far more likely to have the economic reserves and legal rights to protect their property and withstand a quarantine than some of their neighbours. Notably, Glaswegian searchers performed their plague work simultaneously with other leadership or community health roles and thus, were far less likely than the female searchers of London to be defined by their plague work between outbreaks.

A 'Foulle' Time: Epidemics Past and Present

Whether or not citizens were searched or searching during plague outbreaks. In the British Isles in the early modern period, searchers were not oddities, but community health workers who supported public health efforts.¹²⁰ As early as 1574, and very likely prior to that date, the work of viewing, and recording plague cases was a female or a male task, depending on the location. In London, the social marking of a red staff, separate living quarters, and alternative pathways meant female searchers lived in a unique type of quarantine during outbreaks, ostensibly in the service of the public good. Paid for their work, these women viewed the dead inside their living quarters and examined their bodies directly, cited the cause of death, and mandated quarantine in connection with plague cases. Over the ensuing centuries, London searchers were well known to their neighbours, and held diverse roles as health workers and caregivers in their communities.

In 1574, male searchers in Glasgow were burgesses already engaged in community surveillance via oversight of the marketplace, the production and sale of goods, and for a small subset, as town councillors.¹²¹ As such, they were immediately positioned

¹¹⁶SRA MS C1/1/6 f93r–f94r.

¹¹⁷SRA MS C1/1/1 f25r; SRA MS C1/1/6 f97r. SRA MS C1/1/6 f97r addresses the 1606 outbreak. If this is the same person, by 1606, Muir would be an elder in the community and his mother advanced in age for the time. McGrath states that Muir was elected to the town council in 1581. There is no Archibald Muir in the records for the period delineated by 'younger' or 'older,' suggesting this is the same person. McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586,' v. 2 240.

¹¹⁸SRA MS C1/1/6 f97r–f98v.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Munkhoff, 'Reckoning Death, 121–22'; Siena, 'Searchers of the Dead in Long Eighteenth-Century London', 146–47.

¹²¹SRA MS C1/1/1 f29v–f32v.

as plague trackers with law enforcement capacities; leaders expected the populace to allow searching. Men in Glasgow continued to search after 1574, but increasingly, as quartermasters or bailies whose searching work was part of the elected position. By 1584, searchers included a more diverse range of community leaders, with fewer council members and more burgesses who did not simultaneously serve in other capacities.¹²² Additional individuals were called to search in districts where the population had increased.¹²³ While searchers may have engaged others in their neighbourhood to help, it is clear from the increase that all searchers were expected to engage in some of the work directly.¹²⁴ This demonstrates that local power expanded and contracted in response to the threat of plague, though the Glaswegian town council only extended emergency powers of enforcement to men. Nonetheless, the temporary diffusion of power to a wider set of burgesses is notable during a period of oligarchical rule.¹²⁵

In London, female searchers never gained additional municipal power. As a result, we remember the searchers of London and Glasgow differently. The women of London were largely characterised as unethical hags until the late twentieth century; perhaps because of their status, we do not remember the Johnes of Glasgow at all. Yet, because searching in Glasgow and London was implemented within and reflected entrenched gender norms, gender-based power continued to shape these roles even as the modern nation-state emerged. In 1836, female searchers were swept aside in favour of a new professional class of male physicians eager to monitor the health (and morality) of London's citizenry.¹²⁶ In 1866, Glasgow's Police Act generated a system for health maintenance which included police oversight of areas requiring 'sanitary measures' for disease prevention.¹²⁷

The distinctions between the female searchers in London, who became ever-present health workers and data collectors, and the male searchers in Glasgow, whose work was integrated into the quartermaster role of the expanding municipal leadership, also underscores the local complexity that defined early modern urban health regimes. In both cities, public health systems were well established long before modern bureaucracies emerged with an ever-expanding set of new technologies to monitor and control bodies. Plague prevention and response in Glasgow in 1574 suggests that there is neither a contiguous line between early modern searchers and modern public health officials, nor a significant break between pre-modern and modern urban health policies.

The work of Karen Jillings, Leona Skelton and others already demonstrates the complexity of early modern public health and community surveillance.¹²⁸ My observations

¹²²SRA MS C1/1/2 f155v; McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v.2, 201–3, 207. McGrath's findings suggest an increase of 1.5 times the searchers called in 1574 and provides a table showing the increase by neighbourhood in Table 3, 'Relative Population Density of "Quarters" of Glasgow, 1574–1584' (v.2, 210). The most significant increase was at the town centre, where 12 searchers were called in 1584 instead of the 6 called in 1574.

¹²³McGrath, 'The Administration of the Burgh of Glasgow, 1574–1586', v.2, 209–10.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, v.2, 139–40.

¹²⁶William A. Brend, 'Bills of Mortality', *Transactions of the Medico-Legal Society*, 1907–8; Munkhoff, 'Searchers of the Dead', 2; Siena, 'Searchers of the Dead in Long Eighteenth-Century London', 147.

¹²⁷'The Plague: Special Report on the Plague in Glasgow', *The British Medical Journal*, September 8, 1900, 2, 684.

¹²⁸Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*; Skelton, *Sanitation in Urban Britain, 1560–1700*.

of Glasgow suggest there is more to uncover about early modern plague prevention in the British Isles and elsewhere. Scholars might consider what local systems reveal about municipalities and prophylactic community health in the early modern era, or how multidirectional power operated differently between cities and small towns.¹²⁹ To return to the cleaners discussed previously, why did some burghs rely on local cleaners during plague outbreaks, while others hired regional experts? Were these decisions simply budgetary, hires based on local expertise, indicative of a certain level of plague risk, a combination of these, or something else altogether?¹³⁰

A comparative study of cleaners in Scotland would, without doubt, add further texture and depth to the story of early modern plague responses. Like searching, the role of cleaning has distinct local variations and shifts over time. If searchers in London were inherently contaminated, and the searchers in Glasgow were not, Scottish cleaners represent the middle range, being characterised as both clean and contaminated, depending on the nature of their work (e.g. cleaning evacuated homes, deconstructing the foulle muir) and the extent of their contact with the ill. The status of cleaners in Edinburgh is still a puzzle; the designation of some as foul contrasts the pay and provisions used to attract cleaners from elsewhere. Like the searchers in London, cleaners in Edinburgh wore cloth markers or carried wands (though their designators were white rather than red), and they were paid. Like the Glaswegian searchers, the cleaners were primarily men.

However, the cleaners did not perform the social surveillance that comprised the vanguard of plague prevention. Cleaners could not institute quarantine like the searchers in London and Glasgow; they resolved quarantines through fumigation, boiling contaminated goods and scrubbing surfaces. They could be strangers, known to locals only because of their skills.¹³¹ The surety of contamination was such that some cleaners lived on the muir with the sick.¹³² The searchers in Glasgow fulfilled other municipal work; unless they were infected, they could not be lost to the muir. If each outbreak is a narrative arc, then searchers populate the beginning of the story, while cleaners enter at or after the apogee of the epidemic. While the searchers sought the presence of the plague, the cleaners' work confirmed its terrible dance through the local community and eventually, removed its vestiges between outbreaks.

To further complicate these variations, in 1545, some bailies in Edinburgh were called as 'watchers,' who ensured vagabonds and muir dwellers did not re-enter the burgh.¹³³ In each quarter, a bailie chose four men to assist him in his nightly rounds.¹³⁴ Here the

¹²⁹SRA MS C1/1/1 f32v; Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 145. As discussed above, in Glasgow, searchers tracked and reported new cases, but in 1574, one Bette Wytte (the singular woman called) was tasked with viewing anyone who died to discern presence of plague. There were other 'visitors' called to oversee the purity of goods, such as corn in the marketplace, but these were all men (SRA MS C1/1/1 f29v). Again, the division between viewing and interacting with the dead further underscores the gendered distinctions of searching between London and Glasgow, but also between London and other burghs. As Jillings stated, male municipal officers in Sheddocksley viewed the body of Margreit Burnett to look for signs of

plague during the 1605 outbreak. While Scottish burghs relied on the same range of controls, their implementation differed between locations, over time, and commensurate with the threat of plague.

¹³⁰See Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*, 144–45.

¹³¹Jillings, *An Urban History of the Plague*.

¹³²Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 2, A.D. 1403–1528, 77.

¹³³J.D. Marwick, ed, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 3, A.D. 1528–1557 (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Record Society, 1871), 118–19.

¹³⁴Marwick, *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh*, v. 3, A.D. 1528–1557, 118.

geographic organisation of watchers and their connection to local law enforcement mimics Glaswegian searching in 1574. In 1545, Edinburgh's watchers did not track plague cases but worked to stymie the threat of outbreak; they performed prophylactic work.

Resisting the urge to collapse distinctions between prophylactic and response roles during outbreaks signals the varying nature and social status attached to community health roles in the early modern context. Exploring the contrasts between searchers, cleaners, watchers and visitors, across locations and over time, will enrich our understanding of the complex ways individuals understood their duties to their neighbours and municipal leaders in the early modern era. Thus, there is room for further discovery. The locality of plague response is uniquely representative of early modern health in the British Isles because even though larger municipalities and small towns drew from a set of established practices, each tailored their response to fit local political regimes, geographies, cultural and religious practices, and the severity of the outbreak.

Then, as now, citizens chafed against the economic and social strains of quarantine, including shuttered markets and the inability to move between city, town and hamlet. They resisted categorization as ill or infected and balked at forced removal or containment in their homes. During the 1605 outbreak in Glasgow, the records show the council reinstituting the plague acts in June, July, and August, suggesting the epidemic threat required periodic review and reinstatement of the plague edicts.¹³⁵ In the sixteenth century, the tension between economic and health concerns was clear—if a municipality prioritised prevention, then there were other health risks resulting from economic collapse, including the potential for starvation. Engaging male leaders in Glasgow to guard city entrances, check travel documents, prevent the entrance of plague-tainted goods and search each neighbourhood for signs of infection were protective public health policies that kept the public order without disturbing established gender hierarchies.

In the modern context, gender is technically no longer a factor in the design or implementation of epidemic response. Still, studying public health and epidemic response in the early modern period evokes several questions applicable in today's pandemic context. We should consider whether the rush to return to 'normal' is a result of the triumph of modern medicine or hubris. We might question the categorical superiority of our modern tools over early modern methods in outwitting epidemic spread. It is also worthwhile to examine the scale at which pandemic response tactics are effective.

Perhaps the most formidable hurdle leaders face today is the public perception of health mandates. Citizens ably perceive how public health policies are both reliant on and constitutive of state power. Early modern settlements, urban and rural, were forced to contend with recurring outbreaks and to take the interconnectedness of health seriously. The range of roles and duties in Scottish municipalities during outbreaks suggests the leadership met these threats head-on. Yet present-day populations are conditioned to expect relative freedom from epidemic disease. One result

¹³⁵SRA MS C1/1/6 f9v; SRA MS C1/1/6 f14r; SRA MS C1/1/6 f18v.

is a marked resistance to the idea that an individual's health is intertwined with the community's health, a reality all too familiar to those facing plague in the early modern era.

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