'Come: it is time to keep your appointment with the Wicker Man.': The re-enchantment of Scotland through Wicker Man tourism

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Abstract
The location filming of *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973) used a number of places to invent the pagan Scottish island of Summerisle. In the film, Summerisle feels like a timeless place in the Inner or Outer Hebrides. The actual locations are well-known in fan and academic literature. The film begins with aerial shots of the plane carrying Sergeant Howie passing over the dramatic mountains of Skye. But the rest of the film was shot somewhere else. In this paper, I will explore how fans online make sense of the construction of the film, and how that feeds into wider academic debates about horror films and outsiders, and Scottishness and Gaelicness. I will then discuss my own pilgrimage tourism to the location sites in Scotland and use my own pictures and reflections to argue that while all tourism is a highly contested leisure activity, Wicker Man tourism allows tourists to find themselves off the map. It also allows people to re-enchant Scotland, and make meaning of Scottish landscape and history, even if the film draws on English folklore and music and *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890) as much as Scottish folklore and music.

Key words: community, identity, pilgrimage, Scottishness, tourism, Wicker Man

Biography
Karl Spracklen is a Professor of Sociology of Leisure and Culture in Leeds School of Sciences at Leeds Beckett University. His research ranges across leisure studies, popular music studies and metal music studies, though with a sociological lens. He is currently the Editor-in-Chief and the founder of *International Journal of the Sociology of Leisure*, published by Springer. Spracklen was also the co-founder and first editor of its journal *Metal Music Studies*, published by Intellect.

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Introduction[1]

Tourism and pilgrimage are inextricably interwoven through the agentic notion that making any such journey is a performative, staged act (Edensor 2001, 2008; Maddrell et al. 2016; Urry 1990). Tourism is partly a quest for highly contested authenticity (MacCannell 1973, 1976; Matheson 2008; Spracklen 2011a; Spracklen and Spracklen 2014; Wang 1999), and partly a quest for meaning and *communitas* (Turner 1969; Urry 1990). Tourism and pilgrimage for Urry (1990) is especially important in the *inhuman* condition of late modernity, exemplified by the loss of enchantment, the loss of ritual, and the instrumentality of global capitalism. The tourist industry in late modernity tries to make meaning and belonging but only turns agency and authenticity into a commercial transaction (Bain and March 2019; Halewood and Hannam 2001). But this does not stop humans searching. In a paper exploring football stadium tourism, Tim Edensor and his colleagues use an analysis of comments on TripAdvisor to explore the different ways in which users of these sports tourism spaces interact with – and reflect on them – in a *performative* mode (Edensor et al. 2021: 227):

> For certain tourists who lack a local spatial connection but nonetheless possess a strong emotional affinity with the club, such visits to stadia during match-days can resemble a pilgrimage… a means of cementing their fan identity and developing a greater sense of allegiance. Indeed, Gibson, Willming, and Holdnak (2003, p. 185) find that fans travelling to the University of Florida to watch an American football game often consider these touristic journeys as 'pilgrimages to the Mecca of Gator football' and the 'spiritual centre' of college football. Similarly, one Manchester United supporter commented 'Old Trafford oozes history; everywhere you turn is a memory of what makes them the club with the proudest tradition in British football' (September, 2015).

The spaces at the heart of Edensor et al. (2021)'s research are products of the globalisation of popular culture and leisure, of capitalism in its most Darwinian 'red in tooth and claw' (Ruse 1979): enormous buildings that host professional football clubs and their tens of thousands of fans, watched on curated and sponsored television screens by millions of devoted fans (Giulianotti 2019; Waalkes 2017). Yet even where this leisure space and identity is sold to these fans by the machine of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), some still find in the

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[1] This paper was delivered as a keynote at Contemporary Folk Horror in Film and Media, held at Leeds Beckett University on 29-30 January 2022.

pilgrimage a way of making meaning that is communicative in a Habermasian sense (Habermas 1984, 1987; Spracklen 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2015, 2021; Spracklen and Spracklen 2014). Popular culture, then, is as valid as elite culture in the quest for *communitas* – there is no difference between finding meaning in travelling to one place or another. Football grounds, package resorts, the Roman Forum, Vienna, Hollywood – all and everywhere else in the world are places where people can choose to find meaning through pilgrimage and tourism, even if such meaning is constrained by the power of others (Bain and March 2019; Edensor 2001, 2008; Edensor et al. 2021; Halewood and Hannam 2001; Iwashita 2006; Lee 2012; Spracklen 2009, 2011a, 2021; Spracklen and Spracklen 2014; Teng 2021; Wang 1999). Seaton (2019a, 2019b, 2019c), for example, explores myth-making, identity and community around what he calls content tourism related to *The Last Samurai* (Zwick 2003).

In this paper, I explore how meaning is contested and constructed in online spaces and in my own memory through reflective tourism discourses surrounding location filming of *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973), which used a number of places to invent the pagan Scottish island of Summerisle. In the film, Summerisle feels like a timeless place in the Inner or Outer Hebrides, inhabited by smiling but deadly pagans who play folk music, who take part in rituals and dances, and who believe in the power of sacrifice (Spracklen 2020a). The actual locations used in the film are well-known and have been clearly identified in fan and academic literature (Brown 2010; Franks 2020; Murray and Rolston 2017; Murray et al. 2005). The film begins with aerial shots of the plane carrying Sergeant Howie over the dramatic mountains of Skye. But the rest of the film was shot somewhere else: a bricolage of places in south-west lowland Scotland in what is now known as Dumfries and Galloway, with a few shots further north in Plockton, a village north of the railway terminus at Kyle of Lochalsh.

I will explore, then, how fans online make sense of the construction of the film, and how that feeds into wider academic debates about horror films and outsiders, and Scottishness, Celticness and Gaelicness. I will then discuss my own pilgrimage tourism to the location sites in Scotland – my week based at Anwoth and other holidays to Skye where we also went to Plockton - and use my own pictures and reflections to argue that while all tourism is a highly contested leisure activity, Wicker Man tourism allows tourists to find themselves off the well-used map of tartan, heather, and whisky distilleries. It also allows people to re-enchant Scotland, and make meaning of Scottish landscape and history, even if the film draws on English folklore and music and *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890) as much as Scottish folklore and music (Gibson 2013; Spracklen 2020a). This paper, then, provides an innovative account

of content tourism (Seaton 2019a, 2019b, 2019c) in folk horror generally and specifically to the imagined, imaginary Scotland.

The fan accounts are situated in wider debates about fan culture and virtual spaces (Gong 2020; Halewood and Hannam 2001; Jensen 2017; Lee 2012; McConnel 2019; Reichenberger and Smith 2020; Spracklen 2015, 2020b; Spracklen and Spracklen 2018; Sturm 2020; Swan 2018; Toy 2017), and about the legitimacy of horror films (Chibnall and Petley 2001; Jancovich 2002; Murray and Rolston 2017; Ryan 2007; Williams 2015). Fans have a long history of attaching themselves to culture and leisure: from the games and theatres of Classical Rome to the drunken revelry in Victorian music halls, fans have consumed instrumental leisure while shaping their own communicative meaning (Spracklen 2009, 2011b; Spracklen, 2021). But late modernity, globalisation and the rise of the internet have allowed fans to claim space - to claim loyalty to the cultures they love and find others who share their passions and their meanings and their shared myths (Spracklen 2015, 2020b; Spracklen and Spracklen 2018; Sturm 2020; Swan 2018). The internet has provided a virtual space for fandoms to maintain themselves, subject to the constraints of access and the increasing commercialisation of the internet since the 1990s (Spracklen, 2015). The internet has shifted the way horror movies and horror fandom are seen by the mainstream media, too (Jancovich 2002). In the seventies and eighties, horror films were stereotyped by critics as having little cultural, aesthetic or moral value (Chibnall and Petley 2001). Politicians and religious demagogues condemned horror films as 'video nasties', resulting in some films becoming banned in the United Kingdom and other countries (Ryan 2007). At the same time, horror films were appreciated and adored in alternative sub-cultural spaces, among fans and makers of goth rock and heavy metal (Spracklen and Spracklen 2012, 2014, 2018; Spracklen 2020a, 2020b). With the globalisation of culture on the internet, horror films have been re-evaluated as worthy, and horror fans have found belonging, legitimation and acceptance, through information on blogs, on Wikipedia, and on social media (Ancuta 2011; Farrimond 2020; Jancovich 2002; Williams 2015). *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973), for example, is found on reelstreets.com, where mainly British locations are identified by the hard work of its hundreds of amateur sleuths.

Before I move on to the fan accounts, it is necessary here to return to a claim I have made on a number of occasions: all forms of identity are social constructions, all communities are symbolic – even if they are mapped onto something ontologically material or spatial. In Spracklen (2021) I trace the evolution of this theoretical framework from my PhD and other work from 1995 onwards. There is no essential *Scottishness*, no authentic set of stories or

traditions that make Scotland or England, or indeed Yorkshire (Spracklen 2016) or Mongolia (Spracklen 2018). All national and spatial identity formation is negotiated – and contested - through invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and imagined communities (Anderson 1990). Further, such imagined communities operate through symbolic boundaries that are not bound to political hegemony or to the history of a place (Cohen 1985). My work on whisky tourism shows how whisky fans and the whisky industry try to impose their own meanings on single-malt and the Scottish landscape (Spracklen 2011a, 2013, 2014). In my work on Scottish extreme metal bands and Scottishness, I argue that:

> Scottish music in its various forms has been identified as constructing Scottishness, whether a romantic Scotland of bagpipes and heather-covered mountains or the urban Scotland of the Central Belt... That there is nothing essential about Scotland and Scottish identity, or Celticness and Celtic identity, is a truth that is clear enough—but this idealized, Celtic version of Scotland and Scottishness retains its hold around the world, even as Scotland's liquid and polysemic present is very different from this imagined and fixed past. (Spracklen 2017: 105)

Scottishness, or Gaelicness, or Celticness, are performed by tourists and other outsiders - constructed, invented identities that have a limited relationship to the landscape, history and people of Scotland (Gibson 2013; Hesse 2014; Matheson 2008; McArthur 2003; Wood 2012). And people who live in Scotland and claim Scottish identity are just as likely to construct and be constructed by these myths (Spracklen 2011a, 2017; Wood 2012). With those words of caution, now it is time to keep our appointment with the Wicker Man, where we can explore the film's role in the contestation of these myths and its use in tourism and popular culture.

Fans: making meaning

At the time of writing (27 August 2021) there are dozens of relevant websites that come up when the term 'Wicker Man locations' is searched for on DuckDuckGo. For this paper I am going to discuss five of them as they represent different typologies of websites and blogs. The first is reelstreets.com, as mentioned above, which relies on pictures added in 2011 – with an additional one in 2016 - to identify a number of key locations (https://www.reelstreets.com/films/wicker-man-the/, accessed 27 August 2021). It does not include the mountains of Skye. The narrative provided by the user uploading the shots includes the explanation: 'Not the most promising start, one might think, but brother Robin, who went

on an Wicker Man rampage through Scotland knows what he's doing[2]'. The people on reelstreet, then, are already telling us that some people know what they are doing, that they are fans such as the ones Seaton (2019a, 2019b, 2019c) identifies.

The second relevant website is http://scotlandthemovie.com/movies/fwickerman.html (accessed 27 August 2021, last updated 27 December 2017), which I used in my own peregrination to Summerisle. The owner of the site, named on the home page as Doug Hill, makes his claim to being an authentic fan immediately:

> I first saw The Wicker Man in 1973 when it was the B feature to Don't Look Now. Both stuck in my mind ever since but of the two The Wicker Man is probably my favourite. Mauled by the production company and savaged by the critics The Wicker Man has in the years since it's release steadily gained a well deserved cult status. The story of the making of the movie is told in the book Inside The Wicker Man by Allan Brown. The Wicker Man has scenes filmed at Plockton, Skye, Ayrshire, and Dumfries & Galloway. In 2006 Nicolas Cage starred in a remake of The Wicker Man that received mixed reviews from fans and critics. The plot itself has some similarities to the original, but the new version takes on different twists and could leave fans of the original movie feeling like they took a wrong turn.

Doug has been in love with the film since its initial cinema screening with the more well-known *Don't Look Now* (Roeg, 1973). He dismisses the re-make of *The Wicker Man* (LaBute 2006) and situates himself as one of the serious horror fans who would rather forget it ever happened. Doug is so devoted to the film and its depiction of Scotland that it has clearly influenced him to produce the film locations website. For the location of the finale on Burrow Head, where Howie is burned in the Wicker Man, (http://scotlandthemovie.com/movies/wmburro2.html, accessed 27 August 2021), he says: 'I camped next to the main Wicker Man location and was rewarded by a fine sunset over the sea. Curiously given the significance of the hare in the movie the area abounds with hares - I had several wander closely past in the late twilight'.

Doug, then, wants us to know he is tough enough to camp wild, and also that he has an encounter with something associated with an older, British pagan mythology. Another fan site is filled with similar discussions of the uncanny feeling of Scotland, and of the locations used

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[2] All quotes from the internet are cited as written so should be taken as (sic.).

for Summerisle. This is linked to from Doug's site and is the third relevant website used in this research (http://www.wickermanpilgrim.com/mainindex.html, accessed 27 August 2021, no information on date last modified). The main index shows the fan-creator standing at the key location at Burrow Head; on the introductory page he is wearing a Wicker Man t-shirt and says (http://www.wickermanpilgrim.com/intro.html):

> hi there,my name is Martin Griffin,i am 39 from Birmingham England and i am the Wickerman pilgrim and as you probably gathered, like yourselves i am a big Wickerman fan.It is the best cult/horror film ever, i dont think i will get any arguments there will i???????.How did it all start?well after watching the film for the 100th time i thought to myself what a great idea it would be to go and visit Summerisle,as we all know that, at the start of the film, it says thank you to the people of Summerisle for the cooperation in the making of the film so of I… punch in summerisle in goggle having thought it was a real place where people lived?????????,well i found out to my surprise it wasnt!!But what I did find is that there were quite a few different locations all along the south west coast of Scotland that were used in the making of the film.I had never been to Scotland before so i took it upon myself to visit as many of these locations as possible and become a pilgrim to my cause.The first thing to do after reading up on the information provided was to book myself,the wife,mother in law and the 2 kids into the Ellangowan hotel in Creetown and map out my pilgrim route to all these places.As you will see throughout the website i have been to most of the places in the past 18 months and its been brill but dont forget my pilgrimage is on going so keep login on to keep up with my travels and ive got to say what a beautiful place Scotland is and all the people who live there.

Martin's rationale for the site, while over-enthusiastic, is playful. He nods to the conceit that the film was filmed in the real place of Summerisle, and he wants us to know that he believed Summerisle was a real place. He believes the film is the best horror film. He wants us to know he believes Scotland's landscape is beautiful, even the south-west corner of the country that stands in for Summerisle. Interestingly, it is the film that has finally made him make the pilgrimage over the border from the post-industrial city of Birmingham where he tells us he lives. He has carefully identified each location and photographed himself at all of them, and his entire website is the most passionate and endearing of them all as he claims each location

with tagged music. This is content tourism fandom at its purest (Seaton 2019a, 2019b, 2019c): Martin knows his locations and his Scotland, and wants us to know it.

The fourth site of interest is https://www.findingthewickerman.co.uk/ (accessed 27 August, 2021), a very thorough, professionally designed fan site that has wonderful location shots interposed with clips from the film and information about the filming. On the 'About' page (https://www.findingthewickerman.co.uk/about, posted September 2016) they explain:

> A small group of us have undertaken a number of trips to Dumfries and Galloway to find the locations used in the filming of the Wicker Man and all the photographs of the locations used in this site are our own.

Somebody called Michael then responded:

> Interesting site, I adore the film and it's great to get to see the locations. The south west of Scotland is truly beautiful and I look forward to seeing some more pictures as the website develops.

This site, then, is engaging with the construction of Scotland and Scottishness through the prism of Wicker Man tourism. The site does of course cover Plockton despite the creators claiming the site is all about the locations in Dumfries and Galloway. The fan called Michael does not seem to realise that Plockton and Skye are not in south-west Scotland at all. The fifth and final fan-site is a blog about travelling, which includes one trip to the Wicker Man locations (https://www.helenonherholidays.com/galloway-weekend/, accessed 27 August 2021, published 18 June 2016). This site is created by Helen, who begins by saying she first saw the original 1973 Wicker Man after watching the remake. She then continues:

> It took about 4 hours to drive there from where we live near Manchester, with a stop at the independent motorway services at Tebay, just north of the Lake District. This services is like a cross between a Waitrose, a National Trust cafe and a farm shop and is always being praised as the best in the UK. On a busy bank holiday it was absolutely heaving and we wished we'd picked the "normal" services for a quiet life and a Burger King. We checked into our hotel and headed straight out to find the first location, the ruined church at Anwoth. This is the location of Rowan Morrison's grave in the film,

as well as where the maypole scene was filmed with the schoolhouse opposite. On an early summer's evening Anwoth is a beautiful spot but ever so slightly creepy. We were the only people there and it was so quiet – just the sound of birdsong and the odd twitching curtain. We were amazed by how quiet this part of Scotland is in general – away from the main road to Stranraer there's hardly anyone around and there's a sense of silence and peace which we really   enjoyed.

Helen's blogpost starts with her travelling via Tebay services, where people fight to get parked because the independent farm shop and restaurant is the haunt of bourgeois foodies and hipsters. But she is unnerved by the weird, liminal feelings of Anwoth and wants us to know this region is much quieter than the rest of tourist Scotland.

What we did on our holidays

As I have confessed elsewhere (Lamond and Spracklen 2020; Spracklen 2020b, 2021) I was unrepentantly uncool as a child, becoming a huge fan of science-fiction (driven by watching *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*) and fantasy (through reading *The Lord of the Rings* [Tolkien 1954a, 1954b, 1956]). As I reached puberty I was a fan of heavy metal, too, as the music seemed to me to be an extension of the fantastic elements of the role-playing games I was involved in with my friends. Genre fandom and metal gave me identity and protected me at a tricky point in the life cycle. It also led me to horror films. Watching the video of 'Number of the Beast' by Iron Maiden led me through my metal friends to zombie films such as the George Romero trilogy, then the video nasties as I was ten when 'Number of the Beast' charted in 1982 – and, therefore, videos and moral outrage were both becoming normal when I was growing up. I loved metal, horror, fantasy, and role-playing games, and I was shocked at the Christian assault on them. My parents were atheists, and I had a scientific mindset. But I was also drawn to the pagan myths, mainly through watching *Robin of Sherwood* on television and reading Slaine in *2000AD* (Spracklen 2020a). I could see Christians attacking paganism and felt attached to paganism, or rather, the myths and stories encapsulated in my shaky, teenage reading of *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890). I wanted to believe that there was a genuine pagan tradition of death and resurrection written in the British landscape as well as the cycle of seasons and the story of Jesus Christ.

I do not know when precisely I heard about *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973), but trying to see it became an obsession. I heard from friends how it had been deliberately destroyed as was too close to the truth about the world and its guiding spirits. I later found that out to be

nonsense. Then on 08 May 1988 the 87-minute version released as a B-movie in 1973 was aired as the first-ever episode of Alex Cox's *Moviedrome* on BBC2. I watched it and taped it, and from that moment it became part of my life. I remember watching the end, waiting for Edward Woodward to find a way to escape… and it never arrived. He was sacrificed because he was the fool, the virgin, the King. I loved it. I loved its claim that it was filmed with the permission of Lord Summerisle. I wanted to believe this had actually happened. In my 16-year old mind, reading about physics ahead of my GCSE exams, it had happened in some parallel reality, some other part of the multiverse. As I grew older I learned to love it for its essential struggle, the desperate hope that the sacrifice will work. I loved the use of British folk music in the soundtrack (Spracklen, 2020a), and the costumes of the mummers. I also loved its history, the story of the problems with the unseasonal February weather on location, and the struggle by its director and writer to get the film released in its original glory (Brown 2010; Franks 2020; Murray and Rolston 2017; Murray et al. 2005). I kept the VHS tape with me for many years, and would show it to friends to try to get them to see its beauty, its humour, and its perfect, pagan ending. I was never a true believer, but I had sympathy with paganism that still shapes my worldview. When the film came out on DVD with the version I had seen in 1988 along with a restored so-called final cut, I bought it – but the longer re-combined final cut still feels strange to me, as I have watched the earlier version so many times I can feel every movement and whisper as if it is a part of my history.

When I read online about the precise locations used in the film, I had to visit them. As a child and teenager I had never had the chance to travel to the Highlands of Scotland, as my parents did not own a car. We had been to the east coast of Scotland by train (to Arbroath in a caravan), but no further. With my wife Beverley I have corrected that – western and north-western Scotland feel like a second home to me, and we have explored many parts of it: mainly in one-week cottage lets, sometimes moving between cottages and hotels. We travelled to Skye twice, once in 2005, then again in 2012, not only to bag locations but to walk and drink whisky. On that first holiday, we caught the ferry and stayed in the main town Portree and climbed up to the Old Man of Storr, one of the fairy-like rock formations seen at the beginning of the film when Sergeant Howie is supposedly flying to Summerisle. Seeing it in its usual rain-darkened surroundings is enough to make any Christian feel tempted to be impious. On the second pilgrimage to Skye, I was carrying whisky samples for one of the staff at Talisker distillery (a tough delivery job, I know – the distillery staff had links to my local whisky shop and were involved in the tasting club), and we crossed the bridge to the island. We stayed beyond Staffin near the Quiraing, another of the brooding mountains of Trotternish, into which I ran on two

occasions. We drove back to the mainland to Plockton, just up the coast from the end of the railway line at Kyle of Lochalsh. Plockton was better known as being the village where *Hamish Macbeth*[3] was filmed, but by the time we visited there was no sign of any tourism associated with that Sunday evening television series. This small fishing village had appeared in *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973) as the harbour in which Sergeant Howie is seen shouting up at the locals. We identified the correct place where the villagers had been lurking and I left pleased with myself.

Ticking off the Skye locations was easy enough to combine with actual holidays in the Highlands and Islands. I was not such a completist that I needed to see the place where the plane takes off from the harbour on the mainland, but I wanted to see all the other locations used to represent Summerisle: that meant we had to go on holiday in Dumfries and Galloway itself. While I wanted to be as close as possible to the location where the Wicker Man was erected and burned, neither of us wanted to stay in a caravan on the site near the actual location at Burrow Head. Looking at the information online, and combining it with my own awareness of the topography of Dumfries and Galloway, I knew somewhere like Gatehouse of Fleet would be an ideal central spot, with opportunities to eat, drink and walk when not visiting the location sites. But what I wanted most of all was to stay in Anwoth, because of the ruined church and the old school used in the film. I wanted to touch the walls of the ruined church from my bedroom windows - or at least be able to see it every morning and evening as a fan tourist (Seaton 2019a, 2019b). At the time, the owners of the school offered a holiday cottage – Clachan Cottage, possibly the schoolteacher's house – that was visible in the film.[4] The cottage website promised red squirrels eating from the feeders in the garden. I was sold and booked us in for the following May in 2011.

We drove up from Skipton – our home since 2007 - and took the scenic, coastal route once we had crossed the border at Gretna Green. On the other side of the Solway estuary rose the northern fells of the English Lake District. This landscape was and is Scottish because we were in Scotland – but it felt like we were hundreds of miles to the north. Like the soundtrack to *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973) and the traditions cribbed from *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890), we seemed to be in both England and Scotland performing something entirely fictional (Spracklen 2020a): honest pagans on our way to Summerisle. In Anwoth the cottage-owner was polite and did not say anything about *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973), but I could sense she

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[3] BBC Scotland, 1995-1997.

[4] The Old Schoolhouse itself is now available (as of 26 September 2021) as a holiday let, alongside Clachan Cottage. http://www.clachancottage.com/index.html, accessed 06 August 2021.

knew exactly why we were there. As soon as possible we were exploring the churchyard and touching the ruins, and looking back at the school. We took plenty of pictures of the church but for some reason they were not transferred to the Facebook portfolio Beverley uploaded when we got back home. While staying in Anwoth we took delight in watching the film and spotting Clachan Cottage. It made me shiver and cheer at the same time, when the window of our cottage appeared and I looked out into the night.

Anwoth is a couple of miles from Gatehouse of Fleet, so we walked over to it on the first evening and took photos of me standing at the key location there, the exterior of the pub The Green Man:

Image One: Gatehouse of Fleet

This had never been a pub, and was used as estate offices at the time of filming. The interior of The Green Man was in fact the Ellangowan Hotel at Creetown, along the coast from Gatehouse of Fleet and Anwoth. We went there too, of course, a few days later. But standing outside what was then an unused building, I could almost hear the band playing 'The Landlord's Daughter' and see the disgust and lust in Howie's eyes as he stared at Willow.

Through the pictures presented here you can see me performing my serious alternative music fan identity, putting on various t-shirts – on this particular holiday, no one stopped to

nod and identify any of the bands (The Sisters of Mercy, super-cool eighties goth rock; Isengard and Emperor, evil Norwegian black metal). Note as well towards the end, as we neared the headland at the end of Summerisle, the weather became typically Scottish for a May bank holiday week, and I had to resort to wearing a black waterproof jacket. The day before we visited Creetown we went to Kirkcudbright, where Beverley took this picture of me standing outside the location for May Morrison's sweet shop:

Image Two: Kirkcudbright

We ticked off all the other locations in the town then drove to the next destination, Whithorn, halfway to Burrow Head. The key location in the town founded by St Ninian is the island's library, where Howie consults *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890), which is also seen when children walk past carrying Death out of the village. Incredibly, in 2011 it was still in use as a library:
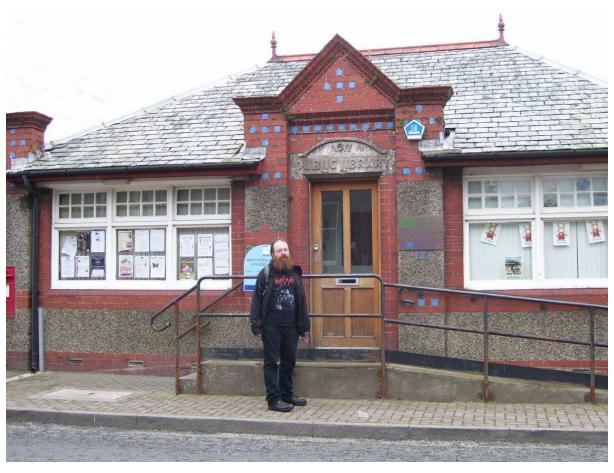
Image Three: The Library

We then travelled to Burrrowhead, at the southern end of what we imagined was actually Summerisle. Before I describe that pilgrimage, I want to describe the other locations, because Burrow Head represents the climax of the film. The next day, then, we drove to see Castle Kennedy and Culzean Castle. The latter was used for the exteriors of Lord Summerisle's home, and on the day we realised it was too far to reach it after we had spent the day looking around the grounds of Castle Kennedy. Here fake standing stones were set up in a circle for a naked flame dance. It was then re-used for the May Day procession, where Howie, dressed as the Fool, is tricked to his doom. This procession wound around the lake and used the weird landscaping for good effect, and here is a picture of me standing just where they had processed:

Image Four: Procession Line

On the day we went to the locations used in the final scenes, we went in order they appear in the film. So we followed the pilgrim markers for St Ninian's Cave and reached the beach, from which the still-sacred Christian site can be seen. This beach is where Lord Summerisle gives a sacrificial offering to the god of the sea. St Ninian's Cave is in sight and is where Rowan Morrison is seen, the supposed victim of the sacrifice. We see her here as Howie sees her, from the beach. At the real St Ninan's Cave there were votive offerings, small candles and crosses, which made us realise that paganism has a strong undying influence on the morals and ethics and faith of Christianity in this country. We then walked back to the car park and drove to the caravan site at Burrow Head, where there are three locations. On the afternoon we arrived we could not work out where anything was, as a mist had descended. There were plenty of caravans but no one around. Then someone appeared as we were tramping across the headland walking his dog, and he showed us the way. The first is the location where Howie and Rowan come out of the subterranean labyrinth through which they have left the cave at the beach. The choppy water indicates how windy it was:

Image Five: Shivering

The second location we found was the concrete plinth and wooden stumps of the smaller of the two Wicker Men burned on the headland. This was used for close-ups of Howie, and was the Wicker Man that collapses so spectacularly as the sun sets at the end of the film. I have a picture of this, like every other location apart from those at Anwoth. Finally, there is the location of the full-sized Wicker Man. This is me standing between the concrete stumps, feeling as excited as some mediaeval Christian pilgrim on reaching Santiago de Compostela:

Image Six: The Wicker Man!

Discussion

The pilgrim tourists online want to share with the world their dedication to the quest in the guise of content tourism (Seaton 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). They have consumed Scotland and recreated Scottishness in their performances and their peregrinations across the country (Edensor 2001, 2008; Gibson 2013; Matheson 2008; Spracklen 2011a, 2017). And they have performed the rites of passage as determinedly as Lord Summerisle and his pagans when they undertake the May Day parade through what is actually the manicured lawns of Castle Kennedy. Martin, the fan-pilgrim with his blog purely about the locations of the Wicker Man, wants to imagine he can hear the folk music of the soundtrack when he is in the locations, as he plays that music to us every time a new page loads. He has a picture of himself posing next to a footpath sign that says Pilgrim's Way. Doug, who has the Scotland movie locations blog, is keen to prove he is an old-school fan of the film, so much that he rejects the re-make altogether. The fans who have identified the locations on the professionally constructed findingthewickerman site use curated photographs and text from the film to make us think Summerisle is a real authentic place, but also a liminal one where the fantastical is just out of

sight (MacCannell 1973, 1976; Turner 1969; Wang 1999). Even the fans on reelstreets have playfully entered into the spirit of pilgrimage by mentioning a brother who has travelled up from the mundane to the numinous. Helen the travel blogger tells us of a pilgrimage that begins with middle-class complaints about how busy Tebay service station is, and how she wishes she did not do the bourgeois thing of stopping there and supporting its supposedly more authentic Cumbrian fare. But then she visits Anwoth and the old church, and she feels as if this real place in the southwest of Scotland is something beautiful, creepy and quiet – something liminal (Turner 1969).

My own reflections on my pilgrimage, and my pictures, have not been presented to the public online, though this paper will be my way of giving this journey into the official record of the public sphere of academic debate (Habermas 1984, 1987). Reflecting on the holidays discussed above, I have made more of Skye than the fans who have created the websites. This is because I have always been cheered at the sight of the mountains of the Trotternish Peninsula whenever I have seen them being used as a backdrop for some Scottish film or fantasy film. They are unreal shapes, and ever since I saw them in *The Wicker Man* (Hardy 1973) I knew I had to walk up to them and explore them. When the Quiraing was used on some of the earliest official pictures of Jodie Whittaker as Doctor Who I was the first raving about it to friends on Facebook. Skye is mountains, moorland and Talisker whisky, my own short-hand caricatures of my own imagined Scotland (Hesse 2014; McArthur 2003). But like the fan-pilgrims, I was determined to tick-off every location spot and to prove I had been there by saving (or trying to save) the evidence in the form of the pictures. This is our evidence as pilgrims – we have been there, in all weathers, and proved ourselves authentic folk-horror fans. But my reflections show that I am as desperate as Martin to try to make Summerisle a real place where I went on holiday, a fictional counterpart to Skye but somewhere further south. We are making a bricolage of the tourist Highlands with the locations around Anwoth in our own myth-making (Seaton 2019a, 2019b, 2019c), constructing imaginary Scotland with every trip and every memory. But at the same time, I felt the liminal and the numinous, especially in Anwoth, which does feel like it belongs to some twilight world of Celtic gods and goddesses. And when I stood on the top where the Wicker Man burned, where the concrete stumps still remained left over as some offering to the goddess of pulp cinema, I so wanted to say we saw hares and watched the sun set. Like the other pilgrims, I had found my way to the end of my journey, and my holiday, and just felt excited that the quest was over.

Conclusion

Although we have all performed the role of the pagan pilgrimage to the "real" island of Summerisle, I do not think that any of the tourists who have visited each location of *The Wicker Man* actually believe we have visited a real place in Scotland. All of us have used the locations and our visits – and our love of the film – to impose our own imagined Summerisle over the real and often unromantic towns and villages of Dumfries and Galloway. We all want to believe it is real, just like the Harry Potter fans who turn up at King's Cross to pay money to be filmed pretending to push their trolleys into fake Platform 9 and three quarters (Iwashita 2006; Lee 2012). But unlike them, we have faith in actual locations and not some Baudrillardian simulacra (Baudrillard 1994), such as the commercialised make-believe Harry Potter constructed well away from the real platforms where the movies were filmed. We want to prove our commitment to the performativity of the pilgrimage by collecting and accurately recording our real-life appreciation of the film locations as content tourists (Seaton 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Inspired by our imagined, imaginary community of pagan Scottish highlands and islands (Anderson 1990; Cohen 1985; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Spracklen 2021) – and ignoring the fact that Christianity had a real and long-term influence across these mountains (Foster 2014) – we breathe new life into these locations by bringing our holiday spending. Plockton and Skye do not need our money, but Wicker Man tourism has brought new business to an overlooked part of Scotland. So even without the rocky mountains and islands of our imaginations, we still feel we are on our holidays in our fantasy Scotland.

Finally, do any of us actually believe we have had otherworldly, liminal experiences? Are any of us practicing pagans? In the churchyard at Anwoth Beverley and I found flowers that had been left on one of the graves used in the film. I think some of the people involved in the blogs online are genuine pagans. All of us I think would like to believe that there was something older than Christianity that still dominates British society and politics: our strange established Church with Bishops in the House and the monarch still appointed by divine will. The year passes, winter becomes spring and summer, people live and die – these are old ideas that still permeate modernity and the Christian church, so most of us who have visited its locations have a sympathy with the pagan mythology of the film, drawn as it is from the incredibly important (if completely discredited) work *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1890). I am certain that all of the bloggers have a sympathy with that mythology, and are happy to perform their pilgrimage as if they are actually undertaking a pagan pilgrimage. As for me, I am an atheist, a secular humanist with trust in science and a cynicism about all beliefs, religions,

myths and superstitions and the power they have over humans. Yet it is precisely because of this that I allowed myself to be drawn into the performance of the pagan, cheering in the film as the Christian copper burned. So my excitement on the cliff-top gave me a liminal thrill of the divine, the numinous and the mysteries of nature. It did not last, but re-watching the film or listening to the soundtrack can send me back in my mind to the imagined Summerisle in the spaces between the Quiraing and Burrow Head. Scotland remains my favourite place to visit for a summer holiday, and I know we will return soon to Anworth, to Gatehouse of Fleet, and I will stand again where the hares run at the edge of Summerisle.

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