

## Major Weir

Major Weir was the last man executed for witchcraft in Scotland in 1670. He lived with his unmarried sister, Grizel, in the West Bow - a Z-shaped street near Edinburgh Castle, "composed of tall antique houses, with numerous dovecot-like gables projecting over the footway, full of old inscriptions and sculpturings, presenting at every few steps some darkest lateral profundity, into which the imagination wanders without hindrance or exhaustion ..." wrote Robert Chambers in *Traditions of Edinburgh*.

Major Weir was an active member of a strict Protestant sect, and was frequently seen at prayer meetings. He officiated at such meetings - but always leaning on his black walking staff. *Robert Chambers* described his end as follows:

"After a life characterized by all the graces of devotion, but polluted in secret by crimes of the most revolting nature, and which little needed the addition of wizardry to excite the horror of living men, Major Weir fell into severe sickness, which affected his mind so much, that he made open voluntary confession of all his wickedness. The tale was at first so incredible, that the provost, Sir Andrew Ramsay, refused for some time to take him into custody. At length himself, his sister (partner in his crimes), and his staff, were secured by the magistrates, together with certain sums of money, which were found wrapped in rags in different parts of the house. One of these pieces of rag being thrown into the fire by a bailie who had taken the whole in charge, flew up the chimney, and made an explosion like a cannon.

While the wretched man lay in prison, he made no scruple to disclose the particulars of his guilt, but refused to address himself to the Almighty for pardon. To every request that he would pray, he answered in screams, "Torment me no more - I am tormented enough already!" Even the offer of a Presbyterian clergyman, instead of the established Episcopal minister of the city, had no effect on him.

He was tried April 9, 1670 and being found guilty, was sentenced to be strangled and burnt between Edinburgh and Leith. His sister, who was tried at the same time, was sentenced to be hanged in the Grassmarket. When the rope was around his neck, to prepare him for the fire, he was bid to say, "Lord, be merciful to me!" but he answered, as before, "let me alone - I will not - I have lived as a beast, and I must die as a beast!"

After he had dropped lifeless in the flames, his stick was also cast into the fire; and 'whatever incantation was in it,' says a contemporary writer, 'the persons present own that it gave rare turnings, and was long a-burning, as also himself.'

To this day, the residents remember the tales of this wizard Major Weir, and can point to the door of his former residence. After his death, neighbors claimed that his ghost was seen on many occasions and mysterious noises and lights came at dead of night from his now-unoccupied lodgings.