

Panic and Persecution:  
Witch-Hunting in East Lothian, 1628-1631

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## **Declaration**

I declare that this is my own work and that no part of it has been previously published in the form in which it is now presented.

Elizabeth J. Robertson

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## **Abstract**

The Project is a regional case study of East Lothian during the national witchcraft panic of 1628-30. Events in East Lothian are considered, as are important individuals involved with cases in the county, some of whom may also have been involved in investigations further afield, particularly in Berwickshire. The project attempts to catalogue events as they occurred during the development, main body and decline of the panic. Using the evidence uncovered for this regional hunt, existing historiographical arguments will be discussed and larger topics of enquiry will be considered. Specific questions include: How do trial records reflect elite and common beliefs in witchcraft? What evidence is there for the existence of belief in fairies and the witch's familiar? Why did the panic develop and end when it did? What is the role of religious authorities compared to their secular counterparts? Does the witch stereotype break down in a period of intense hunting? The primary goal is to analyse events in East Lothian in order to determine how the trials in this region reveal more about the characteristics of witch-hunting during a panic period, when trials take on a serial quality.

## List of Abbreviations

- RPC1*                      *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 1<sup>st</sup> series, 14 vols., eds. John Hill Burton *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1877-1898).
- RPC2*                      *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 8 vols., eds. David Masson *et al.* (Edinburgh, 1899-1908).
- SJC1*                        *Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624-1650*, Vol. 1, ed. Stair A. Gillon (Stair Society, 1953).
- MiscXIII*                 Louise A. Yeoman, ed., 'Witchcraft Cases From the Register of Commissions of the Privy Council of Scotland, 1630-1642,' in *Miscellany XIII*, (Scottish History Society, 2004), pp. 223-65.
- Robertson                 David M. Robertson, ed., *Goodnight My Servants All: The Sourcebook of East Lothian Witchcraft* (Glasgow, 2008).
- HBCR                        Haddington Burgh Court Records, GD1/413/23 covering 1628-90 in the National Archives of Scotland.
- HPM                         Haddington Presbytery Minutes, CH2/185/4 covering 1627-39 in the National Archives of Scotland.

- Aberlady-KSM Aberlady Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/4 covering 1632-45 and 1697-1712 in the National Archives of Scotland.
- Tynninghame-KSM Tynninghame Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/359/1 covering 1615-50 in the National Archives of Scotland.
- Yester-KSM Yester Kirk Session Minutes, CH2/377/1 covering 1613-43 in the National Archives of Scotland.
- Hamilton-JC26/9 Documents from Box JC26/9 in the National Archives of Scotland, relating to Alexander Hamilton.
- Hogg-JC26/9 Documents from Box JC26/9 in the National Archives of Scotland, relating to John Hogg and Margaret Nicholson.
- Young-JC26/9 Documents from Box JC26/9 in the National Archives of Scotland, relating to Isobel Young.

## Introduction

Between 1590 and 1662, early modern Scotland was beset by a recurring series of troubling and violent phenomena. Contemporaries would claim that the problem was the existence of witchcraft, to be solved through execution of the perpetrators. Historians, however, are more likely to consider the witch-hunt itself the true problem. The most intense witch-hunting occurred in five relatively brief periods, generally accepted as: 1590-1, 1597, 1629-30, 1649-50 and 1661-2.<sup>1</sup> There is considerable difference of opinion regarding when hunting was intense enough to define a peak or panic period. Christina Lerner includes 1590-1, 1597, 1629-30, 1649 and 1661-2.<sup>2</sup> Brian Levack disagrees, and while mentioning a 'spate of trials in 1628-30', declares that only 1597 and 1643-4 should be defined as panics.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Levack, the findings of this paper, as well as the data collected by The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, demonstrate the need to include 1628-30 as a peak period.<sup>4</sup>

Most of these periods have been studied in depth, but the 1628-30 peak has not been the object of an exhaustive study, either at the national or regional level. This paper will examine events in East Lothian during this period of intense witch-hunting. Furthermore, the need to study the period from 1628-31, in order to fully understand the 1628-30 peak, will be demonstrated. While new accusations were scarce in 1631, the serial hunt that dominated the 1628-30 peak did not conclude until the middle of 1631. Results from the final investigations and trials must be

1 Lauren Martin, 'Scottish Witchcraft Panics Re-examined', in Julian Goodare *et al.* (eds.), *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland* (Basingstoke, 2008), 119-43, at 119. Julian Goodare argues that the third panic should be classified as 1628-30. Julian Goodare, 'Witch-hunting and the Scottish State', in Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), 122-45, at 133.

2 Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (Baltimore, Maryland, 1981), 60.

3 Brian P. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Laws, Politics and Religion* (London, 2008), 55.

4 Julian Goodare *et al.*, 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft', <http://www.shc.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/> (accessed September 2008 – October 2009).

considered in order to determine the full impact of the intense hunt of 1628-30.

This study will provide insight into the nature of the hunt in both its national and regional aspects. Nevertheless, regional studies have limitations. One must not assume that the events occurring in East Lothian were similar to those happening elsewhere in Scotland, nor attribute the characteristics of this regional hunt to the national peak.<sup>5</sup> Regional variation remained, so investigations in other areas may have been quite different from those observed in East Lothian.

This study cannot be fully localised, because of the mobility of seventeenth-century Scots. Many individuals that lived in East Lothian also had connections in Berwickshire; others did not have a fixed abode and ranged over a broad territory. All efforts have been made to consider only East Lothian cases, or Berwickshire investigations that are directly connected to a case in East Lothian. The inclusion of trials that are not based in East Lothian has been kept to a minimum, and those that do appear serve to illustrate the spread of the serial hunt.

Scarcity of sources provides another major limitation for the study. While there is a selection of surviving records, many are incomplete. Documents often do not remain from this period, and many of the pre-trial records no longer exist. Other documents are extant for the period but do not contain references to witchcraft cases, even when other documents indicate that they should. Pamphlets, a major source of data for English witch trials, are entirely absent, and thus one cannot benefit from their insight. With so many records incomplete for the period of this hunt, there are certainly many details about the investigation and prosecution of witches that have simply been lost. However, David Robertson has produced an invaluable work of

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<sup>5</sup> Lauren Martin notes that one third of witchcraft suspects originated in the Lothians, despite them accounting for only eleven per cent of the Scottish population. Martin, 'Re-examined', 124.

transcription, in which he includes Justiciary Court, burgh court, presbytery, and kirk session records, making these documents easily accessible.<sup>6</sup> By viewing Robertson's transcriptions and then returning to the original manuscripts, difficult passages were more readily deciphered, while simultaneously verifying the accuracy of his work.

Despite these unavoidable limitations, the study aims to explore an oft-neglected period in Scottish witch-hunting. Because so little has been written about the 1628-31 national peak, or the cases that occurred during the period in East Lothian, most of the events are documented only in manuscript and transcribed records of the period. Thus, the paper first aims to provide a narrative description of the East Lothian hunt, focusing on tracing the major serial hunt that developed. Major cases and influential individuals are considered and their activities catalogued and organised for further analysis. The second goal for the paper is to use the collected data in order to discuss how events in East Lothian fit with the major historical arguments.

There are many specific questions that the project addresses, utilising the East Lothian data. Unlike many other projects, which have focused on the development or decline of the early-modern witch-hunt, this study falls within the centre of the period of witchcraft persecution. Questions concerning why witch-hunting occurred and why it eventually stopped are beyond the scope of the project, but the smaller consideration of why such an intense hunt began when it did, and how it diminished, are important.

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6 Robertson

## Chapter 1

### The Hunt Develops

The dates demarcating peak periods from the ongoing, less fervent witch-hunting that occurred throughout the period from 1590-1662 are somewhat arbitrary. There is still much discussion regarding when each interval of peak prosecution actually began and ended. Lauren Martin argues against focusing on a national model for peak years, and even warns against the use of the word panic. Instead, Martin supports a much more local consideration of the numbers of witchcraft cases, and rejects the idea that panics encompassed all of Scotland.<sup>7</sup> However, most historians consider the panic model useful, and the sheer number of accusations recorded in East Lothian between the later half of 1628 and the first half of 1631 indicates that something different was indeed happening at this time. Of course, prosecutorial peaks did not happen suddenly. They developed as the number of investigations increased, and as interest turned from prosecuting individuals accused by their neighbours to seeking out the accomplices of confessing witches.

The year 1627 was quiet for witch-hunting in East Lothian. Records show only one commission was granted to try a suspect for witchcraft. On 3 May, the Privy Council ordered Bessie Brown tried, and stated that she was suspected due to the depositions of 'famous persons'.<sup>8</sup> No further records remain to reveal Bessie's fate, but the wording indicates that she was denounced by her neighbours, whose accusations probably focused on acts of malefice.

The summer of 1628 saw an increase in the number of commissions granted,

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<sup>7</sup> Martin, 'Panics Re-examined', 119-43.

<sup>8</sup> *RPC2*, i, 596; George F. Black, *Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland 1510 to 1727* (New York, 1938), 38.

and the number of suspects named in a single commission. During July and August 1628 three commissions were obtained by Sir John Hamilton of Preston and Sir Samuel Johnston of Elphinstone for the trials of thirteen women from Prestonpans.<sup>9</sup> Margaret Young, Agnes Rankin, Janet Reid and her daughter Margaret Redpath were named in the first commission.<sup>10</sup> A second listed Bessie Riddell, Agnes Dempster, Agnes Riddell, Margaret Oliver and Barbara Mathie.<sup>11</sup> The last ordered the trials of Janet Strachan, Beatrix Cuthbertson, Janet Darling and Janet Boyd.<sup>12</sup> Only Janet Boyd's fate can be discovered; she was executed.<sup>13</sup> The Lairds of Preston and Elphinstone were not the only purchasers of commissions at the time. On 28 August 1628, the Privy Council granted two commissions: the first to Mr John Sandilands and Mr Douglas, a bailie of Niddrie, allowing them to try Janet Wright in Niddrie who had confessed. Sir John Dundas of Arniston, Mr Patrick Edmeston, Mr Robert Cass of Fordell and Adam Wauchope of Cakemuir received the second to try Isobel Thomson, Christian Taylor and Alison Chapman.<sup>14</sup> The fate of most suspects remains unknown, and the motivations of their commissioners are equally unclear. The seventeen women named in these commissions may have been accused of acts of malefice by their neighbours, or perhaps they were denounced by other suspects. It is possible that some or all of them confessed and provided more names for

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9 Perhaps Hamilton and Johnston had been inspired by the more active hunting in Aberdeen, and been worried that the same crimes might be being perpetrated on their own lands. Of the seventeen listings The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft records for 1627, fourteen were in Aberdeenshire, and only one in East Lothian. Events in Dumfries and Dunfermline during June 1628 may have had an effect as well. The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft notes trial commissions issued for six suspects in Dumfries on 5 June. Stuart Macdonald mentions three suspects from Dunfermline. Stuart Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-hunting in a Scottish Shire* (East Linton, 2001), 96.

10 *RPC2*, ii, 353.

11 *RPC2*, ii, 379.

12 *RPC2*, ii, 439.

13 *RPC2*, iii, 3-4.

14 *RPC2*, ii, 444.

investigation and trial, but with no further mention of them in the records, there is no way to confidently connect them to the serial hunt that developed later in 1628. Nevertheless, the number of suspects and trials was certainly on the rise in East Lothian.

A commission was granted in July 1628 to try Margaret Unes in Borthwick and Janet Schitlington in Newbattle, both of who had confessed.<sup>15</sup> On 31 July 1628, the Privy Council received a letter from the late Earl of Lothian's siblings, asking that another commission be granted for the trial of Unes and Schitlington regarding the death of their brother, Robert Ker, second Earl of Lothian, through witchcraft.<sup>16</sup> Ker had committed suicide in March 1624, by cutting his own throat, but it seems his family sought an explanation beyond his considerable debts.<sup>17</sup> By the end of August Unes and Schitlington had been convicted by the first commission, but the Lords postponed their execution so they could be thoroughly examined regarding Lothian. Schitlington confessed to having consulted the devil concerning Lothian's destruction because she hated him, though she gave no reason why. Meanwhile, Unes had come under suspicion in another elite murder: James Borthwick of Newbyres asked the Council to investigate her part in the deaths of his wife, children and the late Lord Borthwick.<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to determine what happened during this investigation, but on 27 September 1628 the Privy Council ordered the pair moved to Dalkeith to await trial by local commission.<sup>19</sup> It is doubtful that either escaped execution since they had already been sentenced to death at their first trial.

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15 *RPC2*, ii, 410.

16 *RPC2*, ii, 624.

17 David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, 8 vols, (ed.) Rev. Thomas Thomson (Edinburgh, 1842-9), vii, 595-6.

18 *RPC2*, ii, 442.

19 *RPC2*, ii, 468-9.

Commissions granted by the Privy Council varied. Some, like those discussed above, were intended to allow local elites to hold trials. Others were much more restrictive, only granting the commissioners permission to arrest and examine suspects. Another commission had to be purchased in order to try the accused, assuming that the Privy Council was convinced by the investigation. Some allowed commissioners to examine only the suspects named in the commission, while others conferred considerably more licence. George Seton, third Earl of Winton, was granted a commission on 11 November 1628 which allowed him to seek, imprison and examine suspected witches. The Council noted that since no one had the power to expose their crimes, witches had been operating freely on Winton's lands.<sup>20</sup> The commission certainly did not give the Earl free rein to prosecute suspects, but unlike most, it did not limit his examinations to specific individuals, giving him broad powers to investigate within his jurisdiction. It is noteworthy that Winton was a known Catholic. Brian Levack has argued that witch-hunting must never be viewed as an activity restricted solely to Protestants or Catholics; it was embraced by those intent on forming a godly state, no matter their denomination.<sup>21</sup> Winton provides a good example of a Catholic participating in a largely Protestant-dominated hunt. At a time when there was a great deal of support among secular authorities to enforce anti-papism laws, his Catholicism must have left him socially exposed. Perhaps Winton saw participation in the witch-hunt as a way to secure his position, while fulfilling his duties as a good Catholic in the battle against Satan. David Robertson and Annemarie Allan discuss Winton, and argue that he may have sought the

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20 *RPC2*, ii, 482.

21 Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn, London, 2006), 111; Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland*, 101.

commission because it was politically expedient. It would have been dangerous for a Catholic's lands to become infamous as a haven for witches.<sup>22</sup>

His name does not appear on any subsequent trial commissions, so he may have sought the Council's order only for appearance sake. However, his bailies participated in the witch-hunt. Winton's lands included Tranent, Seton, Cockenzie and Longniddry. Archibald Turnbull, bailie in Tranent, Alexander Turnbull, bailie in Longniddry and Archibald Weddel, bailie in Seton, were granted a commission along with Robert Seton, elder in Tranent, on 27 September 1628 to try Elspeth Hislop and Isobel Miller in Longniddry.<sup>23</sup> On 4 December the same men obtained another to try Bessie Little and Margaret Bain from Longniddry.<sup>24</sup> Only Bessie Little's fate is known; she was listed as an executed witch during Alexander Sinclair's 1629 trial.<sup>25</sup>

Winton was probably not a particularly enthusiastic prosecutor, but there were other, more ardent witch-hunters in the area. The bailies of Musselburgh showed a particular penchant for brutality and injustice. Margaret Jo complained to the Privy Council that she had been held in the tolbooth in Musselburgh for eleven or twelve weeks on suspicion of witchcraft. During that time she had asked to be either tried or released on caution, but the bailies had refused. The Privy Council responded to Jo's complaint and ordered the bailies to try her within fifteen days or free her.<sup>26</sup> This did not guarantee Jo a fair trial, however. A few days later she wrote again, complaining that the bailies were keeping her shackled and refusing her family and friends

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22 Robertson, 218.; Annemarie Allan, '81 Witches of Prestonpans,' in Gordon Prestoungrange *et al.* (eds.), *Prestonpans: A Social & Economic History Across 1000 Years* (Prestonpans, 2006), 717-63, at 741.

23 *RPC2*, ii, 441.

24 *RPC2*, ii, 516-17.

25 Robertson, 189; HBCR.

26 *RPC2*, ii, 487.

permission to visit her.<sup>27</sup> Stuart Macdonald believes that such isolation was a sign that the prisoner was being subjected to sleep deprivation, yet Jo must have resisted, since she refused to confess.<sup>28</sup> She also complained that the bailies, who were to act as judges, were her personal enemies and planned to withhold her indictment to prevent her from preparing a defence. The Privy Council showed some sympathy for her situation, and ordered the bailies to free her from the irons and to allow her visitors. They appointed Mr Lawrence MacGill and Mr David Primrose to approve the judges and decreed that Jo be given a copy of her indictment by 20 November.<sup>29</sup> The Privy Council was committed to her trial, but they were insistent that she be allowed to mount a defence. As Julian Goodare argues, they had already been convinced of her guilt, otherwise they would not have issued the trial commission, but they were unwilling to allow the bailies to flout legal procedure.<sup>30</sup> Her fate is unknown, but if Goodare is correct, the trial would have been little more than formality.

Two more women complained about the Musselburgh bailies' behaviour, in June 1629. Janet Hardie and Janet Barclay in Fisherrow echoed Jo's claims that they were being treated inhumanely and denied a trial. This time, the Privy Council did not entrust the bailies with the continuation of the prosecution, and transferred the authority to Charles Seton the Lord of Dunfermline, and his bailies.<sup>31</sup> The Council was certain that the women needed to be tried, but they were reluctant to entrust the exercise of justice to the recalcitrant bailies in Musselburgh.

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27 *RPC2*, ii, 487.

28 Stuart Macdonald, 'Torture and the Scottish Witch-Hunt: A Re-examination', *Scottish Tradition*, 27 (2002), 95-114, at 102.

29 *RPC2*, ii, 487.

30 Goodare, 'Witch-hunting and the Scottish State', 130-1.

31 *RPC2*, iii, 162-3.

Witchcraft suspects certainly suffered during the execution of commissions, whether their jailers flouted legal procedures or not. Ironically, commissioners occasionally complained that the fulfilment of their investigations was burdensome. The Presbytery of Dalkeith complained to the Privy Council that the cost of imprisoning, trying and executing witches was so great that they were being forced to use funds from the poor box. Thus, they requested permission to detain suspects at their own expense and the authority to confiscate goods to help defray trial and execution costs. The Privy Council, once again demonstrating their commitment to the commissions they had approved, granted the presbytery's requests.<sup>32</sup>

Of the East Lothian suspects during the second half of 1628, some were clearly connected: named within a single commission and sometimes family members. However, pre-trial and trial records do not remain for these cases, and the only information we have must be gleaned from the wording of their commissions and later mentions in other trials. A few were noted to have confessed, but there is no way to determine if they were named by another confessing witch, nor if they revealed accomplices. Without this information, it is impossible to determine if any of these initial suspects were connected to the serial hunt that began to develop in the autumn of 1628. Nevertheless, the sheer number of those accused during this six-month period indicates that something had changed in East Lothian; witches were being fervently sought in the county.

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32 *RPC2*, ii, 469-70.

## Chapter 2

### Formation of a Serial Hunt

During the autumn and winter of 1628 the pace of prosecution remained high, but a second important characteristic of a peak period became apparent. A chain reaction began to develop, where one investigation spawned several more when confessing witches identified accomplices. Further investigation of newly accused individuals began an expanding web of trials. The period from 1628 to 1631 in East Lothian was dominated by this type of serial hunt.

The central and most far reaching serial hunt began in the Presbytery of Dalkeith, engulfed the Presbytery of Haddington and finally spread as far as Berwick. This accomplice-centric hunt began early in the peak period and did not conclude until well into 1631, months after most historians consider the peak concluded. The sequence began on 27 September 1628 when the Privy Council granted a commission for the examination of Janet Unes in Middleton, her daughter Janet Smibert, Margaret Barrowman in Easthouses in Newbattle, and Marion Shearer and Elspeth Duncan in Cranstoun.<sup>33</sup> On 11 November, having convinced the Lords with their findings, the commissioners were ordered to try the women, along with three more suspects, Malie Turner in Stobhill, William Watt in Westhouses and Margaret Muirhead, a vagabond.<sup>34</sup> Most of the suspects who were named disappeared from the records at that time, and their fates may only be surmised. Only one thing is known without doubt: Muirhead denounced at least one other witch.<sup>35</sup> What little we know of her comes from the trial of William Davidson, the

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33 *RPC2*, ii, 471.

34 *RPC2*, ii, 482; Black, *Calendar*, 40.

35 See Appendix 1, page 100, for a diagram of the serial hunt.

man she accused.

On 10 November 1628, John Sinclair of Hermiston, his son, Sir John Sinclair, Mr George Butler of Blance and Patrick Abernethy of Netherdale, bailie of Saltoun, promised to prosecute William Davidson in Saltoun on the charge of witchcraft.<sup>36</sup>

On 12 November, Mr Archibald Davidson, the minister of Saltoun travelled to the Presbytery of Dalkeith, where Muirhead was imprisoned. He sought more information about Davidson for the case that he was building against the man. The record notes that the investigation into Davidson's crime had progressed to the point where Davidson had been imprisoned and there were enough accusations against him that conviction was likely.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, the document does not include what Muirhead told the minister, but he clearly considered her testimony valuable.

Perhaps this was the point where she made her accusation, but it seems more likely that she had done so previously, since during Davidson's trial on 16 December 1628 it was noted that he had fled Saltoun when he learned of Muirhead's accusation.<sup>38</sup> During his trial, great weight was put on her denunciation, primarily due to her status as a confessed and executed witch.

Margaret Muirhead's accusation appears to have been the beginning of the serial hunt in East Lothian. Davidson confessed to several acts of sorcery and charming and, most importantly, he told his examiners the names of his accomplices.

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36 Robertson, 179; HBCR.

37 Robertson, 152; HPM.

38 Robertson, 179-80; HBCR. That Muirhead accused Davidson in Saltoun, ten miles from where she was imprisoned in Dalkeith, may indicate that as a vagabond she travelled widely. Perhaps she ranged far enough to have known some of the individuals accused during the second half of 1628, from communities such as Prestonpans, Musselburgh, Longniddry, etc. She probably shared a connection with the seven other suspects named in her trial commission, and may have had one with some of those discussed in Chapter 1 of this study. Isobel Thomson, Christian Taylor and Alison Chapman as well as Margaret Unes and Janet Schitlington were Dalkeith residents, and it is possible that Muirhead had some dealings with them. Whether their investigations led to her own trial, however, remains a mystery.

He was over sixty and had been a witch for thirty-two years, since Bessie Gray educated him in the intricacies of charming, soon after he arrived in East Lothian. Davidson had met the devil often, and never attended church; instead he spent Saturday night to Monday morning with Satan. He had seen the devil appear in both the form of a black dog and a black man. His confession incorporated many typical features, including that he had renounced his baptism and sworn to be the devil's servant; in exchange the devil promised that Davidson would 'want for nothing'. Davidson consulted with the devil about inflicting or curing diseases and destroying his enemies.<sup>39</sup> His interrogator may have used leading questions or Davidson was possibly familiar with the standard components of the confessions that were read at public executions. Davidson did not merely confess to his own pact with the devil though, he implicated others. He claimed that on Beltane in 1628, he had met several witches in Saltoun Wood. These servants of the devil included Bessie Mak in Saltoun, Sara Keith in Winton, Alison Taylor in Pencaitland, Thomas Waterson in Nesbitt and Alexander Hamilton, a vagabond.<sup>40</sup>

Most of the other charges against Davidson centred on healing or applying disease. Davidson did not confess to all of the allegations; he denied harming people by bewitching them and also steadfastly refused to confess to healing by way of transferring the illness from one person to another, in effect saving one life at the expense of a second. Davidson confessed to curing five individuals, and certainly must have worked as a charmer or healer in his community. When Andrew Wilkieson was ill in Blaikbie, Davidson treated him with charms and a drink made from foxglove leaves. Wilkieson must have recovered, because the indictment

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39 Robertson, 180; HBCR.

40 Robertson, 182; HBCR.

charged Davidson with curing him by transferring the disease to Wilkieson's nephew, William Wilkieson, who died. Davidson confessed to the cure, but stubbornly denied that he had done so by harming William. A similar accusation was lodged against him for curing Agnes Sinclair in Over Saltoun. Davidson declared that she had been bewitched, so he concocted a salve from butter and foxglove leaves, and spread it on her arm, healing her. However, he denied the further allegation that he placed the disease on William Finlayson in Saltoun, and then refused to cure him. A fragmentary account reveals a third instance of healing, in which Robert Spence in Over Saltoun had lost all the strength from his body, and his wife, Marion Smith, had visited a witch in Home for help. The witch gave Marion an enchanted shirt for Robert to wear and sent instructions for William Davidson to wash Robert in south-running water. The shirt was then to be discarded in a place where no one ever visited. Davidson agreed to assist in the cure and did as required, but soon after Marion fell ill and blamed Davidson. When she asked him to cure her, he complied. In this case Davidson confessed to both cures but not to causing Smith's illness. He finally confessed to having cured one of George Leys' farm workers, by taking the disease on himself, and of healing Janet Howieson, the wife of James Young, carter to the Laird of Hermiston in a similar fashion, when she had been bewitched by Sara Keith.<sup>41</sup>

Davidson confessed to four more cases of curing people and one of curing animals. In these instances he was accused of healing the afflicted individuals without transferring the disease. He healed the wife of Harry Lister in Saltoun by using south-running water. He used a similar technique with Agnes Stenhouse in

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41 Robertson, 182-3; HBCR.

Saltoun. He sent her brother, David, to fetch south-running water, warning him to speak with no one during the task, and to leave a rag or two pins as an offering at the well. Davidson washed Agnes in the water and she recovered.<sup>42</sup> Not all of his cures depended on this special water, however. He helped both John Hill of Hermiston and James Halliday in Wester Pencaitland by placing a salted hake and a piece of raw meat under each of their heads. Finally, he admitted to using charms to cure a cow that belonged to Andrew Hunter in Kirklands of Bolton.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, Davidson's reputation as a healer was not the only source of accusations against him. The final two articles in his indictment accused him of acts of malefice. Davidson was accused of hating Euphame Cathie in Samuelston and having bewitched her so that she fell and lost the power on one side of her body. After she had suffered for a long time her parents sent for Davidson and begged him to help her. He refused, predicted that she would never recover, and silently made her condition worse. After his visit she could only rest when lying on the part of the bench where Davidson had sat. Eventually the illness killed her, but Davidson denied having afflicted her. A final, bizarre allegation stated that Isobel Wilson in Abbay had a sickly grandchild. She had asked Davidson for assistance, not with a cure despite his reputation for healing, but with a drink that would kill the child. After he delivered the concoction Isobel tasted it herself, fatally. Davidson insisted the charge was a lie.

Amazingly, Davidson's unflinching denials of the last two charges convinced his jury, who acquitted him of those articles. Unfortunately for Davidson, he was convicted on every other charge, and was thus sentenced to be strangled at a wooden

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42 Robertson, 182; HBCR.

43 Robertson, 182-3; HBCR.

post and his body burned.<sup>44</sup> Undoubtedly, Davidson's confession to some of the articles in his indictment made conviction an easy decision. Perhaps he had difficulty in understanding why his efforts at healing were viewed so negatively by his prosecutors. He denied every charge of transferring or causing disease, only confessing to providing cures and having attended meetings.

During Davidson's examination, he identified seven other witches: Bessie Gray, who had instructed him in the practice of witchcraft thirty-two years previously, and who may well have been dead by 1628, Bessie Mak, Sara Keith, Alexander Hamilton, Alison Taylor and Thomas Waterson. Finally, he mentioned the witch from Home, whom he had assisted in curing Robert Spence, although through damage to the record her name can no longer be ascertained.

On 9 December, shortly before Davidson was tried, George Cockburn of Ormiston obtained a warrant from the Privy Council to apprehend Alison Taylor, Sara Keith and Alexander Hamilton.<sup>45</sup> On 11 December, Thomas Waterson appeared before the Haddington Burgh Court and demonstrated his cooperation with the investigation into Davidson's allegations. He agreed to enter the tolbooth when required and acknowledged that if he failed to comply he would be assumed guilty and punished.<sup>46</sup> On 20 December John Sinclair, his son Sir John Sinclair, George Butler and Patrick Abernethy returned to the business of witchcraft prosecution, this time agreeing to pursue Bessie Mak.<sup>47</sup> Of the seven implicated by William Davidson, action was taken in some form against five within only a few weeks of his arrest and confession. Thomas Waterson's experience is noteworthy. He was the

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44 Robertson, 182-4; HBCR.

45 *RPC2*, ii, 518.

46 Robertson, 179; HBCR.

47 Robertson, 184; HBCR.

only one who was allowed to remain at large, with simply his word that he would cooperate. He may have been a man of some means, with property and connections in the area that made his investigators less concerned that he might flee, as Davidson had done. He may never have been recalled. Perhaps the investigation proved unconvincing. After promising his cooperation he disappears from the records. Alexander Hamilton was a vagabond, and certainly would have been considered a flight risk; he travelled all around East Lothian and beyond, so there was little reason to believe he would stay in an area where he was wanted for such a serious crime. It was little wonder that an arrest warrant was issued for him, but he eluded capture. Alison Taylor remains a mystery. No commission was granted to try her, and no record of any investigation exists. Perhaps she made a successful escape, or died before being apprehended. Records as yet undiscovered might reveal more. Sara Keith and Bessie Mak, both of whom were at least occasional beggars, were not so lucky. They were arrested, examined and on 20 January 1629 the Privy Council granted a commission to the provost and bailies of Haddington, Sir Robert Hepburn of Alderston and Patrick Abernethy to try the two women together.<sup>48</sup> They were tried on 17 February.

Most of Keith's indictment focused on her presence and participation at meetings with the devil, rather than acts of malefice or healing. Only three charges involved either curing or cursing. She confessed to healing Agnes Lister in Saltoun by washing her in south-running water and using charms. She denied anointing William and James Stenhouse with south-running water to cure their blindness, and also protested that she had not bewitched Janet Thomson, the wife of James Young,

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48 *RPC2*, iii, 16.

carter to the Laird of Hermiston. Davidson had testified that Keith was to blame for Thomson's illness which he had been called upon to cure.<sup>49</sup>

Keith also confessed to having made a pact with the devil in order to have her revenge upon the late George Harlaw in Garvald Kirk. She stated that her father had died twenty-four years previously, and Harlaw had dealt with a large amount of her father's money. Though it was rightfully hers, he gave her none, leaving her destitute. The devil promised to make the wealthy Harlaw as poor as she was at that moment if she would be his servant, so she agreed. Harlaw lost all his money and was forced to beg for food before his death.<sup>50</sup>

Keith described four meetings with the devil that appeared as articles in her indictment. She stated that she had accompanied Bessie Mak and Bessie MacGill to the Three Mile House where they met the devil in the shape of a fine gentleman. Next she recalled the meeting that Davidson had mentioned, saying that Bessie Mak, Alexander Hamilton and she had gone to Saltoun Woods. She claimed that she and Mak had remained outside the woods when the others went among the trees to meet the devil, and thus did not mention Alison Taylor, Thomas Waterson or William Davidson. Another meeting occurred on Michaelmas 1628 (29 September), when she and Mak met the devil at Dryden Dean. They asked him what would happen to them during the intense witch-hunting. He advised them to deny everything if examined, but revealed the limitations of his power by informing them that he could do little for them as he had other servants in more need of his protection elsewhere. At this, Keith said Mak had begged him to save her.<sup>51</sup> Keith's statement fits well

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49 Robertson, 186; HBCR. A clerical error saw the ill woman's name recorded as Janet Howieson in Davidson's trial and as Janet Thomson in Keith's.

50 Robertson, 184; HBCR.

51 Robertson, 185; HBCR.

with the timeline of witchcraft trials in East Lothian. The number of cases being investigated or tried began to grow quickly in the summer of 1628. In September most of the trials were concentrated in the Presbytery of Dalkeith, to the west, but Keith was undoubtedly conscious of the events occurring nearby, and may well have suspected that the hunting would spread. Having associated with William Davidson, an established charmer, perhaps she and Mak worried that he, and in turn they, would find themselves under suspicion.

Keith confessed to one more meeting with the devil. She stated that a year after she was married, the devil visited her in Adniston, where she was living. He appeared in the form of a man and, with her consent, had the use of her body. Afterwards he marked her on her right elbow by gripping her tightly there. Then he asked her for a gift and she had replied that she would give him her only son, who was about six months old at that time. The devil was very pleased with this offering, and returned nine or ten weeks later to collect the child. He took him from the cradle in a whirlwind and left in the baby's place a thin and deformed being. The creature cried for three days before dying.<sup>52</sup> This story is unusual for a witchcraft trial, and none of the other East Lothian records for the period contain a similar tale. The particulars of the story are not uncommon for the period, however. Lizanne Henderson and Edward Cowan discuss changeling stories at some length, but note that most mentions of changeling belief in the context of witchcraft trials centred on attempts by the accused to restore the original child.<sup>53</sup> This story was atypical, since the child's abduction was neither against the mother's will nor blamed on fairies. But here the oddities end, for the changeling left in the child's place behaved as one

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52 Robertson, 184-5; HBCR.

53 Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief* (East Linton, 2001), 96-7.

would expect. It was misshapen, thin, cried constantly and eventually died.<sup>54</sup> The tale that Keith related was based on fairy belief, which had existed in Scotland for centuries, and which was still popular among the common people. But Keith claimed that it was the devil who spirited her child away. Perhaps she attributed the events to the devil only when her more learned interrogators had suggested a connection between fairies and demons. Brian Levack argues that while common people remained much more concerned by a witch's malefice, they still had an awareness of the more elite concept of witchcraft which included the pact, sexual relations between the devil and his servants, and large sabbath gatherings. Ministers' attempts to educate their congregations, and the reading of charges at executions, ensured that the general population knew about elite witchcraft belief, or what Levack terms 'the cumulative concept of witchcraft'.<sup>55</sup> It is possible that she did not change her story to fit her elite investigators' expectations, however, and attributed the events to fairies. Her interrogators may have changed her tale during recording. Henderson and Cowan argue that 'though inquisitors would repeatedly alter or distort the words of their victims, or torture them till they uttered the desired confessions, many people tenaciously held on to the conviction that what they had experienced represented encounters with the fairies rather than with the Devil.'<sup>56</sup> Perhaps Keith was one of these individuals, though with no further testimony from her that can easily be connected with fairies rather than a demonic source, it is impossible to make a confident statement about her story.

Keith's changeling child was not the last tale she related, however. She told

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54 Henderson and Cowan, *Fairy Belief*, 95, 98.

55 Levack, *Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 59-60. For a fuller discussion of Levack's cumulative concept of witchcraft see 33-61 in the same work.

56 Henderson and Cowan, *Fairy Belief*, 131-2.

the investigators that she and Hamilton, along with several other beggars, had gone to Woodhead House to seek charity. The lady of the house, Elizabeth Lawson, Lady Ormiston, gave a shirt to Alison Hunter, a lunatic who was with the group. Hamilton was angry that he had received nothing and demanded part of the shirt. The lady refused to give him alms and scolded him for begging, because both he and his wife were able bodied. Her rebuke greatly offended him and later he told Keith that he intended to have his revenge. He laid an illness on the lady, from which she died. The story took an unusual turn at this point. Keith stated that soon after Lady Ormiston died, William Davidson and Bessie Mak had taken her to Woodhead House at twilight and then sent her to fetch water from the syke.<sup>57</sup> When she returned with the water the three of them went into the house and to the bedroom where the lady was displayed, where they proceeded to wash her body.<sup>58</sup>

The ritual that Keith described is strange; the three witches behaved as if what they were doing needed to be completed secretly, but she made no mention of any difficulty in obtaining access to the lady's body. More bafflingly, her account offered no clue as to the purpose of the ritual, or how their activities were viewed by her elite examiners. Her telling suggests that she was ignorant of the ritual's intention, although Davidson and Mak seemed more knowledgeable. Perhaps the events truly did occur, and Keith did not reveal the purpose behind washing Lady Ormiston's body because she had not been told. Or maybe her intent did not seem important to those who were recording her deposition. After all, sorcery, even if it was not harmful, as in many cases of healing, was still intolerable to those who prosecuted witches.

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57 Syke - a stream that flows through low or boggy ground.

58 Robertson, 184-6; HBCR.

Bessie Mak's indictment was presented next, and unlike Keith she steadfastly refused to confess to any of the charges lodged against her. Her indictment declared that she had been accused of witchcraft by William Davidson. Sara Keith also attested to Mak's sorcery and claimed that Mak was more familiar with the devil than she. When Keith was arrested, it seems that Mak may have worried that she would be next, and told George Shoreswood in Samuelston, her daughter-in-law's brother, that she expected Keith to accuse her of witchcraft, and that she would blame only herself if tried and convicted.<sup>59</sup>

The articles of her indictment echoed Keith's in a few respects, since they were accused of having worked together on several occasions. All of the meetings that Mak was accused of having attended were drawn from Davidson's and Keith's confessions. She protested her innocence in each instance.<sup>60</sup> It is not terribly surprising that no new meetings were included, since tales of witch gatherings arose from confessions, or accusations against accomplices. Since Mak did not confess, she did not provide further demonic evidence against herself.

Most of the charges against Mak were provided by her neighbours, and focused on acts of malefice. She was accused of causing illness in six individuals, but she was also revealed to have had a reputation as a healer. William Davidson told a story about Mak, in which he alleged that Helen Bathgate's husband, the late Cuthbert Henderson, had asked Mak to help his wife, because she was very ill. Mak decided not to heal the woman, and instead was accused of having hastened her death. Eventually Cuthbert remarried, but Mak laid a sickness on him. His new wife approached Mak for a cure but she killed him the same way as she had Helen.

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59 Robertson, 186-7; HBCR.

60 Robertson, 186; HBCR.

Another tale revealed that Mak could cure illnesses, at least if she had caused it, provided she could be persuaded. Mak quarreled with her neighbour, Peter Douglas, over money, and to punish him she lit a smoky fire in her house so that the smoke would filter through the wall and fill his home. Douglas complained, but she would not stop, so eventually he came into her house and doused the fire. Mak was so angry at this that she bewitched his wife, Janet Brown. Douglas begged Mak to cure her, and managed to stir her pity. She told him that his wife would recover, and then went away begging for eight days. Upon her return she gave Brown a piece of raw meat, which she instructed the woman to roast and eat, promising that it would cure her. Brown was afraid to eat what the witch had given her, but Thomas Smith advised her to comply, as she could be no worse off. Once she ate the meat she was healed.<sup>61</sup>

Mak was accused of exacting revenge upon another rival in the community with more resolve. Marion Alan had some cloth that she wanted to pawn with Mak, but Mak asked to buy the cloth instead, offering her some corn meal in payment. Alan refused, and Mak threatened her saying 'you will leave it to those who will give you less thanks for it.' That evening, Wednesday, Alan fell ill, and died the following Monday. During her illness Alan blamed Mak, and shortly after Alan's death Mak was said to have told Alan's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth Fortune, that if Alan had forgiven Mak, she would not have died. Mak was also accused of having placed a sickness on James Robson in Winton, at the request of Sara Keith. He was a friend of Keith's son, but Keith wanted revenge because she believed he had killed her husband. Mak bewitched him and he was sick for the entire harvest season, at which

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61 Robertson, 187; HBCR.

point Keith either decided that she had had her revenge or took pity on him and asked William Davidson to cure Robson.<sup>62</sup> One wonders why Keith did not simply return to her friend Mak, and ask her to remove the curse. Instead, she consulted a different witch to see the spell reversed. While it was not unusual for a victim to seek aid from a charmer when bewitched, it is somewhat surprising that Keith chose to go elsewhere for this cure. Perhaps she did not think Mak could be persuaded.

Besides healing and inflicting illnesses, Mak was said to have other powers. She could cause marriages, even if the couple had previously disliked one another. She offered to arrange a match for George Young. He refused, however, and Mak was offended. She cursed him so that he hurt his back so badly that he could not stand and wasted away until he finally died. He accused Mak of bewitching him, and would not let her come near him, though she had tried.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps she had offered her services as a healer, but her reputation for witchcraft made him certain that she was the cause of his misfortune and also made him unwilling to trust that she would not make his condition worse.

The last accusation of malefice against Mak is the most unusual. She was accused of killing Janet Johnston in Threeburnford, by causing her to hang herself. Mak's guilt in the matter was supposedly confirmed by her behaviour after Johnston's suicide. Mak went into her house without showing any fear and saw her body hanging, and also saw the devil in the shape of a great black dog balancing on the beam where Johnston had attached the noose. Mak appeared to rejoice in what she witnessed, and showed no signs of pity or compassion for the hanged woman. Then she sent Katharine Hilton in to see the body. When Hilton saw the devil, crouching

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62 Robertson, 188; HBCR.

63 Robertson, 188; HBCR.

above Johnston, she went blind in one eye.<sup>64</sup> Normally, a witch was expected to cause illness or injury that might lead to death, but to cause a suicide is a rare charge. Janet Unes and Margaret Schitlington, who were accused of having caused the death of the Earl of Lothian, another suicide, were the only other East Lothian witches accused of such a crime during this period.

Mak was charged with having been involved with the death of Lady Ormiston and the strange ritual described by Keith during her confession.<sup>65</sup> Mak's supposed role in the lady's death was not elaborated upon, so it is difficult to determine just what actions she was alleged to have taken, and unfortunately no further information about the baffling ritual appears. Both women were convicted, and ordered to be executed in Haddington.<sup>66</sup>

Keith appears to have named only one new accomplice, Bessie MacGill, but no proceedings were recorded against the woman. Keith elaborated on Davidson's activities and offered additional testimony against Mak and Alexander Hamilton, beyond Davidson's accusations. She revealed Hamilton's role in Lady Ormiston's death, though Keith and Hamilton might have been suspected of the deed before her confession. After all, it was George Cockburn, the husband of Hamilton's supposed victim, who obtained the warrant to arrest Keith and Hamilton. Nevertheless, Keith's detailed account of Hamilton's malefice and her own involvement in an unexplained arcane ritual certainly strengthened the case against herself, Mak and Hamilton.

But what had happened to Hamilton? A warrant had been issued for his arrest on 9 Dec 1628. Davidson, Keith and Mak had all been executed by mid February

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64 Robertson, 187; HBCR.

65 Robertson, 187; HBCR.

66 Robertson, 188-9; HBCR.

1629. But the man who had been accused of bewitching a noblewoman to death disappeared. Certainly a man accused of such a serious crime, whose victim was an important individual, would have occupied the attention of investigators.

Nevertheless, it is not until July 1629, several months after Keith and Mak were executed, that any further mention of Hamilton appears in the records.

Davidson named one more local witch, perhaps after his conviction, as the name did not appear in his indictment. On 23 December 1628, a week after Davidson's trial and conviction, a commission was granted to the Laird of Hermiston to imprison and examine Alexander Sinclair, a vagabond also known as Alexander Hunter.<sup>67</sup> Three days later, David Kyle, a baker and burgher, promised to purchase a commission to try Sinclair.<sup>68</sup> The investigation was quite lengthy, and on 24 March 1629 the Privy Council finally granted a commission to the authorities in Haddington to try Sinclair.<sup>69</sup>

On 3 April 1629 Alexander Sinclair's trial was held. His indictment first listed several demonological activities, including that Sinclair had practiced sorcery, consulted with the dead, invoked devils, renounced his baptism and become the devil's servant. None of these charges appear to have been described in any of the testimony against Sinclair, and since he did not confess, they were not drawn from his deposition; they could only have been included by his elite prosecutors. Next, his indictment stated that William Davidson accused Sinclair of being guilty of the same crimes to which Davidson had confessed. It continued to relate how Bessie Little, who had been recently executed, had also denounced him. Sinclair often visited

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67 *RPC2*, ii, 543.

68 Robertson, 184; HBCR.

69 *RPC2*, iii, 110-11; Black, *Calendar*, 43.

Little's home for long periods, in excess of one month. She stated that she first realised Sinclair was a witch when he had demonstrated his knowledge of hidden objects. He sent a young girl to Little, requesting money, but she had dismissed his messenger, saying that she had none to give. He responded by sending the girl back to inform Little that she in fact had a five merk piece in her chest, wrapped in cloth. Little was astounded, as she had been sure only she knew about her nest egg. She also revealed that Sinclair kept a bee in a tin, feeding it three drops of his blood daily. She claimed that every year Sinclair journeyed to Norham in England to renew his pact with the devil, where he received a new bee, presumably from his master.<sup>70</sup> Little's second tale is quite rare in accounts of Scottish witchcraft. She described what was clearly Sinclair's familiar, implying that the devil had given Sinclair the insect. More importantly, she noted that the creature was fed on Sinclair's own blood. While the bee was not described as possessing any magical properties or carrying out any deeds in Sinclair's stead, it was nevertheless quite close to the classic description of a familiar, and would not be out of place among English witchcraft accusations. Such concepts were rarely included in the allegations against Scottish witches, however, and this is the only instance of familiar belief in the records for East Lothian during the period. The possibility must be considered that, even if evidence is rare, a belief in the witch's familiar may have been part of the Scottish concept of witchcraft. Further study may uncover more accounts that will reveal whether the familiar was an aspect of common or elite belief in Scotland.

The next charge against Sinclair came from William Davidson, who testified that Susanna Sinclair, the elder Lady Samuelston, hated her brother, John Sinclair of

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70 Robertson, 189-90; HBCR.

Hermiston. She approached Davidson and asked him to help her ruin her brother, but Davidson declined to assist her. Next she consulted Patrick Learmonth and Alexander Sinclair; Sinclair agreed to do as she asked. Davidson believed that Sinclair had placed a curse around the mansion of Hermiston that continued to operate in the area. According to Davidson, Susanna was not satisfied with her brother's destruction, and also wanted to kill her husband, who was already ill. She asked Sinclair to complete this other task as well, and he put on one of her husband's shirts before going away with the garment. By this witchcraft her husband soon died.<sup>71</sup> Davidson's accusation against Sinclair was obviously damning to the investigators, but his statements about Patrick Learmonth, another supposed witch, and Susanna Sinclair, a consulter, had little effect. Neither appear elsewhere in the records, so it is possible that they escaped prosecution despite the deposition of a confessing witch, a declaration carrying a great deal of weight in the seventeenth-century legal system. John Sinclair of Hermiston had been an investigator in Davidson's case; the first in which he took part. Considering Davidson's accusations against Susanna and Sinclair, it is unsurprising that he involved himself in the later trial. His personal involvement does leave one to wonder if Davidson was influenced by the laird to implicate Susanna. Without any record to indicate that she was pursued regarding the matter, however, we are left with more questions than answers. It seems that this family feud played itself out, at least partially, in the trials against Davidson and Sinclair.

With Davidson's evidence concluded, accusations from two of Sinclair's neighbours were presented. Elizabeth Seaton and Isobel Turnbull noted his powers

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71 Robertson, 189; HBCR.

to heal, curse, predict the future and to identify the location of hidden objects, especially money. Sinclair was described as aggressive in his demands and vengeful if not appeased. He used his powers to either intimidate or to harm those from whom he wished to extort either money or other offerings.<sup>72</sup> With the testimony of a confessed witch and two of his neighbours against him, Sinclair was convicted on all counts and he was executed in Haddington by being strangled to death at a post and then burned.<sup>73</sup> Sinclair did not confess, and thus the devil did not figure in his indictment. Demonological concepts were routinely listed at the beginning of indictments by prosecutors whether or not testimony regarding such charges existed. Furthermore, Sinclair did not denounce anyone else as a witch. He was a victim of the serial hunt in East Lothian, but not a contributor to its continuation.

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72 Robertson, 190; HBCR.

73 Robertson, 191; HBCR.

## Chapter 3

### Isobel Young: A Second Serial Hunt

The main serial hunt was not the only sequence of accusations occurring during the period. There was a second, shorter serial hunt developing farther to the east, which played out in relative isolation from the events in Dalkeith and Haddington.<sup>74</sup> In the spring of 1624 Janet Acheson and Margaret Melrose came under investigation for witchcraft in the Presbytery of Dunbar. The two women were interrogated after a commission for their arrest was granted on 24 February 1624.<sup>75</sup> Acheson and Melrose seem to have confessed and named accomplices. On 30 March 1624 a commission was granted for their trial, which was carried out on 9 April.<sup>76</sup> During their interrogation they declared that they had attended witch meetings with Isobel Young, an East Barns woman with an established reputation for witchcraft. Young was investigated by the Presbytery of Dunbar but escaped execution by the secular courts in 1624. During Young's examination on 22 and 24 April 1624, Acheson and Melrose were called to testify, as well as Marion Bathgate and Margaret Baxter, who also accused Young of witchcraft. Acheson and Melrose had already been convicted and were providing further evidence before their execution.<sup>77</sup> It is not clear if Bathgate and Baxter were simply testifying against Young, or if they were also under investigation. Records of the presbytery's examination unfortunately do not remain and the only account of the proceedings must be gleaned from Young's trial in 1629. Despite having survived an

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74 See Appendix 1, page 100, for a diagram of the secondary serial hunt.

75 *RPCI*, xii, 734.

76 *RPCI*, xiii, 485; Black, *Calendar*, 38. Black lists the two women as having been executed in 1628, noting that they were mentioned in the trial of Isobel Young. Without reading all of Young's pre-trial documents, Black could not have surmised that the women were more likely executed in 1624.

77 Robertson, 280; Young-JC26/9.

investigation five years earlier, Young's reputation left her at considerable risk. Bathgate and Baxter may have suffered a similar circumstance. On 19 December 1628, a commission was granted by the Privy Council for the imprisonment, investigation and trial of Margaret Baxter in Dunbar and Marion Bathgate in East Barns on suspicion of witchcraft.<sup>78</sup> It seems that the Council was quite certain of their guilt even before the 1628 investigation, perhaps due to evidence gathered against them in 1624. Undoubtedly, Bathgate and Baxter joined the growing number of executed witches in late 1628 or early 1629. Their statements were used, with those of Acheson and Melrose, as evidence against Young, and their absence from the proceedings, as well as the amount of weight placed upon their statements, suggests that they confessed and went to their deaths.

The case brought against Young was greatly assisted by the fact that the prosecution had the statements of four confessed witches, each alleging that Young was guilty of similar crimes. Her case did not contribute to a continued serial hunt, however, as she obstinately refused to confess. She was not one to be bullied, and was perhaps quite confident that she would escape from the second investigation. She cooperated but was hardly compliant.<sup>79</sup> On 20 January 1629 she wrote to the Council to complain about her treatment at the hands of the bailies of Edinburgh. She had entered the tolbooth on 13 January in order to prepare for her trial, which had been set for 20 January. Obviously, her trial had not occurred as scheduled; she accused her enemies of intending to keep her imprisoned perpetually, when she was over eighty and her life and health were endangered by conditions in the tolbooth. She requested another trial date and a copy of her indictment for preparation of her

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78 *RPC2*, ii, 540.

79 *RPC2*, ii, 540.

defence. Otherwise, she requested to be freed on caution. The Lords appointed 4 February for her trial, and required that her indictment be supplied.<sup>80</sup>

Young was charged with four different forms of witchcraft: the financial destruction of her enemies, the infliction of disease, healing or transferring illness to another individual, and consulting with other witches and the devil.<sup>81</sup> Young's indictment consisted of twenty-four counts of witchcraft, but most of them involved some form of malefice, practised against her neighbours and rivals. Sixteen of the charges hinged upon her inflicting disease or economic harm on her foes. Only three accusations mentioned any form of healing; two of transferring disease from one person to another and one more that described a ritual for curing cattle. Five more told of her association with other known witches and her possession of the devil's mark.

Lauren Martin has completed an exhaustive study of Isobel Young's case, which she is preparing for publication, and it is probably best left to her more detailed research to fully analyse the myriad charges against this prolific witch. For over forty years, Young cultivated a reputation for witchcraft. Undoubtedly, her reputation had been an asset for much of that time, as it probably was for other long practising witches and charmers, like William Davidson. Few in East Barns, Dunbar or the surrounding area would have intentionally crossed her. However, her associations with several women who were executed for witchcraft made her prosecution only a matter of time, in a climate of increasing interest in the discovery of accomplices. Young's indictment noted that she had often kept the company of Christian Grinton, Margaret Melrose and Janet Acheson, who had been executed in

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80 Robertson, 325-6; Young-JC26/9/14.

81 Robertson, 280-293; Young-JC26/9/1 & Young-JC26/9/2.

Dunbar, as well as having consulted with Katharine Gray and Janet Lindsay, who had been executed in Haddington. With so many in her community able to testify that she had welcomed these women into her home, her association with known witches would have been enough to condemn her.<sup>82</sup>

The prosecution did not rely only on the accusations of her neighbours and the word of witches. They also sought more objective proof, by searching her for the devil's mark, which they discovered under her left breast. Young testified that she had developed the mark three years previously, but denied it was anything sinister; it was simply an ulcer.<sup>83</sup> The man who had treated Young for the ulcer was questioned by the Presbytery of Duns, and his statement was used as evidence in her trial. Alexander Fortune (Young gave his surname as Fairbairn) admitted that he had treated her for the small wound, which her neighbours whispered was the devil's mark. He said that the wound caused her no pain, though ulcers were agonising, and showed no signs of healing despite his ministrations.<sup>84</sup> Her affliction certainly left some form of scar. A witch pricker was probably not needed since the mark was visible, and her investigators confirmed its existence simply by asking to see it.

Since she would not confess, the presence of the devil's mark was the most diabolical aspect of Young's indictment. Her prosecutors had no difficulty obtaining evidence against her, however: her neighbours were eager to tell tales of her witchcraft. Most of the statements described typical acts of malefice. Young placed diseases on her enemies, killed their livestock, caused them bad luck and financial ruin, and even prevented their butter from churning. Young's indictment revealed a

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82 Robertson, 291-2; Young-JC26/9/1.

83 Robertson, 310; Young-JC26/9/4.

84 Robertson, 324-5; Young-JC26/9/12.

woman constantly at odds with her neighbours over myriad slights and disagreements. The number of quarrels over the lease or purchase of land suggests that she was of middling status, as did her anger with Andrew Merton who owed her money. Julian Goodare has argued that the stereotypical Scottish witch was an older woman who was poorer than her neighbours, but probably not a vagrant.<sup>85</sup> Young may have been elderly, but she was probably better off than most in the community, making her a poor match to the stereotype. She had enough money to bully many of her neighbours financially, and she was a scold: swearing when angry, threatening her enemies and publicly abusing her neighbours. She swore to destroy anyone that threatened her family's prosperity. She may well have cultivated her reputation for witchcraft as a way to intimidate her neighbours, but with so many enemies and stories that could be used as evidence against her, eventually that reputation became her downfall. She remained obstinate, declaring that the charges against her were slanderous, and her defence team argued each point of her indictment as best they could. She was acquitted on half of the charges, but conviction on only one of the twenty-four counts against her would have been sufficient for execution. With no new suspects named, the brief serial hunt came to an end with Young's execution.

### **Other Cases**

Isobel Young's case was not directly connected with the main serial hunt in East Lothian between 1628 and 1631, but hers was certainly not the only investigation that was divorced from it. Many of the early cases, in the second half of 1628, can not be associated with the suspects within the expanding web of

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<sup>85</sup> Julian Goodare, 'Women and the Witch-hunt in Scotland', *Social History*, 23 (1998), 288-308, at 290.

accusations centred on William Davidson during late 1628 and early 1629.

Unrelated cases continued throughout the peak period, though not all areas showed equal fervour in their efforts to discover Satan's minions within the community.

When these individual trials are considered, variations in procedure can be observed.

While many investigations ended with trials, convictions and executions, not all ended so spectacularly or tragically. Some of those who found themselves accused escaped trial, even when local authorities believed them guilty, especially if their crime was considered relatively minor. The Yester Kirk Session minutes offer insight into the penalties faced by those whose misdeeds were considered less threatening to the community, such as charmers and consulters. These records reveal how small infractions were dealt with, when escalation was not considered necessary, appropriate or viable.

John Halliday found himself before the kirk session on 29 June 1628; but he was not suspected of having performed any acts of sorcery. He stood accused merely of having consulted Patrick Christison, a charmer, about some stolen goods. Halliday was ordered to satisfy church discipline for his poor judgment; he eventually made a payment of linen cloth.<sup>86</sup> There is no mention in the session records that any action was taken against Christison. Perhaps he was not local, and thus did not fall under the jurisdiction of the kirk session in Yester. He either escaped investigation or the records pertaining to him have been lost.

No further mention of magical crimes appears in the session records for 1628, but 1629 proved a busier year. On 18 March 1629, Andrew Matheson satisfied church discipline for the offence of charming. The kirk session warned Matheson

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<sup>86</sup> Robertson, 144; Yester-KSM.

that if he was caught charming or keeping the company of charmers and witches in the future, the penalty would not be so lenient. He would be handed over to the civil courts for punishment.<sup>87</sup> The kirk session may not have had the wherewithal to carry out this threat, since charming was not a secular crime, but it undoubtedly had the desired impact on Matheson; he would have been afraid. On 22 March, an almost identical warning was issued to David Dickson when he too satisfied the kirk's discipline for charming.<sup>88</sup>

The final entry relates to witchcraft, but reveals scepticism on the part of the Yester Kirk Session. John Wheatlie, Jr was summoned before the session on 29 March, charged with slandering Janet Begbie. He had accused her of witchcraft, and was then penalised by being forced to make satisfaction, again by the donation of linen clothing.<sup>89</sup> There must have been something within his accusation that caused to kirk session to doubt his veracity. Even during a peak in prosecution, they were prepared to dismiss the accusation against her as slanderous and instead prosecute her denouncer. Lauren Martin has cautioned researchers not to mistake peak witch-hunting periods with times when every area in Scotland, or even every area within a region of intense hunting, participated in the persecution.<sup>90</sup> The records in East Lothian provide some support for her argument; they indicate that not every parish proceeded zealously against suspects. The parish of Yester seemed to react with moderation; but this only serves to reinforce how important it is to study cases not only in their parish setting, but also their regional context. Seventeenth-century Scotland was not so insular a place as a purely parish-focused study would indicate.

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87 Robertson, 145; Yester-KSM.

88 Robertson, 145; Yester-KSM.

89 Robertson, 145; Yester-KSM.

90 Martin, 'Panics Re-examined', 124-5.

Trials by commission were also continuing, though these individual trials are poorly documented in the surviving records, so any connection they may have had to other trials is impossible to ascertain. On 7 July 1629, a commission was granted to Sir James Richardson of Smeaton, James Rigg of Carberry and Mr Robert Cass of Fordell to try Janet Dowe in Preston.<sup>91</sup> Another commission was purchased on 21 August, by Sir John Hamilton of Preston and two bailies of Preston, Robert Hamilton and John Hall, to try Beigs Wallace and Margaret Matheson in Prestonpans.<sup>92</sup> On 6 November 1629 the same men obtained a commission to try Marion Porteous, suggesting a connection between the women.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps Wallace or Matheson denounced Porteous, or she was implicated by having kept their company. Details may only be surmised, but these cases indicate that the hunt in Prestonpans, which had seen the investigation of thirteen women during July and August of 1628, had not stopped. While the records show that no cases occurred between August 1628 and July 1629, the hunt certainly returned to the parish, if it had ever left. With three fresh suspects in the summer of 1629, and another in the autumn, it seems that interest in witchcraft had returned to the area, and Sir John Hamilton of Preston again led the way in prosecuting the accused.

Martin argues that few parishes continued to seek out potential witches in their midst once the initial suspects had been investigated or tried.<sup>94</sup> Prestonpans does not fit her model, though events there are probably not representative of the entire county during the period. The community not only supplied thirteen suspects in two months during 1628, they returned, albeit to a lesser extent, to the hunt in the

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91 *RPC2*, iii, 209.

92 *RPC2*, iii, 271.

93 *RPC2*, iii, 340.

94 Martin, 'Panics Re-examined', 138-9.

summer of 1629. Sir John Hamilton was involved in the cases of eleven women between 3 July 1628 and 6 November 1629. He continued his interest in prosecution and was involved with several investigations connected to the serial hunt during 1630. Between 26 May and 1 July 1630, he was an important figure in a further eight cases, bringing the total number of investigations in which he participated to nineteen. He was not the only, nor even the most, prolific hunter during the period. Mr Patrick Hamilton of Little Preston, a minister, participated in twenty-two cases, Samuel Johnston of Elphinstone in twenty and Robert Cass of Fordell in nineteen, all during the 1628-31 period.

Individual trials continued throughout the peak period, especially in the areas of Clerkington and Cousland. On 6 November 1629 the Privy Council approved a commission to try Agnes Rannick and Susanna Skaitsone in Clerkington, near Haddington.<sup>95</sup> On 21 April 1630 a commission was granted to try another Clerkington resident, Patrick Murray.<sup>96</sup> William Andrew in Clerkington was also under investigation, because on 10 June 1630 John Denholm and James Logane became his cautioners for 100 merks, guaranteeing that Andrew would appear before the Privy Council when summoned to answer the charge of witchcraft.<sup>97</sup>

Sir James McGill of Cranstoun Riddel, Sir Samuel Johnston, Patrick Hamilton and James Rig were ordered to try Margaret Borthwick, (also known as Berdock), and Elizabeth Selkirk in Cousland by commission on 1 April 1630.<sup>98</sup> 21 April saw another commission offered to a similar set of commissioners to try Margaret Alan, Margaret Veitch and Janet Paterson who were imprisoned in the

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95 *RPC2*, iii, 339.

96 *RPC2*, iii, 535.

97 *RPC2*, iii, 563.

98 *RPC2*, iii, 518.

Cousland tolbooth.<sup>99</sup> Sir Samuel Johnston, Patrick Hamilton, James Rig and the moderator and brethren of the Presbytery of Dalkeith were given a commission on 26 May 1630 to arrest and examine seven people from Cousland: John Finnick, a tailor, his wife Marion Banks, their daughter Agnes Finnick, Janet Richardson, Marion Anderson, Christian Steel, and Giles Swinton. They noted that some had confessed while others continued to obstinately deny the charges against them.<sup>100</sup> The claim that 'some had confessed' may have been an overstatement, because on 8 July 1630 a commission was issued to try John Finnick.<sup>101</sup> If Finnick confessed, he was probably the only one, or more trials would have been ordered.

Other areas experienced isolated trials: Bessie Mitchell, in Crichton, was ordered to be tried by commission on 22 June 1630.<sup>102</sup> On 1 July 1630, Lady Bass was commanded to deliver her servant John Smith, so he could be presented before the Council on charges of witchcraft.<sup>103</sup> She must have complied quite quickly, because Smith appeared on 10 July and was ordered to find caution for 200 merks that he would remain in Edinburgh until released.<sup>104</sup>

The Presbytery of Dalkeith were continuing to struggle with their witchcraft problem. They made a second complaint to the Privy Council, asking for more powers to ward suspects. Unlike the request made in September 1628, asking to imprison the accused on their own maintenance, their supplication on 15 April 1629 was of an even more basic nature. They complained that they no longer had anywhere to actually intern prisoners. The moderator and brethren explained that

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99 *RPC2*, iii, 534.

100 *RPC2*, iii, 544.

101 *RPC2*, iii, 602.

102 *RPC2*, iii, 573.

103 *RPC2*, iii, 587.

104 *RPC2*, iii, 603.

until recently the Earl of Morton in Dalkeith had allowed them the use of his prison, but he now had so many delinquents on his own lands that he had no room to spare. They sought permission to petition local noblemen and wealthy gentlemen to take suspects into their custody. Showing an interest in the continued hunt in the area, the Privy Council granted their request, but reminded them that they operated at the Council's pleasure, and all findings must be reported so that lawful commissions could be granted.<sup>105</sup> With their new-found power they warded Michael Erskine in a small house in Newbattle for six weeks, but again complained to the Privy Council, on 17 December 1629, that imprisoning the suspect for so long was a burden on the people of the parish, who had been responsible for ensuring that Erskine did not escape. They were given permission to transfer their prisoner to Edinburgh, making him the responsibility of the bailies there.<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps the hunt was not sustained in every local parish, but the presbytery continued the search. At the most local parish level, Martin's argument appears sound in many instances, but when the involvement of the presbytery in witch-hunting is considered, a more sustained hunt seems to develop. Stuart Macdonald argues that the presbytery was the 'local geographical unit in which most witch-hunting occurred', but his model must also be used with caution, because hunting did not always remain within a presbytery's borders.<sup>107</sup> Thus, regional studies that use the county as their focus may paint a quite different picture of events in a peak period than strictly local investigations might.

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105 *RPC2*, iii, 142.

106 *RPC2*, iii, 385.

107 Macdonald, *Fife*, 33.

## Chapter 4

### Alexander Hamilton: The Hunt Expands

The argument for a regionally focused consideration of the peak in East Lothian prosecution is supported by the need to look at many different parishes, and even several presbyteries, in order to trace the entirety of the serial hunt over both time and place. The hunt began in the Presbytery of Dalkeith with the investigation of Margaret Muirhead, before spreading into the Presbytery of Haddington with the naming of William Davidson. The serial hunt continued to evolve, encompassing ever more localities in Haddington as Davidson's accusations were followed to their endpoint. However, there was one more suspect that had not been investigated. Why was Alexander Hamilton, the man held responsible for the murder of Lady Ormiston, still at large?

On 7 July 1629, George Cockburn of Ormiston, who had been granted the warrant to arrest the vagabond in December 1628, appeared before the Haddington Burgh Court and again swore that he would prosecute Hamilton, bearing any costs for his imprisonment.<sup>108</sup> It was hardly surprising that Cockburn remained interested in Hamilton. He had sufficient motivation to pursue the vagabond, no matter how long it took to apprehend him. But what prompted him to state his intentions again at this time? Help in locating the accused man had materialised, in the form of Sir George Home of Manderston, a laird in the Duns area of Berwickshire. Home stated that he had heard of Hamilton's crime against a well born lady and felt compelled to assist in the apprehension of her killer. Thus, he had obtained a warrant to arrest Hamilton himself.<sup>109</sup>

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108 Robertson, 191; HBCR.

109 Robertson, 352; Hamilton-JC26/9/2.

It seems that Hamilton, a vagabond, had fled Scotland when he was accused by William Davidson and Sara Keith. He travelled into northern England, at least as far south as Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He successfully escaped justice for more than seven months, but he was finally captured near Newcastle in either late June or early July 1629, and imprisoned on the orders of Lord Bamburgh. It was in the prison in Newcastle that he first met Sir George Home.<sup>110</sup> Home obtained a second warrant in order to return him to Scotland and present him to the Privy Council, which took fourteen days. But Home did not deliver Hamilton to the Lords in Edinburgh, at least not immediately; instead, he stopped much closer to home. On 13 July 1629, Hamilton was warded in the tolbooth in Duns and questioned the next day. It was here that his first deposition was taken by James Mowat, Sheriff Clerk in Berwick.<sup>111</sup>

Hamilton confessed to a variety of crimes in this initial statement, and admitted to fleeing justice when he heard that his guilt had been revealed by fellow witches. He confessed to having been in the devil's service for the past five years, after Satan had appeared to him near Haddington in the shape of a gentleman dressed in black and riding a black horse. Satan promised Hamilton that he would want for nothing if he consented to be the devil's servant, which required Hamilton to renounce his baptism and the cross. Satan then pressed him to receive the devil's mark, but Hamilton refused.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps they had attempted to prick him for the mark unsuccessfully, and this statement offered an explanation for why the test, which was considered an objective means for discovering a witch, had failed. Julian Goodare has commented on Hamilton's refusal of the mark, and attributes it to his non-sexual

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110 Robertson, 353; Hamilton-JC26/9/3; *SJCI*, 145.

111 Robertson, 352; Hamilton-JC26/9/2.

112 Robertson, 352; Hamilton-JC26/9/2.

relationship with his master. The devil instead used violence to control his male servant, beating Hamilton after he failed to appear for an appointed meeting.<sup>113</sup> Hamilton's reference to being forced to renounce both his baptism and the cross is noteworthy. While such declarations were not uncommon in the testimony of confessing witches, they were typically found in Catholic areas of the continent. For a Scot to refer to renouncing the cross is unusual, as such images no longer even appeared in kirks. Perhaps Hamilton was himself Catholic, or this may be an example of the survival of Catholic concepts within folk belief, as Emma Wilby argues.<sup>114</sup> After his initial meeting with Satan, Hamilton spoke of numerous encounters around Haddington. He described witch meetings in the Duns area, stating that at one gathering witches raised a flood in an unsuccessful attempt on the life of James Mowat, the man taking Hamilton's statement. At another, the devil had copulated with all of the women present. Once he had finished, John Smith, a man from Duns and the devil's 'heid man' in Berwickshire, had followed his master's example and 'usit them all behind, and raid them lyk beastes.'<sup>115</sup>

Hamilton's description of joining the devil's service and witch meetings were typical; they closely fitted the elite cumulative concept of witchcraft to which his interrogators subscribed. His next declaration, however, was unusual. Hamilton swore that George Home was in danger of becoming a victim of witchcraft himself. He said that John Neil, an Englishman living in Tweedmouth, was working to kill Home at the request of Dame Helen Arnot, Lady Manderston—Home's wife. Arnot had promised to pay Neil for her husband's death and had consulted both Neil and

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113 Goodare, 'Women', 302, 305; Hamilton-JC26/9/6.

114 Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Brighton, 2005), 12.

115 Robertson, 352-3; Hamilton-JC26/9/1, Hamilton-JC26/9/2.

the devil in her desire to destroy Home. Hamilton stated that three years earlier, she and Neil had placed a dead foal in Home's stable, hoping that he would be the first person to lay eyes on it, and thus be killed.<sup>116</sup> The attempt failed, and presumably another individual in Home's household fell victim to the curse. A year later she had met the devil around midnight at a large witch meeting, including those from both the Haddington and Duns areas. She pleaded with the devil to help her kill her husband, and he had instructed her to obtain a dead man's hand and place it in the corner of Home's garden, which he visited daily.<sup>117</sup> She did as commanded, but again, Home was not the first to see it, and escaped death.<sup>118</sup> Hamilton had warned both Home and Mowat that they were being conspired against. Viewed with a cynical eye, however, such a warning, especially when applied to both of the men investigating Hamilton, is suspiciously convenient. Did these men have something to gain from accusations being made against those whom Hamilton implicated?

On 15 July, Home took Hamilton to Haddington, where he was questioned a second time. On this occasion he said that Alison Combe in Duns had asked the devil for the power to harm James Douglas, the previous Sheriff Clerk in Berwick. Other female witches in Duns, including Katharine Wilson, had asked for the power to kill John Wemyss' wife, her brother, and Margaret Cockburn.<sup>119</sup>

After Hamilton spent the night in the Haddington tolbooth, they continued on to Edinburgh, appearing before the Privy Council on 16 July. The Lords ordered Hamilton imprisoned in the Haddington tolbooth and entrusted his conveyance back

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116 The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft has transcribed the word as 'foil' (a bird). Either animal corpse would have been a logical choice for hiding in a stable.

117 This object may be an 'hand of glory', an object purported to have magical properties, typically useful to thieves.

118 Robertson, 352-3; Hamilton-JC26/9/2.

119 Robertson, 352; Hamilton-JC26/9/1.

there to George Cockburn, who was present.<sup>120</sup> Finally, Cockburn would be able to pursue the case against his wife's supposed murderer.

Hamilton's statements must have come to the Council's attention, because on 30 July they noted that Hamilton had accused several people 'of good fame, credit and reputation'. The Lords, deeply concerned, demanded that Hamilton be transported from Haddington to Edinburgh. They betrayed their agitation by allotting a mere twenty-four hours for the orders to be executed.<sup>121</sup> Hamilton was either too dangerous or too valuable to be left in the hands of local authorities.

He was questioned again on 8 August, and when asked about first meeting with the devil, he recounted the tale as he had in Duns. Hamilton described the devil as a man in black, who looked 'ill-favoured' in the face, wore no cloak and carried a wand or stick. After their meeting he had 'passed away in an obscure manner.'<sup>122</sup> Hamilton spoke of five more meetings with the devil; some where he had been alone with his master, and others that were attended by many witches. In describing his second meeting, where the devil appeared on a black horse, Hamilton said that he had been transported to their meeting place by an unknown force.<sup>123</sup> Hamilton was the only witch during the period who specifically claimed to having been transported mysteriously to a meeting, and he only mentioned a single instance of the phenomenon. Descriptions of other gatherings implied that witches travelled on foot to the prescribed meeting place. This would indicate that most confessing witches had not integrated the elite ideas of flight or hallucinatory meetings into their statements, perhaps because they remained unfamiliar. Hamilton came closer to

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120 *RPC2*, iii, 222.

121 *RPC2*, iii, 261.

122 Robertson, 353; Hamilton-JC26/9/3.

123 Robertson, 353; Hamilton-JC26/9/3.

incorporating such ideas into his declarations, and it was his ability to provide testimony that fitted the interrogator's pre-conceived notions that would make him a popular source of evidence.

At other meetings the devil had appeared as a black man riding a black horse, as the spirit of a foal, and as a man dressed in brown or grey. At other times he appeared as various animals, including a crow, cat, or dog. Hamilton told of going to a large meeting, and then returning to Bessie Sleigh's house in Duns for supper and dancing. At another meeting Hamilton requested the power to harm Mr James Cockburn, the provost of Haddington. The devil had told him to take three ears of corn from Cockburn's haystacks and burn them. Hamilton did so, with the assistance of James Darling, Elspeth Bartie and Katharine Chrystal from Haddington. When they burned the stolen grain, the corn that was drying in Cockburn's kiln burned along with it. While the devil had much power to bestow upon his servants, it was not infinite. He could not always give the ability to harm someone to every witch who asked. Hamilton discovered this limitation of his master's power when he wanted to destroy Archibald Brown in Hugstoun. The devil refused, telling him that he had already granted the ability to Archibald Sharp's wife, a woman in Pickiltillane and Amy Sinclair in Brown Head.<sup>124</sup> On another occasion Hamilton asked for the power to hurt the Laird of Colstoun, because Colstoun had banished Hamilton from his lands. The devil again declared that he could not accommodate his servant's request, as he had already granted the ability to the wife of [illegible] Wilson.<sup>125</sup>

Next his examiners asked Hamilton if he had a way of contacting the devil or arranging a meeting. He answered that when they first met, the devil had been

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124 Robertson, 354; Hamilton-JC26/9/3, Hamilton-JC26/9/4.

125 Robertson, 356; Hamilton-JC26/9/5.

holding a wand, which was a fir stick. He had instructed Hamilton in its use. To summon the devil Hamilton would strike the wand on the ground three times and shout, 'Rise, foul thief!' He dismissed his master by striking the devil on the head with the wand and saying 'Go away to hell, thief!' He said that he had kept the wand during the five years he had been a witch, only disposing of it after he was arrested in England.<sup>126</sup> Hamilton's control over the devil through the fir wand is unique in the period, and Julian Goodare notes how unusual this type of control would have been for a female witch.<sup>127</sup>

Asked if he had the power to charm, Hamilton volunteered a tale about Thomas Home in Clerkington Mill. Thomas had been bewitched when he was the first to pass over a blue thread placed across the threshold of his door. A vagabond woman, who had since died, placed the cursed thread, hoping to bewitch Homes' father, James, who had struck her while she was begging. Hamilton diagnosed Home's illness as magical in origin, and promised to cure him. Hamilton, George Harlaw and Thomas Sanderson's wife then consulted the devil. Satan appeared as a crow and instructed Hamilton to mix animal fat, camomile oil and heart fat and then rub the mixture on Home. Afterwards he was to be rubbed with a warm cloth, which then must be thrown into a stream so it did not harm anyone. Hamilton followed the devil's directions and Thomas recovered.<sup>128</sup>

The last statement he made that morning concerned Lady Ormiston and her daughter. Hamilton said that Agnes Alan from Saltoun, Bessie Sinclair and a woman from Fala, whose name he could not remember, had visited him and declared that

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126 Robertson, 354-5; Hamilton-JC26/9/4.

127 Goodare, 'Women', 305.

128 Robertson, 355; Hamilton-JC26/9/4.

either he must help them to kill Elizabeth Lawson and her daughter, or they would do it alone. Hamilton agreed to aid them, and they paid him a peck of barley and a half peck of wheat. Later they met in Saltoun Wood and asked the devil, who appeared dressed in grey, how they should murder the women. The devil told Hamilton to place a blue thread across the gate of Humbie while the women spoke a few words. Hamilton did not know what they were supposed to say, since the devil whispered it to them. The witches went to Humbie Gate, which was presumably the gate at Woodhead House, where Lawson and her daughter were living, and carried out the devil's ritual. Soon after, both women died. His interrogators asked why he had agreed to help murder the lady, and he replied that he hated her because six months before he had been begging at her gate and the Lady sent him away saying, 'Away you layabout, you'll get nothing here!'<sup>129</sup>

In the afternoon on 8 August he provided testimony about a large witch meeting where he had seen Alison Carrick from Haddington, Bessie Hepburn, who was the wife of Andrew Baines (a constable in Haddington), Margaret Black from Samuelston, Christian Barilman, wife of Samuelston's falconer, and Andrew Alan's wife. He also spoke about John Neil who, he said, was helping Lady Manderston to kill Home. He did not know why Neil had chosen to assist her, but had met the man several times when travelling, and Neil had always been laden with food. Eventually Neil confided that the food came from Helen Arnot. Asked if he had ever met Arnot, Hamilton said she had been present on two occasions when he had received small amounts of food from her daughter. He denied knowing any more about Neil or Arnot.<sup>130</sup> His interrogators inquired as to his knowledge of Katharine Wilson in

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129 Robertson, 355-6; Hamilton-JC26/9/4.

130 Robertson, 356; Hamilton-JC26/9/5.

Duns. He said that she had given him food when he was begging, but they never spoke, and he thought he had seen her at meetings.<sup>131</sup> He did not sound particularly sure that he knew Wilson, but he changed his mind later, and accused John Smith and Wilson of being the witches who had attempted to drown James Mowat.<sup>132</sup>

While most of the details of Hamilton's testimony are typical for a confessing witch, his depositions are notable for the sheer number of accomplices that he named, or at least mentioned. Several were identified only with their husbands' names, and a few more merely by where they lived, their names forgotten entirely. Hamilton also provided evidence that aided in four investigations already in progress. While other evidence was plentiful, his assistance certainly played a part in securing these convictions.

The Privy Council granted a commission for the trial of John Carfrae, his wife Alison Borthwick, and his brother Thomas Carfrae, all living in the parish of Yester.<sup>133</sup> The three had been accused by Margaret Hamilton, who had been executed for witchcraft in Dalkeith, and by their own sister, Bessie Carfrae. Most of the evidence against them came from these two women, but Alexander Hamilton also made a statement against them, and it appeared as the first article in the indictment at their trial on 20 August 1629. The suspects were confronted with Hamilton, who confirmed that he had seen them at meetings with the devil. Hamilton testified that he had been present at a meeting where John Carfrae renewed his pact with Satan, and that he knew Thomas Carfrae had supped with the devil at William Denholm's house in Haddington.<sup>134</sup> Hamilton provided the demonological aspects of their

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131 Robertson, 356; Hamilton-JC26/9/5.

132 Robertson, 360; Hamilton-JC26/9/10.

133 *RPC2*, iii, 269.

134 Robertson, 192; HBCR.

crime, satisfying the elite investigators who may have been frustrated by the focus on malefice in the testimony offered by Margaret and Bessie.

The other charges against them included the accusation that they had murdered, or attempted the murder of, seven individuals, aided by Margaret. Their targets included Marion Cranston and her husband James Hay, who was a bailie in Yester.<sup>135</sup> Thomas was also charged with having killed his wife, and attempting to murder his mother-in-law. Furthermore, he made an attempt on the lives of Magdalen Heriot, a woman with whom he had sired an illegitimate child, and the child itself. Borthwick orchestrated the death of her own child, who was fostered in Fala.<sup>136</sup> During her examination, Margaret confessed to assisting in these murderous attempts, and Bessie testified against her family on her deathbed, claiming that they had used her as a messenger between themselves and Margaret on several occasions.

The remainder of the charges focused on malefice, mostly carried out by the suspects, with minimal or no assistance from Margaret, and entailed the destruction of livestock and property.<sup>137</sup> Bessie's deathbed declarations continued to be the prosecution's main evidence, leading one to question if there was a feud between the brothers and their sister which caused her to lodge such serious accusations against her immediate family. While the jury was unconvinced on several points of Bessie's testimony, the suspects were convicted of more than enough charges to see them strangled and burned. Hamilton's declarations were accepted, and his testimony certainly played a part in their conviction, as well as satisfying the judges' need for demonological aspects within the crimes.

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135 Robertson, 192-3; HBCR.

136 Robertson, 193-4; HBCR.

137 Robertson, 193-4; HBCR.

Hamilton also played a part in the investigation of Katharine Oswald in Niddrie, who had been arrested while Hamilton was still imprisoned in Newcastle. Again he offered elite concepts that otherwise would not have appeared in her dittay. On 2 July 1629, a commission was granted to Adam Wauchope to apprehend Oswald, who had been in process before the Kirk of Niddrie for ten weeks on suspicion of witchcraft. Several indictments had been made against her and the Privy Council declared that she should be interned in the tolbooth in Edinburgh and thoroughly examined.<sup>138</sup> She was warded in Edinburgh, but the investigation against her stalled. Her deposition was to have been reported on 20 July, but on 4 September she wrote to the Lords to complain about mistreatment. She said she had been imprisoned for eight weeks, without even being questioned. She complained that she was detained only on the word of Andrew Learmonth, the minister in Liberton. The Council was sympathetic, to a point, and agreed that it was unjust that she be imprisoned without trial, so they appointed a trial date, and commanded that a copy of her indictment be given to her at least forty-eight hours in advance. Furthermore, they declared that if Learmonth and Wauchope failed to pursue the case, she should be released on the promise that she would appear if called.<sup>139</sup> Unfortunately for Oswald, her accusers did not intend to allow her to escape due to their inaction, and pressed forward the investigation. She was eventually tried on 11 November 1629.

Her indictment noted that she had been suspected of witchcraft for ten to twelve years, and she was known to associate with those who had since been convicted for the crime. Elizabeth Stevin, also called Toppok, had testified against Oswald before her execution, claiming that Oswald was as skilled a witch as she.

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138 *RPC2*, iii, 206-7.

139 *RPC2*, iii, 278. The record of the commission to try her appears on *RPC2*, iii, 290.

Next, the indictment recorded Hamilton's declaration that Oswald had invited him to her home and consulted him on matters of witchcraft. He said that one night she had asked him to join her for a meeting. He agreed and the devil had appeared to them in the shape of a foal and then a man. During the meeting, Hamilton claimed, the devil had sexual intercourse with Oswald.<sup>140</sup> Hamilton provided the vital elite aspects of the accusation. His involvement ensured that a carnal act with the devil was explicitly mentioned.

Much of the rest of Oswald's indictment was composed of common malefice, mostly answered by her defence attorney's protests that all of the misfortunes could have been caused by natural forces.<sup>141</sup> There was one charge of charming, in which she was accused of curing John Niddrie's fever during the summer of 1625 by instructing him to place a nettle on the High Road, before sunrise, and then to urinate on it. Oswald flatly denied having been involved in the cure, and protested that the cure was not even witchcraft, as it required no words to be uttered. Her defence concluded by declaring the entire dittay unworthy, because the Archbishop of St Andrews, John Spottiswoode, had been sought for authority in purchasing a commission, but had refused to offer his support.<sup>142</sup> Her defence council's arguments made little impact, and Oswald's fate was sealed when Mr John Aird, a minister, pricked her for the devil's mark. After what was probably a long process, he thrust a pin into her shoulder, all the way to the head, without drawing blood or seeming to cause her pain. Despite her advocate's best efforts, the judges declared that if the jury did not return a guilty verdict, they would be making a wilful error. The jury

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140 *SJCI*, 131-3.

141 *SJCI*, 133-7.

142 *SJCI*, 137-39.

obligingly agreed, and she was sentenced to death.<sup>143</sup>

Beyond assisting in four prosecutions, Hamilton named an ever-increasing number of accomplices. Whilst it is possible that some of these individuals were already under investigation due to other accusations, it is likely that a high proportion of those whom Hamilton named would otherwise never have come under suspicion. On 15 August 1629 the Privy Council recorded a list of Haddington area accomplices named by Hamilton during his examinations in Edinburgh. They stated that he had accused Katharine Kirkton, Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, and Margaret Mitchell in Haddington, Bessie Duncan in Walkerland, Katharine Lauder in Stobstane, Bessie Lauder in Nunlands, Agnes Sinclair in Burnhead and Margaret Alexander in Pickiltillane. The Privy Council recorded that all of the women had been brought to Edinburgh to be confronted with their accuser, and in their presence Hamilton had reaffirmed his statements against them. Thus they granted a commission to the secular authorities in Haddington to arrest the women and return them to Edinburgh to be confined to the tolbooth during their examination.<sup>144</sup> The orders were not carried out, and they reissued the commission on 3 November.<sup>145</sup>

On 3 December the reason for the delay was finally revealed. The Presbytery of Haddington asked to investigate and try the women locally. They explained that several of the suspects were very poor and would not be able to afford to attend their own trial if it was to be held in Edinburgh. Furthermore, they worried that important witnesses would also find the cost of travelling to the capital prohibitive. The Lords granted a commission to the moderator and brethren to examine the women and to

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143 *SJC1*, 140.

144 *RPC2*, iii, 261.

145 *RPC2*, iii, 334.

find witnesses against them, although they reminded the ministers that the depositions would still need to be presented for the Council's perusal.<sup>146</sup>

Nevertheless, with local authority finally received on 20 January 1630, the presbytery began their investigation. On 3 February seven of the suspects appeared as ordered. Agnes Lauder sent word that she could not comply because she was seriously ill, while Margaret Alexander escaped further investigation, as she had recently died.<sup>147</sup> The local investigation was hardly proceeding faster than the one attempted by those in Edinburgh; the suspects were uncooperative and routinely ignored the presbytery's summons. On 1 April the presbytery again complained to the Privy Council, requesting yet more power that would normally have been reserved to secular officials. They asked for the authority to ward the remaining suspects because the women were conspiring. They accused the women of conferring together and supporting each other's efforts to resist interrogation. Worst of all, they refused to testify against one another. The brethren insisted that any witch who still enjoyed her liberty would never confess. The Lords were convinced and approved their request to ward the women in the Haddington tolbooth. Showing some amount of impatience with the investigation that had dragged on for nearly eight months, they told the presbytery that they expected a report on the findings by 20 April.<sup>148</sup>

On 7 April the presbytery ordered the brethren to speak from the pulpit on the next Sabbath day, exhorting their congregations to produce witnesses against the women.<sup>149</sup> Even with such concerted efforts and additional powers, the investigation

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146 *RPC2*, iii, 361-2.

147 Robertson, 152; HPM.

148 *RPC2*, iii, 515-16.

149 Robertson, 152; HPM.

could not be completed on time; they requested an extension and were allowed until 26 May.<sup>150</sup> When the presbytery finally completed their examinations (more than nine months after the suspects were first accused, and almost six months after the presbytery had been given permission to carry out the investigation) the Privy Council granted a commission to several men in the Haddington area, including Sir John Hamilton of Preston and Sir John Sinclair of Hermiston to try Bessie Duncan, Katharine Kirkton, Katharine Lauder and Alison Carrick.<sup>151</sup> Only four of the remaining eight were named in the commission. Had the presbytery experienced such difficulty in eliciting testimony that they had been unsuccessful in convincing the Council of the need to try the other four?

Bessie Hepburn filed a supplication with the Privy Council on 1 June 1630. She complained that the Presbytery of Haddington had obtained a commission to try her and some other women for witchcraft, but that she had been warded for seven weeks without any charges being verified against her.<sup>152</sup> She objected that the presbytery refused to tell her what evidence had been uncovered. The Lords found in her favour, accepting her son's offer to become her cautioner for 3,000 merks, and ordered that she be released.<sup>153</sup> Obviously Hepburn's son was a man of some means for the Council to believe he would be able to pay such a hefty sum if required. Her husband, Andrew Baines, was the constable in Haddington, so she must not have been one of the impoverished suspects that the presbytery had spoken of. Perhaps her lack of similarity to the common witch stereotype had made finding evidence against her difficult, especially if she was well respected in Haddington. She

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150 *RPC2*, iii, 535.

151 *RPC2*, iii, 544.

152 It seems likely that Hepburn was actually referring to the presbytery's investigatory commission, since no trial commission was issued listing Hepburn's name.

153 *RPC2*, iii, 548.

probably escaped further trouble despite Hamilton's accusation.

She was not the only woman among the group who complained. On 8 June the four women who were to be tried wrote asking for justice. They complained that their judges would not provide a copy of their indictment, nor time to seek legal advice. They noted that the Sheriff and his depute had refused the commission, leaving their trial in the hands of the lairds, most of whom had little experience with such cases. The women asked that their trial be moved to Edinburgh, and for a copy of their dittays to be given to them six days in advance. The Lords agreed that they must have access to the charges against them, but upheld the commission.<sup>154</sup> On 23 June the presbytery again ordered the brethren to demand the appearance of witnesses.<sup>155</sup> With such pressure from the ministers to ensure witnesses materialised, and the prosecution's success in convincing the Council to order a trial, Duncan, Kirkton, Lauder and Carrick almost certainly faced execution. Bessie Hepburn escaped on caution, but of Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Lauder and Agnes Sinclair no trace can be found.

Hamilton's own examination continued throughout the Haddington presbytery's long investigation. He revealed several more accomplices. On 30 October the interrogators finally asked about his past. Hamilton declared that he was sixty years old, and had been born in Prestonpans. He lived there as a young man and worked as a coal miner. During that time he was often in the company of Elspeth Christie and Agnes Thomson, whom he suspected were witches. Much later, after he became a witch, his suspicions were confirmed when he saw them in the devil's presence. About twenty-five years earlier, he and his wife, Alison Edington,

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154 *RPC2*, iii, 556.

155 Robertson, 153; HPM.

had left Preston for the Eastern Borders, where he had worked in the English coal pits, until he was sent to war in Sweden, in 1626. He first met the devil around Michaelmas in 1624.<sup>156</sup> Neither Christie nor Thomson appear in the records; they would have been old women, if still alive.

His questioners read the initial statement that Mowat had penned in Duns, interrogating him on each point. He confirmed everything, except his statement against Helen Arnot. He recanted the story, swearing that he never meant to accuse her. He only heard John Neil say such things about her, but never personally saw her meet with the devil. When asked if he knew any more witches, he told the story that helped convict Katharine Oswald. He accompanied Oswald and Katharine Gilmour from Niddrie to a meeting, where the devil took the women away for about a quarter hour and copulated with them.<sup>157</sup>

On 7 November 1629, Hamilton revealed new evidence, implicating two more people: John Hogg and his wife, Margaret Nicholson. Hamilton told the examiners that five years before he had been at Hogg's home in Markle, where he was a regular guest. Nicholson had asked him if he was one of 'the Society'. After some hesitation, Hamilton admitted he was. He then agreed to join them at a meeting where the devil appeared as a grim black man. Nicholson asked for the power to harm James Sandie, the miller in Linton Bridge. Her request was granted, and Hamilton reported that within a year Sandie fell ill and also lost six horses.<sup>158</sup>

A month later the three witches attended another meeting where the devil appeared as a black man wearing a hat. He copulated with Nicholson, while Hogg

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156 Robertson, 357; Hamilton-JC26/9/7.

157 Robertson, 357-8; Hamilton-JC26/9/7.

158 Robertson, 329-30; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

and Hamilton turned their backs. Nevertheless, Hamilton was able to affirm that the devil had ridden her like a beast. Afterwards, the devil dined and danced with them until dawn.<sup>159</sup> Hogg and Nicholson, when confronted with Hamilton, both denied knowing him, declaring that he might have been one of the many visitors they entertained in their hall, but certainly had never been in their chambers. They strenuously denied all of his charges against them, but Hamilton was adamant that they were witches.<sup>160</sup>

The Privy Council considered Hamilton's word strong enough evidence to grant a commission on 12 November 1629. Hogg and Nicholson were to be examined and confronted with any others who accused them. Afterwards, the commission stated they should be released on caution.<sup>161</sup> This was a strikingly unusual directive. No other commission granted during the East Lothian peak contained a command that the suspects only be held as long as the investigation continued. Only Hogg and Nicholson benefited from a prescribed release. They were probably quite wealthy and enjoyed a good reputation, thus causing the Lords to remain sceptical about Hamilton's claims.

The commissioners wasted little time, questioning the couple on 14 November. Only Hogg's testimony was recorded, but it was clear that Hamilton's was not the only evidence against them. Hogg responded to several accusations. Euphame Yorstoun accused him of asking her to enter into a sexual relationship with him, and then threatening her when she refused. Hogg confessed that he had made the suggestion, but insisted that when she declined, reminding him that they were

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159 Robertson, 330; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

160 Robertson, 330-1; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

161 *RPC2*, iii, 345.

both married, he never mentioned it again.<sup>162</sup> Hogg's admission that he had suggested an adulterous liaison cannot have endeared him to his investigators; the Bishop of Dunblane, particularly, must have taken a dim view of such behaviour, whether or not Hogg had bewitched Yorstoun afterwards.

The rest of the investigation focused around the rumour that Hogg had been seriously ill, but the sickness had been transferred to Yorstoun's infant daughter, who died. Hogg's maternal aunt, Helen Learmonth was suspected in the act. However, several accounts were presented and the timelines were at considerable variance. Hogg claimed that while he was ill his aunt had died, and that about two weeks later Yorstoun's daughter had suddenly taken ill and died within hours. Afterwards, he heard a rumour that his aunt was to blame.<sup>163</sup> Learmonth would have needed the power to curse from beyond the grave. Hogg swore that before she died, he had never heard anyone call his aunt a witch, and he was adamant that 'his mother's sister died before the child died.' Yorstoun also seemed to have accused Nicholson of playing a part in the child's death.<sup>164</sup>

Hogg and Nicholson's sons, James, William, John and Robert Hogg, testified about the baffling tale. James said his father had been grievously ill the night the child died, but had not begun to improve until at least a week after the girl's death. Learmonth died the next week, and it was then that he saw his father begin to improve. He could not remember if Yorstoun had blamed Learmonth before or after his great-aunt's death.<sup>165</sup> According to William, his father began to show signs of improvement within two or three days of the child's death, and Learmonth did not die

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162 Robertson, 331; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

163 Robertson, 331; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

164 Robertson, 331-2; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

165 Robertson, 333-4; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

until about twenty-four days later, by which time Hogg was much improved, though still confined to the house.<sup>166</sup> John declared that his father seemed slightly improved when he left him less than twenty-four hours after the infant died, despite having been at death's door.<sup>167</sup> Robert's only contribution was that Learmonth had been present in the house the night Yorstoun's child died, contradicting his father's insistence that she had pre-deceased the infant.<sup>168</sup>

Several neighbours offered tales of more common acts of malefice, divination, and strange happenings in Hogg's home.<sup>169</sup> They were not universally denounced, however, as several other neighbours offered statements in support of Hogg and Nicholson, something rarely found in witchcraft investigations. Margaret Carraill stated that she never heard anyone say that Hogg or Nicholson were witches until they were brought to Edinburgh, and only the child's parents had claimed that Hogg had begun to recover as soon as the little girl died.<sup>170</sup> Carraill's husband, William Harlaw, declared that his understanding was that Hogg did not fully recover for a month after the child's death. Niniane Dudgeon from Beanston swore that he never heard anyone accuse the couple of witchcraft until after Alexander Hamilton had been questioned in Haddington. He said that the countryside was now abuzz with the tale that Hogg's illness had been transferred to Yorstoun's daughter, but only during the last twenty days. William Bennet and Thomas White both agreed that they had never heard Hogg or Nicholson blamed for witchcraft before Hamilton's accusation.<sup>171</sup> Most surprising was Euphame Yorstoun's testimony; she swore that

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166 Robertson, 334; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

167 Robertson, 334-5; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

168 Robertson, 335; Hogg-JC26/9/6.

169 Robertson, 328-9; Hogg-JC26/9/3, Hogg-JC26/9/4, Hogg-JC26/9/5.

170 Robertson, 335; Hogg-JC26/9/7.

171 Robertson, 335-6; Hogg-JC26/9/7.

she had never accused Hogg, Nicholson or Learmonth for her baby's death, although the town was full of the rumour that her daughter had 'filled John Hogg's grave.'<sup>172</sup> When the very individual who was said to be the source of the accusation denied making the statement, continuing the investigation must have been impossible. It was little wonder that the Privy Council was not convinced. Perhaps Hogg and Nicholson were some of the people that the Privy Council meant when they stated that Hamilton had accused people of 'good fame, credit and reputation'. On 26 November 1629 Hogg and Nicholson were freed from the Edinburgh tolbooth, though they were still required to find caution for 1000 merks.<sup>173</sup> As they never re-emerged in the records, they can confidently be listed among those who were lucky enough to escape death, even with the accusation of a confessing witch levelled against them. For his part, Hamilton stubbornly maintained the truth of his testimony; his last statement in the records, in fact, was a final declaration of their guilt.<sup>174</sup> Fortunately for Hogg and Nicholson, no one seemed to be taking him seriously, at least in their case.

Nor were Hogg and Nicholson the only individuals named by Hamilton who benefited from a collapse in his credibility. Hamilton claimed that Agnes Alan had solicited his help in murdering Lady Ormiston and her daughter. It seems that Hamilton's examiners were increasingly sceptical about the quality of his accusations, however. On 16 December 1629 Hamilton was confronted with Alan and another woman, and asked to identify which one, if either, was Agnes Alan. He declared that neither was the woman whom he had accused. Asked if he would be

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172 Robertson, 337; Hogg-JC26/9/11.

173 *RPC2*, iii, 358.

174 *SJCI*, 147-8.

able to identify her, Hamilton admitted that he barely knew her, having met her only twice, and just once in daylight. Challenged with how he dared to testify against a woman he would not even be able to recognise, he explained that he had heard her called by name at a witch meeting, so he knew she was guilty. Alan swore that she had never seen Hamilton before, and when her identity was revealed, Hamilton still said he could not identify her as the women who had plotted the deaths of Elizabeth Lawson and her daughter, though there was no one else by that name in Saltoun.<sup>175</sup> Since Alan also disappears from the records, it is likely that Hamilton's inability to identify her, even after prompting, ensured her survival.

Hamilton testified against many supposed accomplices in 1629. Between mid July, when he was captured, and early November, he identified forty-one witches operating in the areas around Haddington and Duns. Four were already being investigated: John Carfrae, Thomas Carfrae, Alison Borthwick and Katharine Oswald. He merely assisted their prosecutors by offering further evidence against them. Among the thirty-seven others that he denounced, some may have already been under suspicion, but it seems that John Hogg, Margaret Nicholson, Katharine Kirkton, Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair, Margaret Alexander and Dame Helen Arnot only came under investigation after his accusations. They were probably not the only ones. Obviously, those he identified only by rough description, such as the 'woman from Fala' whose name he could not recall or 'a woman from Pickiltillane' were unlikely candidates for investigation. Others whom he identified by their husbands' names could probably have been traced, but connecting later

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<sup>175</sup> Robertson, 358-60; Hamilton-JC26/9/9.

documents to his testimony would be impossible unless the women's husbands were recorded. Thus, several more suspects who should be associated with the serial hunt may have escaped notice. While Hamilton was not the catalyst for the serial hunt in 1628, he certainly provided enough accusations to ensure its continuation throughout the second half of 1629 and all the way into the spring of 1631.<sup>176</sup>

By November 1629, Hamilton had implicated everyone he was going to, but his own investigation dragged on. It was little surprise that a man who claimed to be so deeply involved with witches all over southeastern Scotland would draw such interest from prosecutors. If there were major conspiracies, especially against the upper echelons of society, discovering the truth would have been considered vital work. On 25 November 1629 Hamilton shocked his examiners by suggesting that his initial testimony had been coached. He declared that one of Home's servants had urged Hamilton to say whatever Home asked, promising that his master would be merciful if Hamilton cooperated. After initially resisting and enduring a night in irons, the vagabond relented and agreed to cooperate after Home promised to be like a father to Hamilton's children.<sup>177</sup>

Mowat questioned him when they arrived in Duns, and Hamilton repeated the accusations Home had directed him to include. However, he now swore that everything he had said against Lady Manderston was only what he heard from John Neil. When taken to Haddington, Home urged Hamilton to uphold the statement made in Duns. During Hamilton's imprisonment in Haddington Home paid him four shillings for maintaining the story.<sup>178</sup> The examiners must have been astounded.

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176 See Appendix 1, page 100, for a diagram of the serial hunt.

177 Robertson, 358; Hamilton-JC26/9/8.

178 Robertson, 358; Hamilton-JC26/9/8.

Hamilton had accused Home and Mowat of witness tampering, and suggested that Home had orchestrated the accusation of Lady Manderston. Why would two apparently honest men perpetrate such a crime?

## Chapter 5

### Cynical Accusers and the Conclusion of the Serial Hunt

A closer examination of Mowat and Home reveals that both men possessed chequered pasts. In November 1627, Mowat had received an appointment from the king, presumably via a contact within the royal court, to the post of Sheriff Clerk in Berwick. However, at the end of January 1628, he wrote to the Privy Council to complain that he had not been allowed to take up his post. He stated that on 3 January he had travelled to Duns, where the Sheriff of Berwick, Sir Alexander Nisbet of that Ilk, was holding court. Mowat had presented his letter and asked to be received but claimed that the Sheriff had 'contemptuously refused'. The Council ordered Nisbet to receive Mowat.<sup>179</sup> A month later, Nisbet lodged his own complaint, claiming that he had every intention of respecting Mowat's appointment, but that Mowat refused to appear at the proper time to be received. Nisbet stated that on the day after he had received the Council's orders, 31 January, he had gone to Duns and waited all day for his new Sheriff Clerk, but Mowat did not appear, nor did he on any other court day. Instead, on the previous Thursday, Mowat had arrived at Nisbet's home with a company of seven or eight rebels armed with pistols. Mowat demanded that Nisbet go to court straight away and receive him. The sheriff accused Mowat of behaving in a bragging and insolent fashion, and asked for more time, as it was Mowat's poor behaviour that had delayed his appointment. The Council allowed the Sheriff eight more days.<sup>180</sup> Mowat seemed a quarrelsome and possibly lawless man, keeping the company of outlaws, behaving in a threatening manner and offending his superiors. In light of this insight into his behaviour, Mowat's involvement in witness

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179 *RPC2*, ii, 205.

180 *RPC2*, ii, 235.

tampering seems less surprising.

Home fares little better under scrutiny. Louise Yeoman considers the events surrounding Helen Arnot in her study on elite witchcraft suspects, and notes some revealing details of the couple's relationship. Home had married Helen Arnot, the daughter of Sir John Arnot of Birswick. At Sir John's death in 1616, he was worth over £20,000. But he left nothing to Home, likely because Home had been deeply in debt to his father-in-law, to the tune of 14,000 merks. The marriage deteriorated after her father's death, and in 1620 Arnot was forced to obtain a decret of adherence against her husband.<sup>181</sup>

The Register of the Privy Council reveals further evidence of their contentious relationship. In December 1628 she complained to the Privy Council that she had been persecuted for years by her 'unkind and unnatural husband'. She said that she had inherited a large estate from her father, over which Home had taken control. She reminded the Council that in March 1624 they had awarded her payment in total of 1300 merks a year, but stated that Home still would not let her live in peace. He had recently taken all of her livestock and moveable goods, with the intention of ruining her so that she would be too poor to pursue him by the law. The Lords, perhaps familiar with Home's behaviour, took her claim seriously and ordered the couple to appear. Arnot dutifully complied, but Home did not and so was ordered to enter the Edinburgh tolbooth within six days or be denounced and escheated.<sup>182</sup>

Home had many creditors, and was deeply indebted, so much so that he

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181 Louise Yeoman, 'Hunting the Rich Witch in Scotland: High Status Witchcraft Suspects and their Persecutors, 1590-1650', in Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 106-21, at 112.

182 *RPC2*, ii, 511-2.

seemed to be in constant risk of being arrested. With a more complete picture of Home's desperate financial situation, a motive begins to reveal itself. Were Arnot executed for witchcraft he would have been in a good position to gain ownership of her considerable wealth. Ultimately, there is no way to be certain of Home's motivation, but it seems likely that he orchestrated an accusation against his wife in a move to both end his unhappy marriage and gain her fortune. Perhaps he hoped that with so many accusations being made at the time, one more would go unnoticed, even if Arnot poorly fitted the stereotype.

Fortunately for her, Home's efforts were less than successful. Hamilton accused her in July, and by November the Council had made no move to appoint commissioners to investigate her. Home had convinced Hamilton to do his bidding, and Yeoman believes that Home paid for Mowat's assistance.<sup>183</sup> It seems that the Sheriff Clerk liked the idea of using Hamilton to deliver accusations, and Mowat probably directed the confessing man to also include the story that painted Mowat as the victim of attempted murder. The development of the case against John Smith and Katharine Wilson indicates that fraud was perpetrated. Furthermore, Home paid Hamilton for reaffirming his statement, and continued to pay him to maintain the story. Perhaps conscience eventually affected Hamilton; he recanted, admitted to having been coached and blamed the entire story on John Neil. Oddly, despite revealing the fraud, Hamilton was careful not to directly accuse Home of having contrived the charge against his wife. Perhaps Hamilton still hoped that Home would help his family. If so, it would seem a tragic delusion to believe that any man capable of such acts against his own wife would honour a promise to a vagabond

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<sup>183</sup> Yeoman, 'Rich Witch', 112-13.

whom he had used to suit his own purposes.

The Council finally took their first action in Arnot's case after Hamilton recanted, but it certainly was not one that would have pleased Home. The Lords stated their intent to investigate the accusation against Lady Manderston; they showed no interest in questioning her to determine if the accusation was true, only in discovering how Hamilton's statement had been elicited. They summoned James Mowat and two other men: Patrick Abernethy, a notary in Duns, and William Mowat, James Mowat's servant.<sup>184</sup> The men appeared on 7 January 1630 and were questioned at length about the recording of Hamilton's initial statement. James Mowat spoke first, claiming that Hamilton had asked him to take his deposition, but Mowat refused, because some of the accusations Hamilton wished to declare concerned him. Since both William and Patrick were present, he directed Patrick to record Hamilton's confession verbatim. Patrick and William disagreed vociferously, stating that William had not even been in the tolbooth, but at Christie Saddler's house. Patrick denied having recorded Hamilton's statement, and insisted that while he had been present for most of it, Mowat had sent him out to fetch ale on two occasions, leaving Mowat alone with the prisoner. When he came back Patrick saw 'James Mowat writing and Hamilton's lips going.' When Mowat finished the original deposition, William and Patrick stated that he had brought it to Christie Saddler's house, where he asked them to make five copies. Mowat obstinately repeated his own version of events several times, before finally admitting that he had lied. He then confessed that he had destroyed the original deposition and presented one of Patrick's in its place. The Lords ordered Mowat warded in the Edinburgh tolbooth at

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184 *RPC2*, iii, 361.

his own expense.<sup>185</sup>

That same day, the Council called for Home to present two of his servants, Alexander Home and Andrew Fraser.<sup>186</sup> They also issued a commission to Home to apprehend John Neil, a slightly puzzling choice since Hamilton had implicated Home in witness tampering.<sup>187</sup> On 12 January Home's servants appeared, and were ordered to remain in Edinburgh until given leave to depart.<sup>188</sup> Two days later Hamilton was re-examined and asked if his statement on 25 November had been true. He said that it was, but for one part. In November he had testified that Home had spoken to him saying 'Alexander, remember my servant Andrew spoke to you? If you keep your promise I'll do you good and be a father to your children.' Now, Hamilton denied that Home had said these things.<sup>189</sup> Perhaps the investigators had indicated their disbelief that Home had been involved in a conspiracy against Arnot. It may have been as difficult for them to imagine a knight falsely accusing his wife as it was to picture a noblewoman as a witch. Perhaps it was easier to believe that Mowat had committed the fraud against Lady Manderston alone.

On 19 January 1630 the examiners wanted yet more confirmation from Hamilton, this time asking about the activities of witches in Duns. He re-affirmed his testimony that John Smith and Katharine Wilson had plotted against Mowat, whom he said he had never met before the Sheriff Clerk examined him in Duns.<sup>190</sup> If the Council believed Mowat had encouraged Hamilton to produce false testimony, one would expect them to have viewed the accusation against Smith and Wilson as

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185 *RPC2*, iii, 397-400.

186 *RPC2*, iii, 400.

187 *RPC2*, iii, 400.

188 *RPC2*, iii, 405.

189 Robertson, 358; Hamilton-JC26/9/8.

190 Robertson, 360; Hamilton-JC26/9/10.

suspicious, yet they made little mention of the case. Despite Hamilton's widely divergent statements, the prosecution must have finally believed they had the truth from him, or at least as much as they ever would. They called for a jury to be formed, and tried Hamilton three days later, on 22 January 1630.

Considering the length of Hamilton's investigation, the multiplicity of documents produced during his frequent interrogations and the number of accomplices he named, his indictment was quite brief. It offered nothing that had not already appeared in the pre-trial records. Uniquely to Hamilton's trial, at least for this period in East Lothian, he made a statement before his indictment was read. He swore that he had never been induced to say any of the things that he had confessed, other than repeating the rumour about Lady Manderston that he had heard from John Neil. He reaffirmed his accusation against John Hogg and Margaret Nicholson, and stressed that no one had asked him to accuse them. He declared that Andrew Fraser and George Home had only encouraged him to make an honest confession.<sup>191</sup> After this statement, his indictment was read, and a verdict quickly reached. With his full confession no witnesses were needed, and there was no question of whether he would be convicted. He was sentenced to death.<sup>192</sup> While Hamilton's indictment simply lists a selection of his earlier confessions, it is the declaration before it was read that is illuminating. Why it was deemed necessary that he specifically exonerate Fraser and Home from having coached his confessions is a mystery, but it leaves the reader with the impression that Hamilton's protests that they never influenced him to lie is the best indication that they did.

If Home had in fact attempted to be rid of his wife by way of a conviction for

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191 Robertson, 361-2; Hamilton-JC26/9/14.

192 *SJCI*, 143-8.

witchcraft, he must have been quite disappointed that she was never even investigated. Instead, the Council imprisoned his accomplice in the fraud, James Mowat. Home's marital strife certainly was not reduced by the events surrounding Hamilton; he remained deeply in debt, and he was no closer to obtaining full control over Arnot's fortunes. Surprisingly, Home still managed to secure some advantage from the situation. He insisted that witches were working against him, and he needed the Privy Council's protection from his creditors, in order to properly investigate the crimes. He must have had a contact in the court, because the first request for this protection came in the form of a letter, dated 16 September 1629, from King Charles I. On 15 December the Council discussed the matter, and gave Home until 20 January 1630 to operate under their protection, free from the threat of being arrested due to his debts.<sup>193</sup> Considering the amount of time between when the letter was sent from court and when the Council acted upon it, it seems likely that Home's original letter to the King would have been sent several weeks before the reply was drafted. Home wasted little time after Hamilton's initial accusation on 14 July before moving to use the situation to secure protection from his creditors. Home continued to use his investigations to secure several extensions.<sup>194</sup>

His marriage continued to deteriorate, and the Council took an interest in assisting Arnot in recovering some of her lands, which Home had been withholding.<sup>195</sup> When Home requested the protection of the Council on 8 June 1630 they granted it on the condition that he relinquish the titles to Arnot's conjoint fee lands.<sup>196</sup> Home produced the writs as commanded, but it did little to improve the

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193 *RPC2*, iii, 381.

194 *RPC2*, iii, 397, 545.

195 Yeoman, 'Rich Witch', 113.

196 *RPC2*, iii, 560.

relationship.<sup>197</sup> Only a few weeks later, on 29 June 1630, Home was forced to swear that he would not harm his wife, her servants or tenants on the pain of £1000.<sup>198</sup> It certainly seemed that Home's efforts to harm his wife had gone awry. The Council may not have acted against Home but they were showing signs of sympathy for the lady. By early November 1630, Home again asked for protection because his wife had begun divorce proceedings against him while he was still seeking witches. The Lords granted his request.<sup>199</sup>

John Neil, the English charmer in Tweedmouth, occupied much of Home's investigatory efforts. Home had been granted a commission to apprehend Neil on 7 January 1630, but failed to do so. On 5 February 1630 a second commission was issued to George Haliburton of Pennikill.<sup>200</sup> Like Hamilton, the Council did not want Neil examined or tried locally, commanding that he be brought to Edinburgh.<sup>201</sup> Neil may not have been a vagabond, but he was certainly poor and unable to pay for his own maintenance in the Edinburgh tolbooth.<sup>202</sup> He never confessed, but rather made his own accusation on 26 May, when he claimed that Lady Samuelston was a witch, and had consulted with the devil to cause the death of her late husband.<sup>203</sup> This denunciation was being levelled at another female relative of George Home: Lady Samuelston was none other than Janet Home, his cousin. The Lords took the accusation seriously, at least showing an interest in questioning Janet. As Home was involved with Neil's prosecution, one is left wondering if Home orchestrated this accusation as well.

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197 *RPC2*, iii, 570.

198 *RPC2*, iii, 582.

199 *RPC2*, iv, 55.

200 *RPC2*, iii, 448.

201 *RPC2*, iii, 497.

202 *RPC2*, iii, 513.

203 *RPC2*, iii, 541.

Lady Samuelston appeared, as ordered, and was commanded to remain in Edinburgh for examination, under the penalty of 1000 merks.<sup>204</sup> It seems that Neil's testimony was ultimately found unconvincing, because no further proceedings appear to have been taken against her. Home's motivation continued to be a mystery until 6 December 1631, when Samuelston made a complaint against Home. She claimed that about a year previously, before she had re-married, Home had influenced her to make an assignation of her lands to his son. It seems that the arrangement was that his son would inherit her lands, but that during her lifetime she would continue to receive the rents. However, she alleged that Home had gone into her house in Berwick, while she was absent, and altered the documents so that she did not receive the rents and had no way to satisfy her creditors. She mentioned a case pending against Home for his actions, and asked for the Lords' protection from her creditors.<sup>205</sup> Thus it seems that Home may have used the accusation against her in an attempt to gain her fortune, while she was unmarried and vulnerable.<sup>206</sup> When the attempt failed, he seems to have settled for swindling her out of her rents.

Home was also involved in several other cases in the Duns area. On 29 June 1630 he presented the dittays against John Smith, Katharine Wilson and Alison Coline to the Privy Council.<sup>207</sup> Coline disappears from the records, but they show that Smith and Wilson appeared on 29 June and agreed to remain in Edinburgh or the Canongate under pain of 500 merks.<sup>208</sup> Home's interest in the case against Smith and Wilson, whom Hamilton had accused of attempting to kill James Mowat, is unknown. Perhaps he took a personal interest in the plot against his co-conspirator.

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204 *RPC2*, iii, 563.

205 *RPC2*, iv, 385.

206 Yeoman, 'Rich Witch', 113.

207 *RPC2*, iii, 571.

208 *RPC2*, iii, 582.

The prosecution against Neil was also continuing. The Privy Council issued orders on 4 November 1630 to landlords in Berwickshire to present any of their tenants who could bear witness against Neil and Ellie Nesbitt.<sup>209</sup> Nesbitt's connection to Neil cannot be determined, but she first appears in the records on 1 July 1630 when a commission was granted to the Sheriff of Berwick to exhibit her before the Council.<sup>210</sup> The investigation dragged on, and Neil's case finally went to trial on 26 March 1631, almost fifteen months after Home was given the commission to arrest him. On 10 March, the Privy Council charged a long list of witnesses to appear for Neil's trial, and commanded their lairds to ensure they complied with the summons.<sup>211</sup>

Neil's indictment revealed a man who had been operating as a charmer or cunning man for some time. The only acts of malefice he was accused of were against Sir George Home. Helen Arnot went unmentioned; instead, Neil was accused of having acted alone in placing the dead foal in Home's stable and the dead man's hand in his garden. In this version Home fell ill on both occasions, and was only cured when the bewitched objects were discovered and burned.<sup>212</sup> Neil was also accused of having attended a witch meeting and consulting the devil.

The bulk of his indictment was dedicated to his sixteen-year career as a charmer. Of the ten charges of curing, six involved him having transferred the disease from his patient to another individual. The remaining four accusations were of direct healing; no secondary victim was named.<sup>213</sup> There is no indication that Neil confessed, but he probably had an established reputation as a charmer. It is

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209 *RPC2*, iv, 56; Black, *Calendar*, 47.

210 *RPC2*, iii, 583-4; Black, *Calendar*, 47.

211 *RPC2*, iv, 164-5; Black, *Calendar*, 48.

212 *SJCI*, 170.

213 *SJCI*, 169-70.

noteworthy how many times he was accused of having transferred the disease, rather than truly curing it. On several occasions individuals within the patient's family became the victims, and one wonders why his services continued to be in such demand. No matter how baffling it might be that such a healer could operate for sixteen years, with the bodies piling up, the jury must have been convinced by the testimony against him. He was convicted, and on 2 April 1631, sentenced to death.<sup>214</sup>

Home had certainly used Neil's investigation in order to maintain an almost unbroken chain of Council protection orders. Home did not end his requests for Council protection with Neil's execution, still insisting that there were more witches working to destroy him. However, the Council seemed unwilling to provide further protection for his witch-hunting activities.<sup>215</sup> Between 15 December 1629 and 31 March 1631, a period of just over fifteen months, he had managed to spend eleven months under the Council's protection. His creditors protested. A fragment of a letter, which must have been penned after 26 March 1631, appears in the Privy Council Papers in which Home answered his creditors' complaints about the unending protection. He referred to the commission to arrest John Neil, and his success in securing Neil's execution, as well as the execution of Alexander Hamilton. Home insisted that he was doing important work for king and country by seeking out these criminals. He said that some of his creditors, at least those who were his enemies, had complained about the protection granted to him. He countered their statements by accusing those who protested of being Neil's accomplices. He insisted that there could be no barrier to him seeking justice.<sup>216</sup> This suggests that Home

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214 *SJCI*, 171.

215 *RPC2*, iv, 316.

216 Privy Council Papers number 222, *RPC2*, iv, 677.

continued to seek protection to pursue his investigations. However, since no entries appear in the Register of the Privy Council, his requests may have been being rejected.

**Figure 1**

*Sir George Home's Protection Requests*<sup>217</sup>

Date of request	Protection granted until
15 December 1629	20 January 1630
7 January 1630	20 February 1630
8 June 1630	1 August 1630
27 July 1630	1 September 1630
10 August 1630	1 November 1630
4 November 1630	10 December 1630
2 December 1630	31 December 1630
21 December 1630	2 February 1631
1 February 1631	31 March 1631

Home escaped any punishment for his role in eliciting Hamilton's fabricated testimony, and had actually turned the situation to his benefit. James Mowat had not fared as well; the Council imprisoned him on 7 January 1630, for his part in influencing Hamilton's deposition. He did not remain in ward for long, however, and was released on 9 February when he proved that he had found caution to reappear within fifteen days when summoned.<sup>218</sup> They recalled him about a month later, but he flouted his agreement.<sup>219</sup> On 6 July 1630 he finally revealed his excuse for disobeying the Council. He explained that his debts prevented him from leaving home. The Lords grudgingly granted him two brief protection orders, but he still did not appear.<sup>220</sup> Eventually, he complied, most likely in late September 1630, because

217 *RPC2*, iii, 381, 397, 560, 622; *RPC2*, iv, 15, 55, 80, 98, 131.

218 *RPC2*, iii, 452.

219 *RPC2*, iii, 475, 483, 494.

220 *RPC2*, iii, 592, 605.

on 2 December he wrote to the Council asking to be released from ward, where he said he had been kept for ten weeks due to the matter regarding Hamilton's deposition. The Lords agreed, freeing him and even discharging his bond of caution, which must have been a great relief to his cautioner, Roger Mowat.<sup>221</sup>

The Lords had not lost interest in his crime, however, and on 2 June 1631 they noted that his crime required further investigation and perhaps punishment. They called for James Mowat and Patrick Abernethy to appear for questioning.<sup>222</sup> On 21 June Mowat complied, promising that he would appear again when commanded on the pain of 2000 merks.<sup>223</sup> Perhaps his speedy compliance was evidence that he had learned greater respect for the Council's authority after his previous impudence. Though the Council recorded no more regarding the continuing investigation, Mowat found himself in even greater trouble shortly thereafter.

Sir George Home had investigated John Smith, Katharine Wilson and Alison Coline, presenting their dittays to the Privy Council on 22 June 1630. While the suspects had been summoned and required to find caution, no commission for their trial had appeared in the records. Nevertheless, it seems the investigation and persecution continued. On 5 July 1631 Katharine Wilson wrote to the Council, on behalf of herself and John Smith, complaining about Mowat. The two suspects, whom Hamilton had accused of attempting to kill Mowat by raising a flood, declared that the former Sheriff Clerk of Berwick had falsely accused them.<sup>224</sup> The tale they told of his persecution was shocking. Mowat had convinced James Home in Duns to testify against them prior to his execution for murder. However, just before his

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221 *RPC2*, iv, 79.

222 *RPC2*, iv, 219-20.

223 *RPC2*, iv, 242.

224 *RPC2*, iv, 265.

execution James had confessed before several ministers that his deposition had been slanderous. He admitted that it was Mowat who had convinced him to make the accusation. Wilson claimed that Mowat had convinced four other men to produce similarly dishonest testimony against them. Furthermore, he had written dittays in the names of six further individuals, without their knowledge or consent.<sup>225</sup> It is hard to imagine that Mowat truly believed that such deception would go unnoticed, as surviving witnesses were regularly summoned to ratify their statements at trial. These people, each professing that they had not made the statement, would have revealed his fraud.

Mowat swore that he had never asked James Home to lie, but unsurprisingly the Lords were unconvinced. They found him guilty of writing dittays without the knowledge of those to whom they were ascribed and also of eliciting false testimony by assuring those who agreed that they would never be challenged regarding the statement's truthfulness. They declared that he had persecuted Wilson—though they probably meant both complainers—and ordered him to be warded in the Edinburgh tolbooth, pending punishment.<sup>226</sup> The case against Wilson and Smith disappears from the records, likely meaning the investigation, which seemed to have been carried out solely by Mowat, was dropped. Even Hamilton's original denunciation would have been called into doubt. Mowat's punishment from the Council remains a mystery, but considering that he had tampered with many depositions and been party to the slandering of at least three people, it may have been severe. His word, or that of anyone he might have influenced, would be quickly discounted as unreliable, which at least should have protected his other enemies.

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225 *RPC2*, iv, 265-6.

226 *RPC2*, iv, 266-7.

## Chapter 6

### Witch-Hunting in Decline

Whilst it is hardly surprising that the Council did not trust Mowat, by the time Smith and Wilson's complaint was made the Privy Council already appeared to be increasingly reluctant to grant commissions. The 8 July 1630 commission to try only John Finnick, who had been investigated with six others, suggests that the Privy Council rejected the evidence gathered against the other defenders. Perhaps the Lords were already questioning whether commissions were being granted too freely, since they did not issue another for eight months.<sup>227</sup> There is evidence that some segments of society exerted pressure to continue the hunt. On 8 March 1631, the bailies of Carrick successfully obtained the first commission since Finnick's, giving them permission to try Marion Simson.<sup>228</sup> Another commission was purchased on 26 July 1631 by Sir John Sinclair, Patrick Abernethy and George Pringle, the chamberlain to the Earl of Haddington, to try Christian Paterson from Hermiston.<sup>229</sup> Acting quickly, they tried Paterson on 9 August. She was charged with several acts of malefice, and noted to be able to both inflict and remove disease.<sup>230</sup> On 21 September her commissioners wrote to the Privy Council, summarising her conviction and requesting orders. The Lords declared that Paterson should be executed in Haddington.<sup>231</sup>

The Tynninghame Kirk Session was still considering witchcraft cases, but showing signs of scepticism. Between late November 1631 and late January 1632 they mediated John and Robert Ewart's dispute with Alison Fowler and Jean Rae.

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227 See Appendix 3, page 118-19, for the timeline of events.

228 *MiscXIII*, 242.

229 *MiscXIII*, 243-4.

230 Robertson, 196-7; HBCR.

231 *RPC2*, iv, 334-5; Black, *Calendar*, 48.

The men had accused Fowler of slandering Alexander Jackson, a man who had recently drowned, and of predicting that John would die in a similar fashion. Rae was essentially accused of showing no compassion when George Ewart, John's brother and Robert's son, died. The case revolved around attempting to determine just what each woman said, by calling all those present when the alleged offences had been committed. Unable to determine the women's precise words, the kirk session asked the presbytery for advice.<sup>232</sup> The presbytery replied that if John and Robert could prove their accusations then the investigation should continue, and the presbytery would examine the witnesses. If they failed to prove their case, however, they should be expected to compensate Fowler. The two men conceded that they could only prove their allegations through a child's testimony, which was inadmissible. Therefore, the minister summoned the complainers and defenders so the matter could be resolved, encouraging them to 'love as became neighbours and Christians'.<sup>233</sup> While the outcome in this case sounds quite amiable, such outward shows of fellowship may have masked continuing feuds. Nevertheless, the Tynninghame Kirk Session showed itself to be more motivated to mend relationships than prosecute an alleged witch.

Further evidence for the growth of this moderate opinion within the kirk sessions can be seen in 1632. The Kirk Session of Aberlady ordered Francis Elphinstone to appear on 2 February, because his wife, Elspeth Meek, had been accused of witchcraft, and the couple had been living in the parish for three years without obtaining a testimonial from Tranent, their previous parish.<sup>234</sup> A week later

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232 Robertson, 136-7; Tynninghame-KSM.

233 Robertson, 137-8; Tynninghame-KSM.

234 Robertson, 67; Aberlady-KSM.

he presented the testimonial, which seemed to satisfy the kirk session that Meek was innocent. They ordered Robert Douglas to appear for having slandered her.<sup>235</sup> He was ordered to ask her forgiveness for having blamed her for his illness. Moreover, he was publicly rebuked for having begged Meek, whom he believed to be a witch and thus the devil's servant, for his health.<sup>236</sup> On 8 April 1632, Meg Barker appeared before the Yester Kirk Session, accused of slandering her neighbours by charging them with witchcraft.<sup>237</sup> On 28 April two more women, Meg Hunter and Patrick Harlaw's wife, were similarly charged with slandering John Merkhous.<sup>238</sup> In these cases it seems that the common people were still intent on solving their local disputes through witchcraft accusations. Robin Briggs argues that witch-hunting was characterised by community denunciations, as seen in these slander cases.<sup>239</sup> However, his model, where elites participated in prosecutions primarily as a response to peasant demands, does little to explain interrogators' interest in seeking out accomplices, nor can it account for the decreased willingness among kirk sessions to pursue investigations raised at the village level.

The Privy Council joined the kirk sessions by showing a tendency to punish accusers. On 23 February 1632 they discussed James Balfour, a witch pricker. They concluded that he was abusing simple, ignorant people for his own benefit, and declared his knowledge unlawful. He was ordered to cease the practice, or be punished.<sup>240</sup>

Only one woman, Isobel Durie, was tried by commission in East Lothian

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235 Robertson, 67; Aberlady-KSM.

236 Robertson, 67; Aberlady-KSM.

237 Robertson, 145; Yester-KSM.

238 Robertson, 145; Yester-KSM.

239 Robin Briggs, *Neighbours & Witches: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London, 1996), 338.

240 *RPC2*, iv, 432-3.

during 1632.<sup>241</sup> It seems the peak in witch-hunting had truly ended. The unwillingness of kirk sessions and the Privy Council to believe accusations of witchcraft showed a departure from the fervour in witch-hunting that began in the second half of 1628 and produced investigations that lasted into 1631, when the final cases of the serial hunt were concluded. This study, which has traced the progression of an intense witch-hunt in East Lothian from its inception to its end, offers us insight into the larger topic of Scottish witch-hunting in several ways. Within the many records left by those who were accused, investigated, tried and executed is a wealth of information that can be used to support or refute several of the important arguments within the discipline.

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241 *MiscXIII*, 248.

## Conclusion

There are many topics being debated within the larger study of early modern witchcraft prosecution, as well as more specifically in Scotland. While there is no guarantee that the trends observed in East Lothian between 1628 and 1631 were typical for hunting in other areas or during other times, the evidence gathered from this regional study can offer insight and direct comment on theories of witchcraft persecution. Several topics for brief discussion have been selected.

### Elite vs. Popular Belief

Most scholars of early modern witchcraft have concluded that the concept of the witch held by the common people was different to that of the secular or religious elites. Brian Levack's cumulative concept of witchcraft is an excellent description of learned ideas about the activities of witches. Elites tended to focus on the pact with the devil as the central act which made an individual guilty of witchcraft, while the common people were more concerned with a witch's malefic powers. H.C. Erik Midelfort's study of southwest Germany led him to conclude that it was the choice to define the crime of witchcraft as making a pact with the devil, rather than causing actual harm, that made mass hunts possible.<sup>242</sup>

This appears to have been the case in East Lothian as well. Most witches who did not confess were charged with various acts of malefice, based on their neighbours' testimony. Their indictments also included a stock list of demonological crimes, which were not based upon any of the witness statements. These activities appear to have been included by the elites penning the documents. In trials where

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242 H.C. Erik Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1652-1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford, Calif, 1972), 117.

demonic activities were described, but the suspect had not implicated themselves, it was usually the testimony of a confessed witch that injected such elite concepts into the proceedings. The inquisitorial search for accomplices ensured that many of the suspects within the serial hunt were not denounced by their communities, but by confessing witches who were influenced by their elite interrogators. As both Lizanne Henderson and Brian Levack have noted, it was the intervention of learned prosecutors that accounted for the demonological aspects found in indictments.<sup>243</sup> This indicates that peasants thought a witch's behaviour centred on causing harm, and were not particularly concerned about the apostasy of the pact. That did not mean that they were unaware of elite beliefs, since confessing witches were able to produce stories that satisfied their elite examiners, but there is no way to determine how many of the crucial details might have been suggested to the prisoner through leading questions.

### **Fairies, Familiars and the Devil**

There are surprisingly few mentions of fairy belief in the East Lothian cases. Nevertheless, Sara Keith's tale about a changeling child left by Satan when he spirited her own son away appears to be an integration of fairy belief into the concept of the devil. It is perhaps not surprising that fairies were not actually mentioned in the story, for the elite examiners who produced the record were likely to believe that fairies were demons. Perhaps Keith attributed the changeling to the fairies, but the account was modified by the one writing her deposition. Another possibility was that Keith, who had already confessed to having made a pact with Satan, simply

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243 Lizanne Henderson 'Witch Hunting and Witch Belief in the *Gàidhealtachd*', in Goodare *et al.* (eds.), *Witchcraft and Belief*, 95-118, at 100; Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland*, 24.

integrated such traditional fairy beliefs into her concept of the devil.

Evidence for Scottish belief in witches' familiars is also very scarce, with only a single instance for the period. Sinclair's bee can confidently be called a familiar, since it was a gift from the devil and was fed on blood, but it does not conform to the more learned concept of the familiar, which is eloquently described by Emma Wilby. The bee displayed no magical properties, was not noted to have spoken to Sinclair or to have performed any magic. Furthermore, it was not the familiar with whom Sinclair made a pact, but the devil himself.<sup>244</sup> Perhaps this simpler witch's companion was another example of common people attempting to satisfy elite demands for testimony beyond malefice.

The devil, as described in the cases within this study, conforms to the one described by Joyce Miller. He is described in quite mundane terms, and does not reflect more elite images of a horned, winged beast. He typically appeared as a man, who was sometimes noted to look grim or ill-favoured, and at other times to be fine. He was almost always dressed in black, but sometimes wore a hat, carried a wand or was mounted on a black horse.<sup>245</sup> At other times he materialised as an animal, but again it was usually domesticated and unimpressive species that he chose.<sup>246</sup> He was commonly described as a crow, dog, cat or foal, but never as anything more frightening or impressive. Elites seemed content to accept this description, and Miller posits that they rationalised the departure from their elite concept of a more monstrous devil by reasoning that as the master of disguise Satan would be even more dangerous if not immediately identifiable.<sup>247</sup>

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244 Wilby, *Cunning Folk*, 94, 107.

245 Joyce Miller, 'Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse', in Goodare *et al.* (eds.), *Witchcraft and Belief*, 144-65, at 144-5, 151.

246 Miller, 'Men in Black', 153-4.

247 Miller, 'Men in Black', 149, 159-60.

Alexander Hamilton described the devil's human form in several ways, at one point stating that he appeared as a black man dressed in black. The phrase 'black man' continues to spark some debate, as it could be interpreted to mean that the devil looked like a man with black hair, a man with black skin, or a man wearing black clothing.<sup>248</sup> Hamilton's description would have been repetitive if 'black man' was meant to describe the devil's attire, and if it was intended to indicate that he had black skin, it would be inconsistent with the otherwise mundane description. Thus it seems most likely to be a description of his hair colour.

### **The Roles of Secular and Religious Authorities**

This regional study supports the conclusion that neither overly-zealous ministers nor crusading landowners and sheriffs can be blamed for the trials during the period. Both religious and secular authorities played a role in the witch-hunt, which was very much dependent on the interest of societal elites, rather than acquiescence to peasant demands for trials.<sup>249</sup> Kirk sessions sometimes began investigations before passing the suspects on to secular authorities for trial. The Yester Kirk Session threatened to report Andrew Matheson to the secular courts if he did not heed their warning to stop charming, though since his was not a capital crime, in this instance they may have been bluffing. When applying for a commission to try Katharine Oswald, her prosecutors noted that her case had been before the Niddrie Kirk Session for ten weeks. Presbyteries sometimes carried out entire investigations, only relinquishing control when secular authorities were appointed to try the suspects. The Presbytery of Dalkeith made several requests throughout the period

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248 Miller, 'Men in Black', 149.

249 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 1, 19, 27.

for additional powers to assist in their investigations, and the Presbytery of Haddington were granted similarly enhanced authority during their examination of the large group of women whom Hamilton named. Once their investigations were completed, these women were tried by a commission granted to local landowners. Such gentlemen, as well as local ministers, regularly sought commissions to carry out examinations on their own.

Both religious and secular authorities helped to press investigations forward by ensuring potential witnesses testified, and then appeared at the subsequent trial. The Presbytery of Haddington exerted their influence by calling for witnesses from the pulpit. During John Neil's trial landlords were ordered to present certain tenants who were sought for their testimony. Such efforts were not always necessary, and neighbourhood charges of malefice were plentiful, especially when a suspect had an established reputation. For those who did not, the authorities seemed to have no qualms about pressuring potential witnesses.

Several gentlemen were particularly prolific witch-hunters during the period, often working with other frequent commissioners: Patrick Hamilton, who was a minister, Samuel Johnston, Sir John Hamilton and Robert Cass. It seems that religious and secular authorities shared many responsibilities in the investigation of witchcraft. Their combined role was providing the pressure to continue trying suspects after the initial accusations of malefice ran out, even if it required extracting names from those who confessed and inciting their tenants and congregations to produce accusations.

## Torture

The use of torture has generally been considered a key element in the Scottish witch-hunt, and a defining difference between Scottish and English trials. Of course, the definition of what constitutes torture is one which is still being debated.<sup>250</sup> Stuart Macdonald, in his study of Fife, concludes that he could find no evidence for the use of judicial torture.<sup>251</sup> This is not all that surprising, since suspects could only be legally tortured if the Privy Council approved, and since Levack only found two instances where the Council granted such powers between 1590 and 1689, most torture would have been performed illegally.<sup>252</sup> Macdonald concurs that most torture was illegal, because the confessions which he suspects had been extracted through torture, were generally obtained *before* a commission was sought.<sup>253</sup> The Privy Council's requirement for proof, preferably in the form of a confession, before a commission would be granted was well meaning, but probably served to encourage torture, rather than to eliminate injustice.<sup>254</sup> Evidence for illegal torture could scarcely be expected, since anyone utilising such techniques would be unlikely to create a record of their disregard for the law. Levack claims that the Council took action against torturers who acted without permission on several occasions, but it seems likely that they did not expend much energy in seeking them out, and those who operated quietly were able to do so without fear of reprimand.<sup>255</sup>

A few cases of sleep deprivation, pricking for the devil's mark, or inhumane

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250 Macdonald, 'Torture', 96-7. Macdonald defines judicial torture as interrogation techniques which relied upon causing pain or the fear of future pain to extract confessions, within the established legal process.

251 Macdonald, *Fife*, 127.

252 Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland*, 22.

253 Macdonald, *Fife*, 95; Macdonald, 'Torture', 104, 108.

254 Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland*, 107.

255 Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland*, 23.

treatment in prison can be observed in the East Lothian records, but these are not strictly torture. Katharine Oswald was pricked for the devil's mark. Isobel Young was certainly searched for it, but since her mark was visible she may have escaped the painful process. Sara Keith confessed to bearing Satan's mark on her elbow, but the documents do not reveal if she was pricked either before or after she made this declaration. Anna Cordey argues that pricking sometimes elicited a confession, but there is no way to be sure if Keith's is an example of this occurrence.<sup>256</sup> Margaret Jo, Janet Hardie and Janet Barclay all complained about cruel treatment by their warders, saying that they were kept in stocks and irons. Alexander Hamilton testified that he had been placed in irons as punishment when he initially refused to cooperate with Sir George Home. Many of the suspects were probably deprived of sleep, but the only evidence for this practice was Margaret Jo's complaint that her family was denied access to her. Macdonald posits that such isolation of the suspect was a sign that 'waking' was taking place.<sup>257</sup>

Reason suggests that most confessions were not offered freely. One is unlikely to confess to activities that carry a death sentence—such as signing a pact with the devil, which we now consider impossible—without some form of coercion. Even accounting for genuine efforts to heal or curse, and delusional or frankly suicidal individuals, most of those who confessed must have been influenced by leading questions, sleep deprivation, intimidation or the application of pain.

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256 Anna L. Cordey, 'Witch-hunting in the Presbytery of Dalkeith, 1649 to 1662' (University of Edinburgh MSc by Research thesis, 2003), 60-1.

257 Macdonald, 'Torture', 102.

## The Witch Stereotype

Early modern peasants, elites and theologians all primarily imagined witches to be predominantly poor, old and female.<sup>258</sup> The argument has often been made that this archetype was strictly adhered to until periods of intense hunting occurred. Then, suspects became less likely to conform to the typical standard. Midelfort concluded that the status of those accused rose gradually over time, as confessing witches implicated their social superiors.<sup>259</sup> The situation in East Lothian appears to have generally followed a similar pattern, but caution should be taken in making too broad a generalisation. Since most suspects appear only in commissions or the descriptions of those who confessed, the vast majority of those accused in East Lothian remain of indeterminate social status. Very high status individuals are more easily identified, as in the cases of Lady Manderston and Lady Samuelston, but since most suspects were noted to have lived 'in', rather than being 'of', their place of residence, very few enjoyed such standing. Nevertheless, an upward trend in status can be observed.

Margaret Muirhead, a vagabond and the first who can be connected to the serial hunt, fits the stereotype well. She accused William Davidson, who at least had a home, but was still quite poor. He kept the company of Sara Keith and Bessie Mak, both of whom were beggars—a relationship which would have been unlikely had he been of higher status. He also accused Alexander Sinclair and Alexander Hamilton, two more vagabonds. Alison Taylor and Thomas Waterson were of indeterminate status, though Waterson enjoyed more respect, as his promise that he would cooperate with the investigation was accepted. Thus, of these eight early

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258 Larner, *Enemies of God*, 89.

259 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 91.

suspects within the serial hunt, six can be said to have been of low or very low status.<sup>260</sup> Higher status individuals began to appear in July 1629, almost a year after Muirhead came under investigation. Helen Arnot was the most obvious example of the rising status of those named, but it must be remembered that the Privy Council never took the accusation against her seriously, other than as a case of slander or fraud. The growing number of middling status suspects offers a better example of the decay of the witch stereotype. Bessie Hepburn, the wife of a constable, was able to secure her release when her son became her cautioner for 3000 merks—a clear indication that they were far from impoverished. John Hogg and Margaret Nicholson, who owned a large house, also secured a hefty sum for their caution, 1000 merks. Isobel Young, while certainly fitting the stereotype as far as her personality and community relations, was definitely of middling status, since so many of her disputes revolved around the purchase or lease of land. There does seem to have been a general trend from vagabonds and beggars toward more middling suspects. However, with no data for so many of the accused, it is difficult to declare with confidence that this progression was accurate for the entire body of suspects.

Male witches also present a departure from the traditional stereotype. Most individual or group cases that cannot be connected to the serial hunt were primarily against women. Even within the main serial hunt a large majority of those named were female (seventy-five per cent female, twenty-five per cent male). When individual East Lothian suspects are added to the figures an even greater proportion

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260 The prevalence of vagabonds in the initial stages of the East Lothian hunt appears to be at odds with Julian Goodare's argument that while poor and old, witches were generally settled and a part of the community. Goodare, 'Women', 290.

of women is observed (eighty-one per cent female, nineteen per cent male). Goodare argues that the proportion of men decreased during Scottish peak periods, 'falling from 19.4 per cent (non-panic periods) to 10.7 per cent.'<sup>261</sup> Serial hunts may have matched Midelfort's model more closely, as an increase of six per cent over Goodare's non-peak, and this study's peak, figure can be calculated. When the denunciation of accomplices became common, men may have been at greater risk of being accused. Some of the most important individuals within the serial hunt were men, and they appeared early in its development. William Davidson was the second suspect investigated, and named at least seven more witches, of whom three were male. Alexander Hamilton was probably the most important figure in the serial hunt, and certainly named the most accomplices. However, of the forty-one individuals against whom he testified, there were only five men.<sup>262</sup> Lara Apps and Andrew Gow have campaigned against scholarly assumptions that men were accused of different crimes than their female counterparts.<sup>263</sup> Undoubtedly, one of those to whom they refer is Midelfort, who made exactly that argument in his study on southwest Germany.<sup>264</sup> This study offers further evidence for Apps' and Gow's contention that this is a fallacy. In East Lothian, male witches were mostly accused of the same types of crimes as female witches: causing disease in livestock and humans, destroying harvested grain, financial destruction of their enemies, curing or transferring disease, meeting with the devil, renouncing their baptisms and making a pact. Midelfort argued that it was women, not men, who were drawn to the devil by

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261 Goodare, 'Women', 291.

262 This may lend support to Goodare's explanation that men did not feature as prominently in Scottish serial hunts as they did in Germany because they never reached the level of intensity of those studied by Midelfort. Goodare, 'Women', 291.

263 Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2003), 29.

264 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 95.

promises of money.<sup>265</sup> This is also inconsistent with events in East Lothian, where confessing witches of both sexes stated that the devil plied them with financial promises. William Davidson stated that the devil promised him that he would 'want for nothing' and Alexander Hamilton was the only witch to actually say he received money from the devil (in this case real coinage, which did not transform into something useless later). One behaviour was restricted to male witches, or at least to Hamilton specifically; he was the only sorcerer noted to have the power to summon and dismiss his master. The activity that seemed reserved to female witches was sexual congress with the devil.<sup>266</sup> Sara Keith confessed to this, and Hamilton referred to several instances of women copulating with their master. Sexual activity was an integral part of the theological concept of the witches' sabbath, but surprisingly few confessions included mention of such behaviour.

### **The Cynical Accuser**

As a student in the field, one is often warned not to assume that accusations were lodged purely for personal gain. We are reminded that those who were offering testimony genuinely believed in the power of Satan and the reality of witches in their midst. However, belief in the possibility of a crime does not preclude cynical abuse of the legal system. Modern society has no doubts about the reality of murder, but accusations of the crime are not always made honestly. Individuals have certainly blamed their enemies for a crime, of which they know them to be innocent, in the hopes of destroying them. Such reasoning raises the possibility that Sir George Home orchestrated the accusations made against his wife and cousin, without

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265 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 92.

266 Goodare, 'Women', 304.

needing to actually believe that they were practising witchcraft. This does not preclude his belief in the reality of witchcraft, and after hearing about Hamilton's alleged crimes, he undoubtedly believed that Hamilton was genuinely guilty. This may have been why he chose Hamilton to deliver the accusation, since he knew that the word of a confessing witch carried great weight in the courts. We can never truly know Home's motivation, since he did not record his reasons for interfering with Hamilton's deposition, but there is no reason to dismiss the possibility that he cynically and selfishly attempted to use the legal system and the fear of witchcraft for his own benefit.

### **Why did the Witch-Hunt Peak and Decline?**

Brian Levack has noted the dichotomy between central and local control of trials in Scotland, where the Privy Council managed trials by granting commissions. Investigations and trials were then concluded locally, once authority had been obtained. Furthermore, most accusations originated locally, either through charges of malefice within the community or denunciation as an accomplice.<sup>267</sup> However, some confessing witches named collaborators from farther afield. Margaret Muirhead denounced William Davidson, a man in a different presbytery, and Alexander Hamilton accused John Neil, a resident of England. Midelfort argues that it was the changing legal system in Germany, where the state took up the role as prosecutor, meaning that there no longer needed to be a specific complainer, that allowed mass hunts to develop.<sup>268</sup> The commissions system in Scotland may have had a similar effect, by allowing concerned elites, who rarely claimed to be the victims of

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267 Levack, *Witch-hunting in Scotland*, 101, 102, 104, 106-7.

268 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 68-9.

witchcraft themselves, to press for prosecutions. These men had the money to seek legal solutions that were beyond the means of peasant victims.

Most of the hunts that Midelfort studied were serial in nature, based primarily on the denunciation of accomplices under torture. He concludes that the most important concept which allowed this form of accomplice-focused hunt was that of the witches' sabbath. It was at these meetings that suspects met accomplices from neighbouring or quite distant villages. This explains the phenomenon wherein a serial hunt migrated, spreading into new territories like a contagion.<sup>269</sup> This was certainly true for the East Lothian serial hunt, where a distinct eastward advance can be observed.

In a hunt based primarily on the discovery of witches through the denunciation of accomplices, defence advocates commonly attempted to employ the argument that witches were untrustworthy, and would accuse the innocent. Despite the logic within this argument, it was rarely successful in convincing judges to dismiss a case. Midelfort's study reveals a possible reason for the failure of this defence in early modern courts. He concludes that a confessing suspect was believed to be making true statements, because the examiners believed that only a guilty person would have the knowledge about witchcraft to recount such stories. That anyone would be able to fabricate a tale that conformed to their conceptions of witchcraft in order to avoid torture was simply inconceivable.<sup>270</sup>

Midelfort declares that hunts were sparked by hardships, such as famine, plague or the fear of war, but also by a mood in the community that remains a

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269 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 89, 106.

270 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 142.

difficult element to quantify.<sup>271</sup> They ended when a 'crisis of confidence' affected magistrates who realised that innocents were becoming caught up in the serial hunt. They did not cease to believe in the possibility of witchcraft, but faltered in their faith that the legal system was delivering justice.<sup>272</sup> When this occurred, they began to treat accusations as slander.<sup>273</sup> This would mean that serial hunts were, to some degree, self regulating. They grew as fear of a conspiracy developed, but when the accusations began to spread to segments of the population that were rarely seen as potential witches, or when so many were being executed that there was concern that a community might be obliterated, scepticism began to develop in the minds of officials. By the second half of 1630 this uncertainty seems to have been growing in East Lothian, despite the relatively small hunt that occurred there when compared with those in southwest Germany. Kirk sessions began to show a much greater propensity for punishing slander than witchcraft. The Privy Council granted fewer commissions, and the only slander case that appeared before the Lords during the period occurred in 1631.

Lizanne Henderson concludes that it was the scepticism of secular authorities that interfered with the religious establishment's continued interest in prosecution.<sup>274</sup> In East Lothian, this did not appear to be the case. However, an excellent example occurred in Leith in 1632, when Helen Hamilton was tried by commission, after being named by a confessing witch, but was acquitted. She later complained that Mr David Forrester, a minister in Leith who had been instrumental in her prosecution and had been ordered to stop torturing her during the investigation, was continuing to

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271 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 121-2, 124.

272 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 143.

273 Midelfort, *Southwestern Germany*, 81.

274 Lizanne Henderson, 'The Survival of Witchcraft Prosecutions and Witch Belief in South-West Scotland' *Scottish Historical Review*, 85:1 (2006), 52-74, at 65.

harass her. She said that she could find nowhere to live, because he had poisoned the community against her, so she had moved to Prestonpans, where she had been born and still had family residing. She encountered the same problem there. Forrester had contacted Mr John Ker, the minister in Prestonpans, and enlisted his help in making her life miserable, even though she had been found innocent of the charges against her. She complained that he did not intend to allow her to settle anywhere in the country, and the Privy Council moved to defend her, ordering both ministers to allow her to live in peace.<sup>275</sup>

### **Why Should Studies of this Peak consider the years 1628 and 1631?**

In order to observe the complete arc of the development and decline of this witch-hunt, neither 1628 nor 1631 can be dismissed. During the second half of 1628 a growing number of individual and group trials could be observed, and the first cases of the serial hunt were prosecuted.<sup>276</sup> The hunt then moved into a two year peak, where many individuals were accused, before the numbers dropped during 1631.<sup>277</sup> The year 1631 saw the conclusion of the final cases of the serial hunt, and all of the evidence for growing scepticism among the kirk sessions and Privy Council was observed during late 1630-2. While few individuals were newly accused in 1631, it is important to consider this year, as it shows the decline in hunting.

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275 *RPC2*, iv, 435, 436-7, 441, 481-2.

276 Of the seventy-two suspects listed by the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft in 1628, thirty-six are from East Lothian. When compared with 1627, when East Lothian produced only one, a peak can be seen to form. Since most investigations during 1628 began in the second half of the year, this accounts for the smaller number of cases than in 1629 or 1630.

277 The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft lists only one new suspect in East Lothian during 1631, which would indicate that the peak period had ended. However, studies that do not investigate records for 1631 will fail to follow the serial hunt, which had played out in East Lothian, but was concluding in Berwickshire. The fates of several important figures, such as John Neil, John Smith, Katharine Wilson, Sir George Home and James Mowat can only be determined by considering events during 1631.

## Should Studies Focus on the Local or Regional Level?

Lauren Martin has responded to the concept of national panics by advocating a much more localised focus to studies, in an effort to determine how widespread were peak hunts. Her model considers hunting at the parish level, so that the origins of those accused can be catalogued.<sup>278</sup> Despite the size of some parishes, her model may still shift the focus too far towards the local level. It risks losing the perspective allowed by regional studies, which focus on one or more counties, to observe how accusations, especially in serial hunts, often originated in villages other than where the new suspect lived. Accusations crossed presbytery, county and even national boundaries; historians must take care that they do not limit their investigations in such a way that these events cannot be traced.<sup>279</sup> While each parish may only have provided a few suspects, the impact of confessing witches, who often accused those in neighbouring or even distant villages, would be under-emphasised. One of her criticisms of the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft is that it is unable to trace when the motivation to investigate a suspect arose outside the local parish.<sup>280</sup> However, through its listing of related suspects it can often trace when an accusation originated from outside the locality. These are generally people living in a different village, or even vagabonds, like Margaret Muirhead or Alexander Hamilton, who cannot be assigned to a single parish. In her model, one wonders how these transients, who in this study played a key role, would be counted at all. Travel in seventeenth-century Scotland was quite common, and villagers' associations were not limited to their

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278 Martin, 'Panics Re-examined', 137.

279 Stuart Macdonald concludes that hunts rarely crossed presbytery borders. Macdonald, *Fife*, 33. However, in this study, three presbyteries: Dalkeith, Haddington and Duns played a major role. Thus a more flexible focus, that could expand with the serial hunt, had to be adopted. There must be limits to any study, but they should fit the data, rather than constraining and possibly obscuring them.

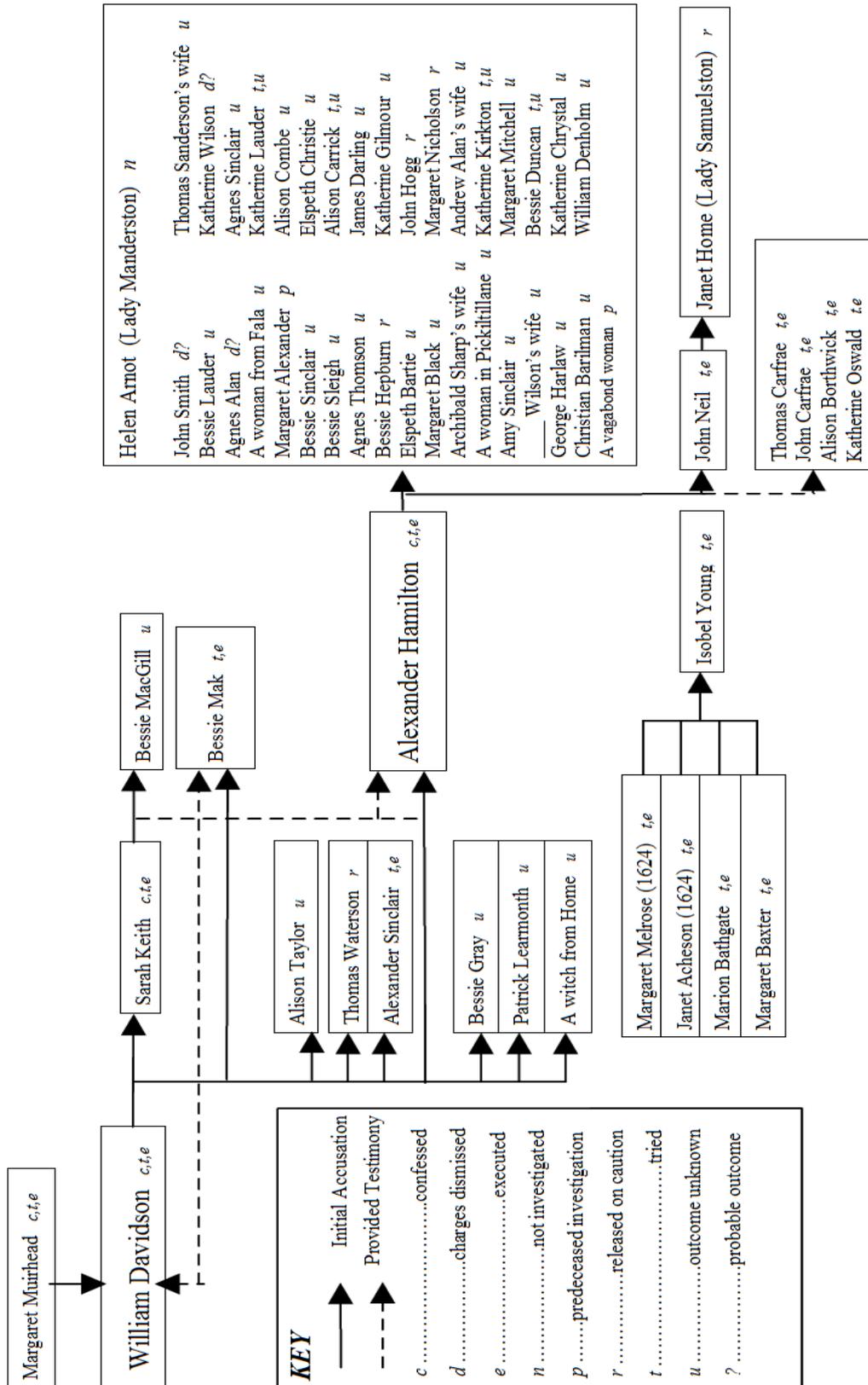
280 Martin, 'Panics Re-examined', 138.

local parish. Regional studies allow one to see how many suspects came from any given parish, thus avoiding the overstating that peaks included the entire nation, or even an entire county or presbytery, without losing sight of the movements of people, and the spread of hunts through non-local accusation. Hopefully additional regional studies into this oft overlooked period of Scottish witch-hunting will continue to increase our knowledge of mid-hunt peaks.

## **Appendix 1**

### **East Lothian Serial Hunts, 1628-1631**

# East Lothian Serial Hunts, 1628-1631



**Appendix 2**  
**List of Suspects**

**Acheson, Janet** – From Dunbar, tried on 9 April 1624, confessed, convicted, executed. Accused Isobel Young.

**Alan, Agnes** – From Saltoun, investigated, probably released, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Alan, Andrew, wife of** – Fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Alan, Margaret** – From Cousland, trial commission issued on 21 April 1630, tried with Margaret Veitch and Janet Paterson, fate unknown.

**Alexander, Margaret** – From Pickiltillane, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, and Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, died before warded. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629 .

**Anderson, Marion** – From Cousland, investigatory commission issued 26 May 1630, investigated with John Finnick, Marion Banks, Agnes Finnick, Janet Richardson, Christian Steel and Giles Swinton, fate unknown.

**Andrew, William** – From Clerkington, found caution for 100 merks on 10 June 1630, fate unknown.

**Arnot, Helen** – Lady Manderston, not investigated. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 14 July 1629.

**Bain, Margaret** – From Longniddry, trial commission issued on 4 December 1628, tried with Bessie Little, fate unknown.

**Banks, Marion** – From Cousland, wife of John Finnick and mother of Agnes Finnick named in the same commission, investigatory commission issued 26 May 1630, investigated with John Finnick, Agnes Finnick, Janet Richardson, Marion Anderson, Christian Steel and Giles Swinton, fate unknown.

**Barclay, Janet** – From Fisherrow, trial commission issued on 9 June 1629, harsh prison conditions, tried with Janet Hardie, fate unknown.

**Barilman, Christian** – From Samuelston, falconer's wife, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Barrowman, Margaret** – From Easthouses in Newbattle, investigatory commission issued on 27 September 1628, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Unes, Janet Smibert, Marion Shearer, Elspeth Duncan, Malie Turner, William Watt and Margaret Muirhead, fate unknown.

**Bartie, Elspeth** – From Haddington, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Bathgate, Marion** – From Eastbarns, investigatory and trial commission issued on 19 December 1628, fate unknown. Accused Isobel Young.

**Baxter, Margaret** – From Dunbar, investigatory and trial commission issued on 19 December 1628, fate unknown. Accused Isobel Young.

**Begbie, Janet** – Yester Kirk Session punished John Wheatlie, Jr for slandering her on 29 March 1629.

**Black, Margaret** – From Samuelston, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Borthwick, Alison** – From parish of Yester, tried on 20 August 1629, tried with John Carfrae and Thomas Carfrae, convicted, executed. Testimony provided by Alexander Hamilton. Accused by Margaret Hamilton in summer 1629.

**Borthwick, Margaret** – From Cousland, trial commission issued on 1 April 1630, tried with Elizabeth Selkirk, fate unknown.

**Boyd, Janet** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 8 August 1628, tried with Janet Strachan, Beatrix Cuthbertson and Janet Darling, executed.

**Brown, Bessie** – From Dalkeith, trial commission issued 3 May 1627, likely accused by her neighbours, fate unknown.

**Carfrae, John** – From parish of Yester, tried on 20 August 1629, tried with Thomas Carfrae and Alison Borthwick, convicted, executed. Testimony provided by Alexander Hamilton. Accused by Margaret Hamilton in summer 1629.

**Carfrae, Thomas** – From parish of Yester, tried on 20 August 1629, tried with John Carfrae and Alison Borthwick, convicted, executed. Testimony provided by Alexander Hamilton. Accused by Margaret Hamilton in summer 1629.

**Carrick, Alison** – From Haddington, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Bessie Hepburn, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, trial commission issued on 26 May 1630, tried with Katharine Kirkton, Bessie Duncan and Katharine Lauder, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629.

**Chapman, Alison** – From Dalkeith, trial commission issued on 28 August 1628, tried with Isobel Thomson and Christian Taylor, fate unknown.

**Christie, Elspeth** – From Prestonpans, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 30 October 1629.

**Christison, Patrick** – Named as a charmer in the case of John Halliday, fate unknown.

**Chrystal, Katharine** – From Haddington, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Coline, Alison** – From Duns, dittay presented on 29 June 1630, fate unknown.

**Combe, Alison** – From Duns, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 15 July 1629.

**Cuthbertson, Beatrix** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 8 August 1628, tried with Janet Strachan, Janet Darling and Janet Boyd, fate unknown.

**Darling, James** – From Haddington, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Darling, Janet** – From Prestonpans, wife of David Thomson, trial commission issued on 8 August 1628, tried with Janet Strachan, Beatrix Cuthbertson and Janet Boyd, fate unknown.

**Davidson, William** – From Saltoun, tried on 16 December 1628, confessed, convicted, executed. Second individual identified within the main serial hunt, accused by Margaret Muirhead in autumn 1628, accused Sara Keith, Bessie Mak, Alison Taylor, Thomas Waterson, Alexander Sinclair/Hunter, Bessie Gray, Patrick Learmonth, Alexander Hamilton and a witch from Home.

**Dempster, Agnes** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 15 July 1628, tried with Bessie Riddell, Agnes Riddell, Margaret Oliver and Barbara Mathie, fate unknown.

**Denholm, William** – From Haddington, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton before 20 August 1629.

**Dickson, David** – Punished for charming by the Yester Kirk Session on 22 March 1629.

**Dowe, Janet** – From Preston, trial commission issued on 7 July 1629, fate unknown.

**Duncan, Bessie** – From Walkerland, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, trial commission issued on 26 May 1630, tried with Alison Carrick, Katharine Kirkton and Katharine Lauder, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629.

**Duncan, Elspeth** – From Cranstoun, investigatory commission issued on 27 September 1628, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Unes, Janet Smibert, Margaret Barrowman, Marion Shearer, Malie Turner, William Watt and Margaret Muirhead, fate unknown.

**Durie, Isobel** – From Pentland, trial commission issued 12 June 1632, fate unknown.

**Finnick, Agnes** – From Cousland, daughter of John Finnick and Marion Banks named in the same commission, investigatory commission issued 26 May 1630, investigated with John Finnick, Marion Banks, Janet Richardson, Marion Anderson, Christian Steel and Giles Swinton, fate unknown.

**Finnick, John** – From Cousland, husband of Marion Banks and father of Agnes Finnick named in the same commission, investigatory commission issued 26 May 1630, investigated with Marion Banks, Agnes Finnick, Janet Richardson, Marion Anderson, Christian Steel and Giles Swinton, trial commission issued 8 July 1630, may have confessed, fate unknown.

**Fowler, Alison** – Investigated by Tynningame Kirk Session between November 1631 and January 1632, not proven.

**Gilmour, Katharine** – From Niddrie, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 30 October 1629.

**Gray, Bessie** – Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628. May have died before his testimony.

**Halliday, John** – Punished for consulting by Yester Kirk Session on 29 June 1628.

**Hamilton, Alexander** – Vagabond operating in the Haddington and Duns areas, husband of Alison Edington, arrest commission issued on 9 December 1628, captured late June/early July 1629, tried 22 January 1630, harsh prison conditions, confessed, convicted, executed. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628. Testified against by Sara Keith. Accused Helen Arnot, John Neil, John Smith, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Alan, a woman from Fala, Margaret Alexander, Bessie Sinclair, Bessie Sleigh, Agnes Thomson, Bessie Hepburn, Elspeth Bartie, Margaret Black, Archibald Sharp's wife, a woman from Pickiltillane, Amy Sinclair, \_\_\_\_ Wilson's wife, George Harlaw, Christian Barilman, Thomas Sanderson's wife, Katharine Wilson, Agnes Sinclair, Katharine Lauder, Alison Combe, Elspeth Christie, Alison Carrick, James Darling, Katharine Gilmour, John Hogg, Margaret Nicholson, Andrew Alan's wife, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Chrystal and William Denholm. Testified against Thomas Carfrae, John Carfrae, Alison Borthwick and Katharine Oswald.

**Hamilton, Helen** – From Leith, trial commission issued 28 February 1632, harsh prison conditions, illegal torture, acquitted. Accused by Marion Mure in February 1632.

**Hamilton, Margaret** – From Dalkeith, confessed, convicted, executed. Accused John Carfrae, Thomas Carfrae and Alison Borthwick in summer 1629.

**Hardie, Janet** – From Fisherrow, trial commission issued on 9 June 1629, harsh prison conditions, tried with Janet Barclay, fate unknown.

**Harlaw, George** – From Clerkington, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Hepburn, Bessie** – From Haddington, wife of constable Andrew Baines and mother of Patrick Young, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, found caution for 3000 merks on 1 June 1630, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Hislop, Elspeth** – From Longniddry, trial commission issued on 27 September 1628, fate unknown.

**Hogg, John** – From Markle, husband of Margaret Nicholson named in the same commission, investigatory commission issued 12 November 1629, found caution for 1000 merks on 26 November 1629, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 7 November 1629.

**Home, Janet** – Lady Samuelston, found caution for 1000 merks on 15 June 1630, not tried. Accused by John Neil on 26 May 1630.

**Jo, Margaret** – From Musselburgh, trial scheduled for 25 November 1628, possible sleep deprivation, fate unknown.

**Keith, Sara** – From Winton, tried on 17 February 1629, tried with Bessie Mak, possible witch pricking, confessed, convicted, executed. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628. Testified against William Davidson, Bessie Mak and Alexander Hamilton. Accused Bessie MacGill.

**Kirkton, Katharine** – From Haddington, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, trial commission issued on 26 May 1630, tried with Alison Carrick, Bessie Duncan and Katharine Lauder, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629.

**Lauder, Bessie** – From Nunlands, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629.

**Lauder, Katharine** – From Stobstane, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, trial commission issued on 26 May 1630, tried with Alison Carrick, Katharine Kirkton and Bessie Duncan, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629.

**Learmonth, Patrick** – Fate unknown. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628.

**Little, Bessie** – From Longniddry, trial commission issued on 4 December 1628, tried with Margaret Bain, convicted, executed.

**Lumsden, Marion** – From Leith, trial commission issued 28 February 1632, fate unknown. Accused by Marion Mure in February 1632.

**MacGill, Bessie** – Fate unknown. Accused by Sara Keith before 17 February 1629.

**Mak, Bessie** – From Saltoun, tried on 17 February 1629, tried with Sara Keith, convicted, executed. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628.

**Matheson, Andrew** – Punished for charming by the Yester Kirk Session on 18 March 1629.

**Matheson, Margaret** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 21 August 1629, tried with Beigs Wallace, fate unknown.

**Mathie, Barbara** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 15 July 1628, tried with Bessie Riddell, Agnes Dempster, Agnes Riddell and Margaret Oliver, fate unknown.

**Meek, Elspeth** – Wife of Francis Elphinstone, Aberlady Kirk Session punished Robert Douglas for slandering her on 30 March 1632.

**Melrose, Margaret** – From Dunbar, tried on 9 April 1624, confessed, convicted, executed. Accused Isobel Young.

**Merkhouse, John** – Yester Kirk Session punished Meg Hunter and Patrick Harlaw's wife for slandering him on 28 April 1632.

**Miller, Isobel** – From Longniddry, trial commission issued on 27 September 1628, fate unknown.

**Mitchell, Bessie** – From Crichton, trial commission issued on 22 June 1630, fate unknown.

**Mitchell, Margaret** – From Haddington, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Katharine Kirkton, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629.

**Muirhead, Margaret** – Vagabond operating in the Presbytery of Dalkeith, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Unes, Janet Smibert, Margaret Barrowman, Marion Shearer, Elspeth Duncan, Malie Turner, and William Watt, confessed, convicted, executed. First individual identified within the main serial hunt, accused William Davidson.

**Mure, Marion** – From Leith, trial commission issued 14 February 1632, confessed, convicted, executed. Accused Helen Hamilton and Marion Lumsden.

**Murray, Patrick** – From Clerkington, trial commission issued on 21 April 1630, fate unknown.

**Neil, John** – From Tweedmouth, arrest commissions issued on 7 January 1630 and 5 February 1631, tried on 26 March 1631, convicted, executed. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 14 July 1629, accused Janet Home.

**Nesbitt, Ellie** – From Berwickshire, call for witnesses on 4 November 1630, fate unknown.

**Nicholson, Margaret** – From Markle, wife of John Hogg named in the same commission, investigatory commission issued 12 November 1629, found caution for 1000 merks on 26 November 1629, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 7 November 1629.

**Oliver, Margaret** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 15 July 1628, tried with Bessie Riddell, Agnes Dempster, Agnes Riddell and Barbara Mathie, fate unknown.

**Oswald, Katharine** – From Niddrie, wife of miller Robert Acheson, ten weeks before Niddrie Kirk Session, investigatory commission issued 2 July 1629, tried 11 November 1629, pricked for devil's mark, convicted, executed. Testimony provided by Alexander Hamilton.

**Paterson, Christian** – From Hermiston, trial commission issued 26 July 1631, convicted, executed.

**Paterson, Janet** – From Cousland, trial commission issued on 21 April 1630, tried with Margaret Alan and Margaret Veitch, fate unknown.

**Porteous, Marion** – Likely from Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 6 November 1629, fate unknown.

**Rae, Jean** – Investigated by Tynninghame Kirk Session between November 1631 and January 1632, not proven.

**Rankin, Agnes** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 3 July 1628, tried with Margaret Young, Janet Reid and Margaret Redpath, fate unknown.

**Rannick, Agnes** – From Clerkington, trial commission issued on 6 November 1629, tried with Susanna Skaitsone, fate unknown.

**Redpath, Margaret** – From Prestonpans, daughter of Janet Reid who was named in the same commission, trial commission issued on 3 July 1628, tried with Margaret Young, Agnes Rankin and Janet Reid, fate unknown.

**Reid, Janet** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 3 July 1628, tried with Margaret Young, Agnes Rankin and Margaret Redpath, fate unknown.

**Richardson, Janet** – From Cousland, investigatory commission issued 26 May 1630, investigated with John Finnick, Marion Banks, Agnes Finnick, Marion Anderson, Christian Steel and Giles Swinton, fate unknown.

**Riddell, Agnes** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 15 July 1628, tried with Bessie Riddell, Agnes Dempster, Margaret Oliver and Barbara Mathie, fate unknown.

**Riddell, Bessie** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 15 July 1628, tried with Agnes Dempster, Agnes Riddell, Margaret Oliver and Barbara Mathie, fate unknown.

**Sanderson, Thomas, wife of** – Fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Schittington, Janet** – From Newbattle, trial Commission issued 29 July 1628, tried with Margaret Unes, convicted late August 1628, second commission issued 28 August 1628, almost certainly executed.

**Selkirk, Elizabeth** – From Cousland, trial commission issued on 1 April 1630, tried with Margaret Borthwick, fate unknown.

**Sharp, Archibald, wife of** – Fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Shearer, Marion** – From Cranstoun, investigatory commission issued on 27 September 1628, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Unes, Janet Smibert, Margaret Barrowman, Elspeth Duncan, Malie Turner, William Watt and Margaret Muirhead, fate unknown.

**Skaitstone, Susanna** – From Clerkington, trial commission issued on 6 November 1629, tried with Agnes Rannick, fate unknown.

**Simson, Marion** – From Carrick, trial commission issued 8 March 1631, fate unknown.

**Sinclair, Agnes** – From Burnhead, investigatory commission issued 3 December 1629, investigated with Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Katharine Kirkton, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder and Margaret Alexander, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton in early August 1629.

**Sinclair, Amy** – From Brown Head, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Sinclair, Bessie** – Fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Sinclair/Hunter, Alexander** – Vagabond, tried on 3 April 1629, convicted, executed. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628.

**Sleigh, Bessie** – From Duns, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Smibert, Janet** – From Middleton, daughter of James Unes named in the same commission, investigatory commission issued on 27 September 1628, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Unes, Margaret Barrowman, Marion Shearer, Elspeth Duncan, Malie Turner, William Watt and Margaret Muirhead, fate unknown.

**Smith, John** – From Duns, found caution for 500 merks on 29 June 1630, charged James Mowat with slander on 5 July 1631, case probably dismissed, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 14 July 1629.

**Smith, John** – Servant of Lady Bass, found caution for 200 merks on 10 July 1630, fate unknown.

**Steel, Christian** – From Cousland, investigatory commission issued 26 May 1630, investigated with John Finnick, Marion Banks, Agnes Finnick, Janet Richardson, Marion Anderson and Giles Swinton, fate unknown.

**Strachan, Janet** – From Prestonpans, wife of Walter Finlayson, trial commission issued on 8 August 1628, tried with Beatrix Cuthbertson, Janet Darling and Janet Boyd, fate unknown.

**Swinton, Giles** – From Cousland, investigatory commission issued 26 May 1630, investigated with John Finnick, Marion Banks, Agnes Finnick, Janet Richardson, Marion Anderson and Christian Steel, fate unknown.

**Taylor, Alison** – From Pencaitland, arrest commission issued on 9 December 1628, fate unknown. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628.

**Taylor, Christian** – From Dalkeith, trial commission issued on 28 August 1628, tried with Isobel Thomson and Alison Chapman, fate unknown.

**Thomson, Agnes** – From Prestonpans, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 30 October 1629.

**Thomson, Isobel** – From Corsoute, trial commission issued on 28 August 1628, tried with Christian Taylor and Alison Chapman, fate unknown.

**Turner, Malie** – From Stobhill, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Unes, Janet Smibert, Margaret Barrowman, Marion Shearer, Elspeth Duncan, William Watt and Margaret Muirhead, fate unknown.

**Unes, Janet** – From Middleton, investigatory commission issued on 27 September 1628, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Smibert, Margaret Barrowman, Marion Shearer, Elspeth Duncan, Malie Turner, William Watt and Margaret Muirhead, fate unknown.

**Unes, Margaret** – From Borthwick, trial Commission issued 29 July 1628, tried with Janet Schitlington, convicted late August 1628, second commission issued 28 August 1628, almost certainly executed.

**Vagabond woman** – Pre-deceased investigation. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Veitch, Margaret** – From Cousland, trial commission issued on 21 April 1630, tried with Margaret Alan and Janet Paterson, fate unknown.

**Wallace, Beigs** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 21 August 1629, tried with Margaret Matheson, fate unknown.

**Waterson, Thomas** – From Nesbitt, promised to cooperate with investigation on 11 December 1628, fate unknown. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628.

**Watt, William** – From Westhouses, trial commission issued on 11 November 1628, tried with Janet Unes, Janet Smibert, Margaret Barrowman, Marion Shearer, Elspeth Duncan, Malie Turner and Margaret Muirhead, fate unknown.

**Wilson, [illegible], wife of** – Fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Wilson, Katharine** – From Duns, found caution for 500 merks on 29 June 1630, charged James Mowat with slander on 5 July 1631, case probably dismissed, fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 15 July 1629.

**Witch from Home** – Fate unknown. Accused by William Davidson in autumn 1628.

**Woman from Fala** – Fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Woman from Pickiltillane** – Fate unknown. Accused by Alexander Hamilton on 8 August 1629.

**Wright, Janet** – From Niddrie, trial commission issued on 28 August 1628, confessed, fate unknown.

**Young, Isobel** – From Eastbarns, investigated by Presbytery of Dunbar in 1624, tried on 4 Feb 1629, harsh prison conditions, possible witch pricking, convicted, executed. Accused by Janet Acheson, Margaret Melrose, Margaret Baxter and Marion Bathgate in April 1624.

**Young, Margaret** – From Prestonpans, trial commission issued on 3 July 1628, tried with Agnes Rankin, Janet Reid and Margaret Redpath, fate unknown.

## **Appendix 3**

### **Timeline**

<b>1589</b>	Isobel Young develops a reputation for witchcraft
<b>1615</b>	John Neil begins his career as a cunning man/charmer
<b>1624</b>	Alexander Hamilton's pact with the devil
<b>9 Apr 1624</b>	Trial of Margaret Melrose and Janet Acheson
<b>22/24 Apr 1624</b>	Isobel Young investigated by the Presbytery of Dunbar due to accusations made by Margaret Melrose and Janet Acheson
<b>1626</b>	Alexander Hamilton leaves English coal pits and goes to war with the Swedish army
<b>3 May 1627</b>	Trial commission for Bessie Brown
<b>24 Jan 1628</b>	James Mowat complains that he has not been allowed to take up the post of Berwick Sheriff Clerk
<b>21 Feb 1628</b>	Counter complaint by Sir Alexander Nisbet against Mowat
<b>29 Jun 1628</b>	Yester Kirk Session punishes John Halliday for consulting
<b>3 Jul 1628</b>	Trial commission for Margaret Young, Agnes Rankin, Janet Reid and Margaret Redpath
<b>15 Jul 1628</b>	Trial commission for Bessie Riddell, Agnes Dempster, Agnes Riddell, Margaret Oliver and Barbara Mathie
<b>29 Jul 1628</b>	Trial commission for Janet Schitlington and Margaret Unes
<b>31 Jul 1628</b>	Earl of Lothian's siblings ask for Schitlington and Unes to be investigated regarding Lothian's death
<b>8 Aug 1628</b>	Trial commission for Janet Strachan, Beatrix Cuthbertson, Janet Darling and Janet Boyd
<b>28 Aug 1628</b>	James Borthwick asks that Margaret Unes be investigated regarding the death of Lord Borthwick and others
<b>28 Aug 1628</b>	Trial commission for Janet Wright
<b>28 Aug 1628</b>	Trial commission for Isobel Thomson, Christian Taylor and Alison Chapman
<b>27 Sep 1628</b>	Presbytery of Dalkeith asks for power to ward suspects at their own expense
<b>27 Sep 1628</b>	Trial commission for Elspeth Hislop and Isobel Miller
<b>11 Nov 1628</b>	Margaret Jo complains about harsh prison conditions and unjust legal practice
<b>11 Nov 1628</b>	Earl of Winton granted broad investigatory commission
<b>11 Nov 1628</b>	Trial commission for Janet Unes, Janet Smibert, Marion Shearer, Elspeth Duncan, Margaret Barrowman, Malie Turner, William Watt and Margaret Muirhead
<b>12 Nov 1628</b>	Muirhead questioned regarding William Davidson
<b>18 Nov 1628</b>	Second complaint by Margaret Jo

<b>2 Dec 1628</b>	Helen Arnot complains about husband, George Home
<b>4 Dec 1628</b>	Trial commission for William Davidson
<b>9 Dec 1628</b>	Arrest warrant for Alison Taylor, Sara Keith and Alexander Hamilton
<b>11 Dec 1628</b>	Thomas Waterson promises to cooperate with investigators
<b>16 Dec 1628</b>	Trial of William Davidson, convicted
<b>19 Dec 1628</b>	Trial commission for Marion Bathgate and Margaret Baxter
<b>23 Dec 1628</b>	Investigatory commission for Alexander Sinclair/Hunter
<b>13 Jan 1629</b>	Investigatory commission for Isobel Young
<b>20 Jan 1629</b>	Trial commission for Sara Keith and Bessie Mak
<b>20 Jan 1629</b>	Isobel Young complains of unjust legal practices
<b>5 Feb 1629</b>	Trial of Isobel Young, convicted
<b>17 Feb 1629</b>	Trial of Sara Keith and Bessie Mak, convicted
<b>18 Mar 1629</b>	Yester Kirk Session punishes Andrew Matheson for charming
<b>22 Mar 1629</b>	Yester Kirk Session punishes David Dickson for charming
<b>24 Mar 1629</b>	Trial commission for Alexander Sinclair/Hunter
<b>29 Mar 1629</b>	Yester Kirk Session punishes John Wheatlie, Jr for slandering Janet Begbie
<b>3 Apr 1629</b>	Trial of Alexander Sinclair/Hunter, convicted
<b>15 Apr 1629</b>	Presbytery of Dalkeith asks for power to request gentlemen ward suspects
<b>9 Jun 1629</b>	Janet Hardie and Janet Barclay complain of harsh prison conditions and unjust legal practice
<b>2 Jul 1629</b>	Investigatory commission for Katharine Oswald
<b>7 Jul 1629</b>	Trial commission for Janet Dowe
<b>14 Jul 1629</b>	Alexander Hamilton makes initial statement in Duns
<b>15 Jul 1629</b>	Hamilton makes second statement in Haddington
<b>16 Jul 1629</b>	Hamilton displayed before Privy Council
<b>22 Jul 1629</b>	Hamilton makes another statement in Haddington
<b>30 Jul 1629</b>	Privy Council orders Hamilton transported to Edinburgh
<b>1 Aug 1629</b>	Trial commission for John Carfrae, Thomas Carfrae and Alison Borthwick
<b>8 Aug 1629</b>	Alexander Hamilton makes a statement in Edinburgh
<b>15 Aug 1629</b>	Arrest warrant for Katharine Kirkton, Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander
<b>21 Aug 1629</b>	Trial commission for Beigs Wallace and Margaret Matheson
<b>4 Sep 1629</b>	Katharine Oswald complains of unjust legal practice
<b>5 Sep 1629</b>	Trial commission for Katharine Oswald
<b>30 Oct 1629</b>	Alexander Hamilton makes a statement in Edinburgh
<b>6 Nov 1629</b>	Trial commission for Agnes Rannick and Susanna Skaitstone
<b>7 Nov 1629</b>	Alexander Hamilton makes a statement in Edinburgh

<b>11 Nov 1629</b>	Trial of Katharine Oswald
<b>12 Nov 1629</b>	Investigatory commission for John Hogg and Margaret Nicholson
<b>13 Nov 1629</b>	Katharine Oswald convicted
<b>25 Nov 1629</b>	Alexander Hamilton declares his deposition was coached
<b>26 Nov 1629</b>	John Hogg and Margaret Nicholson freed on caution
<b>3 Dec 1629</b>	Presbytery of Haddington asks for power to investigate Katharine Kirkton, Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder, Agnes Sinclair and Margaret Alexander
<b>15 Dec 1629</b>	George Home granted protection until 20 Jan 1630
<b>16 Dec 1629</b>	Alexander Hamilton fails to identify Agnes Alan
<b>17 Dec 1629</b>	Presbytery of Dalkeith asks that Michael Erskine be transferred to Edinburgh
<b>7 Jan 1630</b>	George Home granted protection until 20 Feb 1630
<b>7 Jan 1630</b>	James Mowat, Patrick Abernethy and William Mowat questioned regarding Alexander Hamilton's initial deposition, James Mowat imprisoned for lying
<b>7 Jan 1630</b>	Arrest warrant for John Neil
<b>8 Jan 1630</b>	Alexander Hamilton ratifies his 25 Nov 1629 statement
<b>14 Jan 1630</b>	Hamilton exonerates George Home from having coached him
<b>19 Jan 1630</b>	Alexander Hamilton makes a statement in Edinburgh
<b>22 Jan 1630</b>	Trial of Alexander Hamilton, convicted
<b>5 Feb 1630</b>	Arrest warrant for John Neil
<b>9 Feb 1630</b>	James Mowat released from ward
<b>23 Mar 1630</b>	Investigators appointed for John Neil
<b>1 Apr 1630</b>	Presbytery of Haddington asks for power to ward Katharine Kirkton, Alison Carrick, Bessie Hepburn, Margaret Mitchell, Bessie Duncan, Katharine Lauder, Bessie Lauder and Agnes Sinclair
<b>1 Apr 1630</b>	Trial commission for Elizabeth Selkirk
<b>1 Apr 1630</b>	Trial commission for Margaret Borthwick/Berdock
<b>21 Apr 1630</b>	Trial commission for Margaret Alan, Margaret Veitch and Janet Paterson
<b>21 Apr 1630</b>	Trial commission for Patrick Murray
<b>26 May 1630</b>	Janet Home summoned to confront John Neil
<b>26 May 1630</b>	Trial commission for Katharine Kirkton, Alison Carrick, Bessie Duncan and Katharine Lauder
<b>26 May 1630</b>	Investigatory commission for John Finnick, Marion Banks, Agnes Finnick, Janet Richardson, Marion Anderson, Christian Steel and Giles Swinton
<b>26 May 1630</b>	Letter from King Charles I asking for protection for George Home, Privy Council takes no action
<b>1 Jun 1630</b>	Bessie Hepburn complains of unjust legal practice and is freed on caution

<b>8 Jun 1630</b>	Katharine Kirkton, Alison Carrick, Bessie Duncan and Katharine Lauder complain of unjust legal practice
<b>8 Jun 1630</b>	George Home granted protection until 1 Aug 1630
<b>10 Jun 1630</b>	William Andrew finds caution
<b>17 Jun 1630</b>	George Home surrenders writs for Helen Arnot's conjoint fee lands
<b>22 Jun 1630</b>	Trial commission for Bessie Mitchell
<b>22 Jun 1630</b>	Dittays for John Smith, Katharine Wilson and Alison Coline delivered to the Privy Council
<b>29 Jun 1630</b>	Smith and Wilson find caution
<b>29 Jun 1630</b>	George Home agrees not to harm his wife, or her servants or tenants
<b>1 Jul 1630</b>	Lady Bass ordered to deliver her servant John Smith for investigation
<b>6 Jul 1630</b>	James Mowat granted protection until 13 Jul 1630
<b>8 Jul 1630</b>	Trial commission for John Finnick
<b>10 Jul 1630</b>	John Smith, Lady Bass' servant, finds caution
<b>13 Jul 1630</b>	James Mowat granted protection until 16 Jul 1630
<b>27 Jul 1630</b>	George Home granted protection until 1 Sep 1630
<b>10 Aug 1630</b>	George Home granted protection until 1 Nov 1630
<b>4 Nov 1630</b>	George Home granted protection until 10 Dec 1630
<b>2 Dec 1630</b>	James Mowat released from ward
<b>2 Dec 1630</b>	George Home granted protection until 31 Dec 1630
<b>21 Dec 1630</b>	George Home granted protection until 2 Feb 1631
<b>1 Feb 1631</b>	George Home granted protection until 31 Mar 1631
<b>8 Mar 1631</b>	Trial commission for Marion Simson
<b>26 Mar 1631</b>	Trial of John Neil, convicted
<b>2 Apr 1631</b>	John Neil sentenced to death
<b>2 Jun 1631</b>	James Mowat and Patrick Abernethy summoned by the Privy Council
<b>5 Jul 1631</b>	Katharine Wilson and John Smith accuse James Mowat of slander, Mowat imprisoned for fraud
<b>26 Jul 1631</b>	Trial commission for Christian Paterson
<b>8 Aug 1631</b>	Letter from King Charles I asking for protection for George Home, Privy Council takes no action
<b>9 Aug 1631</b>	Trial of Christian Paterson, convicted
<b>21 Sep 1631</b>	Commissioners submit Paterson's conviction to the Privy Council, Lords order her executed
<b>21 Sep 1631</b>	Sir Alexander Home, George Home's son, asks for protection for himself and his father for non-witch related reasons, granted until 1 Jan 1632
<b>20 Nov 1631</b>	Tynninghame Kirk Session begins investigation of Alison Fowler

<b>6 Dec 1631</b>	Janet Home complains about George Home, she is granted protection until 31 Mar 1631
<b>29 Jan 1632</b>	Tynninghame Kirk Session dismisses case against Alison Fowler as not proven
<b>23 Feb 1632</b>	James Balfour ordered to cease practice of witch pricking
<b>28 Feb 1632</b>	Helen Hamilton complains of torture, Privy Council orders practice stopped
<b>6 Mar 1632</b>	Trial commission for Helen Hamilton
<b>30 Mar 1632</b>	Aberlady Kirk Session punishes Robert Douglas for slandering Elspeth Meek
<b>8 Apr 1632</b>	Yester Kirk Session punishes Meg Barker for slandering her neighbours
<b>14 Apr 1632</b>	Helen Hamilton complains of harassment by David Forrester and John Ker, Privy Council orders the ministers to stop
<b>28 Apr 1632</b>	Yester Kirk Session punishes Meg Hunter and Patrick Harlaw's wife for slandering John Merkhous
<b>12 Jun 1632</b>	Trial commission for Isobel Durie

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