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**Bibliography of Scottish Witchcraft**
Julian Goodare

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Witch-hunting was on the mind of Christopher Lowther, an English visitor to Scotland, in November 1629. The third of Scotland’s five great witchcraft panics, that of 1628–1631, was in full spate. As Lowther stood on Salisbury Crags near Edinburgh, he took in a splendid view of the city and its surroundings, as he recorded in his journal: ‘The hemisphere’s circumference from Edinburgh is mountains, as is Westmoreland from about Lowther, but something plainer, and their mountains not so high. In view from Edinburgh 4 miles southwards is Keeth, a borough where all the witches are burned.’

‘Keeth […] where all the witches are burned’ was in fact Dalkeith. Although no full study has been made of the panic of 1628–1631 as it took place there, its outline can readily be reconstructed with the aid of the online Survey of Scottish Witchcraft. This shows that in the presbytery of Dalkeith, a group of sixteen parishes to the south and east of Edinburgh, there were fourteen cases of witchcraft in 1628 and nineteen in 1629. This compares with a total of nine cases for all years before 1628. Lowther’s remark is relevant to several points that I will return to shortly, including panics, execution methods, and the role of towns in witch-hunting. Later in this introduction I will also say more about the Witchcraft Survey.

I

This book’s title phrase ‘Witches and Witch-Hunters’ is a starting point in indicating its contents. Witches and witch-hunters are inseparable. Witches would not have existed in early modern Scotland if people had not hated and feared them; witches were generally labelled by others rather than self-identified. Yet witch-hunters were unusual people.
Introduction

Most people in early modern Scotland, most of the time, lived with those neighbours whom they thought to be witches without displaying a desire to prosecute them. Only occasionally were there outbursts of panic.

The panic in Dalkeith featured some notable local witch-hunters. They included two local lairds, Mr Patrick Hamilton of Little Preston and Robert Cass of Fordell. They were involved as commissioners of justiciary in thirty-one cases altogether; in sixteen of these they acted together, while Hamilton handled eight further cases, and Cass seven, without the other. Cass was also requested to help arrest a suspect. All this activity occurred between 1628 and 1630. Usually there were between four and eight commissioners appointed to hold a trial, and in the Witchcraft Survey one can see teams forming and combinations changing.

Men like Hamilton and Cass were not only important in their localities, but were also able to connect these localities to central government – a necessary requirement, since Scottish witch-hunting was supervised centrally. Commissions of justiciary, which enabled lairds like Hamilton and Cass to act as judges and to convene a court to try a witchcraft suspect, were granted by the privy council. With Dalkeith so close to Edinburgh, both Hamilton and Cass had good central connections. Cass was an advocate (a lawyer representing clients in the court of session, the central civil court), while Hamilton was the brother of the earl of Haddington, a leading government minister. A systematic study of Scottish witch-hunters remains to be carried out, but several chapters of this book take the subject further.

The phrase ‘Scottish witch-hunters’ often brings King James VI to mind – the intellectual king who participated in the North Berwick witchcraft panic of 1590–1591 and in the subsequent panic of 1597, and whose book, *Daemonologie*, was published in 1597. There is some discussion of James in this book, but there are also reasons for looking more broadly at the question of ‘witch-hunters’.

One reason for looking beyond James comes in Michael Wasser’s chapter on the panic of 1568–1569. The idea that James initiated Scottish witch-hunting is surely mistaken. The Scottish Reformation occurred officially in 1560, the witchcraft act was passed in 1563, and the new church and secular authorities knew that witchcraft was one of the offences that they should punish. Yet, witchcraft prosecution was a complex business involving the co-operation of several different authorities. As Wasser shows, the Scottish authorities had not yet worked out how to carry out large-scale witch-hunting successfully.
During the North Berwick panic, James busily interrogated Agnes Sampson and stoked his suspicions of the earl of Bothwell. However, other witch-hunters had their own agendas. One such witch-hunter was William Douglas, ninth earl of Angus, whose predecessor as earl, his cousin Archibald Douglas, had died suddenly in 1588. Victoria Carr’s chapter meticulously follows the clues that enable her to reconstruct how the ninth earl’s suspicions fell on Jean Lyon, the eighth earl’s widow. We also learn that the ninth earl had a personal grudge against Lyon – which probably tells us, not that he pursued a witchcraft case against her cynically, but that he found it plausible that someone as bad as her could be a witch. I am not going to give away the plot here, but the drama of the earl and countess of Angus was surely, for a time, as intense as the drama of the king and the earl of Bothwell.

The panics of the 1590s are also relevant to another witch-hunter, discussed in Liv Helene Willumsen’s chapter. This was John Cunningham, the seafaring son of a Fife laird, who grew up in the 1590s during a period of intense witch-hunting in Fife. Cunningham’s career took him to Denmark, to Greenland, and finally to a job as governor of Finnmark in northern Norway. There, beyond the Arctic Circle, he used some of the ideas that he had learned in Scotland to launch his own witch-hunt, distinctively different from what happened in the rest of Norway.

Much Scottish witch-hunting occurred in bursts of panic. Paula Hughes’s chapter is the first published study of the panic of 1649–1650, one of the five biggest national panics. Until recently it has been a little-known episode, with the other four big panics – those of 1590–1591, 1597, 1628–1631 and 1661–1662 – having received recent scholarly attention. Hughes’s study, like Wasser’s, shows how administratively complicated it was to prosecute large numbers of witches. The revolutionary regime of the late 1640s, despite its many other commitments including warfare with England, made godliness and discipline high priorities, to deadly effect.

Hughes mentions a number of local commissioners, but does not single out any particular ‘witch-hunter’ or ‘witch-hunters’. This may be because she surveys the panic from the top down, and the most single-mindedly zealous witch-hunters were more likely to be found at a local level. Even the notorious Matthew Hopkins in England was essentially a local figure; national politicians had so many other calls on their attention that they could rarely be seen to pursue witches single-mindedly. I have outlined a definition of ‘witch-hunters’ in this sense as ‘men who did not merely carry out their duty in trials, but who went out of their way to orchestrate and promote them’. Using the example of
the English magistrate Robert Hunt, Jonathan Barry has recently pointed out that apparent local ‘witch-hunters’ might in fact be zealous prosecutors of crime in general, rather than singling out witches for special attention. Further study of this is required. Hughes’s chapter reminds us that witchcraft panics could occur in unusual political conditions, and future studies of local panics and local witch-hunters should pay close attention to the local political context.

Panics involved prosecutions of multiple witches, with one prosecution leading on to another in a chain reaction. The smallest example of a chain reaction is the linked prosecution of two witches. This is relevant to the decline of the Scottish witch-hunt because part of the story is the decline of panics. The last of the really big panics was from 1661 to 1662; after that there were several smaller panics. One of these, in the west of Scotland from 1699 to 1700, resulted in a spate of acquittals and has been argued to be the last of its kind. Which may be so – but Alexandra Hill’s chapter shows that the period from 1701 to 1727 (when the last execution occurred) contained numerous instances of linked, chain-reaction prosecutions.

II

Early modern Scotland was largely a peasant society, as Christina Larner, the influential pioneer of Scottish witchcraft studies, recognised. Yet she also drew attention to its status as a ‘middle-range’ society, neither fully primitive nor fully technological, and thus distinctively different from the tribal societies studied by anthropologists who had carried out some of the most influential witchcraft studies of the time when she was working. A ‘middle-range’ society required towns as well as peasants, but Larner regarded towns as unimportant for witch-hunting. Could there be more to be said about towns?

Robin Briggs, who has written influentially about peasants in a European context, has also dismissed the idea of urban witch-hunting:

For reasons which remain obscure, the urban milieu does not seem to have generated many witchcraft cases in most parts of Europe. The obvious exceptions are the pandemics which afflicted some German towns and the more routine persecution found in parts of the southern Netherlands, the latter an exceptionally urbanized region suffering from severe economic dislocation. It may be that elsewhere even these relatively small urban populations were just sufficiently mobile and anonymous to discourage the long build-up
of hostility characteristic of witchcraft accusations in tight-knit rural societies.15

Briggs’s ‘long build-up of hostility’ is a familiar and indeed essential idea in witchcraft studies. I will come back to this, but I first want to use Briggs’s remarks about the ‘urban milieu’ to introduce Alistair Henderson’s chapter on that subject.16 Henderson employs a statistical analysis of the data in the Witchcraft Survey to reconstruct the varying intensity of witchcraft prosecution in Scottish towns of different sizes. The results show a fascinating and complex pattern, but one simple point can be made: Scottish towns were certainly not immune from witch-hunting, and small towns even seem to have hunted witches with particular intensity. Which is what Christopher Lowther seems to have been told when he looked out from Salisbury Crags. Witch-hunting was associated with small towns like Dalkeith, not large towns like Edinburgh.

The ‘long build-up of hostility’ is well exemplified by Lauren Martin’s chapter reconstructing the career of one witch, Isobel Young, in detail.17 Young’s trial for witchcraft took place in 1629, but Martin traces the development of her reputation back to the late sixteenth century, with a series of quarrels connected with landholding and money-lending, and reports of unauthorised ritual healing. Young had a long-running dispute with a neighbouring family, and quarrels with her own husband led him to testify against her at her trial.

On the other hand, Anna Cordey’s chapter on the presbytery of Dalkeith shows that the ‘long build-up of hostility’ was not the only pattern.18 She looks at two panics in the area, those of 1649–1650 and 1661–1662, and asks how many of the witches prosecuted in the area actually had reputations in their communities. Proving a negative is always difficult, but she finds strong indications that many witches were not identified as such in their communities before their arrest. She also contributes to the discussion of ‘witch-hunters’ by showing that William Scott, bailie of Dalkeith, seems to have gone out of his way to frame Janet Cock in 1661. The Witchcraft Survey shows that Scott took various roles in twelve witchcraft cases.

These chapters draw on a wide range of documents, such as property records and minutes of kirk sessions and presbyteries. This gives us a more holistic view of Scottish witch-hunting than we would have had by relying wholly on trial documents, as some Continental studies do. Trial records, the usual sources for witch-hunting, are indispensable – but, as Cordey and Martin both point out, they can be coloured by hindsight.
The ‘long build-up of hostility’ was recorded after the event. In Martin's and Cordey's chapters, we can see some future witches in action before they become witches. Martin shows that Isobel Young was alleged in 1619 to have a Devil’s mark; this was not pursued at the time, but it came up again at her trial in 1629. This testimony from 1619 was given and recorded at the time, giving it a different quality from trial testimonies about events ‘ten years ago’.

This shows that we have much work still to do on the nature of people's recollections, and we should beware of assuming that recollections were accurate. Cordey’s concept of ‘instant reputation’ outlines an important way in which testimony could be unwittingly reshaped to make it appear as if a reputation stretched back a long way. People reinterpreted earlier events to make it look as if there had been a ‘long build-up of hostility’ – but perhaps, at the time, nobody thought that the events had anything to do with witchcraft.

Another chapter using unusual sources is Laura Paterson’s chapter on the process of execution. Information about this is often found in burgh accounts, since both rural and urban witches were often executed in towns, and it was towns that bore the cost of the arrangements. When Christopher Lowther mentioned witches being ‘burned’, he may have been struck by Scotland’s difference from England, where witches were hanged like ordinary felons. Burning, as Paterson shows, had dramatic significance as a public spectacle. Condemned witches were usually strangled before the pyre was lit, but burning was still a particularly degrading way to die.

III

Recent research has begun to show that early modern Scotland was a stranger and more uncanny place than once thought. Some chapters of this book pursue themes related to popular belief and practice in the areas of visionary experience, magical healing and flying. Such phenomena were once the province of ‘folklore’, but historians have recently begun to investigate them as aspects of lived experience. Nobody is suggesting that early modern witches really flew through the air, or really visited the fairies; but we are beginning to take seriously the reports in which they said that they had done these things. Some strange confessions followed a demonological formula and can be assumed or suspected to have been shaped by leading questions, but close examination of confessions and other evidence has shown that there is also a layer of genuine folk belief and practice to be investigated.
It may seem unlikely that the modern experience of abduction by aliens could have anything to do with early modern witchcraft. However, the two are in fact linked by the condition of sleep paralysis, as argued in the chapter by Margaret Dudley and myself. Diagnosing medical conditions at a distance of centuries is usually difficult, but here the evidence seems clear enough. Dudley and I build on a brilliant pioneering study by Owen Davies, who argued that sleep paralysis lay behind many reports by witches’ victims complaining that the witch had assaulted them in their bed. However, we go beyond Davies in showing that sleep paralysis can also be used to explain some reports by witches themselves – confessions in which they were led to interpret an episode of sleep paralysis as a visitation by the Devil. This is literally nightmarish territory.

One of the most famous of all Scottish witches has always been Isobel Gowdie from Auldearn in 1662. Emma Wilby, who recently published a remarkable book analysing Gowdie’s extraordinary confessions in detail, here draws on anthropological studies of tribal societies to elucidate one of the strangest aspects of the confessions: dark shamanism. Shamanism has provided a useful, if sometimes controversial, set of concepts for scholars to analyse visionary magical practices. European visionaries did not engage in the public ritual performances of the tribal shaman in Siberia or elsewhere, so European ‘shamanism’ lacked some important attributes; nevertheless, visionaries like Gowdie did experience flight, trances and visits to spirits in other worlds. They also used these experiences in some similar ways to tribal shamans, bringing information from their spirit contacts to aid them in magical healing and divination. Even conventional shamanism of this kind was remarkable enough, but ‘dark shamanism’ takes us into a world of predatory flights and almost random destruction. The dark shaman, Wilby argues, was nevertheless not simply a killer, but a messenger of fate.

The recent discovery of a shamanistic cult in Scotland, the ‘seely wights’, provides some kind of context for Gowdie’s strange and gloomy world-view. Seely wights (the phrase roughly meant ‘magical beings’) were nature spirits similar to fairies, and human members of the cult flew out in trances to meet them. Fairies were the most important nature spirits in early modern Scotland, but there was a wider world of ‘spirits’ that is only now being opened up. Isobel Gowdie may or may not have been part of a ‘cult’, but her visionary activities were some of the most remarkable on record.

The broader topic of popular belief in witches’ flight is the subject of my own chapter. By arguing that witches were usually assumed
to be able to fly, this underlines how remarkable witchcraft was. The chapter draws some of its concepts from neuroscience journals like *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry* and *Cortex*, where topics like ‘out-of-body experiences’ and ‘hallucinations’ are studied scientifically. Neuroscience is very different, incidentally, from psychoanalysis, the discipline that has more often been used by witchcraft historians who have drawn on ‘psychology’. Ultimately, though, my chapter argues for a cultural interpretation of witches’ flight, as a set of motifs that could be deployed to make sense of witchcraft and to tell stories about it.

IV

Most of the chapters of this book make use of the online Witchcraft Survey, a database of Scottish witchcraft cases. It may help to say a few words here about the Survey, its varied sources, and the varied uses to which it can be put. It can be used to trace statistical patterns and trends, or to identify individual cases with particular characteristics. This introduction, for instance, began with an outline of the panic of 1628–1629 in the presbytery of Dalkeith. The information in this outline was gathered by using the online user interface via the ‘Search the database/Search for accused witches by name, place’ options. Entering ‘Dalkeith’ in the ‘Place of residence’ query box, selecting ‘Presbytery’, and entering a pair of dates in the ‘Case dates between’ boxes, brings up a list of names of witches which can be counted or examined individually. The user interface allows straightforward searches of this kind to be undertaken online. Users wanting to approach the data in more sophisticated or unusual ways can also download the entire data set – the information that lies behind the website’s user interface. They can then run their own queries on it using Microsoft Access.

Any discussion of the Witchcraft Survey is indebted to the detailed analysis of it published by its two full-time researchers, Lauren Martin and Joyce Miller. This analysis provides answers to a number of important queries, with detailed information about the chronology of Scottish witch-hunting and the social profiles of accused witches. My purpose here is simpler: to comment on the ways in which the Survey can best be used, using some of the chapters of the present book to illustrate its strengths and weaknesses. Some of the weaknesses derive from the limitations of the sources, a few from limitations of its own design; avoiding these limitations will enable other users to get the most out of this resource.
There are three levels in the database: the ‘person’, the ‘case’ and the ‘trial’. In the online user interface, these are displayed with three different colours. Usually there is one ‘case’ for each ‘person’, but a few people were investigated more than once. And not everybody had a ‘trial’, or was known with certainty to have a ‘trial’. The most typical ‘case’ was based on a commission of justiciary – a document ordering a trial to be held. The Survey provides 3,212 names of people accused of witchcraft (a few of whom had more than one ‘case’), and has a further 625 records for unnamed people or groups of unnamed people, making a total of 3,837 cases (including some groups of unknown size). For statistical purposes, we counted all the groups as groups of 3 although many groups were probably larger. The Survey gathered detailed information on each case, with 634 data fields that could be filled. Even this number does not guarantee comprehensiveness; we neglected to include a field (or group of fields) for ‘flight’, an omission perhaps atoned for in my chapter below on that subject. My chapter does in fact indicate some fields from which relevant information can be drawn in the Survey.

One good thing about the sources for Scottish witchcraft is that they provide wide coverage, at least after 1608. The earlier coverage is less consistent, since it is only after that date that a central register of commissions survives. But once we have that register, we can gather the names of most accused witches. This contrasts with England, where most assize court records have disappeared, and where some of the most detailed sources are pamphlets that are more or less literary or even fictionalised. Studies of English witch-hunting have very few statistics with which to work. In Scotland, we can produce graphs and charts, and carry out studies of incidence and distribution, like those by Hughes, Cordey and Henderson below. Another good thing is that some very detailed material survives. We have depth as well as breadth, and can reconstruct quite a few cases – like those of Isobel Young or Isobel Gowdie – in detail.

However, most cases survive only in outline, with record survival being not only patchy but also skewed towards certain types of case – particularly those witches who, like Young, were tried in the central justiciary court. The records of the justiciary court survive better than those of evanescent local courts, but cases sent to that court may not have been typical of the others. Because the detailed cases are only a minority, one question must always be kept in mind: Is this case typical? One of the best-known Scottish witches is Alison Balfour from Orkney in 1594. She not only suffered severe physical tortures, but her husband,
son and seven-year-old daughter were tortured in front of her until she confessed.\textsuperscript{32} There is quite a lot about Balfour on the internet, often seeming to assume that this was typical. In fact, as far as we know, it was unique.

Loss of most local trial records means that, for nine-tenths of our witchcraft cases, we have no direct record of whether the person was executed or not. We suspect they were in most cases, for various reasons. One reason is that it is fairly common to come across remarks like Christopher Lowther's mention of ‘Keeth, a borough where all the witches are burned’. The Witchcraft Survey has only partial information on the fate of Dalkeith’s thirty-three witchcraft suspects from 1628 and 1629. For only eleven of them do we have any trial records, and for only two, Janet Bishop and Margaret Cuthbertson, do we have sentences (although these were both sentences of death by burning). Lowther’s remark indicates that many of the others were also burned.

Shortage of information about executions means that scholars studying statistical patterns of Scottish witch-hunting usually study ‘cases’ of witchcraft – people who were formally accused, whether or not we know what their fate was. There are three main categories of ‘cases’ of witchcraft with unknown outcomes. First, there are those for whom we have pre-trial documents showing them to have been formally investigated for witchcraft. Second, there are those for whom we know that a commission of justiciary – an order empowering commissioners to hold a trial – was issued. For these two categories we may not have any actual trial records. Third, there are those who are named as accomplices in another witch’s trial record. We know that many such people were subsequently investigated and tried, so we take this formal accusation as a significant first step towards such action. Looking beyond those who were executed can be an advantage, as Michael Wasser’s chapter shows. We may call these people ‘witches’ as a kind of shorthand, but if we do, we must bear in mind that it is shorthand for ‘someone who was formally accused of witchcraft’ rather than ‘someone who was executed for witchcraft’.

We also excluded people who were accused of other magical practices that were not called ‘witchcraft’ or anything like it. The church courts often prosecuted ‘charmers’ (magical practitioners) for ‘superstitious’ practices, usually making them do penance. This was hardly ever considered to be ‘witchcraft’ unless there was a suggestion of harm done or open demonic involvement. We also excluded people who merely had a popular reputation for witchcraft. In one of my early publications I mentioned as a witch Major Thomas Weir, executed in 1670 mainly
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