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The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-1662

BRIAN P. LEVACK

During 1661 and 1662 Scotland experienced one of the largest witch hunts in its history. Within the space of sixteen months no fewer than 660 persons were publicly accused of various acts of sorcery and diabolism.¹ The hunt began to the east of Edinburgh in the villages and small burghs of Midlothian and East Lothian, where 206 individuals were named as witches between April and December 1661. The hunt did not remain restricted to that area, however, as the privy council busily issued commissions to local authorities throughout the country to try suspected witches. We do not know how many people were executed during the hunt, but the report of John Ray, the English naturalist, that 120 were believed to have been burned during his visit to Scotland suggests that the total number was substantial.² It is true that some of the witches tried in the justiciary court (the central Scottish criminal court, also known as the justice court) were acquitted, and a number of those who were simply named as accomplices never actually came to trial.³ This should in no way, however, detract from the size and importance of the hunt. At no other time in Scottish history, with the possible exception of 1597, were so many people accused of witchcraft within such a brief period of time. Indeed, the hunt, which involved four times the number of persons accused of witchcraft at

I am grateful to Christina Lerner for commenting on an earlier draft of this article.

¹This number includes not only individuals tried for witchcraft and those for whom trials were commissioned, but also those who were merely named as witches in the course of proceedings against others. Most of the names can be located in C. Lerner, C.H. Lee, and H.V. McLachlan, *A Source-Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (hereafter *Source-Book*) (Glasgow, 1977). A total of thirty-eight names not included in *Source-Book* can be found in the Scottish Record Office (hereafter SRO), JC 26/27 (justiciary court processes), CH (kirk sessions records) and PA 7 (records of parliament).

²*Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* (hereafter *R.P.C.*) 3rd ser., I, 1v. F. Legge, "Witchcraft in Scotland," *The Scottish Review*, XVIII (1891), 274, estimates that about 450 witches were executed during the period 1660-63. There is, in fact, hard evidence for only sixty-five executions and one suicide of accused witches during the two-year period 1661-62. It is likely, however, that a great majority of those tried by local authorities upon receipt of a commission from the privy council or parliament were executed. See C. Lerner, "Hekserij als delict in Schotland," *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*, XX (1978), 180.

³See pp. 103-04.

Salem in 1692, was comparable to the large witch hunts that occurred on the European continent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴

Although the Great Scottish Witch Hunt has attracted a fair amount of historical attention, it has never been studied in detail, nor has it ever been fully explained. We still do not know all the reasons such a large hunt occurred at this particular time, why it began in the Lothians, why certain types of persons became its victims, and why it ended. Most historians have been content to attribute it to the political and administrative changes that took place at the time of the Restoration. "Whatever satisfaction the return of King Charles the Second might afford to the younger females in his dominions," wrote one early commentator, "it certainly brought nothing, save torture and destruction, to the unfortunate old women, or witches of Scotland . . ."⁵ In particular, historians have attributed this hunt to the end of English rule in Scotland. During the Protectorate, Scotland had been joined to England in an incorporating union, and Englishmen had sat with Scots as commissioners for the administration of justice. These English judges had been reluctant to prosecute and especially to execute suspected witches, and consequently the number of witches believed to be at liberty had steadily increased. As soon as native Scots, who customarily exercised much less restraint in the prosecution of this crime, regained exclusive control of their judicial system after the Restoration, they set out to rid the country of the large "backlog" of witches that had accumulated.⁶

This interpretation does not in any way offer a complete explanation of the Great Hunt, but it does provide us with a good starting point, for the English judges who served in Scotland do appear to have been more lenient than their Scottish predecessors and successors in the treatment of accused witches. Such a policy was to be expected from a group of justices trained in English law, which did not allow the use of torture in the interrogation of witches, the means by which most witchcraft confessions were obtained both on the Continent and in Scotland. For this reason, and also because the belief that witches made explicit pacts with the Devil and worshipped him in large nocturnal gatherings never gained wide acceptance in En-

⁴The number of persons known to have been accused at Salem is 165. See J. Demos, "Underlying Themes in the Witchcraft of Seventeenth-Century New England," *American Historical Review*, LXXV (1970), 1314. P. Boyer and S. Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 190, work with only 142 accusations. For the size of the hunts at Sasbach and Oppenau, Germany, see H.C.E. Midelfort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684* (Stanford, 1972), p. 137. These hunts were of course more restricted geographically than the Scottish hunt of 1661-62.

⁵C.K. Sharpe, *A Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft in Scotland* (London, 1884), pp. 125-26.

⁶R. Chambers, *Domestic Annals of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1858), II, 277; W.L. Mathieson, *Politics and Religion* (Glasgow, 1902), II, 182-83; H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Scotland and the Puritan Revolution," in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change* (London, 1967), pp. 440-41.

gland,⁷ there were relatively few executions for witchcraft in that country.⁸ Indeed, the process of witch hunting, in which the number of accusations increased dramatically as the result of confessing witches implicating their cohorts, often under the pressure of judicial torture, rarely occurred in England.⁹ No wonder, therefore, that the English judges in Scotland, whom Cromwell intended to use as the instruments of reforming Scots law, should have imposed English standards in the prosecution of this crime.

There is in fact a good deal of evidence to support the contention that the English judges did actually inaugurate a reformed "English" policy toward suspected witches. Long after the end of Cromwellian rule a confessing witch who had been prosecuted "in the English time" admitted that in those days the judges "would put no person to death without proven malefice against them and when nobody was insisting."¹⁰ In 1652, the commissioners heard charges against sixty persons accused of witchcraft, but after learning that the suspects had made their confessions under torture and finding "so much malice and so little proof against them," the justices refused to condemn any of them.¹¹ At about the same time a circuit court at Stirling cited a number of witches but gave them liberty to return home upon caution.¹² And when the commissioners received the confession of John Bayne, a warlock from Kincardineshire in 1654, they ordered a commission to be sent to the Governor of Inverness for a reexamination.¹³ Overall, between 1653 and 1657, the commissioners succeeded in keeping the number of prosecutions and executions to a minimum, the latter totaling only twelve known cases.¹⁴ In 1658 and 1659 there was a notable increase in judicial activity against witches, resulting in thirty-eight

⁷See K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971), pp. 438-49 for a discussion of the weakness of continental witch beliefs in England.

⁸C.L. Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials* (London, 1929), p. 112, estimates that fewer than 1,000 witches were executed in England. Larner, "Hekserij," *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*, XX, 181, sets the figure for Scotland at less than 1,500. In comparing these figures, however, one must consider the differential between the populations of the two countries. The total number of persons executed for witchcraft throughout Europe was probably not more than 100,000. See E.W. Monter, "The Pedestal and the Stake: Courtly Love and Witchcraft," in *Becoming Visible*, R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz (eds.), (Boston, 1977), pp. 129-30.

⁹The only real hunt was the operation conducted by Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne in 1645-46. See W. Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England* (Washington, D.C., 1911), pp. 167-79, and A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970), pp. 135-44.

¹⁰SRO, articles against Andrew Laidlawe (Laidly), 1671, JC 26/38. Laidlawe was set at liberty. See SRO, JC 2/13.

¹¹C.H. Firth (ed.), *Scotland and the Commonwealth* [Scottish History Society, XVIII] (Edinburgh, 1895), pp. 367-68; Chambers, *Domestic Annals*, II, 220.

¹²G.R. Kinloch (ed.), *The Diary of Mr. John Lamont of Newton, 1649-71* [Maitland Club, VII] (Edinburgh, 1830), p. 47.

¹³SRO, confession of John Bayne, 4 January 1654, JC 26/16.

¹⁴*Source-Book*, pp. 15-16, 53-55, 209-10.

executions in the latter year alone,¹⁵ but even then the judges came under sharp criticism for being too lenient. "There is much witcherie up and downe our land," complained Robert Baillie in 1659, "though the English be but too spareing to try it, yet some they execute."¹⁶ Even at Tranent, where the commissioners sentenced eleven witches to death in 1659, the elders of the kirk recalled one year later that some who had been delated and imprisoned had subsequently been released, while others who had been delated had not even been imprisoned.¹⁷

The leniency of the English judges, their reluctance to allow the application of judicial torture, and their skepticism regarding confessions obtained at the local level all contribute to an explanation of why witch hunting assumed such moderate proportions during the Cromwellian period. There were, however, other reasons. Throughout the early seventeenth century the Scottish privy council had issued numerous ad hoc commissions to local authorities to try suspected witches. But during the period of the Cromwellian Union the privy council was disbanded, as was the Scottish parliament, which had authorized a number of witchcraft trials in 1649 and 1650. At the same time, moreover, local Scottish courts, which had often proceeded peremptorily against witches prior to 1652, came under stricter governmental supervision. The end result was a dramatic reduction in the chances that a suspected witch would even be brought to trial, let alone be convicted. These chances became even smaller during the two-year period that preceded the Great Hunt. For on May 6, 1659, the date marking the end of the Protectorate, the judicial machinery of Scotland ground to almost a complete halt.¹⁸ This created a serious legal crisis that only compounded the economic crisis that had been developing for a number of years. "Scotland's condition for the tyme is not good," wrote Baillie, "exhaust[ed] in money; dead in trade; the taxes near doubled; since the sixth of May without all law, nor appearance of any in haste."¹⁹ Other

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 16-25, 55-57, 211-14. Seven of the witches executed in 1659 are listed more than once. The increase in prosecutions in 1658 and 1659 might be attributable to the majority of Scottish commissioners during those years. See A.R.G. M'Millan, "The Judicial System of the Commonwealth in Scotland," *Juridical Review*, XLIX (1937), 240.

¹⁶D. Laing (ed.), *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie, A.M.* (Bannatyne Club, LXXIII) (Edinburgh, 1841-42), III, 436. This letter is dated 31 January 1661, but the first half of it was written in 1659, as both internal evidence and the author himself indicate. See p. 437.

¹⁷SRO, extracts from the records of the kirk of Tranent, 25 November 1660, JC 26/26.

¹⁸The minute books reveal that the commissioners actually sat until 5 July 1659. SRO, JC 6/5. The English parliament attempted to resolve this crisis. See *Journals of the House of Commons*, VII, 659, 775. A bill of union was introduced shortly after the Long Parliament was recalled in July 1659, but parliament was dissolved before the third reading. In October, commissioners were instructed to see that Scots had justice administered to them, but there is no record of actual legal proceedings. See BL, Egerton MS 1048, fol. 177.

¹⁹Laing, *Letters of Baillie*, III, 430. See above, n. 16.

Scots also complained bitterly about the interruption of justice, cataloging the adverse effects of the situation.²⁰ For those who expressed concern about the prevalence of witchcraft, the cessation of criminal justice was particularly regrettable. "Beaus the laws ar now silent," complained the Earl of Haddington after nearly two years of judicial paralysis, "this sin [that is, witchcraft] becomes daylie more frequent."²¹

The question remains, however, whether the leniency of the English commissioners, the absence of the Scottish privy council and parliament, the regulation of local jurisdictions, and the interruption of legal proceedings actually led to an accumulation of suspected witches, thus creating a demand for legal action that only a hunt as great as that of 1661-62 could satisfy. This is a reasonable hypothesis, but a difficult one to substantiate, since there is only fragmentary evidence concerning witches who had managed to avoid formal accusation, trial, or conviction during the Cromwellian period, only to be caught in the wide net of the Great Hunt. We do know, for example, that Margaret Cant of Aberdour, who had been arrested for witchcraft in 1654 but subsequently released, was apprehended again by the restored Scottish authorities in 1661.²² In similar fashion, Christian Wilson of Dalkeith, who had been released from prison on bond when the English entered Scotland, was finally burned for witchcraft in 1661.²³ Another four witches from Newbattle who had been delated by a confessing witch in 1656 were not imprisoned until 1661,²⁴ while Jonet Millar, delated by six confessing witches in 1650 and eventually arrested and induced to confess in 1659, was not actually prosecuted until 1661.²⁵ There is also substantial evidence that many of the witches accused in 1661 had been suspected of their crime many years before, although there is no way to determine whether these suspicions would have resulted in earlier legal action had the judicial climate been more favorable.²⁶ But even if all the witches of 1661 had in fact been suspected of diabolical activity during the 1650s, and early attempts to prosecute them had been frustrated in one way or another, the restoration of the traditional authorities cannot by itself explain the Great Hunt. It cannot, for example, explain why the hunt

²⁰C.H. Firth (ed.), *Scotland and the Protectorate* [Scottish History Society, XXXI] (Edinburgh, 1899), pp. 391-92.

²¹*Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland* (hereafter *A.P.S.*), VII, app., p. 31.

²²G.F. Black, *A Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland, 1510-1727* (New York, 1938), p. 65.

²³SRO, petition against Christian Wilson, 6 June 1661, PA 7/9/1, and proceedings against Wilson, GD 103/2/3/11, item 1.

²⁴Jennet Wilson, Jennet Watt, Margaret Litle, and Jennet Fergreive. SRO, Newbattle kirk session, 11 and 14 August 1661, CH 2/276/4. The confessing witch was John MacMillan (McWilliam), who was executed on 5 February 1656. SRO, JC 6/5.

²⁵SRO, Jonet Millar process papers, JC 26/27. See also SRO, Kirkliston kirk session, 14 August 1659, CH 2/229/1.

²⁶It was not at all unusual for suspicions to develop over a number of years before action was taken against a particular witch. And witchcraft was, according to learned tradition, a habitual crime.

was restricted to a relatively small area during the greater part of 1661. Nor can it account for the long duration of the hunt. Even more important, it cannot explain why the accusations were made in the first place. The most that can be said is that the end of Cromwellian rule and the restoration of the regular judicial machinery and personnel in 1661 provided a necessary precondition of the hunt. Unless the English commissioners had been succeeded by a Scottish justice general, unless the privy council and parliament of Scotland had been restored, and unless the regular judicial institutions had been returned to smooth working order, the Great Hunt probably would never have occurred.

But what was the real driving force behind the hunt? Who set the machinery of justice in operation and then maintained it? For some time now the clergy of Scotland have shouldered much of the blame, not only for this particular hunt but for the spread of the entire "witch craze" in Scotland.²⁷ Whether the clergy of 1661 were trying to prove that they were as zealous against the "powers of darkness" as their predecessors in the 1640s²⁸ or reacting against the Cromwellian policy of laicization in the interests of "religion and justice,"²⁹ they certainly appear to have played an active part in the Great Hunt. Ministers, acting with the lay elders of their parishes³⁰ in the kirk sessions, conducted the initial examination of persons arrested for witchcraft, allowed them to be searched for the Devil's Marks, and took depositions from witnesses before referring the cases to the appropriate secular authority. In this capacity the clergy often acted without proper restraint. They extracted a number of confessions from accused witches, often employing torture, and when the justiciary court acquitted one witch in 1661, the kirk session of Dalkeith prepared a second set of charges in order to prevent her release.³¹ But the complete records of the kirk sessions, especially in those areas where witch hunting was most intense in 1661, suggest that the clergy do not deserve the reputation they have gained as the most avid witch hunters of their day. In addition to interrogating suspected witches, the kirk sessions often took action

²⁷Black, *Calendar*, p. 13; Legge, "Witchcraft in Scotland," *Scottish Review*, XVIII, 260-69; J.I. Smith, "The Transition to the Modern Law," in *An Introduction to Scottish Legal History* [Stair Society, XX] (Edinburgh, 1959), pp. 42-43.

²⁸*R.P.C.*, 3rd ser., I, 1v.

²⁹Trevor-Roper, "Scotland and the Puritan Revolution," in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change*, pp. 440-41.

³⁰Lay elders were of course only quasi-clerical figures. See G. Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 186-87. Irrespective of how one labels them, they form a part of the clerical organization that Black and others consider to have been a main source of Scottish witchcraft prosecutions.

³¹This was Janet Cock, against whom three dittays were drawn up. All three are in SRO, JC 26/27. Cock was acquitted on 10 September 1661, but liberty was denied 18 September. See SRO, warrant for witnesses, 11 November 1661, JC 26/27. Cock was convicted on 11 November. SRO, JC 2/10. See also W.G. Scott-Moncrieff (ed.), *The Records of the Proceedings of the Justiciary Court, Edinburgh, 1661-1678*, I [Scottish History Society, XLVIII] (Edinburgh, 1905), pp. 13-21.

against individuals for slandering their neighbors of that crime. Thus, at Dalkeith on July 30, 1661, at the height of the Great Hunt, the kirk session heard the complaint of John Hume against John Dobie for saying he would wager five hundred marks that Hume's wife would be convicted of witchcraft if tried.³² The session referred the matter to the civil magistrate. At Newton, Midlothian, where no fewer than twenty-eight witches were named in 1661, the kirk session warned John Nielson three times for calling Margaret Allen a bitch and a witch.³³ The Newton session also ordained during the summer of 1661 that anyone who would slander the child of a person who had either been convicted or delated for witchcraft should suffer publicly before the congregation, and the kirk session of Inveresk issued a similar warning that applied to friends as well as children of witches.³⁴ Action of this sort, while incapable of preventing all villagers from making further accusations of witchcraft, nonetheless did keep the hunt from becoming larger than it actually was and might have even helped to bring it to an end.

If the kirk sessions did not make as great a contribution to the Great Hunt as some historians have argued, then the presbyteries, which consisted of the clergy from a number of parishes, made an even less noteworthy contribution. As late as 1659 presbyteries had played a limited role in witchcraft prosecutions, but they did not do so in 1661.³⁵ Perhaps the presbytery of Dalkeith, in which jurisdiction a majority of the accusations were made in 1661, still remembered the reprimand it had received in 1609 when it had proceeded against the suspected witch Geillis Johnstoune. At that time the privy council had protested against the "preposterous" form of proceeding undertaken by the presbytery, noting that the case should have been referred to the lord of regality or the justice general and his deputies.³⁶ In any event, the Dalkeith presbytery in 1661 remained inactive in the face of the crisis developing around it.³⁷ As long as witchcraft remained a statutory crime triable in the secular courts, it was difficult for the clergy to take the leading role in its prosecution.³⁸ Of course, the clergy could use the power of the pulpit to make their parishioners more attentive to the dangers of witchcraft, and there is some

³²SRO, CH 2/84/3, fols. 17^v. For similar proceedings at Dalkeith before the Great Hunt see CH 2/84/2, fols. 29, 44^v.

³³SRO, CH 2/283/2, fols. 56^v-57.

³⁴*Ibid.*, fol. 55; Inveresk kirk session, 4 June 1661, CH 2/531/1.

³⁵SRO, report of presbytery of Irvine, 2 February 1658, JC 26/24; A.G. Reid (ed.), *The Diary of Andrew Hay of Craignethan 1659-1660* [Scottish History Society, XXXIX] (Edinburgh, 1901), pp. 145n, 195, 243.

³⁶R. Pitcairn (ed.), *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland* [Bannatyne Club, XLII] (Edinburgh, 1833), III, 600.

³⁷SRO, CH 2/424/4.

³⁸Neither the kirk session of Newton nor that of Edmonston would take action against Agnes Johnston, although the elders of Edmonston did express a hope that the civil authorities would proceed against her for witchcraft. SRO, Newton kirk session, 4 August, 15 September 1661, CH 2/283/2, fols. 55^v-57.

evidence that the clergy acted in this way before and during the Great Hunt.³⁹ The minister of Inveresk, for example, notified his congregation that a woman who had been imprisoned on suspicion of witchcraft would have to be released unless someone brought charges against her, and he also warned them not to harbor two witches who had fled from Chrichton after being imprisoned for witchcraft.⁴⁰ But if the clergy railed against witches and alerted the population to the activities of the Devil's confederates, they were not alone. The cleric Robert Baillie may have bemoaned the prevalence of witchcraft in 1659, but he was joined by the laymen Alexander Brodie, Andrew Hay, John Nicoll, and John Lamont. And it was the petition of a layman, the Earl of Haddington, that moved parliament to delegate a commission to try the witches who were allegedly infesting his lands in Samuelston and thus to begin the Great Hunt in April 1661.⁴¹

Haddington's petition and parliament's quick response to it suggest that this witch hunt, like any other, required not only adequate judicial machinery to bring witches to trial but a fear of witchcraft among influential members of society and a commitment by the ruling elite, especially those who exercised secular power, to activate that machinery. Three months after Haddington's petition, heritors in the parishes of Musselburgh, Dalkeith, Newbattle, Newton, and Dudingston, all within Midlothian, complained to the privy council about the number of witches in their locality. In response to this complaint, the council ordered three justice deputies to travel to Musselburgh and Dalkeith to try accused witches.⁴² These towns, where the same judges had been sent a month before by order of parliament,⁴³ became two of the most important centers of witchcraft prosecutions during the Great Hunt.

The question remains, however, why did so many people harbor such deep-seated fears of witchcraft in 1661? The petition of Haddington provides a number of clues:

That wpon severall malefices committit of late within and about my landis of Sammelstowne thair being severall persones suspect of the abominable sin of witchcraft apprehendit and searched, the marks of witches wer found on thame in the ordinarie way. Severallis of thame haif maid confessioun and haif dilatit sundrie otheris within the saidis boundis and haif acknowledged paction with the devill.⁴⁴

³⁹See for example SRO, Humber kirk session, 7 July 1661, CH 2/389/1.

⁴⁰SRO, Inveresk kirk session, 5 November and 3 December 1661, CH 2/531/1.

⁴¹A.P.S., VII, app., p. 31; VII, 123. For the confused judicial situation in January 1661, see Sir John Lauder, *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs*, D. Laing (ed.), [Bannatyne Club, LXXXVII] (Edinburgh, 1848), I, 1, 3.

⁴²R.P.C., 3rd ser., I, 11-12.

⁴³A.P.S., VII, app., p. 78.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 31.

It is clear from this statement that *malefices*, that is, harmful deeds attributed to the witches' superhuman, mysterious, or extraordinary power, provided the original grounds for suspecting at least some of the Samuelston witches. Such *maleficia*, or acts of black magic or sorcery, were often incorporated into the dittays (that is, indictments) of the accused, and since witnesses could often be induced to testify to their reality, they often helped to bring about convictions. But *maleficia* do not appear to have been the only reason for Haddington's concern. Nor do the charges of sorcery brought against those witches who were examined by the kirk sessions and tried by the court of justiciary in 1661 reveal much that was by itself capable of causing a large-scale panic. The witches were accused of a wide variety of harmful deeds, such as injuring or causing the death of their neighbors, making them tremble or sweat, preventing them from arriving at their destinations, riding horses to death, turning over stones to prevent corn from growing, and burning barns.⁴⁵ These were, of course, serious charges, and they were probably the reason why Haddington's tenants threatened to leave his lands if the witches were not prosecuted.⁴⁶ But it is clear that Haddington was concerned with more than the alleged practice of sorcery and his tenants' fear of it. What bothered him most was the fact that the people accused of committing *maleficia* had confessed to making pacts with the Devil and had implicated a large number of confederates. It was of course the belief that sorcerers made explicit pacts with the Devil, copulated with him, renounced their baptism, and worshipped him that distinguished European witchcraft of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries from the simple black magic found in all parts of the world at all periods of time. And it was the belief that witches worshipped the Devil collectively in large numbers and thus constituted an enormous conspiracy to subvert the Kingdom of God that aroused the fears of European authorities, lay as well as clerical, and led to the large witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Haddington's petition to parliament in 1661 simply expressed the same fears that had dominated European elites for nearly two hundred years. He might have been able to cope with a few isolated individuals tampering with the normal processes of nature, but large-scale apostasy and recruitment by the Devil was something of an entirely different order.

Another phrase in Haddington's petition, the indication that the "marks of witches wer found on thame in the ordinarie way," suggests why he and other Scots were especially concerned with the "abominable sin of witchcraft" at this particular time. Searching a suspected witch's body for marks that were insensitive to pain and did not bleed had been employed frequently in Scotland and on the continent, and King James VI had

⁴⁵SRO, JC 26/27, *passim*; Newbattle kirk session, 23 June 1661, CH 2/276/4. Although these records include numerous charges of *maleficia* made in 1661, there is no record of the specific *maleficia* allegedly perpetrated at Samuelston.

⁴⁶*A.P.S.*, VII, app., p. 31.

specifically recommended this procedure to determine whether a suspected witch had made a pact with the Devil.⁴⁷ The practice derived from the theory, which commanded a certain measure of popular acceptance but was also vulnerable to popular criticism,⁴⁸ that the Devil gave witches marks as signs of allegiance. Finding the marks did not by itself secure the conviction of the accused; it only served as a preliminary indication of guilt that would lead either to further interrogation, often under torture, or to trial. But as a means of confirming the suspicions of a community, validating the belief that a pact had been made, prejudicing the case against the accused, and in some cases actually forcing the accused to confess, the location of marks played an important role in witch hunting. In the middle of the seventeenth century a number of professional witch hunters who specialized in pricking suspects in order to find the marks became active in Scotland. These "prickers" operated for profit and may have even used their craft as a pretext for extortion.⁴⁹ But irrespective of their motives, they satisfied the demands of local magistrates and even some witches themselves, who naively sought out the prickers in order to establish their innocence.⁵⁰ The prickers appear to have been most active during the early months of 1659, just before the interruption of justice, and again in 1661, when witches were pricked almost as a matter of course.⁵¹ This suggests that the prickers were at least partially responsible both for the substantial increase in the number of prosecutions and executions in 1659 and the hunt that began in 1661.

There is also a strong geographical connection between the activities of the most famous pricker, John Kincaid, and the prosecutions of both 1659 and 1661. Kincaid lived in Tranent, East Lothian, and although he traveled about the country, he was most active in his home county and in neighboring Midlothian. In 1659, eighteen of the thirty-eight individuals executed for witchcraft resided in East Lothian,⁵² and almost all of them submitted to searches by the pricker, who in a number of cases was specifically identified as Kincaid.⁵³ When the machinery of justice was once again set

⁴⁷[James VI], *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597), p. 80.

⁴⁸Larner, "Hekserij," *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*, XX, p. 184. The Newbattle kirk session rebuked Janet Little on 7 August 1661 for saying that every man and woman had so many marks like witches. SRO, CH 2/276/4.

⁴⁹J.G. Dalyell, *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1834), p. 643.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 640. At Newbattle Jennet Wilson, Jennet Watt, and Isobel Fergusson all asked for the pricker. SRO, Newbattle kirk session, 3 July and 14 August 1661, CH 2/276/4.

⁵¹For the activities of the prickers before 1659 see SRO, case of Janet Bruce, 1657, JC 26/22 and JC 6/5.

⁵²*Source-Book*, pp. 21-24.

⁵³Kincaid, using a "great long pin," searched Christian Cranstoun, Jonet Thomson, Barbara Cochrane, Marioun Lynn, Helen Simbeard, and Marioun Guild, and it is almost certain that he searched the other Tranent witches as well. SRO, Tranent witches process papers, 1659, JC 26/26. Kincaid was practicing his trade as early as 1649. See Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, III, 599.

in operation in April 1661, the first witches brought to trial came from Samuelston, East Lothian, which is only six miles from Tranent. Since these witches confessed after marks were found on their bodies, they were probably searched by Kincaid, who was active during the entire hunt. It might also be suggested that one of the reasons why the Great Hunt was at first confined to East Lothian and Midlothian was that Kincaid and his associates operated mainly in that area.⁵⁴ A further reason for the heavy concentration of prosecutions in that region was the thorough administration of justice there by the justiciary court.

The Great Scottish Witch Hunt received its direction mainly from above—from the judges, magistrates, clergy, and local gentry who controlled the judicial machinery and used it to obtain confessions, depositions, implications, and convictions. Consequently, the reasons the hunt took place reside primarily in the beliefs, fears, policies, and activities of that ruling elite. But popular fears, suspicions, and accusations also played an essential role in the process, mainly by determining which people would be prosecuted and providing evidence of the alleged witches' maleficent deeds. A complete inquiry into this hunt requires, therefore, that we learn why certain individuals incurred the suspicions of their neighbors.

The most obvious social characteristic of those accused of witchcraft in 1661-62 is that 84 percent were adult females. In this respect the Scottish witches of those years conformed closely to the stereotype of the witch that has prevailed in all societies, ancient as well as modern, and received reinforcement during the European witchcraft prosecutions of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁵ But by itself this dominant characteristic cannot provide an adequate explanation of the pattern of accusations. Perhaps the people of the communities of East Lothian and Midlothian suspected women of witchcraft more readily than men because they shared the assumption of the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* that women were morally weaker and more carnal than men and hence were more prone to abjure their faith and copulate with the Devil.⁵⁶ This, however, is unlikely, since initial suspicions and accusations at the village level did not usually involve the charge of making a pact with the Devil and having sexual relations with him. Almost invariably these charges were added at a later stage of the judicial process, often at the instigation of an interrogator.⁵⁷ Perhaps the alleged moral weakness and natural carnality of women gave added plausibility to the charges against women

⁵⁴For Kincaid's activity in Midlothian see G.F. Black, *Some Unpublished Scottish Witchcraft Trials* (New York, 1941), pp. 38-45.

⁵⁵See C. Garrett, "Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis," *Signs*, III (1977), 461-70; N. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (New York, 1975), pp. 248-53; Monter, "Pedestal and the Stake," in *Becoming Visible*, pp. 128-35.

⁵⁶M. Summers (ed.), *The Malleus Maleficarum* (New York, 1971), pp. 41-47.

⁵⁷For a discussion of the introduction of learned notions of diabolism in medieval witchcraft trials, see R. Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials* (London, 1976), pp. 73-92.

who were suspected of witchcraft for other reasons. But it does not lie at the root of the original suspicions, nor can it explain why certain women were singled out from other members of their sex, since allegedly all women shared in the moral weakness attributed to them.

Why then did the people of towns like Dalkeith and Musselburgh testify against these particular women? The evidence is not substantial enough to support any firm conclusions, but it does suggest motivation in a number of cases. Certainly some of the witches of 1661, such as Agnes Johnston and Janet Cock, were midwives or healers, occupations that could easily lead to charges of practicing sorcery.⁵⁸ Others, such as Janet Lyle, Beatrix Leslie, Christian Patersone, and Margaret Porteous, were widows who, simply because they were old and poor, could easily have exhibited eccentric forms of behavior and bothered their neighbors, thereby inviting suspicion of sorcery. A number of women accused of witchcraft had previously been suspected of, or even prosecuted for, various forms of moral deviance. Helen Cass, for example, was widely known to be sexually promiscuous, especially with English soldiers, as early as 1655,⁵⁹ while Christian Wilson had been delated for cursing on the Sabbath in 1658⁶⁰ and Helen Concker had committed fornication with John Wysurd before being committed to the tolbooth for witchcraft in 1661.⁶¹

Even more widespread than specific charges of deviance was the irascibility attributed to many of the witches accused in 1661. Of course the charge that the accused had been angry with her husband or a relative or neighbor was often made simply to provide a plausible emotional backdrop to the alleged pact with the Devil. But the testimony of witnesses against the accused, which remains the most reliable evidence regarding the personality and behavior of the witch, reveals an exceptionally high incidence of angry, vengeful activity on the part of the witches of 1661. This anger was usually directed against male members of the community who occupied positions of social or economic superiority over them. All the witches regarding whom information is available appear to have lived in rather straitened circumstances, a fact that explains why the incidents that triggered outbreaks of anger often had economic origins. Christian Wilson, for example, sought revenge against William Richardson for felling one of her hens,⁶² while Janet Cock had an argument with James Douglas over the raking of dung,⁶³ and Margaret Allen "conceived malice

⁵⁸SRO, Newton kirk session, CH 2/283/2, fols. 55^v-57, *passim*; Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Scotland*, pp. 129-30. Johnston had been delated by Janet Dail of Newton. See SRO, Musselburgh witches process papers, 29 July 1661, JC 26/27. A few days after being imprisoned, Johnston escaped. SRO, CH 2/283/2, fol. 59.

⁵⁹SRO, Inveresk kirk session, 17 July 1655, CH 2/531/1.

⁶⁰SRO, Dalkeith kirk session, 16 November 1658, CH 2/84/2, fol. 39^v.

⁶¹SRO, Inveresk kirk session, 4 June 1661, CH 2/531/1.

⁶²Black, *Unpublished Trials*, p. 36.

⁶³SRO, dittay against Cock, 18 June 1661, JC 26/27; Black, *Unpublished Trials*, p. 36.

and hatred" toward Thomas Hoyer because he had taken some of her husband's land.⁶⁴

In some cases the witch's antagonist actually denied her an act of charity she had requested, such as when Walter Lithgob, a cook, refused Janet Cock the broth she had asked for and he gratuitously threatened to scald her with it instead.⁶⁵ But it is not possible to conclude from this and other similar incidents⁶⁶ that most of the witches prosecuted during the Great Hunt were making their wealthier and more individualistic or "capitalistic" neighbors feel guilty by demanding that they adhere to communal standards of social justice. Alan Macfarlane has argued that such a situation prevailed in Essex in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum have shown that a somewhat different type of conflict between medieval corporate ideals and a nascent spirit of capitalism explains the pattern of accusations at Salem.⁶⁷ It is difficult, however, to establish any such broad trends on the basis of a few isolated witchcraft accusations from the towns of Midlothian and East Lothian in 1661. Not only did Scottish society lag far behind that of Essex in the development of early capitalism, but those Scottish accusations that had an economic foundation often reflected little more than a jealousy and hostility common to many precapitalistic societies.

Actually, what is most striking about the witches accused in the Great Hunt is that so many of them conformed to the traditional stereotype of the poor, old female who aroused suspicion, fear, and discomfort among her neighbors. As far as can be determined, this stereotype persisted throughout the hunt and did not break down as the first suspects began to implicate others. Such a change did occur at Salem and in many of the German witch hunts studied by H.C.E. Midelfort.⁶⁸ In the later stages of these hunts a larger number of men, including some of the wealthier and more influential members of the community, incurred accusations of witchcraft, thereby creating a sense of alarm within the ruling elite and stimulating a crisis of confidence in the legal institutions used to prosecute witches. Scotland

⁶⁴SRO, dittay against Margaret Allen, 14 November 1661, JC 26/27.

⁶⁵SRO, dittay against Cock, 11 November 1661, JC 26/27. This was the third dittay against her. Cock was accused of threatening Lithgob that he would not have the power to stand, after which he was bedridden for three months.

⁶⁶Jonet Millar allegedly enchanted the milk of Helen Black when the latter refused to give her some butter. Millar was also held responsible for the death of James Wilkie's horse after he refused to lend it to her for a shilling. Margaret Hutchinson became angry at Harry Balfour because he refused to do some work for her. SRO, Dudington witches and Jonet Millar process papers, JC 26/27.

⁶⁷Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, pp. 147-56, 173-76, 205-06; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, pp. 209-16. Both authors argue that witchcraft accusations arose at a "critical stage" in the emergence of an individualistic ethic. It should be noted, however, that at Salem those villagers who wished to preserve the old order accused their more entrepreneurial antagonists (as well as some members of their own group), whereas in Essex, England, the situation was reversed.

⁶⁸Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, pp. 32-33; Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, p. 194.

did eventually experience a crisis of confidence, but it did not derive from a change in the status of the victims of the hunt. The witches remained the most vulnerable as well as the most easily suspected members of the community.

The crisis of confidence in Scotland began when the judges of the justiciary court, which had assumed primary responsibility for trying witches in Midlothian and East Lothian, came to the realization that a number of accused witches, especially those named in the later stages of the hunt, were in fact innocent. The judges appear to have become most skeptical regarding accusations made by dying and confessing witches, who often gave no evidence concerning the activities of their alleged confederates except that they had seen them at one of their nocturnal gatherings (actually rather tame affairs by continental standards) at such places as Wolmet Bank, Libberton Kirk, or Newton Dean.⁶⁹ Very few of the witches thus named ever came to trial, at least in the justiciary court. Some of them may have avoided prosecution because local communities, burdened with the cost of maintaining large numbers of witches in jail, and unable to locate individuals who were willing to testify against them, decided to set them free. A few witches imprisoned in 1661 were released for precisely these reasons,⁷⁰ but it is much more likely that the judges simply refused to hear such cases. There is no doubt that the judges had begun to question seriously the validity of accusations made by confessing witches. In one case, the court not only accepted the retraction of a witch's confession but also sentenced him to be whipped and placed in a house of correction for implicating so many honest people.⁷¹

Even when suspects had been accused by individuals who were not themselves witches, and the trials actually did take place, the judges of the justiciary court proceeded in a cautious, skeptical manner. In a number of cases they declared certain articles against accused witches to be irrelevant, a procedure that laid the foundation for no fewer than fourteen

⁶⁹Numerous implications are recorded in SRO, JC 26/27. In East Lothian, Helen Deanes and Anna Pilmore, both of whom had been named in the Earl of Haddington's petition of 3 April 1661, implicated a total of fourteen persons on 24 April, the day that the commission established by parliament sentenced seven witches to death. See SRO, PA 7/23/1. Thirteen of these fourteen had been named as witches, together with Deanes and Pilmore in 1649 but had not been convicted, mainly because a sufficiently empowered commission had not been established. Compare the names in PA 7/9/1, fol. 42 and PA 7/23/1 with *R.P.C.*, 2nd ser., VIII, 205. In place of Jonet Wast, accused in 1649, Helen Wast was named. Commissions to try seven of these individuals were established on 9 May and 6 June 1661. *R.P.C.*, 2nd ser., VIII, 199, 248.

⁷⁰See for example the case of Janet Stoddart, SRO, Inveresk kirk session, 5 November 1661, CH 2/531/1. In November 1661, the Earl of Haddington asked that Agnes Williamson, who had been kept in prison eight months at the charge of himself and his tenants, be either tried or set at liberty. *R.P.C.*, 3rd ser., I, 78.

⁷¹Sir George Mackenzie, *The Laws and Customes of Scotland in Matters Criminal* (Edinburgh, 1678), p. 104. See also Scott-Moncrieff, *Justiciary Court Proceedings*, I, 34.

acquittals. In two cases, those of Janet Cock and Margaret Hutchinson, acquittals were followed either by reapprehension of the accused or formulation of a new dittay against her.⁷² Both Cock and Hutchinson were eventually convicted and executed, but in another similar case, that of Jonet Millar, the judges denied the request for a second trial, despite the submission of a new dittay, on the grounds that the witch had already been declared not guilty by the assize.⁷³ Acquittals, if numerous enough, can have a profound effect upon the momentum of a witch hunt by short-circuiting the chain of accusations, reducing the willingness of local authorities to initiate new cases, and calling into question the means by which the witches had been apprehended and examined. Even more important, the process leading to acquittal often allows the judges themselves to clarify the reasons for their caution. There is little doubt that Sir George Mackenzie's involvement in the Great Hunt as a justice depute influenced the development of his relatively moderate, cautious, and enlightened attitude toward the prosecution of witches, which he later formulated in *The Laws and Customes of Scotland in Matters Criminal*.⁷⁴ It is also possible, though impossible to prove, that the growing skepticism of Mackenzie and his colleagues explains why the justiciary court almost completely stopped adjudicating cases of witchcraft in 1662.⁷⁵

The cessation of judicial activity by the justiciary court did not, however,

⁷²For the dittays against Cock see above, n. 63, 65. For those against Hutchinson see Scott-Moncrieff, *Justiciary Court Proceedings*, I, 9, 11; SRO, Dudingston witches process papers, JC 26/27.

⁷³Millar, having been delated by six confessing witches in 1650, was examined before the kirk session of Kirkliston on 14 August 1659. She confessed on 26 August, but the session, requiring more verification, requested the presence of the Lairds of Dundas and Carlowrie and two J.P.s from the sheriffdom of Linlithgow. In their presence, Millar admitted that she had made a confession, denying that she had been tortured but claiming that the constable, Robert Wilson, had promised that if she were to confess, she might return home afterwards. SRO, Kirkliston kirk session, 14 August 1659, CH 2/229/1; Jonet Millar process papers, JC 26/27. In 1661 Millar was confined to the tolbooth in Edinburgh, but since no witnesses would compare, the justice deputies sent her back to Kirkliston on 5 July to be tried by such commissioners as the parliament or the council should nominate. See Scott-Moncrieff, *Justiciary Court Proceedings*, I, 3. This trial was to have taken place on 10 September, but on 20 August Millar was tried together with a number of witches from Dudingston and was declared not guilty by a plurality. At an unknown date new dittays were drafted. The justice deposes, however, would not allow her to be tried at Kirkliston, as previously planned, since she had already been acquitted. See SRO, Dudingston witches and Jonet Millar process papers, JC 26/27; JC 2/10. There is no doubt that Jonet Millar of Kirkliston (*Source-Book*, nos. 403, 2812, 2813) was the same person as the Jonet Millar tried with the Dudingston witches (no. 392). Compare the articles in the various dittays and also the Kirkliston kirk session proceedings, 14 August 1659.

⁷⁴Mackenzie, *Laws and Customes*, pp. 80-108. See also Sir George Mackenzie, *Pleadings in Some Remarkable Cases* (Edinburgh, 1673), pp. 185-97.

⁷⁵There was only one witchcraft case between 1663 and 1669. See *Source-Book*, p. 40.

put an end to the prosecution of witches at this time. Quite to the contrary, the news of the burnings in Edinburgh, the sense of alarm that had arisen within the ruling elite, and the accumulation of routine suspicions throughout Scotland led the privy council to issue an unprecedented number of commissions to try suspected witches during the first half of 1662.⁷⁶ The records of these trials are no longer extant, nor are the fates of most of the accused known, though it is likely that many were executed.⁷⁷ As long as the council continued to issue these commissions, the hunt could have been sustained, even without the assistance of the justiciary court. But by the spring of 1662 the council had begun to manifest the same skepticism that had affected the justiciary court. In a proclamation issued on April 10, the council noted that great numbers of suspected witches had been apprehended, hurried into prisons, pricked, tortured, and abused, with the unfortunate result that many innocent people had suffered. It therefore ordered that a suspected witch could not be arrested without a special warrant from the council, the justice general, or his deputies, or from the sheriff, justices of the peace, steward, bailie of regality, or magistrates of the burgh where the suspected witch resided. It also prohibited pricking or torture except by order of the council and forbade the use of any other unlawful means to extract confessions.⁷⁸ As a further indication of its new policy the council imprisoned Kincaid and John Dick for their activities as prickers.⁷⁹

By this decisive action the council dealt three strong blows to the Great Hunt of 1661-62 and to the entire process of witch hunting in Scotland. First, the requirement that a special warrant be obtained before arrest made it difficult for local communities to proceed peremptorily against suspected witches. Second, the prohibition of torture, while not absolute, discouraged the use of a judicial tool that was responsible for most of the confessions and implications made during this and other witch hunts. In this respect the council was simply adopting the policy that the English commissioners had implemented when they controlled criminal justice during the 1650s.⁸⁰ Finally, and most important, the imprisonment of Kincaid and Dick put almost a complete end to the activities of the

⁷⁶*R.P.C.*, 3rd ser., I, *passim*; *Source-Book*, pp. 125-42. The privy council met for the first time on 13 July 1661, the day after parliament adjourned.

⁷⁷Larner, "Hekserij," *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie*, XX, 180, estimates that 95 percent of all privy council commissions resulted in convictions.

⁷⁸*R.P.C.*, 3rd ser., I, 198.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 187, 210.

⁸⁰Even in 1658, when local authorities were proceeding against more witches than in the previous few years, they were careful to deny that any torture had been used to extract confessions. See SRO, testification of the justices of the peace, 19 July 1658, JC 26/24. The Claim of Right prohibited the use of torture without evidence or in ordinary crimes. A complete prohibition of torture was enacted in 1708 (7 Anne, c. 21, sec. 8).

prickers, who had been partially responsible for starting the Great Hunt and had helped to define its early geographical boundaries.⁸¹

A few months after issuing this order, the privy council granted its last commission of 1662, and during the next two years it granted only three more.⁸² Since parliament had already issued its last commission on July 12, 1661, the day of its adjournment, and since the justiciary court had already stopped hearing all but a few isolated cases, the Great Hunt of 1661-62 came to a halt. The end of the hunt in many ways constituted a turning point in the history of Scottish witchcraft, for after 1662 one can detect a general, although not a strictly progressive decline in witchcraft prosecutions until the last execution in 1727.⁸³ Seen in this light, the Great Scottish Witch Hunt assumes an importance comparable to that of the *auto-da-fé* that occurred at Logroño in northern Castile in 1610. In the wake of the Logroño trials, which resulted in eleven executions for witchcraft and the publication of an edict of grace that induced a further 1,802 individuals to confess to that crime, the Spanish Inquisition adopted policies that led to a dramatic reduction in the number of witchcraft prosecutions in all of Spain throughout the remainder of the seventeenth century.⁸⁴

The person most responsible for the change in the official Spanish attitude toward witchcraft was the inquisitor Alonso de Salazar Frias. Salazar had taken part in the Logroño trials but had disapproved of some of the procedures employed by his colleagues. He had also become skeptical regarding the confessions prompted by the promulgation of the edict of grace, and after an extensive investigation of the evidence he concluded that none of the "witches" had actually performed the deeds to which they had confessed.⁸⁵ Salazar's counterpart in Scotland was Sir George Mackenzie, who, mentioned earlier, played an active role in the trials of 1661. Mackenzie's cautious and moderate stance toward witchcraft did not derive from a philosophical skepticism. Although he did not think that witches were very numerous, he believed in the reality of witchcraft and took issue with the skeptical arguments of the German humanist Johann Weyer.⁸⁶ In this respect, Mackenzie appears to have been more credulous than Salazar. But Mackenzie, like Salazar, did exhibit a *legal* skepticism that had emerged from his involvement in the prosecution of witches and

⁸¹Prickers, including one Cowan, a pupil of Kincaid, became active again in 1677, but the council imprisoned him. See W.N. Neill, "The Professional Pricker and His Test for Witchcraft," *Scottish Historical Review*, XIX (1922), 209.

⁸²*R.P.C.*, 3rd ser., I, 319; II, 165, 635.

⁸³See *Source-Book*, pp. 238-39; T.C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830* (New York, 1969), p. 206.

⁸⁴G. Henningsen, "The Papers of Alonso de Salazar Frias," *Temenos*, V (1969), pp. 85-96.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 96-103. Of the 1,802 individuals who confessed, 1,384 were girls under twelve or boys under fourteen years of age.

⁸⁶Mackenzie, *Pleadings*, p. 185; *Laws and Customes*, pp. 81-85.

his scholarly investigations of witchcraft prosecutions in the past. The numerous miscarriages of justice that he had either witnessed or studied convinced him that of all crimes witchcraft required "the clearest relevancy and most convincing probation."⁸⁷ He condemned judges who burned people by the thousands for their alleged witchcraft, and he defended the "poor, ignorant creatures" who were so often accused.⁸⁸ Most important, he gave expression to all those doubts and reconsiderations that had begun to prevail in 1661 and 1662. He insisted that the justice court exercise exclusive cognition of the crime and he discouraged the council's practice of issuing commissions to "country men" and inferior courts.⁸⁹ He condemned the art of pricking as a "horrid cheat," and he argued that the Devil's Mark, which "useth to be a great article with us," was not relevant unless the witch confessed that she got the mark by her own consent.⁹⁰ Finally, he insisted that the implication of the accused by other confessing witches was not by itself sufficient for conviction.⁹¹ These observations read like a commentary on the experiences of 1661-62. It appears as if Mackenzie, one of the most intelligent participants in the Great Hunt, was writing its final footnote.⁹²

Lut us add one more. This hunt took place at a time when royalist and counter-revolutionary sentiment was strong. The Restoration had been extremely popular in Scotland,⁹³ and it had led to a repudiation of all the revolutionary changes that had occurred during the previous three decades.⁹⁴ It is possible that royalist professions of hatred for revolution and rebellion created a public mood, at least in some communities, that was especially conducive to witch hunting.⁹⁵ At Linlithgow on May 29, 1661, a

⁸⁷Mackenzie, *Laws and Customes*, p. 85.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁹²For specific references to the Great Hunt in Mackenzie, *Laws and Customes*, see pp. 90, 93, 97, 104, 105, 106.

⁹³M. Lee Jr., *The Cabal* (Urbana, 1965), p. 36.

⁹⁴The Rescissory Act of 28 March 1661 annulled all the acts of the "pretended" parliaments of the 1640s, and a further act of the same day declared that the Rescissory Act extended to all the pretended parliaments since 1633. On 6 September 1661 Charles ordered the restoration of the Scottish episcopacy by royal proclamation. See G. Davies and P. Hardacre, "The Restoration of the Scottish Episcopacy, 1660-1661," *J.B.S.*, I (1962), 45-50. It is difficult to determine how popular the restoration of the episcopacy was. See M. Lee Jr., "Comment on the Restoration of the Scottish Episcopacy, 1660-1661," *J.B.S.*, I (1962), 52-53 and I.B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters, 1660-1688* (London, 1976), p. 45.

⁹⁵G.L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 279, 372, argues that outbreaks of witch hunting are likely to accompany or follow crises in politics and religion because of the "perturbed condition of the public mind." This episode can be regarded as one hunt that occurred after, or perhaps in the very late stages of such a crisis. Witch hunts generally took place after, rather than during, periods of warfare. See Midelfort, *Witch Hunting*, p. 75; E.W. Monter, *Witchcraft in France and Switzerland* (Ithaca, 1976), pp. 47, 81.

day established as a solemn anniversary of the Restoration, a royalist "pageant" took place. The purpose of this ceremony, which involved the burning of an arch displaying various pictures and inscriptions, was to discredit the Covenanters as rebels. At the top of the arch stood the Devil, exhorting his followers to "stand to the cause." Another inscription read "Rebellion is the mother of witchcraft."⁹⁶ The incident may have been isolated, but the reference to witchcraft shows that some local Scottish authorities, who were understandably eager to give evidence of their royalism and consolidate their power, had little difficulty establishing a connection between the rebellious sin of witchcraft and the rebellious political activities of the Covenanters. Perhaps the royalist association of these two apparent threats to the established order helps to explain why many members of the ruling elite were especially eager to proceed against witches at this time.

If the Great Scottish Witch Hunt did in fact gain strength from the anti-revolutionary fervor of royalist authorities, it did not occur mainly because of such sentiment. This hunt had a number of much more important causes. It took place, first of all, because the prosecution of so many suspected witches had been frustrated in one way or another between 1652 and 1660, because the traditional machinery of justice had been set into operation once again in 1661, and because Scottish courts no longer had to employ English procedures in the prosecution of this crime. More specifically, it took place because John Kincaid and other professional prickers had confirmed that numerous suspected sorcerers in the Lothians had made pacts with the Devil, and because a frightened Earl of Haddington succeeded in bringing judicial relief to his locality. Once the hunt had begun, it increased in size and scope because confessing witches implicated large numbers of confederates and because magistrates in other areas, plagued by fears such as those of Haddington, secured commissions from the privy council to conduct witchcraft trials. At every stage, of course, the hunt required the support of the king's government. As soon as judges like Mackenzie and members of the privy council began to suspect that some of the individuals convicted of witchcraft were in fact innocent, the hunt could not be sustained. The members of Charles II's Scottish government must accept some responsibility for allowing the witch hunt to take place, but they were almost solely responsible for bringing it to an end.

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⁹⁶J. Kirkton, *The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland*, C.K. Sharpe (ed.) (Edinburgh, 1817), p. 126. One of the pictures was that of an old hag holding the Covenant.