

Thesis
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Cantrips and Carlins:
Magic, Medicine and Society
in the presbyteries of
Haddington and Stirling,
1603-88

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Stirling.

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the belief and practice of popular magic, specifically related to charmers, in the presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling between the years 1603 and 1688. It is the first study of either locality which concentrates on identifying the difference between charmers and witches, and considers the practice of the former in the broader context of seventeenth-century attitudes towards health and disease of both orthodox medical practitioners and the wider population. The thesis examines charmers and their healing practice in reference to theories of power, popular and elite culture, the church and gender, and reveals new information about seventeenth-century society. The principles and practice of charmers are then compared to orthodox medicine and popular magic, and the recorded healing treatments and rituals have been examined and analysed in close detail. A comparative analysis has been made of the two localities which assesses and contrasts patterns of witchcraft and charming accusation on a parish level.

By using evidence contained in kirk records, supplemented by secular court material, it has been shown that all levels of society identified differences between the practice and intent of charmers and witches. Accusation and prosecution of witches was influenced more by local elites, and by elite demonological theories, than accusations of charming. Importantly, the devil was not a feature of charming accusations. Due to the overt nature of charming, differences in its perception and acceptability were highlighted by the less severe penalties which were ordered by the kirk. The dilemma for the church and society was that the church had, to an extent, surrendered its practical healing role with the abandonment of pre-Reformation ritual. The emphasis on personal piety and prayer for the relief of mental and physical suffering did not appear to offer sufficient comfort for the rest of society.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and that the work which it embodies has been done by myself and has not been included in another thesis.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Mike" or similar, written in a cursive style.

September, 1999.

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Acknowledgements

A combination of three factors led me to undertake this thesis. One was my first academic encounter with witches in Scotland during a first-year tutorial as an undergraduate in Scottish History at Edinburgh University. My tutor at the time, Professor Michael Lynch, encouraged us, even as first-year students, to get to grips with primary source material, even if it was in its printed form. Thus, I was given the task of sifting through the 'Trials for witchcraft, 1596-1597' in Spalding *Miscellany* to chose a 'case' to present for discussion in the tutorial. What intrigued me about certain cases was not so much any references to diabolic pact but details about other aspects of witchcraft practice, both in terms of their overlap with popular religious customs and also aspects of healing. Some of these ideas about magical healing practice were developed further in my final-year dissertation for the School of Scottish Studies. Secondly, Helen Dingwall, my later supervisor, had introduced an undergraduate course which covered the history of medicine and surgery in Scotland which proved another source of inspiration. The parallel development of medical and surgical theory and training during the years of witchcraft accusations was puzzling: I wanted to know more. And finally, but by no means least, since chronologically it was first, was my own professional background as a nurse and health visitor, fully-trained in the orthodoxy of twentieth-century medicine. All these combined to create more questions than I was able to get answers. I have solved some of those questions, attempted to address new ones and also rejected some of my own ideas and biases.

Clearly Christina Larner's work was an important resource and inspiration for the study and research in the field, particularly considering the lack of other material relating to Scotland. But what surprised me was the emphasis on the analysis of the prosecution of witches. The occasional

reference to charmers only intrigued me more. Who were they and what did they do? I also wanted to know more about witchcraft belief and practice and how charming fitted into the complete picture. I felt that this area had not been previously acknowledged or addressed.

To have reached this stage would not have been at all possible without the help and support of many and varied people and organisations. The staff at both the National Archives of Scotland and Stirling Council Archives were most welcoming and helpful in providing documents and photocopies. The staff at the National Library of Scotland, both in the manuscript room and the general reading room, were also very helpful. As were the staff at Edinburgh University Main Library, New College and the Law Library; Stirling University Library, Edinburgh District Library and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow. Also the departments of Scottish History and the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University were extremely helpful in allowing me access to their collections. Financially the Scottish Office helped provide funds for the first three years through the Scottish Academic Awards Scheme.

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There are also many personal friends and family who have helped in various ways through the past four years. Their interest, hospitality and moral support, as well as their reality-checks, ensured that, hopefully, I did not become too much of a witchcraft bore, albeit a charming one – they all know who they are and, to them, thank you. My parents, Ruby and Tom Miller, as well as other family members, are also due particular heartfelt appreciation and thanks for emotional and financial support. If, at times, they wondered why on earth I wanted to do yet more studying, they expressed no doubts and now they can read the result. Finally, and by no means least, my thanks must go to my husband, Martin Coventry, whose help has been immeasurable. Not only for his technical support in compiling maps, graphs, charts and tables and help with spreadsheets, but also for designing not one, but two, databases. His computer skills and technical know-how have turned a virtual computer nonuser into a relatively competent one. For this, and for other financial and emotional support, many, many thanks.

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List of Abbreviations

APS – *Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, Thomson, T and Innes, C (eds) (Edinburgh, 1872).

EUL – Edinburgh University Library.

IR – *Innes Review*.

NAS – National Archives of Scotland.

NLS – National Library of Scotland.

PSAS – *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*.

RPC – *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, Burton, J H *et al*, (eds) (Edinburgh, 1877).

RCPS (Glasgow) – Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.

SCA – Stirling Council Archives.

SHR – *Scottish Historical Review*.

Introduction

Samuel Johnson, speaking of the islands of Western Scotland in the eighteenth century, confidently reported that: 'the various kinds of superstition which prevailed here, as in all other regions of ignorance, are by diligence of the ministers almost extirpated.'¹ At the end of the nineteenth century Bridget Cleary, of Clonmel in Ireland, was thought to be a changeling and was held over a fire by her husband and other relatives. Tragically, Bridget died of her injuries and her family were accused of murder. A well or spring, *Tobar na Suil*, on the island of Luing was regarded as having particular efficacy in healing eye diseases; and water was being collected and offerings left, apparently, as recently as the 1970s. In the present day cloutie or healing wells in the Black Isle in the north of Scotland are still visited on 1 May or Beltane. What is striking about these latter cases is that changeling and fairy belief, and the belief in the power of a well or spring was still being acknowledged some one hundred and two hundred years after Johnson's observation.

These examples may not appear to be obviously related to the examination and analysis of witchcraft and charming belief in the seventeenth century. However, they are indeed extremely pertinent to the subject as they are indicators of magical beliefs and practice and their continuity. What they are not directly associated with, apart from Johnson's observation, is witch *hunting*. This is a crucial distinction as this thesis is only indirectly about witch hunting. It is essentially about seventeenth-century society's beliefs, ideas, behaviours and attitudes related to magic, of which aspects of witchcraft, and particularly charming, practice played an important part.

Deciding on a title of a thesis is as much a challenge as proposing

¹ Johnson, *S Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, 1775, (reprint London, 1984), 110.

the general subject to be researched as it has to convey in a few words what is covered by many. The final title *Cantrips and carlins: magic, medicine and society in the presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling, 1603-1688* has been chosen because it covers quite precisely the different aspects of the thesis. It is not only an examination of witches, charmers or carlins themselves, but is about what they did, what their healing spells, or cantrips, were, and what their roles in their local communities were. The term witchcraft has been omitted from the title deliberately because, although cases of witchcraft are important to the final analysis, it is another particular aspect of magical practice – charming – which has been the main focus. It may also be valuable at this stage to point out what this thesis is not about. It is not only an examination of the prosecution of witches as criminals, but is about the belief and power of witchcraft and those who practised it. A proportion of the evidence used has been from the trials of accused witches, but this is simply because these records are the most extensive and provide usable evidence rather than because the focus was on criminality or prosecution. Some individuals whose cases have been examined in detail were not actually categorised as witches in the contemporary documents. They were identified as charmers by their contemporaries and, therefore, it is important to this present analysis not only to stress this distinction but to maintain it.

The reality of witchcraft or charming practice, or even popular belief in magic, is impossible to measure retrospectively. Similarly to suggest that its belief and prosecution was in fact a metaphor or an excuse to punish or reject certain behaviours can ultimately only be conjecture. It is, of course, difficult to avoid interpreting history in terms of our own experiences but in this case this has to be attempted. Whether or not seventeenth-century society believed absolutely in the reality of magic and

witches is to a degree academic. What is undoubtedly real is that magic was practised by many, it was blamed by many and it was discussed, debated and punished by those in authority.

The aspect of witchcraft which is examined here is an extremely fundamental one: the role of charming in the diagnosis and treatment of disease. There is no denying that individuals, in the presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling, were questioned and disciplined for certain practices and beliefs. What is interesting about these accusations, however, is that they were to a large extent quite different from our impressions of demonic worship and pact which have resulted from the domination of elite theories and opinion. The idea and figure of the devil certainly existed in the spiritual consciousness of these communities, but fear of death and disease and loss of crops or animals were of more immediate physical concern to a pre-Cartesian society. Religion had offered spiritual and physical comfort but, during the post-Reformation period, the kirk concentrated more on society's spiritual needs, arguing that moral behaviour would ultimately be rewarded by God's will. Nevertheless, this did not offer satisfactory succour to many of the populace who continued to seek cures and advice for their physical misfortunes from other sources. This thesis will examine society's perception of the causes and cures of disease, and in particular assess the attitudes of the church towards this complex area during the seventeenth century.

The kirk and secular authorities certainly played an important role in the prosecution and punishment of certain individuals. However, the kirk itself was in a process of change and development during this time and was to an extent in a vulnerable position. The argument that the church attempted to control all aspects of social and moral behaviour in

order to create a godly society² is well founded. Witchcraft and witches would appear to have been easy targets to identify and punish, but from the evidence it would appear that certain features of witchcraft practice were not so easily categorised or defined. Charming as a practice and felony was harder for both the church and society to condemn yet, as an important feature of magical belief, it should have been quite straightforward. This paradox and ambivalence has been addressed, not simply in an attempt to excuse or defend the behaviour of the kirk in general, but rather to offer a wider context and meaning to their attitudes.

The seventeenth century was also a century of change and development in the area of medical science. Latterly medicine, and medical treatments, were not only based on the aphorisms of the ancient authorities but on the scientific principles of contemporary intellectuals. Thus charming was attacked not only by ecclesiastical and judicial authorities but by 'rational' scientists. Charming, it was argued, was based purely on experience and had no epistemology of practice and was therefore mere superstition. In this case superstition referred not to demonic practice but to ignorance and unnecessary tradition. The practice of charmers has been analysed in order to address the question of whether or not charming did indeed have a system of knowledge, based on a combination of pre-Christian and Christian cosmology. This practice may have had as much, if not more, relevance to day-to-day life of seventeenth century society in terms of spiritual and physical comfort as the rituals of the post-Reformation church.

The framework of the thesis is fundamentally thematic. The first section is a discussion about the literature and theories related to the main subject areas of witchcraft, medicine, magic and religion. The methods,

² Larner, C *Enemies of God: The Witch Hunt in Scotland*, (London, 1981) *passim*;
MacDonald, S 'Threats to a Godly Society: A Witch-Hunt in Fife, Scotland, 1560-1710' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Guelph, 1997), *passim*.

sources and localities which have been used and examined are covered next, along with some description of the historical background of the period. The second part covers general theories and attitudes. The chapters are theoretical, in the sense that they consider different aspects of the phenomenon of magic and attitudes towards it. Thus the concepts of power and of culture are discussed in relation to witchcraft and charming. The development of the church, its doctrine and organisation, as well as its attitude towards health and healing, is discussed in the following chapter. The question of gender is also considered in this section. The third part covers particular healing theories and practices. Theories, practitioners and principles are covered in one chapter which is then followed by an analysis of the 'magical' healing practices of charmers. The last chapter is devoted to a comparative analysis of the two presbyteries, which examines the involvement of the kirk in accusations of witchcraft and charming, the patterns and variations of charming and its prosecution within the presbyteries themselves, and considers the influence and relevancy of national events on local statistics.

Fear and guilt were prominent emotions in seventeenth-century life. Fear of the devil, fear of disease, fear of the kirk and fear of punishment were all common, but they were all influenced by guilt. People felt guilty about some of their practices and behaviours which were deemed unacceptable by the ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Folk belief and practice certainly counted among these undesirable behaviours – perhaps because they were so important to society. This thesis addresses this complex area and helps contextualise how society perceived witchcraft practice and belief, and thus broadens our understanding of the subject.

Chapter 1 – Literature Review

Janet Anderson appeared before the privy council in 1617 accused of being a 'common charmer',¹ and in March 1629 the Yester kirk session called Andro Mathiesone to satisfy for charming and ordained that:

..gif Andro Matheson shall evir bie fund charming or meddling in any [way?] with charmers and witches ... he shall be declared evill into the hands of the devill...²

In another case, in 1649, Agnes Anderson was reprimanded for her charming and ordered to make a public repentance of eight days in sackcloth.³ This thesis is about witchcraft, and particularly charming, and its practice and belief systems and yet only one of these cases made any reference to witches or the devil, and then only as a condition against more serious punishment. Charming and witchcraft were a reality in seventeenth-century Scotland. They were not part of a fantasy imposed by elites to control sections of society but beliefs understood by all. The important feature of these cases, in relation to this thesis, is the reference to charming. These individuals and their punishments do not fit the conventional picture of the early-modern witch but their practices and belief system clearly overlapped with contemporary exegesis on witchcraft. Although accepted by seventeenth-century society the actual or theoretical difference between charming and witchcraft has led to confusion among later generations. Charming has been acknowledged as a somewhat

¹ *RPC*, 2nd series Vol VIII, 345.

² *NAS*, Yester kirk session records, CH2/377/1.

³ *NAS*, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

awkward adjunct, but has not been given much further attention.⁴ The focus to date has been primarily on witchcraft.

Witchcraft itself, and its historiography, have been the focus of much debate and analysis not only for Scotland, but throughout Europe. Essentially it has been perceived by some as a peripheral topic to be pursued by sensationalists, those seeking to validate some new-age rites and rituals or those who practise modern-day white witchcraft. During the nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, interest in witchcraft and witch persecution was approached either from a folklorist or antiquarian angle, and certainly resulted in copious documentation of cases with somewhat meagre analysis. These works by, for example, Dalyell, Sharpe, McLagan, Campbell, Black and Legge⁵ were written during a time when positivists sought to stress the shortcomings of their ancestors' behaviours and attitudes but at the same time justify the enlightened position achieved by their own contemporary society. Thus the blame for the persecution of witches lay either with the church, in many cases, or failure of the judiciary to intervene sooner. Later twentieth-century works marginalised the whole subject as an aberration, in part because it was not perceived as relevant to political, ecclesiastical or economic history, but also because it was such a complex area. Witchcraft was an important aspect of life for medieval and early-modern society, yet those constitutional historians who studied and deconstructed the minutiae of the early-modern period, in particular the seventeenth century, often

⁴ See for example Lerner *Enemies of God*, 137; also MacDonald 'Threats to a Godly Society', 250-1. James Sharpe, in discussing English material does give the distinction some more attention, see *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550-1750* (London, 1996), 66-70.

⁵ Dalyell, J *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1834); Sharpe, C *Historical Account of the Belief in Witchcraft in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1884); McLagan, R *Evil Eye in the Western Highlands* (London, 1902); Campbell, J *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1909); Black, G *A Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland* (New York, 1938); Legge, F 'Witchcraft in Scotland' *Scottish Review*, 18 (1891).

treated witchcraft to no more than a paragraph or a footnote.⁶ This may be because the topic incorporates all of the above themes and more. This imbalance is currently being redressed by a new generation of historians approaching the subject from a multiplicity of angles, theories and disciplines. The complexity of witchcraft means that it can be used to answer many questions about past generations. It can be used both in metaphorical terms, and in real terms, to explain behaviours and attitudes and it can be utilised both as part of the general picture but also to illustrate specific features or aspects of history.

The language associated with witchcraft and related practices is extremely complex and a common mistake made by those writing about the subject seems to arise from the assumption that witch 'hunting' was synonymous with witch 'craft'. In other words the examination of the persecution of witches contextualised and explained its beliefs and practices. Unfortunately this approach has contributed to a lack of examination, in the Scottish material at least, of what witchcraft actually meant to ordinary members of society, not simply ecclesiastics or members of the legal profession who were often involved in persecuting individuals for quite different reasons. It is timely therefore that an analysis be made not only of witchcraft, but also of charming, in order to establish whether there was any difference between the two and, if so, where did the division lie? Why were some charmers punished only with a period in sackcloth and a public apology? What were the perceptions of the elites and the ordinary populace to the practice and what features

⁶ See for example Stevenson, D *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Scotland, 1644-1651* (London, 1977), 142-3. Also Mitchison, R *Lordship to Patronage, Scotland 1603-1745* (Edinburgh, 1983), 88-90; Lynch, M *Scotland: A New History* (London, 1991), 185; Smout, T C *A History of the Scottish People: 1560-1830* (London, 1969), 184-92. These are all very general histories and as such try to include vast amounts of information and detail but because the whole area of witchcraft does not fit into any one model it is often dealt with less than satisfactorily.

distinguished it from witchcraft?

Although this research has essentially been about witches and charmers in seventeenth-century Scotland, it is not simply an analysis and study of witch hunting. Indeed, this aspect is only part of the whole picture. The themes of healing, popular belief, understanding of disease causation have just as important a place in the overall work. The literature which was required to be reviewed was, as a result, both more wide-ranging and varied than simply works which examined the phenomenon of witch hunting. The literature not only provided valuable information but also highlighted many questions with which to approach the primary research and analysis.

The literature which was deemed to be pertinent to this work can be divided into broad themes. Witchcraft, medicine and science, religion, gender, popular culture, elite culture, magic and social and community relations were some of the most obvious subject areas, as indeed was the whole area of the historiography of the subject itself. Writing about witchcraft was difficult for those who attempted huge comprehensive, albeit authoritative, commentaries, therefore those who undertook to study witchcraft as their main subject often adopted a specialist approach. Understanding the particular specialism or position of the writers themselves is therefore important, for example whether they were Marxist social and economic writers or Marxist feminists; whether they adopted a functionalist definition of witchcraft or a relativist one; or whether they employed post-modernist techniques of literary criticism. An understanding of all of these is important, particularly when examining a subject as subtle and ethereal as witchcraft. Is the study of witchcraft history without the politics, to paraphrase G M Trevelyan?⁷ Perhaps it is,

⁷ Trevelyan, G M *English Social History*, (revised edition, London, 1978) quoted in Evans, R *In Defence of History* (London, 1997), 166.

particularly when the focus of the study is about something where the symbolic is often more important than the reality. This is especially true when considering the difference between witch hunting and witchcraft. Both were real occurrences but to attempt an evaluation of witchcraft, as opposed to witch hunting, understanding of the symbolic is perhaps more important.

The works consulted have been both general and specific, covering wide areas of analysis either geographically or chronologically. Thus works covering an earlier period in Europe such as Kieckhefer's *European Witch Trials: Their Foundation in Popular and Learned Culture 1300-1500*⁸ through to much more localised studies as seen in *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* by Boyer and Nissenbaum⁹ all had some interest and value, even if it was only to eliminate possible comparisons. The methodologies used by different historians in different countries at different times were of as much interest as the actual theories and arguments themselves. Witchcraft, because of its broad appeal, has also been analysed by writers in a variety of disciplines therefore works produced outside the narrow confines of historical writing have also been read. Works by sociologists, scientists, anthropologists, philosophers and judicial experts have all attempted to find the answer to the riddle of why witchcraft existed.

As has been pointed out, the general works related to witch hunting and witchcraft provide a variety of style, method and subject. Some initial works were read in order to establish an understanding of terminology and interpretation. At the outset it is a fair assessment that almost no work produced about witchcraft and witch hunting has provided all the answers

⁸ Kieckhefer, R *European Witch Trials: Their Foundation in Popular and Learned Culture, 1300-1500* (London, 1976).

⁹ Boyer, P and Nissenbaum, S *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass, 1974).

to all the questions. The topic is such a large one that there are new interpretations constantly being presented. Some have attempted an analysis of the major theories, such as Quaife¹⁰ who distinguished two major camps of interpretation: those who supported Montague-Summers and Russell's position that there was a genuine struggle with Satan in the Christian world, and those who rejected diabolism and instead blamed the church itself for projecting their fears onto dissenting groups.¹¹ Monter, in an earlier article from 1972, divided the approaches taken to witchcraft as either intellectual history of elites or social development from below.¹² His conclusion was that there were still many gaps in our knowledge and understanding. A comprehensive inventory of European witch trials; a categorising of witchcraft practices; an examination of the decline of Satan and a study of the gender issue were some of his suggestions for future study. Twelve years later, Butler, in his review article 'Witchcraft, healing and historians' crazes', considered the different approaches of several important monographs.¹³ His conclusion that more comparative analytical work was needed to increase regional and national comparisons in order to 'transcend inevitable local particularities' was certainly along the same lines as Monter, although Butler also acknowledged that work needed to be done on the role of elites, popular religious practice and learned and popular concepts of magic. It is interesting that both of these writers felt that larger, more comprehensive works were needed rather than individual local studies.

There have been attempts to incorporate comprehensive detail and

¹⁰ Quaife, G *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage: The Witch Hunt in Early-Modern Europe* (London, 1987).

¹¹ Quaife, *Godly Zeal*, 62-3.

¹² Monter, E W 'The Historiography of European Witchcraft: Progress and Prospects' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1971/2), 435-451.

¹³ Butler, J 'Witchcraft, Healing and Historians' crazes' *Journal of Social History*, 18:1 (1984), 111-18.

analysis of European evidence in order to achieve this international analysis yet at the same time more localised studies have been undertaken. Works which attempt to survey centuries and whole continents such as that of Trevor-Roper¹⁴ can give an overall impression, but fail to adequately find common reasons behind the events in vastly differing regions or nation states during the early-modern period. However, two works which do cover the European problem usefully are those of Kieckhefer and Levack.¹⁵ They both attempt not only balanced overviews of the subject but also address conceptual issues such as learned and popular definitions of witchcraft, sorcery, diabolism and high and low magic. Both works go into great detail about the learned beliefs related to witchcraft which developed and disseminated throughout Europe from the fifteenth century onwards, and consider the particular conditions which preceded accusations. By highlighting the distinction between learned and popular beliefs, Kieckhefer illustrated the changing nature of witch trials from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. Levack's examination of individual regions identified particular factors which led to the likelihood of witchcraft persecution occurring, but at the same time stressed that it was the combination of the development of legal procedures along with the witch beliefs which were the two main contributory features.¹⁶ Although stressing the common foundations of pan-European witch hunting, he also points out that 'the European witch-hunt was really nothing more than a series of separate hunts',¹⁷ which supports the case for localised or regional studies.

Another important work which also took Europe as its focus, but at

¹⁴ Trevor-Roper, H *The European Witch-Craze of the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Hardmonsworth, 1969).

¹⁵ Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*; Levack, B *The Witch-Hunt in Early-Modern Europe* (London, 1987, second edition, 1995).

¹⁶ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 259.

¹⁷ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 3.

the same time took a regional approach, is *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen.¹⁸ This collection of essays illustrates not only the variety of experiences throughout different areas but also cross-cultural aspects of both witchcraft beliefs and theories. The main focus of the book is the Scandinavian experience, but other cultural differences and similarities are considered from different perspectives. Theology, the law, Satanic beliefs, gender and accusations from Hungary, Estonia, Sweden, Portugal, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland are among the subjects discussed. Not only are the analyses valuable but the different approaches and methodologies also provide an excellent comparative reference. They reflect trends in historical analysis and stress the importance of the 'cross-fertilisation' of the study of different *mentalités*.¹⁹ *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* is another useful general collection of essays which includes discussions on linguistic and cultural practices as well as the wider political context.²⁰

Studies of different localities and regions have also provided useful comparative material. MacFarlane's study of Essex took an anthropological approach to the material.²¹ His essentially Marxist interpretation placed economic tensions at the centre of his analysis but, although this approach may have been useful in 1970, recent studies have tended to challenge the importance of economics. Other regional studies include those of France²²

¹⁸ Ankarloo, B and Henningsen, G (eds) *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁹ Ankarloo and Henningsen, *Early-Modern European Witchcraft*, preface.

²⁰ Barry, J; Hester, M and Roberts, G (eds) *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge, 1996). See in particular 'State building and witch hunting in early modern Europe' by Brian Levack and 'On the continuation of witchcraft' by Willem de Blécourt.

²¹ MacFarlane, A *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970).

²² Briggs, R *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tensions in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1989); *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London, 1996).

and Germany.²³ Briggs's extensive work on Lorraine examines the cultures and tensions of communities in order to argue that belief in the power of witches was a major part of early-modern society. Witchcraft was accepted as being logical and rational and part of everyday life. Another wide-ranging general work by Sharpe on English witchcraft also considers the wider cultural aspects of popular witch belief as well as elite interpretations of witchcraft as a crime.²⁴ These later works have all moved away from despairing at the behaviour of earlier society and instead emphasise the importance of the contemporary cultural context.

Of the Scottish material, undoubtedly Christina Larner's work merits the greatest attention as she attempted the widest-ranging analysis of the Scottish material to date. Her work was both insightful and, within the confines of the methodology and technology available at the time, comprehensive. The *Source Book*²⁵ compiled with McLachlan and Lee and published in 1977 provides an invaluable resource for the study of witch trials in Scotland. Their statistical analysis, breakdown and cross-referencing of different source material is extremely useful in assisting those seeking primary evidence and sources. Their research was an improvement on Black's *Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland, 1510-1717*²⁶ and certainly revealed many more cases. However, there are problems with the *Source Book* of which Larner herself was aware. Duplicated cases and untouched sources – in particular church records and minutes – mean that while the *Source Book* is useful as a preliminary

²³ Monter, E (ed) *European Witchcraft* (New York, 1969); Midelfort, E *Witchhunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684* (Stanford, 1972). See also Roper, L *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early-modern Europe* (London, 1994) for an examination of German evidence from a psychological perspective.

²⁴ Sharpe *Instruments of Darkness*. See also Sharpe, J 'Witchcraft and women in seventeenth-century England: some northern evidence' *Continuity and Change*, 6 (1991), 179-99.

²⁵ Larner, C; Lee, H and McLachlan, H *A Source Book of Scottish Witchcraft* (Glasgow, 1977).

²⁶ Black, *Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft, passim*.

source, it is not an absolute authority and should be used with care.

In her other material such as *Enemies of God*²⁷ and 'Crimen Exceptum' Larner outlined her main argument that witch hunting was elite-led. In *Enemies* she examined the legal definitions of the crime of witchcraft used in Scotland, and explained the common foundations with European Canon law.²⁸ She carefully outlined the typical process through which an accused witch went, analysed the material geographically and chronologically, identified age and gender statistics and attempted to distinguish between popular and elite cultural definitions of the crime. One of her main claims was that witch trials were not only elite-led, but also occurred as a result of tensions between two groups of elites: the church and state.²⁹ Although she acknowledged the divergence between popular concerns about malefice, which were seen in the initial complaints about the accused, and elite worries about demonic pact which were noticeable in the later confessions, her main interest lay with the influence of elites.

Witchcraft and Religion, a collection of essays by Larner, was published after her death³⁰ and illustrates her continued interest in learned and popular culture, the wider issue of crime in general and also the question of whether witch hunting was in fact women hunting. In other articles³¹ Larner also emphasised the impact of elite demonological theories on the witch hunt in Scotland. She was also aware of the

²⁷ Larner *Enemies*. See also 'Crimen Exceptum? The crime of witchcraft in Europe' *Crime and Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500*, Gattrell, G; Lenman, B and Parker, G (eds) (London, 1980).

²⁸ Larner *Enemies*, 9.

²⁹ Larner, *Enemies*, 72.

³⁰ Larner, C *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford, 1984).

³¹ Larner, C 'James VI and I and witchcraft' in *The Reign of James VI and I*, Smith, A G R (ed) (London, 1973) and 'Two late Scottish witchcraft tracts; *Witch-Craft Proven* and *The Tryal of Witchcraft*' in *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, Anglo, S (ed) (London, 1977). See also Larner's 'Scottish Demonology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' (unpublished PhD thesis, Edinburgh University, 1962).

limitations of her work and pointed the way for future research and acknowledged that not enough work had been done on the church records and that more detailed local studies were needed.³²

Larner's work was undoubtedly ground-breaking, as the frequency with which her work is referred to by other historians testifies. However, this is in part due to the rather meagre range of other works produced. There are several books and articles which have either taken a populist view of the subject or have examined in detail a particular, and often quite atypical, case or time period, most frequently the North Berwick trials of the 1590s.³³ Another case which was also quite unusual was the Bargarran case of 1697. The study by Isabel Adam, although not inaccurate, does not uncover any new or startling evidence or interpretation.³⁴ There is much to be gained from the close examination of a particular case, location or aspect and there are some more recent articles which address this more satisfactorily. Brian Levack's article 'The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-1662' examines the events of the witchcraft accusations which occurred in East Lothian at the time of the Restoration. He considers the influence of the Cromwellian occupation prior to 1660 and of the legal profession, as well as the role of witch prickers and of the local elites, notably the local nobility.³⁵ His assertion is that, rather than the church being the driving force, it was the state's attempt to reassert the monarchy which contributed to this episode.

³² Larner, *Enemies*, 88, 100, 133.

³³ See for example Maxwell-Stuart, P G 'The fear of the king is death: James VI and the witches of East Lothian' in Naphy, W G and Roberts, P (eds) *Fear in Early Modern Society* (Manchester, 1997). Also Murray, M 'The 'Devil' of North Berwick' *Scottish Historical Review*, 15 (1918); Cowan, E 'The darker vision of the Scottish Renaissance' in Cowan, I and Shaw, D (eds) *The Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1983).

³⁴ Adam, I *Witch Hunt: The Great Scottish Witchcraft Trials of 1697* (London, 1978). See also Yeoman, L 'The Devil as Doctor: Witchcraft, Wodrow and the Wider World' *Scottish Archives*, 1 (1995), 93-105 for a more recent evaluation of this case.

³⁵ Levack, B 'The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-1662' *Journal of British Studies*, 20(1980), 90-108.

Stuart MacDonald's recent thesis examines the witch hunt in Fife and is a detailed and valuable analysis of that area. His main focus is on the role of the church in relation to witch hunting, which he feels played a more important role than local nobility and burgh officials.³⁶ According to MacDonald, the clergy in Fife were more interested in imposing discipline on their congregations and the accusation, prosecution and punishment of witches was one way to achieve this. Heresy and diabolism were less important than discipline, and the church was not particularly concerned with the distinction between harmful or helpful practices. The objective was to create a godly society by eradicating all evil.³⁷ MacDonald acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing between charming and witchcraft, and understanding what the attitudes of contemporary society were towards them. By concentrating on the role of church elites however his analysis of this difficult area does not go far enough. Charmers were undoubtedly disciplined and although their crimes were certainly not as serious as witchcraft, according to MacDonald, the motivation behind the discipline was the same. In other words, the church did not really distinguish between the two practices.³⁸ This ignores the very real evidence that the church authorities did indeed recognise the difference between the two and treated them accordingly. Godly discipline may very well have been the ultimate objective, but neither the church, nor the rest of society, regarded charming and witchcraft as being absolutely the same.

More recently, Goodare³⁹ has produced a discussion on the key theme of gender. 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland' gives a long-overdue assessment of why women were in the majority of those accused of witchcraft. His argument is that since most witches were women witch

³⁶ MacDonald, 'Threats to a Godly society', 340.

³⁷ MacDonald, 'Threats to a Godly society', 342, 344.

³⁸ MacDonald, 'Threats to a Godly society', 274.

³⁹ Goodare, J 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland' *Social History*, 23 (1998), 288-308.

hunting was indeed women hunting, although indirectly because the accused were both women and witches. The aim of the prosecutors was an attempt to reinforce a patriarchal system during a period of state building.⁴⁰ This analysis may certainly have some relevancy to the prosecution of witches but, like the other works related to Scotland, it emphasises witch hunting and an elite objective. There is some discussion of witchcraft itself, but in its perception as a crime rather than a practice. However, he also recognises the problem of folk-healing⁴¹ and acknowledges that this area might benefit from some further study.

As the other main focus of this thesis is the actual practice of the charmers, material covering folk healing was surveyed. There is only a relatively small amount of literature dedicated to folk healing as a separate area, therefore more general works which examine the development of scientific thought, both in Scotland and beyond, were also examined. As the broad themes of science, magic and religion are so closely interwoven, important works such as Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*⁴² and Stuart Clark's *Thinking with Demons*⁴³ were undoubtedly valuable sources. Other works included more straightforward examinations of science and medicine during the early-modern period, for example Webster,⁴⁴ although some of these are a little dated now. Webster felt that the quest, by some, for medical and scientific enlightenment and development was a result of the radical religious and political objectives of

⁴⁰ Goodare, 'Women and the witch-hunt', 293, 306-8.

⁴¹ Goodare, 'Women and the witch-hunt', 303.

⁴² Thomas, K *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London, 1971.

⁴³ Clark, S *Thinking with Demons* (Oxford, 1997). See also 'Inversion, misrule and the meaning of witchcraft' *Past and Present*, 87 (1980), 98-127; 'Protestant Demonology: Sin, superstition and society' in *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds).

⁴⁴ Webster, C *The Great Insauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660* (New York, 1976); *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth century* (Cambridge, 1979). Grell, O and Cunningham, A (eds) *Medicine and the Reformation* (London, 1993); King, L *The Road to Medical Enlightenment* (London, 1970). For a more recent collection see Pumfrey, E (ed) *Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe* (Manchester, 1992).

the Puritans. Some more recent ideas and interpretations of medicine and religion in the seventeenth century have been covered by Elmer.⁴⁵ Elmer considers the role and influence of Puritan religious belief in relation to medical practice, and is opposed to Webster's theory.⁴⁶ His theories, however, have limited relevance to the Scottish experience, as Puritanism was not a strong religious or political movement in Scotland at this time.

The great debate between Galenic, which advocated natural causation and treatment, and Paracelsian, or chemically-based, medicine which occupied Europe at this time also appears to have had less obvious effect in Scotland. The Galenic tradition continued to be used by physicians during the early seventeenth century despite their strong connections with Europe. Nevertheless it is important to understand the issues and assess the evidence relating to attitudes towards witchcraft in the light of medical trends which were developing elsewhere.

Specific Scottish material in this area is, to date, quite limited and written from a positivist perspective, although some revision is now being attempted. The history and development of the medical profession rather than its actual practice, has been the focus of works written by members of the medical profession. Duncan and Craig both produced detailed accounts of the medical profession in Glasgow and Edinburgh.⁴⁷ An account of the practice of medicine in Scotland was written by Comrie in 1932⁴⁸ but recent works by Hamilton and Dingwall have brought more contemporary perspectives to the subject and have examined professional

⁴⁵ Elmer, P 'Medicine, religion and the Puritan religion' in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, French, R and Wear, A (eds) (Cambridge, 1989).

⁴⁶ Elmer, 'Medicine, religion and the Puritan religion', 10-12.

⁴⁷ Duncan, A *Memorials of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, 1559-1850* (Glasgow, 1896). Craig, W *History of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1976).

⁴⁸ Comrie, J *The History of Scottish Medicine*, two volumes (London, 1932).

medical practice with some reference to non-professional practice.⁴⁹

Literature which addresses the subject of Scottish folk healing has been confined either to antiquarian material produced in the early twentieth century by, for example, David Rorie,⁵⁰ or limited to Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland.⁵¹ Nevertheless these works include some useful comparative material and demonstrate both the extent and spread of customs and belief as well as a degree of continuity of practice.

Some of the studies produced from a medical perspective examine the principles of disease causation and cure, while others have considered that the rationale and causes of witch hunting had, at least in part, a medical explanation. The cause of disease by bewitching and its cure by disenchantment have been examined by Clark.⁵² The belief that devils caused diseases was held by demonologists, by those involved in the teaching of medicine and by the majority of the rest of the population. Yet at the same time, other diseases were thought to be caused by witches. The diseases thought to be caused by demons and devils often had more emotional or mental symptoms and therefore some writers, such as MacDonald and Harley, have concentrated solely on mental disease in

⁴⁹ Hamilton, D *The Healers* (Edinburgh, 1987); Dingwall, H *Physicians, Surgeons and Apothecaries: Medical Practice in Seventeenth-century Edinburgh* (East Linton, 1995). Hamilton has quite a large section covering folk healers, witchcraft, healing wells and stones, 78-90.

⁵⁰ Buchan, D (ed) *Folk Tradition and Folk Medicine in Scotland: The Writings of David Rorie* (Edinburgh, 1994).

⁵¹ Beith, M *Healing Threads: Traditional Medicines of the Highlands and Islands* (Edinburgh, 1995); Martin, M *A Description of the Western Island of Scotland, c 1695* (first edition 1698, facsimile edition, Edinburgh, 1994). Bannerman, J *The Beatons: A Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1986) examines the tradition of healing found in Gaelic areas which was based on orthodox medical theories.

⁵² Clark, S 'Demons and disease: The disenchantment of the sick, 1500-1700' in *Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe*, Gijswijt-Hofstra, M Marland, H and Waardt, H (eds) (London, 1997).

relation to witchcraft.⁵³ Diseases caused by the power of the Devil were described by contemporaries in terms such as possession, obsession or suggestion and as such seem to have manifested themselves as mental illness. The problem lies in the difficulties of retrospective diagnosis and whether a positivist or relativist position is adopted. A positivist interpretation would argue that mental illness was a real condition which can be identified from the evidence, on the other hand the relativist position would claim that mental illness was only a form of label used by society which may not, in fact, relate to any of our contemporary diseases.

Another aspect of medical interpretation has sought to relate the causes of witch hunting to mental illness, either of the witches or the witch hunters. Interpretations such as Andreski's 'The Syphilitic Shock'⁵⁴ which use both physical and psychiatric models are interesting, if somewhat simplistic. Andreski's rather sweeping account places the blame with women not only for being sexually enticing to men, but also for spreading syphilis. However, he also blames sexual frustration for the activities of witch hunters. He then blames syphilitic psychoses for causing witch mania, of both accusers and the accused, and suggests that the insensitive spots found by witch prickers were the result of the infection. While it is undoubtedly true that syphilis was present as a disease at this time, there is no evidence to suggest that those accused were infected, and it is therefore unlikely that Andreski's thesis has any validity. The problem of attempting to extrapolate backwards using contemporary knowledge is that it often results in an inaccurate and inadequate

⁵³ MacDonald, M *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, anxiety and healing in seventeenth-century England* (Cambridge, 1981); also *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan England* (London, 1991). See also for example Harley, D 'Mental illness, magical medicine and the Devil in northern England, 1650-1700' in *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century*, French, R and Wear, A (eds).

⁵⁴ Andreski, S 'The Syphilitic Shock: A New Explanation of the 'Great Witch Craze' of the 16th and 17th centuries in the light of Medicine and Psychiatry' *Encounter*, 5 (1982), 7-26.

explanation. As Schoeneman summarises in his review article, 'the past is interpreted in terms of the present' by some historians of psychiatry.⁵⁵ For the most part other writers⁵⁶ have taken a more physiological approach to witchcraft and have attempted to identify possible hallucinogenic drugs and herbs which might have been used to create the illusion of night flying and out-of-body experiences. Although there are some out-of-body experiences described by Scottish witches, hardly any mentioned the use of salves and it is again doubtful whether these pharmacological theories have much relevancy or can be validated.

Another approach, adopted by Estes, lays the blame for the witch hunting craze firmly at the door of medical science.⁵⁷ His thesis is that scientific and medical developments provided the intellectual basis for witch hunting. As medical science increased its understanding and range of treatments, it also lost control over some types of disease, in particular those which could not be explained in scientific terms. Therefore illnesses which were strange and unusual often resulted in witchcraft accusations and trials. Although there is certainly some truth in this latter statement, there is no evidence to suggest that the specific symptoms of illnesses which were ascribed to witchcraft changed as medical science developed. The types of disease and symptoms described by those involved in witchcraft cases remained, on the most part, quite vague and non-specific. Also, as Estes himself points out, the actual influence of new medical or scientific developments on the ordinary populace was extremely limited⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Schoeneman, T 'The role of mental illness in the European witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: an assessment' *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 13 (1977), 337-351.

⁵⁶ See for example Harner, M 'The role of hallucinogenic plants in European witchcraft' in *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, Harner, M (ed) (London, 1973). Also Mann, J *Murder, Magic and Medicine* (Oxford, 1992).

⁵⁷ Estes, L 'The role of medicine and medical theories in the rise and fall of the witch hunts in England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1985); 'The medical origins of the European witch craze: a hypothesis' *Journal of Social History*, 17:2 (1983), 271-284.

⁵⁸ Estes 'The medical origins', 275.

and since the acceptability of blaming a local witch for misfortune had a long tradition these new developments had little practical effect on the use of charming. Estes suggests that the increasing sophistication of the judiciary meant that, in order for these accusations to have any credibility in court, they required the official support of the medical profession. In other words, medical professionals could be summoned to give their expert opinion on the likely causes of a disease. Although it is certainly accurate to say that natural and unnatural causes occupied the minds of lawyers, clerics and members of the medical profession in Scotland, it is worth pointing out that there were very few cases where a doctor was called to a trial to give an opinion. Again, although this theory is interesting its relevance to the Scottish experience is limited.

The history and examination of magic has also been an important source of information and stimulation. The works by Thomas and Clark have already been mentioned as being extremely valuable⁵⁹ but others such as those of Butler, Monter, Shumaker, Flint, Scarre, Kieckhefer and Midelfort have also provided interesting examinations and theories about the development and overlap of magic, science and religion.⁶⁰ The occult sciences have attracted much interest both in connection to witchcraft, and also in their role as acceptable intellectual practices. Some practitioners of occult science held a position of respectability because of their philosophy of searching for truth, and those who practised learned magic were rarely accused of witchcraft. Writers such as Scarre base their interpretations on the differences between, and social functions of, witchcraft, sorcery and

⁵⁹ Thomas *Religion and Decline of Magic, passim*, Clark *Demons, passim*.

⁶⁰ Butler, E *Ritual Magic* (Cambridge, 1949); Monter, E *Ritual, Myth and Magic in Early Modern Europe* (Brighton, 1983); Shumaker, W *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, California, 1972); Flint, V *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1991); Scarre, G *Witchcraft and Magic in 16th and 17th century Europe* (Basingstoke, 1987); Kieckhefer, R *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1990); Midelfort, E 'Witchcraft, Magic and the Occult' in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, Ozment, S (ed) (St Louis, 1982).

high and low magic.⁶¹ Certainly an important aspect of early-modern belief was the distinction made between white and black or natural and unnatural magic, and also the Judeo-Christian basis to the logic of this distinction. Magical practices such as witchcraft and charming had both a functional and an intellectual purpose. This explanation was itself then attacked by the church as it developed other justifications for misfortune. Magical beliefs declined or were abandoned because they were seen as irrational or superstitious.

Current thinking has moved away from the interpretation that medieval and early-modern belief in magic was irrational, and was simply a reflection of primitive social organisation and function. More recent ideas have been advanced that the church actually incorporated some aspects of magical ritual into its practice, in order to be able to offer society comfort and provide a positive role for the organised church.⁶² Flint argues that this amalgamation of magic into religion led to the distinction, which was later lost, between harmful and helpful magic. Of course, this hypothesis has its detractors, in particular Kieckhefer, who feels that the term magic is itself inappropriate and misleading.⁶³ The term *mirabilia* may be more apposite although Kieckhefer's other alternative, 'unofficial ritual', despite being rather clumsy, may actually have less pejorative association for a twentieth-century audience. There will always be arguments over fundamental beliefs such as religion and magic, but the many points raised by different historians are all valuable. What is certainly not disputed is that in order to appreciate the subtleties of witchcraft accusations and practice of the seventeenth century it is necessary to spend some time examining and understanding the meaning

⁶¹ Scarre, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 3-6.

⁶² Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 102, 127, 146, 400.

⁶³ Kieckhefer, R 'The specific rationality of medieval magic' *American Historical Review*, 99:3 (1994), 813-36.

of the language used in the evidence.

A third major area which influenced the approach to this thesis is that of gender studies. It has been acknowledged that the majority of those accused of witchcraft were women, but for many years there were few attempts to explain this statistic. Like other aspects of historical writing this has resulted in diversity both in approach and quality of work. Perhaps more obviously than in other studies, the theoretical background of some of the writers in this area has influenced their work for better and for worse. Feminists, Marxist feminists, revolutionary feminists, male historians and female historians have all tackled this area, and some have had a very clear agenda. *Witches, Midwives and Nurses – A History of Women Healers* by Ehrenreich and English⁶⁴ is one of the poorer quality works. It is based on the outdated ideas put forward by Margaret Murray who suggested that all witches were part of a Pagan fertility cult and the political polemic and poor historical methodology, such as lack of primary research and poor referencing, make this book of little value. In contrast the vexed question of whether the majority of witches were involved in obstetric care has been demolished by Harley in his article 'Historians as demonologists: the myth of the midwife-witch',⁶⁵ but the involvement of women in the whole process is still problematic.

Some general explanation of the topic is found in Weisner's *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*,⁶⁶ but recently more specialist interpretations have been produced by Roper, Willis, Barstow, Purkiss and

⁶⁴ Ehrenreich, B and English, D *Witches, Midwives and Nurses – A History of Women Healers* (London, 1976).

⁶⁵ Harley, D 'Historians as demonologists: the myth of the midwife-witch' *Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1990), 1-26.

⁶⁶ Wiesner, M *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1994) especially chapter 7.

Hester.⁶⁷ All of these writers have taken different positions and developed very different explanations for the prosecution of women. Some have argued that women were prosecuted either because of their behaviour or because of a change in society's attitudes towards them. In Barstow's case she argues that it was the development of a cash economy which challenged the socio-economic and political position of women. Women, who were seen as powerful no matter what position they held, were then accused of witchcraft.⁶⁸ Others have identified the nature of sexual differences as the root cause of witchcraft accusations. Roper suggests that the relationship and boundaries between the physical and psychological, the body and mind, and the flesh and spirit changed with the Reformation,⁶⁹ whereas Hester apportions all the blame for witchcraft accusations to male sexual violence towards women and a male desire to dominate and control women.⁷⁰ Willis and Purkiss both consider the effect of women's role in private and public spheres, and in particular consider their role as mothers. As the image of mothers and motherhood changed, then it was those who transgressed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour who were accused of witchcraft.⁷¹ Purkiss also suggests that most effects of witchcraft were seen in the disruption of the domestic sphere which was the domain of women themselves.⁷² In other words, in many cases it was women being attacked by, or being accused of attacking, other women which prompted accusations. What both the latter two writers stress is that witchcraft beliefs were a reality in early-modern society, and this is an

⁶⁷ Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*; Willis, *D Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (New York, 1995); Barstow, *A Witchcraze: a New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco, 1994); Purkiss, *D The Witch in History* (London, 1996); Hester, *M Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (London, 1992).

⁶⁸ Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 103-110.

⁶⁹ Roper, *Oedipus*, 173-4.

⁷⁰ Hester, *Lewd Women*, 200-1.

⁷¹ Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, 18, 28.

⁷² Purkiss, *The Witch*, 97-8.

important point. Supernatural ideology was undoubtedly a major part of everyday cosmology and culture, in the early-modern period, and as such has caused problems for many historians. Witchcraft was part of the belief in an 'other' world – an intermediate world – which Christianity had attempted to remove. It was also an inexact power with multiple applications and meanings which contributed to later misinterpretations, not least because of our later rejection of the possible reality of belief.

These useful, if at times frustrating, interpretations demonstrate that there is still work to be done in this area. Although much of the recent work has proved to be a great improvement on the earlier material, it is clear that the relationship between women and witchcraft at times still struggles for academic recognition. The work produced by male historians on the question of gender is often limited to a chapter⁷³ or to examining women's role as accusers and as part of the legal process which, in some ways, appear to exonerate male responsibility.⁷⁴ The work done by recent male historians is not so deliberately misogynistic as implied by some feminist writers but, nevertheless, the gender question has to be addressed. The fact that women accused other women is not surprising given that communities were small and social relationships and etiquette were often fragile. What is unique, however, is that women, who in other legal matters were virtual non-persons, were permitted to appear as witnesses. This tells us just as much about the attitudes of elites, as about how women regarded each other.⁷⁵ This whole area has much potential for further study, as does its antithesis: the role of male witches and charmers.

⁷³ See for example Sharpe, *Instruments*, chapter 7; Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, chapter 7.

⁷⁴ See for example Holmes, C 'Women, witnesses and witches' *Past and Present*, 14 (1993), 45-78.

⁷⁵ For a discussion on crime and the criminal process in Scotland see Wasser, M 'Violence and the Central Criminal Courts in Scotland, 1603-1638' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Columbia, 1995).

Another important approach which has influenced the analysis of witchcraft is the area of popular culture. As has been alluded to previously, an understanding of the cultural context of witchcraft beliefs is extremely important. Not only is it necessary to distinguish between learned and popular culture, but also to make some attempt to consider the cosmology of seventeenth-century society. The witchcraft concerns of the general population reflected popular ideas and beliefs, rather than elite fears, but the whole cosmology of witchcraft was part of both spheres. There are some general works which examine the theme of popular culture, for example Burke's *Popular Culture*, which devotes a small section to the case of witches as an illustration of the difference between the cultures.⁷⁶ Hutton's work *Stations in the Sun*⁷⁷ is a wide-ranging examination of popular customs and beliefs practised throughout Britain. He does include Scottish examples although the available source material is limited.⁷⁸ There are also works which place popular witchcraft beliefs as their central theme, such as those of Kieckhefer⁷⁹ and Cohn.⁸⁰ Cohn cites religious zeal as the cause of the witch trials but points out that the trials themselves reveal a combination of peasant accusations from below and elite interrogation from above.⁸¹ This point is echoed by others such as Briggs, and demonstrates that witchcraft remains difficult to fit into any one simple pattern or explanation.

For more specialist cosmological ideas, works by Lyle and Febvre are

⁷⁶ Burke, P *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), 274.

⁷⁷ Hutton, R *Stations in the Sun* (Oxford, 1996).

⁷⁸ Hutton cites Anna Mill's valuable work *Medieval Plays in Scotland* as the source for much of his evidence. This extremely valuable work was produced in 1927 and clearly the subject deserves further research.

⁷⁹ Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*..

⁸⁰ Cohn, N *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch Hunt* (London, 1975).

⁸¹ Cohn, *Inner Demons*, 254.

useful.⁸² Contextualising beliefs and practices in both Indo-European and Christian terms is central to a deeper sensitivity to the experiences of early-modern society. The approaches taken by these writers also help place the concept of 'other world' into relief, by examining the boundaries of reality and fantasy. Witchcraft motifs may have been metaphorical in some cases, but since medieval and early-modern society's view of the world was so elastic and unformed, the distinction between reality and fantasy was not so clear-cut as it appears today. Features and motifs may well have been accepted as real. Anything was possible in the medieval and early-modern imagination, and the power of witchcraft was only one aspect of the overall picture.⁸³ Once the boundary between real and unreal, and natural and supernatural, is seen as being an artificial construct then other aspects of folk beliefs, and the motifs found in the accusations, become less troublesome. Fairies and devils take on new meaning and relevancy once this has been acknowledged. At the same time the perceived power of healing rituals, with their own logic and application, falls into place against this background.

It is clear that the range of material related directly, and tangentially, to witchcraft and witch trials is vast and complex, and often leads to more questions being asked rather than providing all the answers. The different disciplines and methods have shown that no one model or approach is perfect, but many are undoubtedly better than others. There is much to be gained from a wide base of knowledge, especially in order to understand charming practice in relation to healing. What is also clear is that rather than taking a broad brush to the whole subject, there is potentially much to be learned from the examination of local material which concentrates

⁸² Lyle, E *Archaic Cosmos* (Edinburgh, 1990); Febvre, L *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

⁸³ See in particular Febvre *Unbelief*, 438.

on a specific aspect of the evidence.

The literature reviewed has been varied and extensive, some has been related to a specific aspect of the research and other works have been more general in content. What none of the works have covered is a detailed examination of charmers and charming. The gaps in knowledge and understanding about magic and witchcraft in general have been gradually addressed, but the area of charming as part of magical practice, which is central to the thesis, has still to receive its fair share of analysis. The area of charming is both under-acknowledged and under-examined but this research will redress this lacuna. This thesis will assess the specific practice of charmers, in the context of the wider areas of magic and witchcraft, as well as in relation to orthodox medical practice and to the rest of society in general.

Chapter 2 – Methodology and Sources

The broadest themes having been identified, more precise boundaries and methodologies require to be established. Because charmers and their practice of healing, rather than witches (although they have an important role) are the main *dramatis personae*, the thesis is also a consideration of seventeenth-century attitudes and philosophy towards health and disease. Witchcraft in general is obviously an important area of this study, but details relating to disease and treatment found in cases of witchcraft accusation, and especially cases of charming, were of greater interest. In order to establish what, if any, the relationship was between elite and popular beliefs about health, illness and death, the form and content of treatments used by charmers have been examined closely. At the same time, examples of the practice and philosophy of Scottish medical practitioners have also been used as a comparative source of evidence.

The intellectual areas of the research having been outlined, the physical boundaries also require careful deliberation and explanation. It is clear that regional and local studies are currently an important form of analysis. In order to interpret such an enigmatic aspect of seventeenth-century culture and belief as health and disease, an intensive examination of a local area is necessary, rather than an attempt at a national survey which, ultimately, may be too superficial. Choosing the geographical area to be examined is in itself vital both to the eventual outcome of the research, and, the length of time available to the researcher. Availability of records and evidence is clearly an important factor in deciding the locality, but other issues require to be taken into account. Witchcraft trials in Scotland were concentrated mostly in the south-east part of the country.¹ They were also concentrated in peak outbreaks: 1597, 1629-30, 1649, 1661-2. These two factors

¹ Larner, *Enemies*, 82.

undoubtedly influenced both the area or areas chosen and the method of analysis used in order to avoid reaching an unbalanced conclusion.

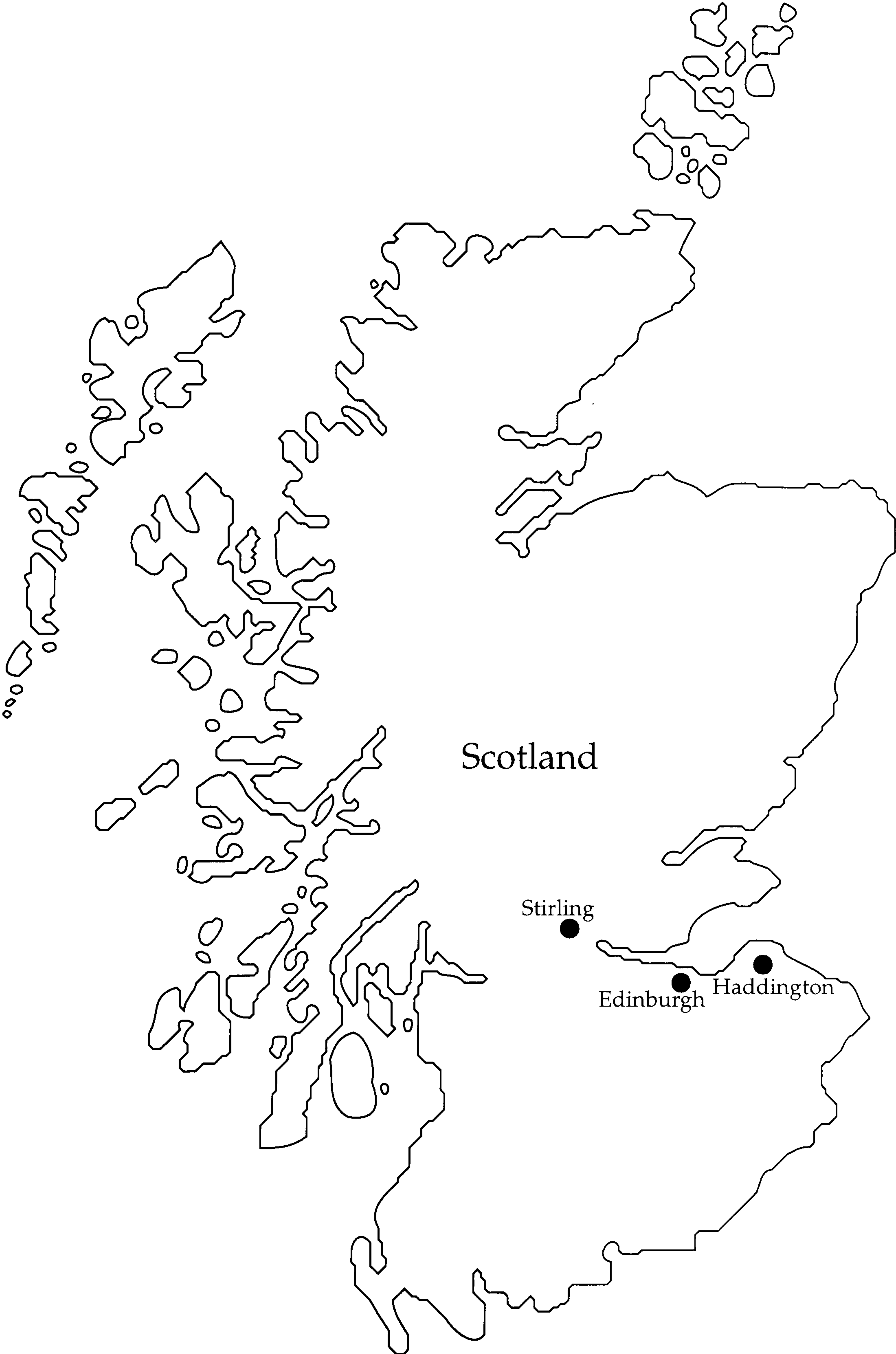
Choosing an area that was both representative in social and economic terms and had available records was necessary so that the final analysis could be related to the wider picture. For the same reason, material from a longer time span, rather than only related to periods of high intensity witch hunting, was examined. The area chosen also had to have clearly defined physical boundaries in order to locate the positions of documented cases. Using the presbytery boundaries which were established in the seventeenth century provided not only a clear geographical location for the research, but also identified an important source of relevant documentary material. Also, a presbytery provided not only the peripheral, or external, boundaries but also the internal boundaries of its parishes. This meant that the examination could be even more specific and localised. However, the presbytery chosen had to be one which was well established, both theoretically and practically, by the beginning of the seventeenth century in order to provide an adequate range of documentary material. It was also decided that a comparison of two presbyteries would be more useful, and that both the areas would be located in the lowland region. There are two reasons, apart from linguistic difficulties, why the highlands have not been included at this time. Firstly according to Larner's research, the highlands did not experience the same degree of problem with witchcraft as the lowlands did. This is a surprising statistic given other evidence of a long continuity of belief in the efficacy of many practices similar to witchcraft and charming in highland communities. Secondly, the establishment of fully-functioning presbyteries in the highlands was much later than in lowland areas and so, on a practical level, availability of comparable evidence was limited. It is very likely that these two factors are closely linked, and the lack of witchcraft trials in the highlands reflected a less

well-organised church disciplinary procedure rather than absence of actual witchcraft practice. The higher recorded incidence of witchcraft and charming in the lowlands may therefore not reflect a higher level of practice in these areas but a greater involvement of the kirk authorities.

From Larner's preliminary work done in the *Source Book* two presbyteries were chosen: Haddington and Stirling (see figure 1, p 34). From Larner's statistics these areas clearly demonstrated quite different patterns of accusation. Haddington had among the highest numbers of accusations and Stirling relatively few, yet both were well-established and well-organised presbyteries by the beginning of the century. This contrast, and similarity, were important factors in establishing whether church attitudes and power were the similar in different localities, and to what extent proximity to central authority – church or secular – was relevant.

As this research was not primarily about witch hunting or prosecution the information which was most important was not simply numbers of accusations but the details of the accusations themselves. These details contain a considerable amount of material about witchcraft beliefs and practice and it was therefore necessary to survey different trial records. The types of 'trials' examined ranged from preliminary church inquiries to formal high court of justiciary trials. It was important to examine a range of material which covered both local and central attitudes and experiences. The survey of the church records commenced with local kirk session and presbytery minutes, but also included synod records as well as printed extracts from General Assemblies. Local burgh court records were checked, as well as formal justiciary court documents. The records of the justiciary court are available in manuscript form, often in unsorted boxes, although some selected proceedings are available in an edited and annotated version

Figure 1: Map of Scotland



published by the Scottish History Society.² The central government sources used were the Privy Council Records and Acts of Parliament. Although the church records were of most interest in order to assess the attitudes of the church both centrally and at local level, it was also important to compare and contrast the information found in ecclesiastical and secular records.

Since most of the documents which have been mentioned were handwritten they also varied greatly in legibility, and deciphering of handwriting was often a challenge. However deciphering of the documents did not stop at just the handwriting. Most of the records were in elite legal and theological language which also had to be deciphered carefully in order to decode and identify meanings and beliefs. The most obvious details recorded in the documents were names, dates, some locations, accusations, confessions, names of witnesses and accusers, defence and prosecution arguments, appeals, points of law, theories about crime and decisions and verdicts. These details may seem on the surface to be somewhat dry and formal, and only represent elite cultural attitudes rather than popular beliefs. Certainly, in both secular and ecclesiastical records, there is evidence that elite demonological theories were incorporated into, or disputed, during Scottish witch trials. Diabolic pact, renunciation of baptism, copulation with the devil, sabbat worship and devil's mark are all found in some of the accusations and confessions. Biblical citations, quotations from James VI, Del Rio, who published *Disquisitionum Magicarum Libri Sex* in 1599, and the *Malleus Maleficarum*, are also seen in the language of the clerics and lawyers who sought to deny any signs of scepticism. Yet there were others who did introduce a degree of caution, albeit somewhat late in the day. Sir George McKenzie, Lord Advocate for Scotland from 1677, was involved in a number of cases both as a lawyer and member of commissions of inquiry, for example

² See for example *The Records of the Proceedings of the Justiciary Court, 1661-1678*, (Scottish History Society, 48, Edinburgh, 1905).

the general commission for Musselburgh, Dalkeith, Newbattle, and Duddingston of 1661, when he was Justice Depute.³ McKenzie was later critical of the clergy for being too quick to believe confessions and pursue those accused of witchcraft.⁴

There is no doubt that elite opinion dominated many of the records. Yet below the surface of officialdom these documents do contain details about popular concerns about witchcraft practice and power. By examining the information about diseases and cures; descriptions of symptoms experienced; recovery or death; methods of laying-on and taking-off of disease, an impression of seventeenth-century popular belief and cosmology can be obtained. It is also possible, against other background information found either in the kirk records or other sources, to gain some indication of the relationships between the individuals involved, and also the complex role which the charmers had within their communities.

Because another important focus of this thesis is the development and practice of medicine, the records of the Scottish medical organisations were examined. It was hoped that these might have contained some useful information about the attitudes towards witchcraft and those accused of practising unofficial healing. The *Minute Book of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow* and the *Minute Book of the College of Physicians, Edinburgh* were surveyed.⁵ However these sources only reveal the 'professional' concerns of the surgeons and physicians which appeared to dominate their meetings. Details about their membership, training, professional status, legal and professional jurisdiction and relationship to each other made up the bulk

³ *RPC*, 3rd series, vol I, 11.

⁴ McKenzie, G *Pleadings in Remarkable Cases* (Edinburgh, 1672), 196.

⁵ The manuscript version of the *Minute Book of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow* is held in the Royal College library in Glasgow. The *Minute Book of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh* is held in the National Library, Acc 3439. The records of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons have been checked by Dr H Dingwall who is currently writing a history of the College. She has not come across any references to concerns about witches by the surgeons in the minute books.

of the minutes, although there were some occasional references to unlicensed practitioners. What concerned the surgeons and physicians about these practitioners was not where the source of their knowledge or powers came from, but the fact that they were practising without license within the boundaries of the college or faculty's geographical and legal jurisdiction. For example, a gardener, James Dougall, appeared before the Glasgow faculty in 1657 and promised to abstain from: 'any pairt of the airt of chirurgaiurie or prescribing of any medicmentis of physick'.⁶ The same year Elspeth Murray was cautioned not to use 'the forsaid art [medicine and surgery] to any persoune qhtever except to those members of her owne familie'.⁷ Later cases of a similar nature were fined.⁸ The Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh was established later than either the College of Surgeons of Edinburgh or the Faculty in Glasgow. Since, by the late seventeenth century, fears and accusations about witchcraft were on the decline they appeared to be of little interest to the physicians. The *Minute Book* from the 1680s, like the Glasgow minutes, contains professional anxieties about licence to practice or the activities of certain mountebanks who were giving advice and treatment without permission from the College. It does not provide any particular information on how medical practitioners perceived the witchcraft phenomenon.

It was therefore necessary to find other sources of material which might shed some light on contemporary attitudes towards health and disease. These other documents may not have contained any direct reference to witchcraft, but they provided interesting details about various types and symptoms of ill health, and their relative treatments. This information was found in the letters, diaries and notebooks of ministers, doctors, lawyers and other literate members of society held either in the National Library

⁶ *Minute Book of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow*, RCPS (Glasgow), 1/1/1, 127.

⁷ *Minute Book*, RCPS (Glasgow), 131.

⁸ *Minute Book*, RPCS (Glasgow), 280, 371.

Manuscript collection or the Gifts and Deposits collection at the National Archive for Scotland. The documents ranged from letters describing, or recommending, a treatment for some symptom or other, to alphabetical lists of symptoms and treatments. There are several examples of the latter form of vernacular medical lists, and a typical illustration is a copy made by Robert Ferguson of *A Rich Storehouse or Treasurie for the Diseased* from 1661.⁹ Robert Small's remedies, which were written out by James Blair in 1688, is a similar list of treatments.¹⁰ Another volume of the same kind was recorded by Robert Landess, who was minister at Blantyre between 1660 and 1705.¹¹ The exchange of letters between physician and patient can also be most revealing and those in the Tweeddale papers are quite typical.¹² Details about illness are contained in the correspondence between the earl of Tweeddale and Sir Edmund King in London, who was appointed the king's physician in 1687. The letters reveal detailed and complex prescriptions recommended for both the earl and his household. Often the information which was included was extremely personal and, on occasion, may seem to a modern reader to contain rather too much detail. One item on the list of treatments recommended for the earl's wife by King was 'a constant supply of cephalick confections, anti paralytick juleps and powders' and another that she was to vary the amount of paeony water in order that she had three or four evacuations a day, three times a week.¹³ These descriptions may seem somewhat excessive now but they indicate the strong influence of humoral medicine which prevailed at this time. The ethos of purging and evacuation, followed by the administration of

⁹ NLS, Ferguson, R *A Rich Storehouse or Treasurie for the Diseased*, 1661, MS 5171. For a discussion of the use and popularity of these types of medical manuscripts see Slack, P 'Mirrors of health and treasures of poor men: the uses of the vernacular medical literature of Tudor England' in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Webster, C (ed) (Cambridge, 1979).

¹⁰ NLS, Robert Small's remedies, 1688, MS 5898.

¹¹ NLS, Reverend Robert Landess's journal, 1660-1705, MS 548.

¹² NLS, Tweeddale papers, MS 7010, f 161; MS 7108, f 100-107.

¹³ NLS, Tweeddale papers, MS 7010, f 161. Cophalick or cephalic treatments were used to treat headaches and anti-paralytick treatments were used to prevent paralysis or spasms. Paeony root was used to treat spasms and convulsions.

restorative tonics, was paramount and the prescriptions, treatments and results recorded reflect this philosophy.

During the seventeenth century the boundaries and definitions of natural and unnatural causes and cures of diseases were being established. There was debate in wider medical and scientific circles about the reality of natural and unnatural causes, and also the existence of witches and demonic power. Writers such as Johann Weyer criticised the persecution of witches and argued that they were, on the most part, simply old, melancholic women who needed help. In *De Praestigiis Daemonum* he suggested that the melancholic state was caused by natural means, most likely due to problems centred in the uterus.¹⁴ Another medical theorist, Paracelsus, was also interested in magic and traditional healing methods, and distinguished between natural and unnatural causes of illness. His attitude towards witches and witchcraft was an unusual paradox in that he was in agreement with the description of witches as old, bent, ugly, unmarried and melancholic women, but at the same time he rejected the idea of the demonic pact while accepting the rationale and efficacy of beneficial magic.¹⁵ Essentially, both these writers rejected the possibility of demonic power, an opinion which led to much criticism. Later other physicians, such as Edward Jorden,¹⁶ further distanced themselves from superstition, magic and belief in demonic power as they became increasingly sceptical and rational in outlook. Gradually some physicians, particularly in England and France, began to deny the possibility of possession and instead suggested that some cases were in fact merely acting – either consciously or subconsciously.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hysteria had been traditionally associated with the womb or hysteria and Weyer's theory was therefore not novel or original.

¹⁵ Webster, C *From Paracelsus to Newton: Magic and the Making of Modern Science* (Cambridge, 1982), 83; also 'Paracelsus confronts the saints: miracles, healing and the secularisation of magic' *Social History of Medicine*, 8:3 (1995), 403-421.

¹⁶ See MacDonald, *Witchcraft and Hysteria* for a discussion of Edward Jorden's theory.

¹⁷ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 211-6 for another discussion of Edward Jorden and also the mass possession of the nuns at Loudun in 1634.

It was hoped that it might be possible to demonstrate support, or rejection, of these different medical theories among Scottish physicians. However, there appear to have been only a handful of cases when a physician was called to examine an accused witch in Scotland, which might have provided evidence about the opinion or attitude of physicians. For example, in 1632 Marion Mure from Leith was diagnosed as having 'hypocondriack distractioun' by Dr Gellie.¹⁸ However, despite Gellie's diagnosis, Mure's confession of diabolic pact was accepted by the court and she was later executed. Dr Gellie was clearly of the more sceptical camp which felt that Mure needed medical treatment, yet a case from 1688 demonstrates that opinions differed greatly, and that scepticism was not necessarily that common. The case of Catherin McTagart from Dunbar was discussed by the Privy Council in 1688. In 1682 James Lauder's wife, after reluctantly giving the accused soup, took pains in her hands. She was examined and bled by a Dr McKullo who diagnosed that an 'evill wight had delt with her'.¹⁹ This case illustrates not only the divergence of opinion circulating around Scotland, but also that in some areas scepticism had little influence, even by the end of the century. It has, therefore, not been possible to assess fully whether the struggle for professionalisation and the development of rationality by the medical profession actually had much influence on witchcraft prosecution or its decline in Scotland.

Having established both the physical and theoretical themes and boundaries, it was also necessary to consider not only what the evidence revealed but what questions might be asked of it. Once these had been identified then it would be possible to assess the data more closely. It has been stressed already that this was not a straightforward study of persecution. MacDonald points out that his research developed into not only

¹⁸*RPC*, 2nd series, vol IV, xl.

¹⁹*RPC*, 3rd series, vol XIII, 234-251.

a study of witches, but a study of persecution in general.²⁰ Conversely, this study increasingly moved away from an analysis of persecution towards a consideration of why accusations levelled against some individuals did not result in more severe punishment. This lack of prosecution seemed to suggest that witchcraft, or more precisely, charming, at the same time as causing fear and loathing to society was also quite acceptable. Apart from periods of peak prosecution, relatively small numbers were accused during the years in between. The pattern that evolved was that, for much of the time, witchcraft was not feared by most of the ordinary population. The question then was why? Other questions then became clearer; what was the incidence of charming compared to witchcraft? What distinguished charming from witchcraft? What were the attitudes of society, at all levels, towards it? Who were charmers and was the gender ratio the same as for witches? Why were some charmers not accused of witchcraft? How great was the influence of demonology and demonic pact theories? What were the common features of charming and did it have a rationality or system of belief? What kind of diseases were treated by charmers?

As it was decided at an early stage that a fully comprehensive, quantitative study was not feasible a qualitative analysis was undertaken. This did not, however, eliminate the use of any statistical analysis in the research at all. Because the form and content of the evidence was both similar and different the storing of the information and subsequent analysis could be best achieved using two small databases. One of these stored biographical information about those accused, such as name, gender, date, presbytery, parish (if known) and whether they were accused of witchcraft, charming or both. The other database held detailed information about the motifs and features used in charming rituals: words, either in the form of invocation or incantation, water, washing, cutting of nails and/or hair, clothing, thread,

²⁰ MacDonald, 'Threats to a Godly Society', 40.

wood, numbers, movement, metal, fire, animals, meat, bread or meal, eggs, salt, bleeding, other objects, herbs, specific time, boundaries, use of hands, any particular restrictions or taboos, and the use of a verbal request. The database also recorded whether the disease treated was human or animal, mental or physical and if the charmer used words or ritual or a combination of the two.

The statistical analysis of the data could then be done from the databases rather than by hand. Because the information stored was relatively simple, and from only two presbyteries, the analysis was still essentially qualitative rather than quantitative. The calculations which were possible using a computerised database were more complex and more accurate. By analysing those accused, it was possible to calculate the percentage of charming cases compared to witchcraft. The difference between the percentages of men and women accused of either practice could also be examined. As the presbytery and parish of the accused were recorded, a comparison between the two presbyteries was possible, as well as an analysis of statistics from individual parishes within the presbytery districts. A year-by-year record was also created in order to examine what happened in those years which were not part of the peak periods. This created a pattern of what, where and when accusations were made. The analysis of the charms was quite straightforward and formed the basis of the chapter on healing. Calculations of percentages of human or animal illnesses and physical or mental illness were made. The motifs themselves were examined for frequency of use and also how often words, rituals or words and ritual together were used.

Although questions, ideas and models have been stimulated by further multi-disciplinary reading there is no doubt that this is fundamentally a historical study. Absence of any theoretical approach in current

historiographical research is hard to justify. However, being too method-orientated or process-driven can be restrictive. Interpretation using contemporary ideas to evaluate evidence certainly, according to Carr, supports the use of theories but at the same time is open to accusations of Whiggism. However, taking Elton's approach, using pure historical narrative to discover an objective truth, ignoring factors other than political ones, is also not acceptable. Neither of these approaches is entirely satisfactory for this study, nor even in any current historical research. Witchcraft and charming prosecution may be measurable statistics, compared to the development of theoretical ideas about science and magic, and therefore each would seem to require a different type of analysis. Analysis of prosecution of witches and charmers can reveal a geographical and chronological pattern, whereas the history of ideas and culture is about concepts and theories which are much harder to quantify. However, rather than treating them as separate areas they can be examined in tandem and provide a useful comparison and context for both.

An examination of attitudes towards health and disease using the magical practices of charmers can be made using a comparative analysis of evidence relating to different localities. This can highlight both similarities and differences in practice and belief between both popular and elite cultures and also answer the important question that if they were both perceived as aspects of magic, what was the difference between witchcraft and charming?

Chapter 3 – 1603-1688: Political, Religious, Social and Economic Background

The period 1603 to 1688 which has been examined for this research has not been chosen at random. There is evidence that the prosecution of witches and charmers and the belief in magic or supernatural power certainly existed prior to these dates, and in some areas extended beyond them. For example, the infamous North Berwick witches were prosecuted in 1590-1, although this case was as much about treason as witchcraft. There were also some earlier cases and some later cases; the last recorded execution was in Dornoch in 1727. Another example is a case from 1723 which has features in common with those which will be examined in detail later. Catherine Cameron and William Mcildoe were questioned by the kirk session of Strathblane for passing a cat round the belly of a sick horse.¹ There is no doubt that 1603 to 1688 was a period of intensive activity and censure of witchcraft and charming which needs to be seen against the background of extensive change in many other aspects of Scottish society.

Witchcraft and charming can be treated in a simple, one-dimensional way as a form of behaviour and belief which frightened people and therefore needed to be suppressed, without any attempt to consider the wider social picture. However the existence of, and response to, the belief and practice of magic can also symbolise on other levels some of the changes that occurred during the seventeenth century. Many of the events and periods of prosecution had a huge, national and impersonal impact and yet witchcraft and charming accusations, and their use, also

¹ Record of the kirk session of Strathblane, CH2/510/3 cited in Stephen Davies 'The Courts and the Scottish Legal System 1600-1747: The Case of Stirlingshire' in *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe*, Gatrell V, Lenman B and Parker G (eds) (London, 1980), 127. The kirk of Strathblane was outwith the presbytery of Stirling, it actually lay in the presbytery of Dumbarton, but the example and practice cited is similar to one found in Gargunnoch in 1631. See case of Rosie Graham, SCA, Gargunnoch kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

had immediate, localised and personal consequence. These two extremes may seem too distant from each other to be part of the same issue, but they do represent neatly the range of changes and continuities that took place. In summary, these included the union of the crowns, the difficulties with the monarchy, the civil war, the changes in the church, the pressures and changes in the economy and alterations in the law. In general these alterations represent themes of the shifting of power both in its form and location; the tension between local and central authorities; the tension between the theory and practice of religious doctrine; the continuity of belief and custom; the definition and control of criminal actions. All of these are embodied in the problem and treatment of witchcraft and charming, and yet at the same time run through the much larger national events.

The union of crowns and removal of the royal court to London in 1603 shifted one aspect of central power so far away that the country of Scotland itself became to an extent a form of locality. The departure of James VI south provides a convenient starting point for this research as it reduced his personal influence on proceedings related to witchcraft prosecution. His personal interest and involvement in the period of witch prosecution in the 1590s, and particularly the North Berwick trials, gave that decade its unique pattern and rationale.² In general, prosecutions after 1603 reflect a different principle and a more typical pattern and, arguably, merit examination as a separate group. Equally it may be coincidence that the general wave of accusations and prosecutions dwindled after 1688-9, but again this provides a suitable concluding date, as it marks the

²This episode of witchcraft prosecution has previously been frequently examined in great detail and while many of these examinations are erudite and worthwhile have partly created an inaccurate interpretation of the general picture. See Maxwell-Stuart, 'The fear of the king is death' in *Fear in Early Modern Society*, Naphy and Roberts (eds); Larner, 'James VI and witchcraft' in *The Reign of James VI and I*, Smith (ed).

beginning of the end of the *de facto* reign of the Stewarts. The revolution against James VII and II and the coronation of William and Mary of Orange started another period of extremely complex and unsettled politics in Scotland, not least the development of Jacobite sympathies and campaigns, major economic crises in the prelude to the union of parliaments and an exacerbation in the religious difficulties and rivalries which pervaded the whole century.

The major themes of the time are without doubt interconnected. The ongoing problem of crown and church rivalry contributed to the key political and religious events of the century. The constitution of the country shifted from a monarchy, to a republic and back to a monarchy in the short period of fourteen years. Throughout the century the conflict between the presbyterians, the episcopalians and the extreme presbyterians – the covenanters and Cameronians – provided the catalyst for both physical violence and religious passion. Religion and politics were convenient bedfellows for a short time when their immediate aims – the removal of a monarch who supported rule by bishops – coincided, but each group had its own agenda and ultimately their co-operation was short lived.

Another area which underwent much change during the century was the economy, both in the specific and the general. Part of this was bound up to some extent with the removal of the king to London and the problems created by absentee landowners, many of whom required increased funds to run households not only in Edinburgh and their family estates, but also in London if they wished to be present at court. Of course, numerically these were relatively few compared to the overall population of the country, but the effect of their later fiscal difficulties was felt by their many dependents and tenants and so cannot be ignored. The general

economic condition of a largely agriculturally-dependent society has to be understood in order to appreciate the conditions of many of those who were involved in the witchcraft and charming accusations. The development of burghs and trade and how this affected the specific localities is another important consideration, given that the areas studied both had burghs within their areas. Demographic changes also influenced general living conditions.

Political and ecclesiastical background

In 1603 James VI and I moved south with his court in a dynastic union of the countries. However, Scotland remained a separate country with its own church, education, law, coinage, custom, culture and parliament. James's claim of successful government by pen was due to his reliance on his Privy Council and Committee of Articles to control Scotland in his absence.³ James, despite his ambitions, also left behind a country that was united only in part. Highland society continued to be outwith his absolute control and the introduction of the Statutes of Iona (1609), which abolished certain features of clan society in return for peace, neither resolved nor improved relations. The rest of the kingdom, although under the rule of the crown, was not an entirely homogeneous or compliant population. The powers of central government were still limited and much local administration continued in the hands of nobles. By manipulating the Privy Council and Committee of Articles, James could ensure parliament's support but at the same time magnates maintained their autonomy within their own locality.

James depended on an 'alliance between crown, nobility and

³Mitchison, *Lordship to Patronage*, 20-1.

bishops'⁴ which later contributed to the downfall of his son. His administration relied not only on the presence of nobles, but also the reintroduction of bishops to positions of both secular and ecclesiastical power. He also attempted to reduce the power of the presbyterians by restricting the meetings of the General Assembly and by 1610 succeeded in introducing a diocesan episcopacy. However, the presbyterians were not entirely suppressed and would remain a force to be reckoned with.

With the succession of Charles I, the country acquired a king who not only understood little of the traditions and culture of Scottish society but one who had been trained in the theory of divine right and absolute monarchy. Following his father's example, he attempted to extend a centralised order of control, particularly over law and order. To this end, he removed the system of heritable jurisdictions which, although a system full of inequity and in need of revision, the nobles saw as an attack on their local autonomy. To ratify these projects Charles required the support of the Privy Council, and so he introduced bishops to both the Privy Council and Parliament to influence the voting. This again alienated the nobles as it extended ecclesiastical authority into secular matters, something which had been rejected at the Reformation. Clerics were once more given offices of high state, and often given precedence over lay officials. For example Archbishop John Spottiswoode was made chancellor in 1635.

It was not only the nobles who were disenchanted by Charles's policies. Despite the promotion of bishops and clerics to positions of secular power, the church itself did not escape Charles's interference. His attitude to the church was no less episcopalian than his father's had been, and in the long run was no more successful. Along with maintaining an

⁴Ferguson, W *Scotland's Relations with England: A Survey to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1977), 107.

episcopal church government he revised the notion of a new liturgy, and by 1636 a new book of canons was introduced. By 1637 there was further consternation about the introduction of a new prayer book. The objections to the prayer book were organised by a coalition of Calvinist ministers and nobles, both of which groups felt that their authority was being threatened by Charles's policies and the objection to his religious scheme became the catalyst for much wider protests and complaints. There followed a period of turmoil and change.

Using the objection against the prayer book as a central tenet, the National Covenant was produced in 1638 which restated the sovereignty of the church and the justification for resisting any perceived threat of a Counter-Reformation, even if this meant rejecting the king's authority. This document was a revolutionary statement and voluntary acceptance of it was demanded from all.⁵ On the surface ecclesiastical policy was the main focus, but it was the nobles who dominated the proceedings and who would continue to set the agenda. By 1640 Charles's prerogative was removed and the authority of the covenanters was confirmed, yet with the replacement of the Tables by the Committee of Estates, the real power was with the nobles. Over the next seven years war in Scotland, England and Ireland would result in temporary coalitions of convenience between different groups. The Scots were divided between the Privy Council and the General Assembly. Some covenanters wanted to negotiate with both sides in order to achieve a uniform presbyterian settlement throughout the Scotland, England and Ireland. Some presbyterians were also concerned that the ultimate aim of the Covenant was to remove all royal power and so a pro-royal party built up around the marquis of Montrose.

During the three years after Charles's surrender in 1646 the

⁵ Mitchison, *Lordship to Patronage*, 43.

situation was just as complicated and the Engagement, a negotiation with Charles, was agreed to by the General Assembly and the parliament. Yet the aims of ecclesiastical and secular authorities no longer coincided and the result was further internal conflict in Scotland. Yet again social order and authority underwent another period of transformation. Although this crisis may have been reflected in an increase in accusations and prosecutions of witchcraft there were other social changes. The passing of the Act of Classes in 1649 resulted in a purge of burgh councils at the insistence of a minority of extreme Calvinists. Responsibility for the poor was passed onto individual kirk sessions and church discipline was directed not only at the ordinary members of the congregation but also at the nobles and landowners themselves, not entirely to their liking. In 1649 lay patronage was abolished and the fragile cooperation between the church and parliament was once again broken as the church asserted its independence and dominance in all aspects of life.

The execution of Charles in 1649 was the decision of the English parliament; indeed the Scottish parliament voiced its objection, and within a short period declared his son king. Cromwell's campaign in Scotland, led by General Monck, was relatively quick, if not entirely without resistance. Stirling surrendered on 9 August, Dundee was attacked and pillaged and eventually garrisons were established along the east coast. The church experienced a loss of status during Cromwell's occupation. In 1653 the resolutioner General Assembly was dispensed with and forbidden to meet again. However their rivals, the protesters, were not permitted sole authority either and the differences between the two groups continued to fester. The protesters, despite their anti-Royalist stance, were extremely intolerant of any other religious practice and found Cromwell's religious tolerance unacceptable. The resolutioners were at

heart royalists, thus both parties, much to their displeasure, were excluded from power. The influence of the occupation was also seen in the administration of justice. Institutions such as the Privy Council and Committee of Estates were abolished. The influence of ecclesiastical courts was reduced and their jurisdiction over assault, trespass, riot, poaching and begging transferred to the civil courts. A smaller number of witchcraft accusations took place, certainly up to 1656, partly due to the abolition of the Privy Council.

With the restoration of Charles II in 1660 there was some optimism about a period of peace and retrenchment. Of course it was to be more than merely a restoration of the monarchy, as the nobles also hoped to reestablish their place in the hierarchy. Along with the reintroduction of the Privy Council, the Scottish Parliament, judicial system and Committee of Estates, bishops would also reappear. Charles II, however, was somewhat wiser than his father, in that he did not repeat the mistake of appointing bishops to high office. The pre-commonwealth *status quo* was to an extent reestablished. An episcopal system was reimposed onto the presbyterian system and yet again the kirk experienced a period of disorder. As a result, there was an increasingly aggressive policy of 'outing' conventiclers. By 1662 nearly 300 ministers had been evicted, almost a third of the total number of ministers in Scotland. Most were protesters but some were resolutioners. Aside from this expulsion, the actual administration of church policy carried on relatively unchanged. Most kirk sessions were still actively involved in controlling the moral and social discipline of the population, and in many parishes the provision of a school had been successfully achieved. The period 1661-2 was also marked by another outbreak of witchcraft accusations. This episode, which was not experienced throughout the country is an interesting paradox

since it did not occur during a period of general change and upheaval, but during one which had particular effect on the church. This does rather suggest that this peak of prosecutions might well have been instigated by the church in reaction to its own position.

James VII and II succeeded his brother in 1685 and fled the country in 1688 to be replaced by his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange. James's reign, although short, was fraught with difficulties. There were two attempted protestant risings early on: one led by Monmouth in England, and the other by the earl of Argyll in Scotland but both were defeated. James's aim was to repeal the Test Act in order to allow catholics to hold office but this did not meet with much support. His objective was to allow toleration and religious freedom for catholics and Quakers. Although there was increased anti-catholic feeling in Scotland, there was, perhaps unsurprisingly, no great rush towards rebellion, nor was there any increase in accusations of witchcraft or charming. It was in England that alarm was more widespread, particularly after the birth of a son to James and his second wife in June 1688. Attention turned to William and Mary who, until the birth of the prince, had been the heirs apparent, as alternative protestant monarchs. The settlement of William and Mary's succession would take until 1690 to resolve adequately. Even with the succession of overtly protestant monarchs the issue of presbyterian or episcopalian polity in Scotland was still troublesome. Presbyterianism was finally restored in 1690 but it would be followed by another purge of ministers. Religious and political disturbance continued beyond the period of witchcraft and charming belief and prosecution.

Social and economic background

Alongside the political and religious changes of the period there were

other social and economic pressures felt by the Scottish population. During the early years of the century James VI's fiscal policies created economic pressures on Scottish society. This was an era of pecuniary and personal patronage coupled with inflation, and taxation, to provide the crown with enough income, put demands on all levels of society, but particularly on the burgesses and lairds. The nobility, rather nicely, escaped many of the taxes but the others faced heavy and repeated financial expenses which left them resentful at their lack of political power. Despite the presence of the Convention of Royal Burghs the status and power of the burgesses was limited and by calling on conventions of nobles, rather than parliament, James ensured that the political leverage of the burgesses was minimal.

The end of James's reign was not only marked by religious and political discontent but also economic and social crisis. There were harvest failures and episodes of near-famine in the early 1620s.⁶ The crises between 1621 and 1623 compounded episodes of dearth which had occurred in the previous years. The highest prices for grain during the decade were recorded at Stirling in 1615. There were also outbreaks of smallpox in 1623. These years of particular crisis were combined with yearly outbreaks of plague from 1615 onwards. Although many episodes did not reach serious endemic proportions until the 1630s and 1640s, the continual anxiety about infection and serious illness permeated the whole of society. In the 1620s there were calls for fast days to help crop failures and parishes had to provide for the poor.⁷ As if to confirm the thesis that demonic witchcraft prosecution was used to explain more widespread anxieties, accusations and trials also increased during the 1620s culminating in a major episode during 1629-30. Added to the political and ecclesiastical difficulties, these

⁶ Flinn, M (ed) *Scottish Population History* (Cambridge, 1977), *passim*.

⁷ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 120.

social and economic factors combined to create a country that may well have been 'more prosperous and more at peace'⁸ but was in actuality not particularly stable or well-governed at all, but rather in a state of flux.

As in the 1620s, there were localised outbreaks of plague in 1636 and rises in crop prices suggest that there were also episodes of crop failures. The imposition of increased taxes and the falling-off of trade put particular strain on burgesses and nobles. The general rise in prices was part of a wider European trend and in other countries the inflation rate was much higher,⁹ but to a large extent much Scottish trade was still conducted on a payment-in-kind basis and this protected some of the population from the immediate effects of monetary crisis. For many, economic problems were part of an ongoing state of affairs and they survived from year to year with very little in reserve. Life for the majority of seventeenth-century society was not always comfortable or assured, and 'threats' to survival were always present and part of the natural state of things, but when the moneyed sections of society – and in particular the great landowners – began to feel the pinch of economic pressure their reaction was not one of silent acceptance. Many tenants paid their rents in kind using food products or animals, but the landowners were faced with paying tax bills in cash, which many did not have. When these natural 'leaders' of society became involved in physical protest against the head of state, the whole foundation upon which society was structured was threatened. It has been suggested that in general Scottish society was relatively stable, and even harmonious, as there were few episodes of peasant revolt.¹⁰ It is therefore somewhat ironic that revolt in 1638, when it raised its head, came from those sections of society – the nobles and the churchmen – where it was

⁸ Mitchison, *Lordship to Patronage*, 21.

⁹ Mitchison, *Lordship to Patronage*, 49.

¹⁰ Whyte, *I Scotland Before the Industrial Revolution* (London, 1995), 152.

least expected.

During the late 1630s and 1640s the country not only suffered from the effects of military campaigns but also from further serious outbreaks of plague. Although the 1644-1649 episodes were more serious in the burghs than in the rural population, there were still recorded deaths from plague in outlying villages. In Stirling the number of deaths was sufficient to concern the council about possible loss of income in the burgh.¹¹ The Haddington presbytery called for a stop to baptisms and marriages as well as nightwatchings and lykewakes where groups of people gathered together during 'the fearfull time of the Lord's visitation by the plague' in 1645.¹² The burghs in general did not recover quickly from this devastation. In addition, taxation to pay for military conflict had put further strains on an already pressurised economy. The supply of men to the army over the years, as well as the deaths suffered during combat, was also a drain on local and family incomes as it reduced available manpower.¹³ Certainly a general atmosphere of anxiety would appear to have affected society at all levels and there was a price to pay for the years of uncertainty. Those who look for conspiracy theories to explain witchcraft and charming prosecution may find some evidence in the number which took place during this time.¹⁴ A national overview would certainly confirm that there was a rise in the numbers accused and tried, which may suggest that they were perceived as increased threats, on religious grounds, as a secular crime and in relation to economic conditions. However a closer analysis of the figures suggests that these increases occurred on a localised basis, particularly in East Lothian and

¹¹ *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, 1667-1752*, Renwick, R (ed) (Glasgow, 1839), 300.

¹² NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹³ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 133-49.

¹⁴ See Larner *et al*, *Source Book* for numbers of witches accused and prosecuted during this period.

Berwickshire, rather than throughout the country as a whole. Certainly both these areas were involved in fighting during the years of conflict and that might be reason enough to create a need for a scapegoat purge.

However the Stirling area, which suffered particularly badly from plague as well as armed conflict during the same period, did not appear to follow this pattern, which suggests that prosecution of witches and charmers was influenced not only by national events but also, more importantly, by the dynamics of local populations.

The cost of warfare to the population both on economic and social terms has already been alluded to, but these economic pressures remained during the Cromwellian occupation. The costs of building, manning and maintaining the citadels were massive. The monthly assessment which Scotland had to meet was £10,000, although it was later lowered to £6000. Taxation ran at £90,000 which resulted in an accumulated deficit.¹⁵ Many landowners were ruined by the wars of the 1640s. The presence of the army was felt strongly in many areas of life, but not all of the effects were negative. In some areas, such as Inverness, the presence of the garrisons actually maintained law and order as well as bringing money into some towns.¹⁶ However, the devastation of agricultural land reduced the economy of the whole country. Free trading privileges were introduced as part of the Ordinance of Union and some areas and individuals did benefit either from improved trade or from personal promotion. However, better trade with England was gained at the loss of some trade with the continent.

In the initial Restoration years of 1661-2 there was an increase in applications for commissions for witch trials and yet within a short time

¹⁵ Lynch, *New History*, 284.

¹⁶ Ferguson, *Scotland's Relations*, 140.

there were clear expressions of scepticism circulating. Even the Privy Council was concerned by the number of commissions, and altered the prerequisites and banned the use of torture. During the late seventeenth century the law and judicial process itself were clarified and reorganised. The Court of Justiciary was restructured in 1672 and the theories and principles of the law were tightened. In 1681 James Dalrymple, viscount Stair produced his *Institutions of the Law of Scotland* concerning civil law, and three years later Sir George McKenzie produced his *Institutions* which related to criminal law. The Royal College of Physicians was founded in Edinburgh in 1681 after several aborted attempts. Interest in science and the arts flourished, at least among some sections of society. For much of the population their lives and culture were controlled both by the patronage and personality of their local landowner and other persons of position, and by their local kirk sessions. These dominant powers controlled day-to-day life both in public and in private. Employment, income, trade, travel, birth, death and marriage were administered by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities. Penny weddings, guising, drinking, customs and beliefs were abolished by the church as a means to achieve the 'godly' society which was the desire of seventeenth-century religious powers.

In the rest of the country life progressed at a slower rate of change. Central authorities adopted an increasingly interventionist approach in some areas of life, as seen in the administration of justice which was no longer in the hands of heritable officer holders. Baron courts continued to administer social control at a local level along with the kirk sessions. Many of the men who officiated in the baron court were also present on kirk sessions as elders. Greater controls were imposed on roads, poor relief and education. Domestic manufacturers set up glass, wool, soap, leather,

paper and sugar works during the second half of the century although their commercial success was limited. In Haddington the New Cloth Mills were established in 1681.¹⁷ Coal mining and salt production found a reasonable export market and, of course, there was still importation of luxury goods for those who could afford them. New luxury items which were introduced to the country included, tea, coffee, chocolate, tobacco and potatoes.

Investment in agricultural improvement was limited due to the low price of grain and tenurial agreements. There were some limited improvements, such as partial enclosure, liming and crop rotation but these were restricted to Fife and Lothian. There was still a general atmosphere of insecurity which permeated downwards. Many landowners had been forced to sell after the mid-century crisis and, as paternalism was still a strong social influence, the effects were also felt by their tenants and dependents. Although short leases for tenancies were traditional there was a pattern of inheritance or continuity in that the lease would usually continue in a family. The pressure, or problem, of lack of investment was more likely to have resulted from the method of paying rent. In areas where rents were paid in kind tenants were protected from the increases, whereas those who paid money faced more immediate problems.

There were also other sections of society about which very little is known, of whom witches and charmers were part. They were those anonymous people whose names and details were not recorded on any document. This was because they were landless or had access to only very small plots of land, such as the cottars who sublet small plots from tenants. They were often referred to as grassmen, hinds, herds, taskers or

¹⁷ Scott, W R (ed) *New Mills Cloth Manufactory, 1681-1703*, (Scottish History Society, 46, Edinburgh, 1905).

shepherds, and as well as working the land for subsistence often carried out other tasks as well. Some were tradesmen or craftsmen such as millers, smiths and weavers. Beneath them were the landless labourers who were entirely dependent on cash wages. Another group of landless was the living-in servants. These were male and female workers, usually unmarried, who lived in another household for board and lodgings as well as some cash wage. Some communities revolved around specialist industries, for example coal mining and salt panning, both of which were found in the Haddington and Stirling areas. In 1606 a parliamentary act forced colliers and salt workers into serfdom, which bonded them to their employer and prevented them leaving and finding work elsewhere. Wages were slightly higher than for farm workers and houses were provided, but the work conditions were very poor.¹⁸ This all serves to illustrate the hierarchical and paternalistic nature of Scottish society in the seventeenth century.

Witchcraft and charming were real and serious problems during this period, not least for those who were accused. At the same time they need to be seen in the wider context of national political, religious and social events. Without some understanding of the general historical background then any closer examination of witchcraft and charming would be the poorer. Beliefs and practices are important aspects of culture, yet they cannot be entirely divorced from other perhaps more pragmatic issues and events. Belief in magic and the supernatural underwent an enormous shift in the seventeenth century, due in no small part to changes in theological doctrine of the presbyterians, the development of science, the reorganisation of the law and its administration and the rivalry between central and local power, as well as modifications in more

¹⁸ Whyte, *Scotland before the Industrial Revolution*, 159-167.

social and economic factors. Nevertheless it is not how or why witchcraft and charming were perceived as crimes or practices to fear which is important here, but how and why they were perceived as important aspects of daily life.

Chapter 4 – Haddington and Stirling presbyteries: Social and Economic Comparison

Ecclesiastical Background

The presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling were selected because both have similar, as well as contrasting, features. It should be noted that the ecclesiastical boundaries of presbyteries did not always coincide exactly with the administrative boundaries of sheriffdoms. Haddington presbytery covered approximately half the shire area; and Stirling approximately a third. Both were among the eight earliest presbyteries established in the 1580s. Haddington presbytery records commenced in 1587 and provide a virtually complete run of years between 1603 and 1688. Stirling presbytery records started in 1581, and again provide a good stretch of years, apart from 1616 to 1627 and 1640 to 1654. This range of available records provides an excellent amount of documentary material for closer analysis: 78 years for Haddington and 56 for Stirling. At an even more local level the presbyteries consisted of fifteen parishes in Haddington and eleven in Stirling, although these changed over the years. In 1640¹ the Haddington presbytery included the parishes of Aberlady, Athelstaneford, Bolton, Bothans (Yester), Dirleton, Garvald, Bara, Haddington, Humbie, Morham, North Berwick, Pencaitland, Saltoun, Saltpreston (Prestonpans), Tranent. The parishes of Garvald and Bara were combined in 1702. (See figure 2, p 62) Stirling presbytery consisted of Airth, Alloa and Tullibody, Alva, Bothkennar, Clackmannan, Denny, Dollar, Gargunnock, Larbert (which included Dunipace from 1624), St Ninians and Holy Rude, in the burgh of Stirling itself. (See figure 3, p 62) However, the records of the kirk sessions are both less consistent, and less complete, than those of the presbyteries. Eleven of the kirk sessions from the Haddington presbytery have records available for the years examined, providing an average of 29.7 years per

¹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/4.

Figure 2: Map of Haddington Presbytery Showing Outline of Parishes

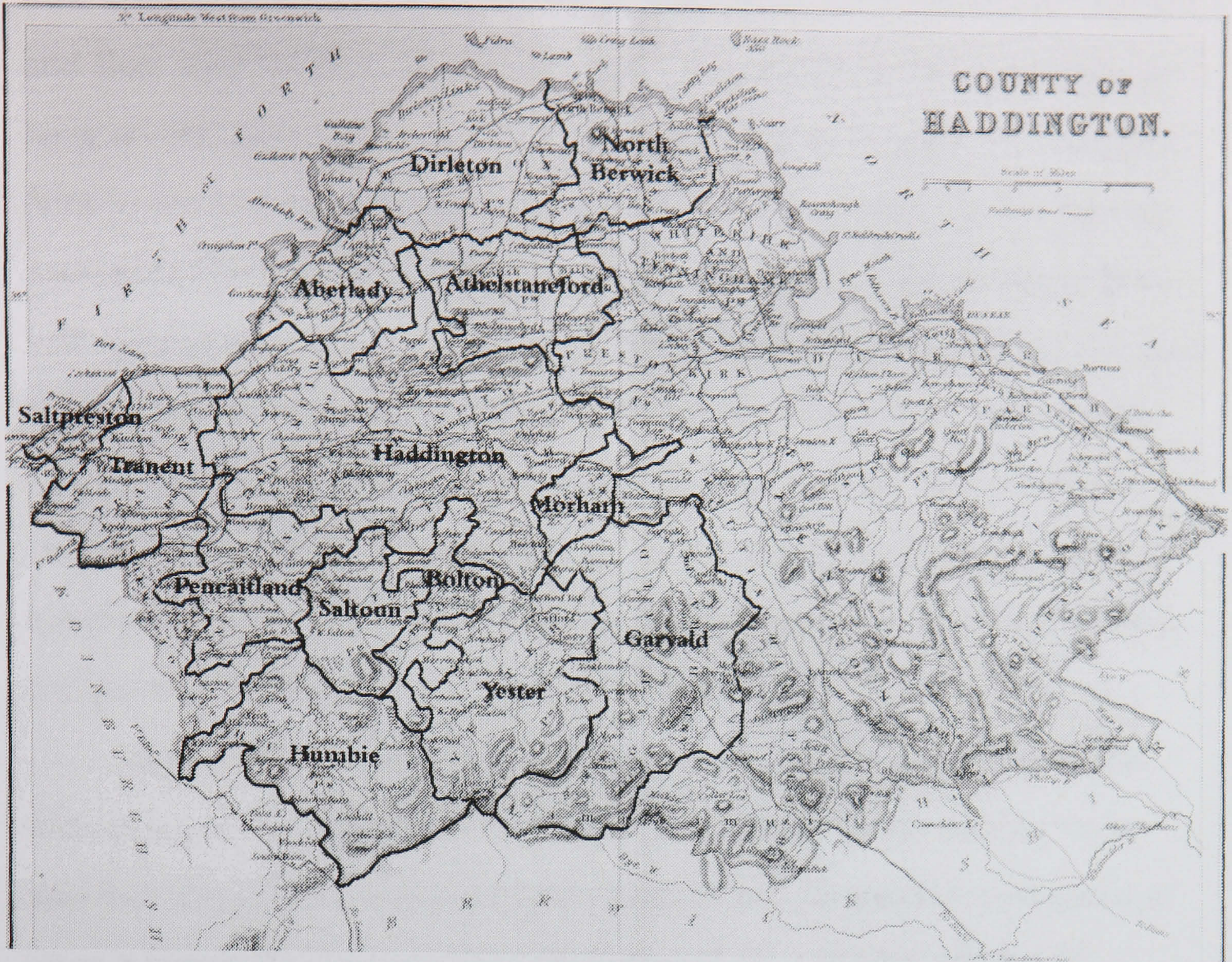


Figure 3: Map of Stirling Presbytery Showing Outline of Parishes



kirk session. The records for the others, Athelstaneford, Morham, Garvald and Bara start too late. However, some of the records have fewer years or have several gaps where the records have been lost or were not compiled. Nine of the kirk records do not start until after the 1630s. For the Stirling presbytery the average is 31 years per kirk for seven of the parishes. The kirk session records for Bothkennar, Denny, Dollar and Larbert do not start until after 1699. Four of the kirk session records start before 1630 but the other three do not start until the 1650s, 1660s and 1680s. Nevertheless, despite the variation, the average records available and years covered correspond sufficiently to provide a suitable foundation on which to do a comparative analysis of accusations and practices.

Both presbyteries are located in lowland Scotland, Stirling in the central area and Haddington in the east. (See map 1, p 34) As they were also both established as presbyterian areas relatively quickly, compared to other areas of the country, then there should be a similar pattern of conformity and practice seen in the records. All of the kirks had incumbent ministers by the early seventeenth century² and many were in post during the late sixteenth century and so the general populace experienced many years of Calvinist preaching and catechising which, according to contemporary ecclesiastics, abolished all remnants of past superstitious beliefs and practices from the population. Apart from Gargunnock, all the parishes had Protestant ministers by 1600, and throughout the rest of the century, except for an average of two years, all had ministers in post. In other words, there were no long episodes of vacancies, although there were individual cases of disputed, or unpopular, appointments or controversial behaviour by certain ministers.

² All the parishes had ministers by 1603 apart from Gargunnock, which was filled by 1615. *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae: the succession of ministers in the parish churches of Scotland, from the Reformation AD 1560, to the present time*, (Vol 1, Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale; Vol 2 Synods of Fife, and Perth and Stirling), Scott, H (ed) (Edinburgh, 1866 & 9).

There was also some variation in the political and religious fervour of the ministers during certain difficult years or periods. Some parishes endured a fair degree of unsettlement, such as Tranent, Pencaitland and Airth but others, such as Aberlady, Athelstaneford and Alloa and Tullibody, experienced very little change of personnel or involvement in wider political and social issues. Robert Balcanquhal, who was minister at Tranent in the Haddington presbytery from 1614, was suspended in 1649 and deprived in 1650 as part of the general purge of engagers or resolutioners.³ The next minister, Thomas Kirkaldie, was deprived in 1662, during the purge following the restoration of the monarchy and the return of episcopal church government, and Robert Balcanquhal returned, but only until 1664. The parish then had a further four ministers until 1688. The minister at Pencaitland, also in the Haddington presbytery, during the 1640s was David Calderwood, who was notable in his opposition to episcopacy. He wrote a *History of the Church of Scotland* after he fled the country. However, a later minister at Pencaitland, Robert Douglas, who was a leading light among the resolutioners, was given an indulged position in 1669. The parish of Airth in the Stirling presbytery had eight different ministers between 1603 and 1688. James Simson was deprived of his post in 1651 although he continued to preach until his arrest in 1660. These examples contrast with the experiences at Aberlady and Athelstaneford in Haddington and Alloa and Tullibody in Stirling, all of which had only four ministers between 1603 and 1688. Certainly by the late 1680s, with the reintroduction of presbyterianism, the two areas appear to have become more divergent. Eight of the Haddington parish ministers were deprived during the 1689 purge, whereas only three of the Stirling ministers were removed. Some of the earlier Haddington

³ *Fasti*. He was suspended by the General Assembly in 1649 because he was an 'accessorie to the Divisive Supplies' and deprived in 1650. He returned to his position in 1663.

ministers appear to have been active presbyterians, involved in the politics of the church at national level by attending the General Assembly, but by the second half of the century the majority appear to have conformed to episcopacy. In contrast, fewer ministers from the Stirling presbytery attended the General Assembly – only James Edmonstone from St Ninians, Edward Wright from Clackmannan, William Justice from Gargunnoch and Henry Guthrie from Holy Rude – although a number of ministers were openly opposed to episcopacy in 1606. In 1651 the minister of Holy Rude, Thomas Guthrie, deposed by the General Assembly because he opposed the resolutioners in 1651, formed an alternative presbytery under Cromwell's protection. He was imprisoned, tried and executed for treason on Charles's restoration. Despite this there would appear to have been less general ecclesiastical disruption within the Stirling presbytery area.

Social, cultural and economic structure

Population

Both areas spoke Scots, there being little evidence of Gaelic in these localities by the seventeenth century. Both presbyteries had a royal burgh at their centre, but most of the rest of the population lived in rural parishes and were agriculturally dependent rather than merchants, craftsmen, professionals or landowners. However, at this time merchants and tradesmen would also have had some arable lands and a share of common grazing for their own households⁴ making them just as dependent on agricultural production as the rural population. Both areas had proportionally sized populations, given the number and type of

⁴ Whyte, I 'The Occupational Structure of Scottish Burghs in the Late Seventeenth Century' in *The Early Modern Town in Scotland*, Lynch, M (ed) (London, 1987), 228.

parishes, based on a projected distribution from the hearth tax of 1691.⁵ The Haddington presbytery, despite the lower number of paid hearths of 5957 had the more concentrated, and higher, population of the two at 46 hearths per 1000 acres. Stirling's paid hearths actually numbered 7492, but averaged 26 per 1000 acres indicating that Haddington had proportionately 1.77 times the number of hearths per 1000 acres as Stirling. To confirm this proportional difference between the two areas, the number of poor calculated from the Hearth Tax can also be compared. There was a greater number of poor in the Haddington presbytery compared to Stirling: 611 compared to 349 and the proportional difference between the two areas was very similar: Haddington had 1.75 times the number of poor. These figures indicate quite a marked difference not only in population, but also quite a difference in the amount of wealth generated by manufacture and overseas trade in the two areas. The population of Haddington was approximately 1.75 times greater than that of Stirling. The average number of paid hearths per 1000 in Scotland was between 20 and 25,⁶ therefore the projected population for Haddington would appear to have been well above the national average indicating a higher level of wealth in that area. Stirling, on the other hand, appears to have been more in keeping with the national average.

Stirling

The burgh of Stirling had royal status, which entitled it to a monopoly of foreign trade, and developed around the central focus of a royal castle. (See figure 5, *Stirling* by John Slezer, p 69) It was one of the first to be granted the right to have a merchant guild in the thirteenth century.⁷ By the end of the seventeenth century it was still a moderate-sized market town but its

⁵ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 188. All figures are based on Flinn.

⁶ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 189.

⁷ Whyte, *Scotland before the Industrial Revolution*, 69.

status had fallen six places compared to other royal burghs, from seventh to thirteenth, in terms of tax liability.⁸ The main industry, or craft, was weaving but there was a small number of nobles and merchants who lived in substantial town houses. The merchants, as in other comparable burghs, were the main source of economic, political and social power. There was the usual mix of craftsmen associated with burghs, such as weavers, hammermen, fleshers, bakers, tailors and skimmers. Finally, the non-burgesses, the indwellers who had no official status, made up the rest of the population. Urban specialisation was slow in Scotland, and in the mid-seventeenth century most centres of population reflected the usual range of trade, retail and basic domestic industries although people were likely to have carried out a variety of jobs.⁹ Projected population figures are usually based on the tax levied in 1690/91 to pay for the war against the Jacobite threat; however, as Harrison points out, Stirling was both more vocally supportive of the Jacobite cause and had also agreed to a new malt tax to replace all other taxes during the previous year, and so more than 18% of the tax was unpaid.¹⁰ Of course there are other problems with these figures. They are based on an assessment of burgh hearths and do not cover rural households. It is likely that in rural houses there would only be one hearth, whereas many urban houses would have had more than one. Since the majority of Stirling presbytery was rural it is unreliable to project figures for the burgh onto the rest of the area. Neither do the figures account for seasonal or occasional variations, such as the presence of garrisons, itinerant or migrant workers.

The other parishes in the Stirling presbytery hinterland were

⁸ Smout, T C *Scottish Trade on the Eve of Union* (Edinburgh, 1963).

⁹ Whyte, 'Occupational Structure', 220.

¹⁰ Harrison, J 'The Hearth Tax and the Population of Stirling in 1691' *Forth Naturalist and Historian*, vol 10, (1985), 89-107. Harrison makes no attempt to estimate population size as there were too many variations in the form of seasonal fluctuations, trade swings, presence of garrisons as well as the effects of disease and famine to make any confident calculations.

mainly agricultural, either pastoral, arable or a combination of the two, although coal mining was also found in several of the parishes such as Alva, Clackmannan and Alloa. Indeed, the agriculture economy of Alloa was so poor that mining was the biggest form of employment and income even at the time of the *Old Statistical Account*¹¹ in 1791. Miners or colliers were regarded with great disdain by ministers in the eighteenth century, even more than ordinary agricultural workers and, according to the minister of Alloa, were 'an unruly set of labourers'¹² who despite recent improvements in their employment conditions did not appear to have improved their own lifestyle. Miners were bound in serfdom by an act of 1606, which was ratified and extended throughout the seventeenth century. By 1672 mine owners could put any vagrants to work in their mines.¹³ Although the work conditions were dangerous there were some small recompenses in that the wages paid were slightly higher than those paid to agricultural workers, and housing was supplied. However, it would appear that these groups of workers were perceived both by themselves, and by others, as being distinctive and different. Their specialised work resulted in different concerns and traditions, coupled with the continuity of generations of families working as colliers, kept this group apart from the rest of their neighbouring communities. This socio-economic combination means that the parishes examined provide an interesting cross section of seventeenth-century society and will demonstrate that the beliefs and rituals were common to all.

The actual size and area of the different parishes varied quite markedly. The parishes of Haddington, Garvald – in Haddington presbytery – and St Ninians and Clackmannan – in Stirling – covered a much greater geographic area than for example Bolton or Saltoun in

¹¹ OSA, vol VIII, 592-650.

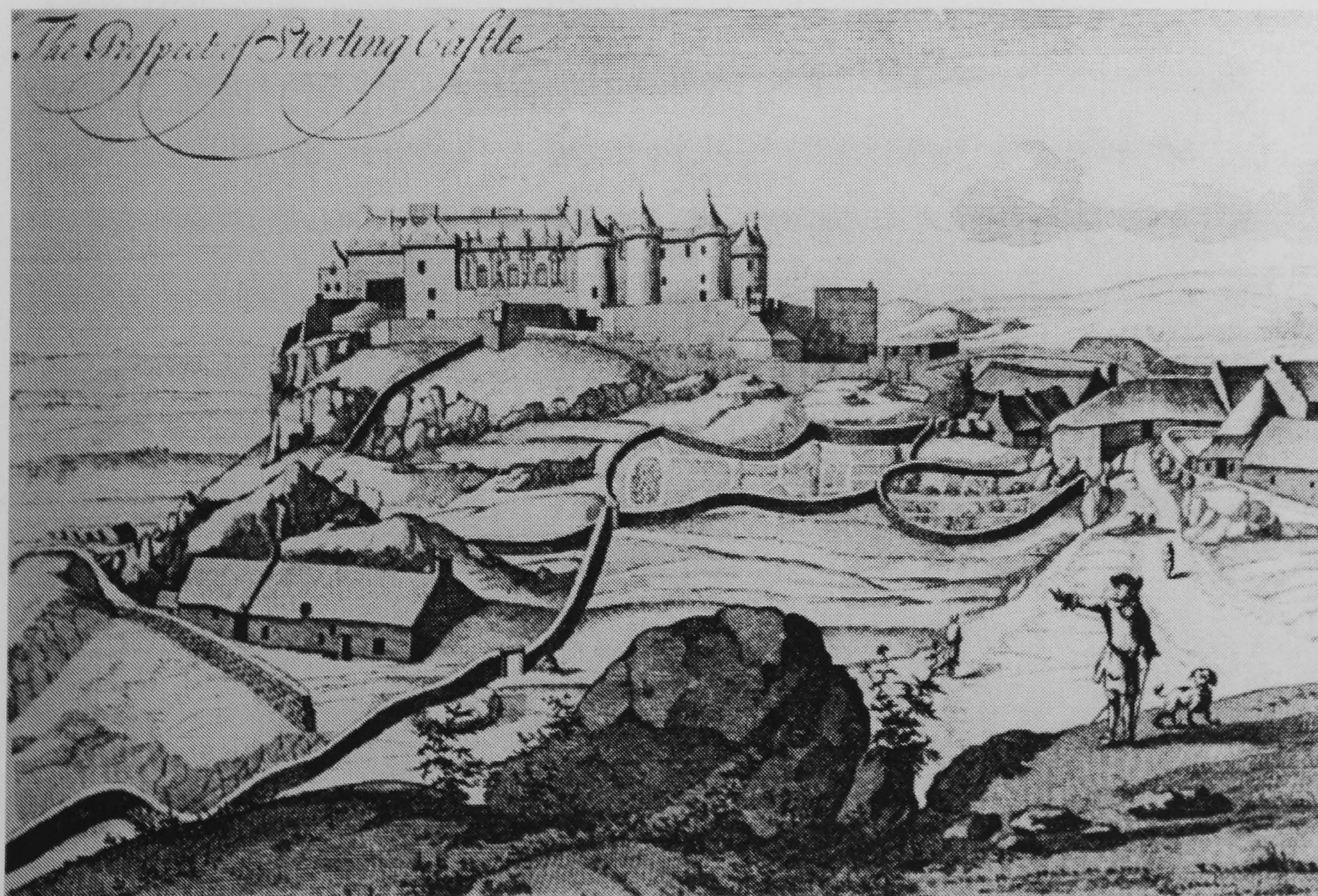
¹² OSA, vol VIII, 592-650.

¹³ Whyte, *Scotland before the Industrial Revolution*, 166.

Figure 4: Haddington (John Slezer, c. 1670s)



Figure 5: Stirling (John Slezer, 1672)



Haddington and Bothkennar or Alloa and Tullibody in Stirling. According to the population figures in the *OSA* St Ninians and Stirling, Holy Rude, had the highest populations, followed by Larbert and Airth. Given that St Ninians had the largest geographic area, and Holy Rude included the burgh population, then these figures are not surprising. Bothkennar and Alva had the lowest populations, although, geographically they were not the smallest. Gargunock and Airth were both predominantly agricultural and not surprisingly St Ninians and, more particularly, Stirling, Holy Rude, had a more mixed income. Even the smaller agricultural parishes had a number of tradesmen and craftsmen such as weavers, masons, wrights, millers, distillers and smiths. If witchcraft and charming were simply the beliefs, or practices, of agricultural communities, then the accusations found in the presbytery records should have come mostly from Gargunock and Airth. However, although a number of cases did come from both these areas, references were also found in Alloa, Clackmannan and Holy Rude, which indicate that the belief in witchcraft was undoubtedly extensive rather than restricted to one section of the population or area of the country. It is interesting to note that in the *OSA* for Gargunock, the minister noted that fear of witchcraft, the evil eye and in particular old women was still present in 1793, especially in relation to cattle disease, which suggests that the efforts of the church during the seventeenth century to expunge all vestiges of superstition and witchcraft had met with limited success.¹⁴

Haddington

Haddington was also a royal burgh but did not have a royal castle at its centre (See figure 4, Haddington by John Slezer, p 69). It received its charter

¹⁴ *OSA*, Vol XVIII, 90-114.

from David I in 1130 and had been an important centre of catholic christianity. As the largest population centre in the presbytery, it also had its share and hierarchy of lairds, merchants, craftsmen and indwellers. Haddington merchants were relatively late in forming their guild which was not organised until 1659. The craftsmen, despite being better organised than the merchants, as in other towns and burghs, were excluded from the town council. Most local power was in the hands of the merchants. Although the economy was for the most part dependent on agriculture, the concentration of hearths per 1000 acres suggests that there was a higher level of wealth throughout the Haddington area than Stirling.¹⁵ This may have been due to the relative proximity of Haddington and surrounding area to Edinburgh as compared to the Stirling area. Whyte points out that the occupational structures of the East and Midlothian towns of Musselburgh and Dalkeith were closely linked to Edinburgh, and that the same was likely to have been also true for Haddington.¹⁶ Haddington exported wool, hides and sheepskins and had a weekly market on Saturday until 1633, when Charles I gave permission for a market to be held on a Wednesday as well. Three fairs were held annually. Cloth manufacture started in Haddington in the 1680s, although there had been an earlier attempt in 1645 which had encountered difficulties during the Civil War.¹⁷

The parishes in the rural hinterland, as in the Stirling presbytery, were a mixture of agricultural and mining. Saltpreston, Pencaitland and Tranent all had some colliers among their populations. Eighteenth-century attitudes towards colliers from the Haddington presbytery were similar to those voiced by the Stirling presbytery. The minister at

¹⁵ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 189.

¹⁶ Whyte, 'Occupational Structures', 236-8.

¹⁷ Scott, *New Mills Cloth Manufactory, 1681-1703*, xxxiv-v; lv.

Pencaitland was as critical of their lifestyle as was the minister at Alloa.¹⁸ Saltpreston – as the name suggests – also had salt pan workers and was granted a burgh of barony status in 1617. This entitled Saltpreston to hold markets and fairs for local trade but it was not allowed any foreign trade. These three parishes, along with Garvald and Bara, were the most densely populated areas. Garvald and Bara covered the largest geographical area whereas Saltpreston, Tranent and Pencaitland were much smaller. The parishes of North Berwick, Yester and Dirleton were the next largest, both in population and area.¹⁹ The smallest populations were in Bolton and Morham which were the smallest-sized parishes. The economy of the parishes other than Saltpreston, Pencaitland and Tranent was almost exclusively agricultural, although there was some oyster dredging in Saltpreston and Tranent. The harbours at North Berwick, Cockenzie and Port Seton were used mostly for import and export of goods and grain, as commercial fishing was quite limited at this time. The agriculture was a mixture of arable with some pastoral farming. Some of the larger villages had the usual mixture of tradesmen and craftsmen.

Like Stirling, the accusations and references to witches, charmers, sorcery, magic and other supernatural practices in the Haddington area came from a range of parishes, rather than just either the most densely populated or the most agricultural. In the Haddington presbytery area the accusations appear to come from Haddington itself, Tranent, Humbie, Yester, North Berwick and Saltpreston; again not only indicating that the belief in witchcraft was widespread, but also that the variations in local statistics are more likely to reflect local attitudes to authority, either church or secular, by individual communities than indicate that there were particularly active clusters of witches and charmers. In both areas the

¹⁸ OSA, Vol XVII, 33-44.

¹⁹ Figures based on OSA accounts.

attitudes of neighbours were as important to accusation as the local heritors, elders, ministers and landlords were to the prosecution process.

The type and content of witchcraft-related accusations reflected the lifestyle and concerns of the local population. If seeking cures for disease using charming was a major component of these practices during the seventeenth century, then by implication it is unlikely that there were many, if any, medical professionals available in either of these areas for people to consult or could afford to consult. As the presence of physicians was restricted to burghs of higher economic status than either Haddington or Stirling, or any of the smaller villages, then it is not surprising that there was no specific mention of any physician.²⁰ For a burgh as populous as Edinburgh²¹ the estimated figures for medical professionals during the seventeenth century show that there were a greater number of surgeons than physicians. The stent rolls for 1650 identified 13 surgeons, three physicians and 11 apothecaries, whereas the poll tax of 1694 identified 23 surgeons, 33 physicians and 19 apothecaries, although stent rolls are less reliable than poll or hearth tax rolls.²² The poll tax for Old and New Aberdeen mentioned one surgeon and three apothecaries.²³ Despite the apparent rapid proliferation in the number of physicians by 1694, in the earlier part of the century surgeons and apothecaries would appear to have been more numerous. If Edinburgh only had three physicians then it is not surprising that neither Haddington nor Stirling had any.

²⁰ The status of physicians, surgeons and other related medical practitioners is discussed in more detail later. See chapter 10, 227-31.

²¹ Population figures of about 12, 500 estimated by 1550: see 'Introduction' in *The Scottish Medieval Town*, Lynch, M ; Spearman, M and Stell, G (eds) (Edinburgh, 1988), 2; Also Dingwall, H *Late Seventeenth-Century Edinburgh: A Demographic Study* (Aldershot, 1994).

²² Dingwall, *Physicians*, 25-6. Although it is pointed out that these figures can only give a general impression. Dingwall includes the number of surgeons recorded by the Incorporation of Surgeons which indicates a higher number of surgeons than the tax rolls demonstrate. She points out that even for a burgh as important as Edinburgh it is impossible to estimate the exact number of physicians in the early seventeenth century.

²³ Dingwall, *Edinburgh*, 233.

In less important or less wealthy burghs it is likely that there would only have been a surgeon or apothecary. Given the status and income of the burghs of Stirling and Haddington and their surrounding areas, compared to either Edinburgh or Glasgow, the presence of a small number of surgeons, and possibly apothecaries, was likely. However, even by the eighteenth century there are only a handful of references to either of these groups. Haddington appears to have had a surgeon by the beginning of the seventeenth century and an apothecary – Robert Millar – by the mid-seventeenth century.²⁴ The Stirling records contain some references to surgeons in the seventeenth century: Alexander Sklaitter in 1609 and Johnne Buchannan in 1646.²⁵ Similar records for the outlying parishes are either not available or contain no references to surgeons or apothecaries, so is it fair to assume that there were no medical professionals resident in the outlying communities? By the end of the next century Saltpreston is recorded as having one surgeon, Tranent had two and Yester had a physician resident in the parish. In the Stirling presbytery only Gargunnock had a surgeon by the end of eighteenth century. Clearly these statistics cannot give an accurate representation of the situation in the previous century but, as has been illustrated already, they can give some indication of the relative wealth or hierarchy of the different communities. If this is assumed to be relatively constant, then the presence of only one surgeon in both Stirling and Haddington during the seventeenth century would suggest that it was unlikely that the smaller communities could provide an adequate income for a surgeon or apothecary.

Some indication of burgh attitudes towards health and disease can also be gleaned from burgh records particularly during times of famine or

²⁴ See chapter 10, 228, note 28, 29.

²⁵ See chapter 10, 228-9, note 31.

epidemic. Certainly the sale or importation of food was controlled, as well as the movement of people in and out of the major towns during outbreaks of plague. But these restrictions were practised in burghs throughout the country and were not unique to either Stirling or Haddington. References to the plague indicate that outbreaks in both presbyteries followed the general national pattern. In 1601 the burgh boundaries of Stirling were to be watched and protected by neighbours and inhabitants to ensure that no strangers were admitted.²⁶ The records also show that there was an outbreak in Airth in 1605 for which the burgh merchants provided 100 merks to help the 'neighbours of Airthe visitit with the present plaig'.²⁷ There were further outbreaks of bubonic plague in 1605 in Stirling²⁸ and by 1607 and 1608 it was necessary to send for cleaners from Edinburgh, Linlithgow and Leith at the cost of 2000 merks.²⁹ There was another major outbreak in 1645 and 1646 – the last major outbreak in Scotland – when victims were buried at the Chapel Well.³⁰ This disease was more of a problem for burgh populations who were living in close proximity to each other. In these conditions mortality was often as high as 60-85% of those infected, but smaller numbers, often as few as one or two cases, were recorded in some of the the smaller, outlying villages, such as Alloa and Tillicoultry in 1645.³¹

In the Haddington area there appear to have been fewer plague crises although there were still outbreaks or small numbers of deaths during particularly bad years. There were plague deaths in 1636 when local fairs were cancelled, and the loss of these markets had a knock-on effect on

²⁶ *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, 1519-1666*, Renwick, R (ed) (Glasgow, 1887), 100.

²⁷ *Extracts from the Records of the Merchant Guild of Stirling, 1592-1846*, Cook, W and Morris, D B (eds) (Stirling, 1916), 23.

²⁸ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 117.

²⁹ *Stirling Burgh Records*, 117.

³⁰ *Stirling Burgh Records*, 187.

³¹ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 141.

trade and food supplies for the rest of the population. Saltpreston (Prestonpans) had some plague cases³² and there were a few burials recorded at Tynninghame, in the parish of Whitekirk in the adjoining presbytery of Dunbar, between 1628 and 1644. Saltoun in 1645, Bolton and Athelstaneford also recorded a small number of burials.³³ In 1645 the Haddington presbytery declared that such celebrations as Penny Weddings were to be stopped during 'the Lord's visitation by the plague of pestilence'³⁴ which would appear to have been a method of controlling movement in and out of the burgh in order to reduce the spread of disease.

The deaths associated with plague were not the only problems which seventeenth-century society had to face. Loss of population and cancellation of trade created problems in the years after the actual outbreaks. The same effect would be felt from episodes of food and grain shortage. Death from famine or dearth was a serious problem for several years during the 1620s, the 1670s and even into the 1680s. The shortage of grain was reflected in the high prices seen at the Stirling markets in 1615, and in the early 1620s repeated dry summers resulted in poor harvests which had an effect on the amount and quality of grain available for planting the next season. Fast days were called for in Tynninghame in 1621 to appeal for improved weather.³⁵ During the 1670s the crisis for the population was a combination of smallpox and food scarcity. Severe weather caused food shortages as a result of delayed ploughing and poor harvests, which then contributed to increased prices in the following years. Beggars, vagabonds and the poor put increased pressure on kirk sessions to provide assistance throughout the late 1670s, even in small

³² Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 127.

³³ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 129, 140.

³⁴ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

³⁵ Flinn, *Scottish Population*, 120.

rural parishes such as Yester,³⁶ as well as larger parishes like Haddington.³⁷ The problems and effects of bad weather and harvest were still being felt into the 1680s as the Privy Council ordered a national fast in 1681,³⁸ and in 1684 Haddington kirk session called for a public fast on 7 May 'for the great storme in the winter and the coldnes of ye spring yr after.'³⁹

Civil and religious warfare were national crises but they also affected localities, causing loss of life and goods. Haddington, and East Lothian in general, suffered greatly during the time of the battle of Dunbar in 1650, and the Stirling area during the siege of the castle in 1651. Assault and destruction of buildings and crops in the Haddington area were in part due to the importance of this area on the main route north and south. The capitulation of Stirling was, however, of great symbolic significance as it had been the location of the Scottish administration after the loss of Edinburgh. Undoubtedly, during the late 1640s and early 1650s, both areas suffered quite extensively. However neither locality was involved to any great extent during the covenanting troubles of the 1660s, although there were reports of conventicles being held in both areas. This illustrates yet again the similarities between the two presbyteries in that they both participated in national events at a comparable level.

From the records it would appear that both areas suffered a similar course of economic and health crises during the seventeenth century, and both fit the general national pattern, although there were some small individual differences. If panic episodes of witchcraft and charming prosecution were influenced by economic crises then this would be reflected in the numbers and years of accusations. There should be an increased number during the 1620s, in the late 1640s and the 1670s and

³⁶ NAS, Yester kirk session records, CH2/357/2.

³⁷ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/4.

³⁸ *RPC*, 3rd series, vol VII, 132-3.

³⁹ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/4.

into the 1680s if these factors were the main catalysts for accusation. It is difficult to see any exact correlation at this stage apart from the 1649 crisis. By the 1680s, when economic hardship was still noticeable, the number of accusations had fallen quite noticeably.

What is clear is that these two areas had social, economic and political similarities yet highlight differences which illustrate that experiences were not homogeneous. Both areas illustrate the power of local autonomy and at the same time demonstrate the sometimes limited effects of central interference. Magic, charming, witchcraft and health were important aspects of daily life and as such warrant closer examination. Using material specific to local areas, rather than a broad national survey, is more appropriate to the subject matter and will provide a more accurate picture of events and experiences.

Chapter 5 – The Paradigm of Power

'Knowledge is power'
[Francis Bacon *Meditationes*]

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with power and the specific powers of witchcraft and charming; not just as powers on their own, or as part of magic, but as component of a much greater continuum. Witches and witchcraft can be seen to have been regarded as having had immense power both over and within society – otherwise why would the measures taken against them have been so severe? Whether this power was actual or potential is, at this juncture, an unnecessary distinction, not only because it is an unanswerable question, but it conveys more about those who ask it, than what the evidence can tell us. Since health and disease were fundamental concerns for society those who had knowledge of healing were also perceived as powerful. The issue of power therefore is not simply one of quantifiable units of strength, but a much more abstract one. Witchcraft and charming, as part of magic, were only two of many conceptual forms of power that affected seventeenth-century society, and so cannot be treated in isolation. In order to attempt an understanding of the significance of their power, they require to be analysed in the context of other forms of power.

This discussion will initially consider a definition of power followed by a deeper thematic examination of types of power: as control; in cultural differences; who had it and how it was achieved. Witchcraft and charming, as specific powers, will be examined in terms of how they were practised, particularly in relation to the interaction of unequal powers. This theme will be compared to, and contrasted with, examples of other power struggles or dichotomies. The question of whether the power of

witchcraft was perceived as frightening will also be considered, if indeed it was, and if the witch hunt as a whole can be used as a metaphor for the other power struggles which were current in seventeenth-century Scottish society.

The broad concepts of power as an overall theme will be examined more fully by considering the effects of power, the use and abuse of power, the development of power, the perception of power, the manifestations of power and why and how it was used. As a corollary to the concept of power – in terms of physical reality or metaphorical and metaphysical theory – control and tension are closely linked components, and should therefore be taken as part of the overall discourse. This is particularly important when the consequences of opposing or rival powers are considered. In physics, power, energy and force are measurable units, but in sociological terms these are far more difficult to demonstrate. It may be that ultimately the conflict which arose between and among powers was in fact necessary in order to establish cultural mores. Also the need to establish hierarchy and precedence was, to some extent, an unavoidable development given the structure of seventeenth-century society and how it operated. Furthermore it may also be an obvious truism, although one which nevertheless should be recognised, that the existence of one power necessarily implies the presence of its antithesis: absence of power or weakness, impotence and frailty.

Another aspect of the theory of power, which is of particular relevance here, is the power and responsibility of the historian¹ who has the capacity to create or destroy myths surrounding witches and witchcraft. Historians have the potential power to create anything from the evidence of the past. Some historians saw themselves as the arbiters of unbiased

¹ Roper, L 'Witchcraft and fantasy in early modern Germany' *History Workshop Journal*, 32 (1991), 19-33; Purkiss, *The Witch*, 60. Both develop the idea of the power of historians over history.

truth² against the credulity of those who believed in the possibility of witchcraft, or perhaps took the evidence at face value. This assessment serves to remind us of the fine line between truth and fantasy in the evidence that the historian assesses and that, despite an admirable desire to uncover objective truth, truth itself may be entirely subjective or even elusive. Despite Elton's claim that such a commendable search is both laudable and successful,³ Carr's alternative approach⁴ of examining the historian's partiality and circumstances before turning to the evidence itself, might appear more apposite when reading the theories about witches espoused by 'historians' of various periods and schools of thought. However, at this time even the relatively modern approaches of Carr and Elton have been reassessed and recast by more recent writers such as Jenkins and Evans.⁵ The advent of postmodernism has turned historical analysis into literary discourse. This denies the feasibility of absolute historical truth or objectivity, and even questions the validity of historians' rationale and purpose. In other words, historical research need no longer be the monopoly of historians, as their methodology and approach have not evolved and adapted enough, but have instead become somewhat torpid. But perhaps it is possible to take a more practical, intermediate position, and while acknowledging that facts are facts, recognise that it is the interpretation and analysis, historical or postmodern, that converts them into usable evidence. All those who examine historical documents, from whatever position, look for meaning within the language used, which suggests the disciplines have more in common than not. Thus the duty of all historians, whether feminist,

² Elton, G R *The Practice of History*, Sydney, 1967. Elton declared history was a search for objective truth about the past, and that the 'fortress of truth' was an achievable target.

³ Elton, *The Practice of History*.

⁴ Carr, E H *What is History?* London, 1961.

⁵ Jenkins, K *On 'What is History?'* From Carr and Elton to Rorty and White, London, 1995; Evans, *Defence of History, passim*.

relativist, economic or post-modern, is to recognise both the potential effects and limits of their work but at the same time acknowledge their common aims and objectives. Historians are able to rewrite the past, which is a powerful responsibility.

What was power?

How can power be defined? In order to answer this it is perhaps easier to list qualifying adjectives associated with power. Thus there are not only endless types of power but also numerous dialectic oppositions. Central and local; church and state; male and female; devil and god; science and religion; physical and spiritual; good and bad; elite and popular; insiders and outsiders; reality and fantasy – all describe a framework of power types, but do not provide a clear definition of power itself. Power can be defined, albeit somewhat simplistically, as the ability to do anything.

Clearly it implies the existence of some strength and energy – physical, mental, social, political and so forth. But on a more subtle level, influence and authority are also implicit within a definition of power, both of which suggest the nuances of the effects of the power itself as much as its manifestations. What is not explicit when defining power, but which is quite implicit in subjective terms, is the relative goodness or badness of a particular power. Associated with any power is a measure of its value, good or bad. Thus our interpretation of power within a social context is usually a composite, and complex, one. If we eliminate the adjectival qualifier, all these disparate types of power are essentially the same.

Types of power – political, national, local, social, religious.

Of course the power of witchcraft was seen by contemporary society as an ambiguous and an unquantifiable force. The evidence suggests that there

were both physical and spiritual manifestations; and also serious tensions with other forms of power. Most importantly, it was its potential for negative, or positive, use which was used to justify or excuse its use. There are of course other types of power, often just as ambiguous, which might be assessed equally subjectively but which have not been subjected to such close examination. These can include state-sanctioned powers such as political, economic and social power; or rather more esoteric ones such as morality, goodness or fantasy.

The power of the monarch, the noble, the church, the law, the head of the house were all permitted; all were interdependent and relative and so established a perceived sociopolitical hierarchy. Thus the power of one level was related to another, but at the same time each one also required the others in order to validate itself. For example, contemporary medieval and early-modern political doctrine concentrated on theories of order, particularly in relation to God. This order of things stressed the importance of stability, but did not, in reality, reflect the actual state of affairs. Instability and disorder were just as prevalent as stability in the seventeenth century. Reality and idealism struggled to dominate culture and society.

It should also be remembered that while these powers appear to have been effective at a general, national level, the same types of power may have had quite a different influence at local level. Local patterns of power may have been similar in theory, but they also had unique features and often demonstrated markedly distinct attitudes – sometimes opposed to those of the central authorities. An example, related to witches and witchcraft, illustrates this variation quite neatly. It has been suggested that persecution of witchcraft was the result of a shift towards centralised state building with increased control of nationalism, tax and judiciary.⁶ If we

⁶ Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 39; Lerner, *Enemies*, 55.

rely solely on official documentary evidence such as Acts of Parliament or, in Scotland, debates of the General Assembly, then the picture is one of a desire to suppress certain groups of, or practices by, people in positions of power. Thus, further to the 1563 Witchcraft Act, parliament declared in 1574 that:

all ydill personis gaying about in ony cuntre of this realme using subtile crafts and unlauchfull playis, as iuglerie ... and sic utheris; the ydill people calling thame selffis egyptianis or any uther that ... have knowlege in physnomie, palmestrie or utheris abused scienis quhairby they perswade the people that they can tell thair weardis deathis and fortunes...⁷

This proclamation was reissued and extended in 1579 to include specifically charmers – although witchcraft was still subject to its own act. Later, in 1629, the Privy Council declared that there was still some concern about persons going on pilgrimages to chapels and wells.⁸ In 1646, the General Assembly appealed to parliament to extend the witchcraft act to include charmers⁹ and in 1648 the Stirling diocese noted that all presbyteries were to be responsible for ensuring that any wells or superstitious places were abandoned and that those individuals who sought comfort there should be duly reprimanded.¹⁰

These examples might be read as evidence supporting the theory that central and local powers worked together, for political reasons, to strengthen the principal authority. But, alternatively, the evidence can be used to demonstrate that central and local powers were not always working entirely in unison. Each had their own agenda, which at times coincided to work in harmony for a common goal, but more often had

⁷ *APS*, Vol III, 87.

⁸ *RPC*, 2nd series, Vol III, 241.

⁹ *Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*, Mitchell, A (ed), Vol I, 1646-47, (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1892), 123.

¹⁰ *Register of the Diocesan Synod of Dunblane, 1662-1688* (printed version), Wilson, J (ed)(Edinburgh, 1877), 263.

their own objectives at heart. Parliament was more concerned about the general stability and security of the country as a whole. Thus vagabonds, Egyptians, jugglers and fortune tellers were threatening because they were not part of the official social order. They were outsiders and therefore likely to be perceived as difficult to control. Witches and charmers to some extent also fell into this category, although they were part of the settled community, rather than itinerant; what they did was outside official control. The church saw the threat from witches and charmers, along with players, story tellers and Jesuits, as being not only against the secular hierarchy, but also the spiritual one. However, the appeal to parliament from the General Assembly for legal sanction to pursue charmers in 1646 was not endorsed. Parliament had other, more pressing issues relating to national security – such as the civil war – to contemplate in 1646. Church and state, in this instance, were not working entirely hand in hand.

The other examples about wells and pilgrimages, from the Privy Council and Stirling diocese, might well be interpreted as displaying a common concern, however the fact that these bodies discussed the same issue in 1629 and 1648, nearly 20 years later, suggests that the former declaration may have not been as efficacious as it was hoped. That the practices were still being carried out in 1648 in areas of the country outwith Edinburgh is somewhat suggestive of an inability, or perhaps reluctance, to change social behaviour, either by the authorities in a locality or by the rest of society itself. The records relating to the Stirling area, both secular and ecclesiastical, do not demonstrate any notable increase in the number of accusations relating to pilgrimages or visits to holy wells during 1648-9, despite the official minute.¹¹ The combined force of two official

¹¹ Figures obtained from Lerner *et al*, *Source Book*, cover parliament, High Court of Justiciary, Privy Council, Circuit Court and miscellaneous cases and revealed one case in 1649 (Janet McNab). No cases were found in the church records – synod, presbytery or kirk session level.

organisations attempting a common aim would appear to have been unsuccessful, and so questions the very nature of power itself. Does a dominant power require the collaboration of the subordinate – for want of a better word – force in order to ensure its authority, or can a subordinate power on occasion ignore the dominant one, due to its geographical location as well as its own local autonomy?

The political agenda behind the prosecution of witches and charmers during the seventeenth century was an important consideration in relation to the development of the state, as well as to changes in the judicial system, in particular the effects of the Cromwellian Union and the abolition of heritable jurisdictions.¹² The lack of prosecutions during the Cromwellian Union has been used to explain the flurry of prosecutions in 1661-2 but this has been disproved in Levack's analysis of the period.¹³ It might appear that there was an accumulation of accused persons awaiting trial because of the absence of the Scottish Privy Council and parliament during the Cromwellian occupation, and that it was with the restoration of the Stewart monarchy and the reintroduction of the Scottish judicial system that these cases were finally examined. Although the machinery of prosecution was reintroduced by the restored system, the accusations still came from local communities and had continued to be made in the previous years during the occupation. The increase in prosecution of witches during 1660 and 1662 might seem like a neat analogy to illustrate the restoration of crown and noble power over rebellion, but does not take account of local variation and patterns.

The appeal to Parliament from the earl of Haddington in 1661 wherein he complained: 'because the laws ar now silent this sin [of

¹² Heritable jurisdictions were the right of jurisdiction over tenants which went with land ownership and which were inherited, such as courts of regality and barony.

¹³ Levack, 'The Great Scottish Witch Hunt', 90-108.

witchcraft] becomes daylie more frequent'¹⁴ may have contributed, in no small degree, to the large numbers from the Haddington area who were prosecuted during this period, but it should be emphasised just how localised this power was. There is no evidence to show any similar peak in the Stirling area.¹⁵ State power, in the form of noble, judicial and crown power, may have cooperated to control the problem of witchcraft, but it was a local, not a national, remedy. There may have been no more to this local issue than a straightforward desire by the earl of Haddington to control his tenants. This example also underlines the difference among national cultures. Barstow's analysis, which examined France, highlights a disparity between central and local power.¹⁶ The distribution of cases in France suggests that in areas of tight, central control there was little prosecution; however in peripheral areas, where there was little central influence, numbers were much higher. The opposite would appear to be the case in Scotland: Haddington, nearer to the location of central administration, had a greater number of prosecutions than Stirling, which was a greater distance from central authority.

Another theme associated with witches and witchcraft power was that of religion. It is not so much religious belief which is important here but the power of religion, as an organisation, which is more relevant. One interpretation of religious power was the duality between good and bad – religion was good, witchcraft was bad – but there are other issues related to this question. For example, the relationship between God and the devil was discussed frequently by the church¹⁷ as was the issue of male dominance. Thus the influence of male priest figures, and the denial of access for women to this role has been stated, restated and denounced

¹⁴ *APS*, Vol VII, appendix, 31.

¹⁵ *Larner et al, Source Book* has only three Privy Council cases in 1661 and there are none in the church records. See chapter 12, 304-7.

¹⁶ Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 69.

¹⁷ Scarre, *Witchcraft and Magic*, 14.

quite vociferously in feminist literature as the medieval, and later, Christian church has been portrayed as a monotheistic, male-dominated organisation.¹⁸ Women were marginalised by the church as the masculinity of God was stressed, and the role of Eve as temptress was emphasised. The association of the relationship between a male devil-figure and a female witch-figure has also been frequently debated and cited in both primary and secondary material.¹⁹ For example:

Epistemon: "...the Devill used as meanes to intyse them to his service, for such of them as are in great miserie and povertie, he allures to follow him, by promising unto them great riches..."²⁰

Philomathes: "...what can be the cause that there are twentie women given to that craft, where ther is one man?"

Epistemon: "The reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer then men is, so it is easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Devill..."²¹

There is also the matter of theological differences between protestant and catholic doctrine, although ultimately any distinction between the two is a question of dogma rather than fundamentals. The church as an organisation, despite its seeming position of strength, appeared at various times to have been fearful not only of rival religious doctrines, but in a more general sense also anxious about the behaviour and wider beliefs of the ordinary population. It should be acknowledged, however, that some of the attitudes and proclamations issued by the church may have probably also been the result of concern for the mental and physical well-being of the populace, rather than a simple desire to expunge popular practices. An illustration of the former is found in the Haddington presbytery records of

¹⁸ Achterberg, *J Woman as Healer* (London, 1991), 66-8; Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 109; Hester, *Lewd Women*, 200.

¹⁹ Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, 15. James VI, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597) (facsimile edition, London, 1922), 43 are but two examples.

²⁰ *Daemonologie*, 32.

²¹ *Daemonologie*, 43.

1645.²²

An report that in the fearfull time of the Lords visitatioun by the plague of pestilence manie people use to call great [meetings?] of strangers to their banquets and bridalls, the presbyterie therefore ordains to stoppe both baptisme and marriage till people lay their pledge that they sall not gather multitudes and to inhibite all manner of minstrells. Ordaines likewyse that night wakings and liakwaikes²³ about the dead may be forbiddin and stayed...

While this might seem a harsh desire to restrict people's marriage celebrations or grieving practices, it might also be seen as a practical measure to restrict the spread of the plague. Public gatherings of local communities at this time were bad enough, but inviting strangers who might then go on to spread the disease elsewhere as they returned home was, in the light of later scientific understanding, quite a sensible measure. Restriction of public recreation was an added advantage, as far as the church was concerned, as Calvinist belief often interpreted the outbreak of plague as punishment for society's general inclination towards sinful behaviour. The power, and motives, of the state and church were neither straightforward nor static. There is no doubt that the desire of these two bodies was to maintain their position and power by influencing aspects of social life during the seventeenth century. However, their reasons did not always coincide as the state was more interested in controlling political or social unrest, and the church spiritual unrest. On occasion these two objectives might overlap when Godly discipline could be enforced at the same time as secular rule.

²² NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

²³ liakwaik; lyke wake; laikwake: 17th century term used to describe vigils kept over corpses until burial(CSD).

The power of order and control

The power of accepted doctrine, or the natural state of things, also had at its heart the question of religion, although it was equally closely related to politics. This area has been covered from a number of perspectives; for example Robin Briggs²⁴ stresses the idea that political thought was dominated by theories of natural order and that, since this order was God-given, church and state colluded to maintain this impression of stability. Stuart Clark also discusses the dominance of natural order in seventeenth-century society, but has emphasised the use of contrariety or opposition to reinforce and reaffirm the traditional.²⁵ They both illustrate the multiple and complex uses of power. What may be seen to have had an overtly political agenda often had a multiplicity of hidden meanings and influences. What may appear to have been straightforward episodes of protest or rituals of misrule did not, in fact, restrain or control those who had power, but instead appeared to strengthen their position. In Europe religion did at times play a central role in ensuring compliance with state control by using symbolism to release stress, but only as a means to ensure its own position.²⁶ Days of misrule such as elections of boy bishops, bean kings or abbots of unreason often depended on the cooperation of both church and state and the ultimate decline in their popularity was also the result of the reaction of both authorities.²⁷ At this high level, all power – political, judicial, economic, religious or social – was used to control. The prohibition by the Scottish parliament in 1555 of Robin Hood plays²⁸ and, later, the abandonment of other religious festivals such as *Corpus Christi* by the church are examples of kirk and state working together to remove

²⁴ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 323.

²⁵ Clark, 'Inversion, misrule', 98-127.

²⁶ Klaniczay, G *The uses of supernatural power: the transformation of popular religion in medieval and early-modern Europe* (Princeton, 1990), 6.

²⁷ Hutton, *Stations in the Sun*, 95-111.

²⁸ APS, vol II, 500.

communal festivities which were rivals to the authority of both.²⁹ The Edinburgh pageant which celebrated the visit of Charles I in 1633 was an allegorical representation of the conflict between good and evil and the removal of superstition and oppression by justice and religion.³⁰ The church would continue to suppress ordinary folk rituals such as guising or celebrating other calendar festivals throughout the century and later. For example, in 1663 George Bartilman was censured by the Haddington kirk session for his sin of ‘..disguising of him self at yuill by putting one womans clothes...’.³¹

Control of society as an objective of the power of the state has been well documented.³² Theories about witches and witch prosecution are only one manifestation of this. A parallel attitude can be seen in the response of the state towards mental illness. There was a change in attitude, culminating in a desire to remove sufferers from sight and put them into institutions, which was the result of both the Reformation and the increasingly centralised nature of government.³³ Demonologist theorists explicitly condemned witches as their main targets, but implicitly included overall social control in their agendas. Larner suggested that crime waves should be retitled control waves, as they reflected policing activity rather than criminal activity.³⁴ Larner is more accurate with the term ‘control wave’, as her use of the term ‘crime wave’ is problematic here. It suggests that those who practised witchcraft increased their activity at certain times as a result of other events, perhaps taking advantage of social instability. Prosecution statistics can never give an indication of the level of belief or

²⁹ See Hutton, *Stations in the Sun*, *passim* especially 250, 305. See also Mill, *A Medieval Plays* (Edinburgh, 1927), 30, 91.

³⁰ Mill, *Plays*, 81.

³¹ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/3.

³² Burke, *Popular Culture*, discusses in depth the reform of popular culture by elite, educated sections of society.

³³ Rosen, *G Madness and Society* (London, 1968), 142. But also Foucault, *M Madness and Civilisation* (New York, 1975).

³⁴ Larner, *Enemies* 62.

involvement in a practice, they can only ever enumerate those who were involved in a disciplinary process, and so only reflected the activity of the prosecutors. To use the term crime wave is therefore not only inaccurate but reflects a twentieth-century bias and perspective.

Although the terminology may be variable, the theory of social control as a manifestation of power is one that has much support, but the necessary precondition of social tension has less unanimous endorsement. Briggs, in his examination of French evidence, certainly suggests, fairly convincingly, that power was an important factor in tension, particularly when religion and state were closely interdependent.³⁵ But we cannot ignore local variations, as illustrated in Horsley's³⁶ argument that local social tension theory is not on its own a sufficient explanation. It is how this tension manifested itself and how it was managed, which is more relevant. His explanation relies on a Marxist model wherein elite power was used to manipulate popular culture in order to control the general population during a time of change.³⁷ Therefore belief in magic, and by association fear of it, were an everyday part of popular culture, but elite groups exploited them in order to achieve their own objectives. This functional analysis suggests a common national, or even international, objective, relying heavily on an acceptance of conspiracy theory. It is unlikely that this explanation can be applied to all cases. Scotland in the seventeenth century was not wholly peaceful, but in relation to earlier centuries was perhaps no more unsettled. Also, although these turbulent times had a national impact, local areas were certainly also affected, although sometimes to a greater or lesser extent. There is no doubt that the religious problems of the seventeenth century affected the positions of

³⁵ Briggs, *Communities of Belief*, 398.

³⁶ Horsley, R 'Who were the witches? The social roles of the accused in the European witch trials' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* IX:4 (1970), 689-715.

³⁷ Horsley, R 'Further reflections on witchcraft and European folk religion' *History of Religion* 19(1970), 71-95.

local ministers, heritors and elders; but the yearly cycle of life for the majority of the congregations continued relatively unchanged. Within the presbyteries of Stirling and Haddington several ministers were deprived during the 1640s as a result of their refusal to conform to episcopacy – 44% of the ministers in the Haddington presbytery and 25% in Stirling³⁸ – and although these events were undoubtedly unsettling for some, the majority of the population were likely to have had other more immediate concerns. The difference in the numbers deprived in the two areas again emphasises the different level of influence the central authorities had within different localities and the different opinions of the individual ministers in the areas.

A social control explanation for witch prosecution can have a functionalist interpretation as well as a Marxist one, but both approaches often rely too heavily on elite dominance and ignore tensions which evolved between, and among, equals. It should be remembered that local communities in the seventeenth century did not necessarily live any more harmoniously than at any other time. A village was not always a peaceful idyll of romantic illusion, but rather was fraught with personal tensions, often of more immediate significance than national ones. This has been discussed by both Thomas and Stone³⁹ for English society, and there are examples to be found in the Stirling and Haddington evidence which illustrate that disharmony between neighbours certainly existed at times. Cases, such as that of Alison Hume and Janet Gray, who were involved in a spat in 1650 where they called each other, in turn, thief and witch,⁴⁰ illustrate that disharmony between neighbours was often reciprocated. In another example, in 1679, Elspeth Paterson was reported to

³⁸*Fasti*.

³⁹ Stone, L *The family, sex and marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1977), 98-9; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 526.

⁴⁰ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

Haddington presbytery for venting a 'wicked and scandalous expression at the burning of som witches'.⁴¹ It was recorded that she said: 'The devil receave thir soulls' and the reason she gave for her anger was that those being burnt had taken away *her* good name. As Gregory has pointed out, there has been an inclination to exaggerate the difference between elite and popular cultures, which has resulted in an impression that: '... the populace seem no more than passive receptacles of inherited beliefs, while the elite appear cynical manipulators of an acquired ideology'.⁴² The general populace were quite capable of asserting themselves within their own social and economic spheres and did not, on the whole, need the elite members of society to impose behaviours and mores.

Good and bad power

This manufactured dichotomy between elite and popular culture underplays the significance that both forms of culture gave to yet another form of power, that is supernatural power. Different sectors of society had different concerns and different powers; that much is quite obvious. But it would be quite wrong to suggest that supernatural concerns were the product of only one or other. The difference between the two lay not so much in the belief in supernatural power, but its source. Demonic origins were the explanation of elite discourse, while popular culture generally accepted the possibility of natural causality although still recognising some demonic influence. It has been suggested that elite culture shifted away from belief in superstition, and increasingly regarded the rest of society as primitive, pagan and overindulgent.⁴³ If this were true, then by association, any power associated with superstition was perceived as

⁴¹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁴² Gregory, A 'Witchcraft, politics and "good neighbourhood" in early seventeenth-century Rye' *Past and Present* 133(1991), 31-66.

⁴³ Burke, *Popular Culture*, 209.

backward, but yet at the same time was the product of the devil.

This theory was developed at length in elite demonologies, and can also be seen in the documentation which resulted from elite participation in accusations: the ecclesiastical and secular investigations and trials. At all levels society was as familiar with the devil as with God. But the disquiet expressed in elite discourse was more concerned with the relationship between God and the devil, and the difficult problem of how much power the devil had. If the devil had infinite power, then he might be equal to God. This form of dualism had already been rejected by orthodox Christian theology, and so a more acceptable explanation was that God permitted the devil to have some power over humankind in order to censure them.⁴⁴ However, the ordinary populace did not generally appear to be so troubled about this aspect. Supernatural power could be used for good or bad purposes, but more importantly it was accepted as a natural force, rather than being necessarily received from God or the devil. The more immediate anxieties of the general population were related to the effect this power had on themselves, their families or their livelihoods.

The confessions made in the later stages of ecclesiastical and judicial investigations confirm that the theory of diabolic pact was acknowledged and used in Scotland, but to suggest that opinions were so neatly divided into demonic or natural camps is to deny the heterogeneity of society, even in such a relatively small country. There is evidence that even those of an elite persuasion understood, and even occasionally accepted, the paradigm of natural cause. In the case of Janet Cock of Dalkeith, tried at the Justiciary Court twice in 1661, her defence lawyer cited natural causation as the likely explanation for many of the accusations laid against her.⁴⁵ The

⁴⁴ Stanford, P *The Devil: a biography* (London, 1996) discusses the Christian evolution of the personification of the devil through Gnosticism, Manicheism, Cathars and even Jewish Kabbalism.

⁴⁵ *Record of the Proceedings of the Justiciary Court, 1661-69*, vol 1, Scott-Moncrieff, W G (ed), (Scottish History Society, 48, Edinburgh, 1905), 14-20.

injury to Agnes Spindie was entirely natural, as was the distemper which resulted. In another case, Agnes Williamson of Samuelston was accused of taking away the fusion of meal, which her defence suggested was not a relevant point: '... for as the giving of fusion, so the taking away belongs to the power of God...'.⁴⁶ The cause of the death of a horse, for which Agnes was also blamed, was equally questionable. Her defence countered that: '...tho the death was extraordinary, yet not without the compass of naturall causes ...'. Another example, which illustrates that even elite intellect was ambivalent, and not as entirely black and white as we might perceive, is seen in the case of Jane (or Jeane) Craig, from Tranent, who was tried at the Justiciary Court in April 1649.⁴⁷ Jane was accused of causing the death of three horses which were 'schot to dead'. The phrase 'schot to dead' meant to be killed or harmed by magic, in particular by fairy or elf arrows.⁴⁸ Its inclusion in a legal document, in a matter-of-fact way, as a believable cause of death should not be seen to give it necessarily a greater degree of credibility, but rather demonstrate the complexities and dualities of seventeenth-century logic, elite or popular.

How was power acquired? – becoming a witch.

God, and his antithesis the devil, were obvious sources of power, but there were many others who commanded comparable levels of authority. To merely list them would, to some extent, be a restatement of the types of power discussed previously. It can be assumed that any list of positions of power would include: the monarch, nobles, clerics, lawyers, university graduates, merchants, craftsmen, elders, physicians, surgeons, fathers, brothers, tenants and somewhere there might even be the occasional

⁴⁶ *Proceedings of the Justiciary Court, 1661-69*, vol 1, 24.

⁴⁷ *Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624-50*, vol III, Smith, J Irvine, (ed), (Stair Society, 28, Edinburgh, 1974), 812-15.

⁴⁸ *CSD*

woman, often as a widow. In fact, there is reasonable evidence to show that women, in renaissance and early-modern periods, did have more power than has previously been assumed.⁴⁹ These women who ran merchant businesses or were known to have midwifery skills – although there were fewer licensed midwives in Scotland than there were in England⁵⁰ – were women who had some social status through familial ties or economic worth which gave them power. Those who had some reputation for knowledge of, or practised, charming or witchcraft were also powerful. As the specific question of gender in relation to witchcraft language, accusations and historiography is discussed in depth elsewhere⁵¹ there is no need to repeat the contention further at this point. Suffice to say that the power of certain women can be assessed in the same terms as all the others, who were predominantly male.

Power was achieved through social or economic status. This status was attained by a variety of means: by family or kinship ties, knowledge, training, experience, association with others of similar position and by the reaction and attitude of other people. The most significant feature was the acquisition of knowledge. This knowledge could be gained consciously by special training or, more unconsciously, by inheritance: learning by experience and observation of close associates. This formula can be applied to all forms of power, including charming and witchcraft. For example Horsley's hypothesis distinguishes between the acquisition of the powers of witchcraft and of sorcery. Thus witchcraft was an inherited power, whereas sorcery was an acquired, or learnt, power.⁵² Purkiss, although taking a more oblique approach, develops this argument in more depth in

⁴⁹ There are a number of recent works which cover this area in depth. For example Maclean, I *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A study in the fortunes of scholasticism and medical science in European intellectual life* (Cambridge, 1980).

⁵⁰ Forbes, T 'The regulation of English midwives in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' *Medical History*, 8 (1964), 235-44 for a discussion of this.

⁵¹ see chapter 9, 181-219.

⁵² Horsley, 'Who were the witches?', 696.

her chapter 'Self fashioning by women: choosing to be a witch'⁵³ where she suggests that witchcraft ran in families – much like other trades. This suggests that some witches readily embraced the knowledge, despite the dangers implicit within the practice. However, there is also the argument that the term 'witch' was actually a label applied by others and which was then, in the face of no alternative, acknowledged by the accused themselves.⁵⁴ This can be seen as part of the scapegoat theory which, along with social tension discussed earlier, presupposes a climate of anxiety which found alleviation by blaming one particularly vulnerable group in society.

There are several examples of accused charmers, embracing the title or not, who on questioning revealed various sources for their knowledge and resultant power. In these cases, where demonic pact was not part of the initial accusation, other sources were frequently mentioned. Steven Maltman, from Gargunock, confessed to Stirling presbytery in April 1628 that he: 'had theme [healing practices] of the fairye folk'.⁵⁵ Margaret Dickson, from Pencaitland, told the Haddington presbytery in 1642 that she had learnt certain healing skills from an old wife.⁵⁶ Identifying some other person, often deceased, and usually from outwith local boundaries seems to have been a relatively common explanation. It was certainly preferable to admitting any relationship with the devil. Thus, in 1646 Andrew Yuill from Haddington had 'learned it of George Broun of Thornidyke'.⁵⁷ Janet Tailzeor, from Alloa, got her knowledge from Jon Burgaman, and Andrew Aiken, from Stirling:

... confessed that upon thirtie yeirs ago Thomas
Fergusonne in Skiethie[sic] who is now dead taught
him to tak off witchcraft ather aff beast or bodie by

⁵³ Purkiss, *The Witch*, especially chapter 6, 145-176.

⁵⁴ Briggs, *Witches and neighbours*, 162-3.

⁵⁵ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁵⁶ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁵⁷ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

saying of yr words ...⁵⁸

Another source of acquired power was through family inheritance, as seen in the case of George Beir⁵⁹ from Haddington, who, in 1646, when asked by the presbytery about his skill, replied:

... yt he never learnt his skill [in curing the kings sickness, scrofula] from any bot only yt he wis the 7 sonne and was desyred be ... Mr Ja Knox at Kelso understanding yt he was the 7 sonne, to say qn he caine to anie [sick person] laying his hand on the sore pt, 'I touche thee, Lord cuir thee' ... yt he never used the cure before the sd Mr Ja Knox bade him, that ever since as he had occasion, he hes used the cuire, yt he applyes nothing bot clean clothes and binds 2 black silk threads about the patients neck ...

George was reprimanded by the presbytery and promised to stop using his cure. There was no accusation of witchcraft or demonic powers in this case, only natural powers with no intended malefice, therefore there was to be no further trial. Other cases illustrate the power conferred by accident of birth, or at least conferred on an individual by others in the community. Certain individuals, who were born with some abnormal or unusual physical feature or congenital condition, were often perceived as having special powers. In 1652, Haddington presbytery was informed that there was a dumb boy in Ormiston who was consulted by Tom Clark, Robert Mitchell, David Bald and Isobell Lindsay about items that had been stolen.⁶⁰ Ten years later a dumb woman from Pencaitland was being consulted for exactly the same reason.⁶¹ There is no explanation of how these people would be able to identify who the guilty party was, the inference being that they would physically point them out in some other way.

In other cases, birth or family ties were less significant. In March

⁵⁸ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁵⁹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁶⁰ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

⁶¹ NAS, Pencaitland kirk session records, CH2/296/1.

1657, Elspeth Dairymed (or Dairyyes) was called a witch by Joan Nicolsonne and her daughter, Marion Henderson.⁶² The reason Elspeth was believed to be a witch was because her mother and her 'goodame'⁶³ were witches and so, logically, was Elspeth. However, in the absence of any further corroborating evidence, it was Joan Nicolsonne and Marion Henderson who were rebuked for slander, rather than any investigation into Elspeth's practices being ordered. In March 1659, Issobell Bennet's case was heard at the Justiciary Court in Stirling, along with Bessie Stevenson, Magdalen Blair, Kathrin Black and several others.⁶⁴ Issobell told the court that she had procured the health, or death, of several persons by using a horse shoe that had been used by 'our good neighbours' – a euphemism for fairies.⁶⁵

Most of these charming powers appear to have been acquired accidentally, or by good fortune, and although the form of power, and even some of the techniques employed, may have been similar to malefic witchcraft, it is clear that these individuals were regarded and treated more favourably than their demonically driven counterparts. In the case of demonic witchcraft power, elite explanation accepted that its acquisition was through demonic pact, though another proof of this was association with other known, or confessed witches. Thus family members could be accused, as in the case of Elspeth Dairymed, many years after the first case. Equally, once an accused witch was involved in an inquisitorial process then any other person named by him or her would almost certainly also be investigated. In July 1658, Margaret Duthill confessed to the kirk session that Elspeth Black came and took her to meet with the devil and several others, namely Jonet Black, Bessie Paton, Margaret Tailzeor and Katherine Hainy (or Penny) at the 'crasse of Alloway'.⁶⁶ In the Justiciary Court Janet

⁶² NAS, Dirleton kirk session records, CH2/1157/1.

⁶³ Gudedame, guid-dame: grandmother (15-17th century)(CSD).

⁶⁴ NAS, JC 26/26.

⁶⁵ CSD

⁶⁶ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/6.

Black, Margaret Tailzeor, Katherine Hainy (Penny) all confirmed this, and Margaret Tailzeor further named James Hudston, James Kirk, Jonet Paterson, Barbara Erskine and Janet Millar.⁶⁷

Certainly, any of these individuals, whether they had supernatural powers or not, were regarded in a special way. Any magical power – black or white, good or bad, harming or healing – regarded as witchcraft, sorcery or charming gave those who acquired or practised it, consciously or not, positions of influence. These were powerful people and although the rest of their communities, and society in general, benefited from them at times, they were aware that these individuals needed to be controlled. Thus the fear that was generated had a two-fold effect. On the one hand there was respect, but also an awareness that as a community, at times, they needed to cooperate to control, or censure, these individuals. How did those who had this power interpret this perceived threat? George Bier was conscious of his power only after he had been told what to do, and he was quite clear that he only carried out the procedure for the ‘cruells’,⁶⁸ that he had had the illness himself and that some of those that he had treated had been cured, but others had not. It is also clear that George Bier’s assistance was actively requested by others and was offered, like many of the others, for no reward, or at least no recorded financial reward.

Illness and revenge are well recognised features of witchcraft and charming accusations, but in some cases their connection is somewhat unexpected and suggests another reason why some individuals might have been labelled with the title of witch. The case of Manie Haliburton⁶⁹ of Dirleton is interesting for several reasons. She was accused by her husband, unusual in itself, particularly as he was also accused, although not by Manie. Manie confessed to having carnal dealings with the devil,

⁶⁷ NAS, JC 26/26/3: bundles 20, 21.

⁶⁸ Cruels, cruelles: scrofula, the kings evil (late 16th century-) (CSD).

⁶⁹ RPC, 2nd series, Vol VIII, 194-5.

but the reason she gave for acquiescing to the devil's demands were not selfish ones. She agreed to sleep with the devil in return for his help in curing her daughter. She told the Privy Council that eighteen years previously:

... her dochter being seik, scho first sent for Patrik Chrystisone in Aberladië to cum and cur her dochter, and he refusing went herself for him, who refused to cure her, and within [blank] dayes efter came the devill in lickness of a man in to hir house, calling himself a phisition, and said to hir that he had good salves (and namlie oylispek) whairwith he wold cur her dochter...⁷⁰

Manie paid the man two English shillings for the salves, and later he lay with her. While we cannot know what really happened in this case, either during her daughter's illness or why her husband accused her, there are several speculative explanations, which would suggest that this case was not really one of straightforward witch power. Manie was not accused of any other involvement in supernatural or demonic activities, for example healing or harming any other person. She did not confess to meeting other witches. She appeared to have paid the devil money, rather than the other way round. In most cases, although often this apparent money turned to stones later, any money exchanged was given to the witch by the devil as a sign of greater rewards yet to come. Two English shillings – which amounted to 24 Scots shillings⁷¹ – was quite a sum of money to find in 1649. We have no way of knowing Manie's reason for her explanation, but an alternative, if somewhat more down-to-earth reason might be that she may have committed adultery, in which case her husband wanted revenge, or that she had given away or lost money. Although bearing a grudge for eighteen years does seem rather a long time, in accusations found in many other cases the ability to recall, in detail, events stretching

⁷⁰ *RPC*, 2nd series, Vol VIII, 194-5.

⁷¹ £12 Scots = £1 Sterling in the seventeenth century.

back up to twenty years before was a feat of memory demonstrated frequently by the ordinary population.

There are other examples which demonstrate the more common tendency for a person to be named a witch because of family relationships. In May 1678 a commission of inquiry into witchcraft and other associated practices was granted against Agnes Kelly, widow from Prestonpans, and her servant Marjorie Anderson.⁷² Hellin Nicoll and her daughter, Issobell Atkine, were both accused of charming by the Stirling presbytery in 1615.⁷³ Part of the evidence mounted against Jane Craig⁷⁴ of Tranent in 1649 was the fact that her mother, Beigis Wallace, had been tried for witchcraft by the Privy Council in 1629. Any family connection, distant or otherwise, might be drawn upon for accusation, as many household servants were actually members of the extended family. Local communities used their power over those suspected of witchcraft by accusing them because of their family connections. The acquisition of witchcraft or charming knowledge and power, which was assumed to be hereditary, was undoubtedly not always a blessing for some individuals.

The manifestation of charmers' and witches' power

There is evidence to confirm the assertion that people did believe in the special talents of certain individuals. There is also evidence from the protagonists themselves which explained how this talent or power was achieved, but how was it practised? In other words, what did the individuals who were perceived as having special talents do in order to harm or heal? Much of the power was implicit, but there were overt manifestations which were recognised by all. The most common visible features found in both healing and harming rituals included the use of

⁷² *RPC 3rd series, Vol V, 193.*

⁷³ *SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4.*

⁷⁴ *Selected Justiciary Cases, vol III, 812-15.*

words, actions and items.⁷⁵ The procedures used to project, or protect against, the evil eye were much the same.

The use of words can be seen in the number of curses made by disputing parties. Margaret Diksone, from Pencaitland, was reported to have cursed James Mill in the following manner: ‘... shee would sie me sickd in a gutter and my bairns make me evill hindrence...’.⁷⁶ The case of Bessie Paton, from Stirling, is another fairly typical explanation about how the evil eye was cast. Robert Formand had summoned her to answer for a complaint he had about her, to which her retort was: ‘... it sould be a deir summonding...’ – in other words he would pay dearly for it.⁷⁷

Unfortunately for Bessie the said Robert took a grave sickness shortly afterwards, associated with a fever, which lasted six months, compounded by the fact that both his horses also died at the same time. Magdalen Blair, from Stirling, acknowledged that she had put a malison⁷⁸ on John Steill, who had made her pregnant, but she denied that she spoke a malison about Helen Keir.⁷⁹

These examples illustrate the common theme of the power of words as a curse, but they also demonstrate differing reactions and responses, both by the immediate individuals involved, and by the state-sanctioned authorities. James Mill complained to the kirk authorities who questioned Diksone and others but, unfortunately, the final decision of the presbytery is unclear. There is no evidence to suggest they involved the secular authorities, whereas the cases of Bessie Paton and Magdalen Blair were both heard by secular courts. Thus in a dispute where there was a heated exchange of words followed by some sudden episode of illness, the person perceived to have cast the misfortune might precipitate events by

⁷⁵ These motifs are examined and analysed in detail later, see chapter 11, 274-94.

⁷⁶ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁷⁷ NAS, JC 26/26/3, bundle 21.

⁷⁸ Malison; malisoun: malediction or curse. (CSD).

⁷⁹ NAS, JC 26/26/3, bundle 4.

seeking a public hearing themselves. If a common form of verbal exchange had been undertaken – in other words a request for the return of health – then it appears that it was quite likely that the person making the request was the one who was actually admonished. The only acceptable source of assistance to be called upon by invocation or prayer was God himself. John Howden was admonished by the Haddington presbytery in October 1642⁸⁰ when he told them that he had lost the power of the lower parts of his arms after Isabel Wood had grabbed him and pronounced some words. Two years later he took a pain in his stomach and, at the request of his wife, he went to Isabel to ‘... ask his health of her thrafter for God’s sake, with heavie leaning on his staffe, but not kneeling, and thereafter grew better by litel...’. Howden had requested someone other than God to restore his health which was not acceptable, even if he tried to minimise his transgression by stressing that he had not knelt down. In December 1648 the Haddington presbytery heard details about the accusations of charming practised by Agnes Anderson and her daughter Janet Symie.⁸¹ Both were found guilty but Isobell Smith and Janet Cossie, who had consulted them, were also reprimanded. In Gargunnock, the kirk session heard an accusation about charming from Margery Ker in May 1631.⁸² She accused Rosie Graham, from Leckie, of giving her advice about curing her cow. The case was considered, but in July it was Margery Ker who appeared before the session and was ordained to make public repentance for her sin in consulting Rosie Graham. The kirk recognised that the threat to their authority lay not only with the witches and charmers themselves, but with those who consulted them. The accused might be found guilty and executed, if they were tried in a secular court, but it was only the kirk which could punish the consulters. By

⁸⁰ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁸¹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

⁸² SCA, Gargunnock kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

reprimanding the consultants, as well as those who gave advice, the kirk emphasised the importance of the personal relationship with God and attempted to change society's perception of illness.⁸³

These forms of exchange between individuals can be sketched relatively simply from occasional references and descriptions, but the meaning and motive behind them are harder to elucidate. Robin Briggs has put forward an interesting and credible theory explaining why this form of exchange was relatively common. He suggests that there was an elaborate code associated with the negotiations for the return of health. Behind the ritualised request, there was a desire for both parties to accept a degree of responsibility for the events, to cancel bad-will and reestablish acceptable relations.⁸⁴ The examples used here would appear to confirm this hypothesis, but it can also be shown that when this request was refused, the relationship was damaged even further. In 1608, for example, it was reported that Beigis Tod and Alexander Fairlie, from Longniddry, had had a severe falling out seventeen years before.⁸⁵ The perceived consequence was that Alexander's son took a 'heavie and unknowin seiknes' whereupon Alexander:

... maist earnestlie besocht hir to cum and remedie his sone of the said seiknes; quha refusit to cum; yit, at the eirnest desyre of Archibald Galloway, scho, accompaneit with hir tua sones, come to the hous, and sa sone as the said Alexander [the son] saw hir, he eftir that tyme became bettir and bettir...⁸⁶

The outcome was that the assize in 1608 found Beigis guilty of the

⁸³ Graham, M *Uses of Reform 'Godly Discipline' and Popular Behaviour in Scotland and Beyond, 1560-1610*, (Leiden, 1996), 308. Graham discusses the kirk between 1560 and 1603 but his point that the kirk recognised the need to punish both charmers and their consultants in order to achieve an ideal relationship with God in the later sixteenth century is relevant, in that the same objective informed the attitude and actions in the seventeenth century.

⁸⁴ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 75-6.

⁸⁵ Pitcairn, R (ed) *Ancient Criminal Trials in Scotland*, vol II, part II (Edinburgh, 1833), 542-44.

⁸⁶ Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 543.

accusation of bewitching, along with the accusation of association with another known witch. Interestingly, on the third count brought against her, that of casting an illness on Robert Woid, she was found not guilty. This demonstrates that Scottish juries did attempt to consider the evidence before them fairly, and that although the statistics may suggest that a predicted verdict of guilty was often the most likely outcome, there were exceptions.

There were other aspects of ritualised behaviour which were cited as clear evidence of witchcraft knowledge and power. The actions, or rituals, of the accused were part of the bewitching process. In 1649 Jane Craig, who was convicted of witchcraft,⁸⁷ was said to have caused the death of a child by rubbing it with three enchanted stones. Issobell Bennet, in 1661, was accused of taking sick persons three times round an oaken post.⁸⁸ In 1633 Janet Tailzeor, from Stirling, was accused of causing the sickness and death of John Stein.⁸⁹ According to John Stein's widow, following a disagreement between the accused and the said John, Janet went away dissatisfied and shortly after John fell ill. Janet was requested to return and help him, which she did. On her return visit she:

... handled him and did washe his fit and hands in south running water, and paired the nails of his hands and fit and caist thame in ane south running water...

This again illustrates the significance of the negotiation of forgiveness, and the restoration of more usual relations. The curse was removed by the ritualised cleansing of the victim and casting away of the disease by the discarding of finger- and toe-nail cuttings. This ritual, in this case carried out by the person accused of causing the sickness, was frequently used by others who were consulted as charmers. The manifestation of the power

⁸⁷ *Selected Justiciary Cases*, vol III, 812-15..

⁸⁸ NAS, JC 26/26

⁸⁹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

was not just in the actions themselves, but also in the relationship between the parties. The negotiation of forgiveness was an important indication of the perceived power.

The other main element associated with the execution of witchcraft and charming power was the use of physical objects. In Scottish cases the use of image magic is relatively infrequent, although there are a few cases.⁹⁰ More commonly there are references to the use of an item belonging to an individual which had either been handed over voluntarily, or acquired surreptitiously from their environment. In the former case, it was more usual that an item belonging to the victim was used to provide assistance, rather than cause harm. In the latter case, an item belonging to the accused might be used in order to negate the power of the maleficent witch. This was often limited to three pieces of thatch stolen from the accused's house. In 1659 Agnis Dinven told the Justiciary Court that Margaret Harvie had told her that in order to cure her daughters' illness she was to 'goe to Isobel Keir hous and carrie of thrie ringis of the thak⁹¹ above ye said Issobell hir doore heid'.⁹² Similarly, in order to direct a curse upon another person, it would appear that although words by themselves were often effective, occasionally accompanied by a ritual, the use of some item connected to a victim was also seen as a route through which the power could be channelled.

There are examples which illustrate the use of a physical medium, such as the case of Elspeth Wood from Haddington in 1653.⁹³ Elspeth was accused of sorcery and taking the milk from George Forrest's cow. This was achieved by Elspeth's son stealing the tether from George's cow. After this the cow gave only blood until the tether was returned to its owner. In

⁹⁰ For example James Reid, from Musselburgh, in 1603 was accused of having 'maid ane pictour of walx'. Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 422.

⁹¹ thack: thatch (CSD).

⁹² NAS, JC 26/26/3.

⁹³ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1 .

another case, Elspeth Dobie, also from Haddington, was accused of stealing a piece of Cristian Douglas's baby's clothes, which contributed to the loss of Cristian's breast milk.⁹⁴ The use of an item connected with the person or animal that these women were accused of harming, appeared to have provided the physical contact through which the damage was inflicted. The use of intermediate objects was common to both witchcraft and charming. These objects, either belonging to the affected individual or to the suspected witch, served as a focus for all those involved. Their use provided both the medium and explanation through which the power could be transferred. They also reduced the need for direct exchanges between suspect and complainer and also empowered those who were not charmers or witches, and allowed them the medium through which to remove a charm.

Fear of witches and charmers

There is no question that these witches and charmers were in positions of power, which may explain why, in some cases, those involved actively chose to cultivate the role of witch. They may have had some degree of respect as a witch-healer or charmer; a role which confuses our stereotyped classification features of old age, lack of income and temper. These were individuals of some power, and whether the intent behind its use was good or bad, others were wary of their power. It is evident from the recorded accusations that those involved were afraid. It may have been that seventeenth-century society was generally anxious: anxious about war, religion, survival, neighbours, family, birth and death, God and the devil. There was much to be worried about, and witches were a convenient group upon which to project these fears. Or, alternatively, this fear was exploited by the witches themselves to increase their status or

⁹⁴ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

power. Thus the strength of the power of these individuals was dependent on an unequal relationship between parties, but a relationship which was nevertheless recognised by both sides. Apart from belief in the power of magic in general, as a major part of the general cosmology of the time, how did witch figures perpetuate this image of power? In other words, were there overt practices which confirmed, for both sides, the reality of the power? An obvious one was the consultation of charmers or witches by individuals who either wanted advice about removal of an ailment, or sought out those they blamed for their problem in order to request that they remove the spell or curse. Thus both parties participated in a procedure which confirmed their relative positions. The case of Issobel Griersoune, from Prestonpans, tried for witchcraft in March 1607, illustrates this fragile relationship. Issobel was accused of casting a fearful illness on Robert Peddan more than a year previously and the victim had used all means within his power to procure a cure until:

... he callit himself to remembrance, that he was addettit to the said Issobell in nyne schillingis and iiij d; and that befor the taking of the said seiknes, becaus he refusit to pay hir the said soume, unto the tyme scho delyverit to him certane paittis that scho kepit of his; scho then, eftir utering of diverse blasphemous speichis to the said Williame[sic] said, he "sould repent it" and "sould nocht haif bayth his health and haill clathis togidder" Quhairupoun, he than come to hir, for Godis saik; saying "Gif ye haif done me ony wrang or hurt, repair ye samin and restoir me to my health" And thaireftir the said Robert peddane, within xxij houris, recoverit his health...⁹⁵

However, further to being accused of causing Robert Peddan's illness, Issobel was then accused of causing his wife to develop a 'feirfull and uncouth seiknes'. The said Issobel, on hearing that she was being accused of causing this other illness, appealed to other neighbours to mediate and

⁹⁵ Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 523-526.

arrange a meeting between herself and Margaret Donaldsone (Robert Peddane's wife). This having been arranged, the two women shared a drink together, and Margaret's condition improved. Eight or ten days later, however, Issobel, again hearing that her name was to be slandered and that she was to be called a witch 'quha had skill to lay on and tak af seiknes' went again to Margaret's house, where she cursed Margaret verbally. Immediately Margaret was again taken ill, in which condition she remained until Griersoune's trial. Griersoune was found guilty and later executed.

Although this example illustrates a degree of mutual negotiation between both parties, even if the truce was only temporary, there are other cases which were bargained much less cordially. In 1633 Robert Mitchie appeared before the Stirling Presbytery as a witness against Helen Keir.⁹⁶ He explained that Helen had taken some of his coal, and so he had reprimanded her. Helen had then threatened to do him harm, and within twenty four hours he fell ill. As a result Robert went to Helen and drew '...ane whinger [short stabbing sword] to her and threatened to kill her gif she restored not his health to him...'. In 1634 the Aberlady kirk session heard the case brought against Robert Douglas, who was accused of slandering Elspeth Wood.⁹⁷ In 1669 the Haddington Presbytery heard the case of Bessie Clark.⁹⁸ These cases are slightly different in that both Robert and Bessie were called because of altercations between themselves and others, whom they had called witches. Robert Douglas: '...sat downe upoun his knees befor hir and askit his health thryse in the name of God from hir...'. Bessie confessed that she had argued with William Whyt and that, later, her child took a dangerous illness and so the next day she went to the said William: '...and did blood him with a prine [metal pin] and sat

⁹⁶ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁹⁷ NAS, Aberlady kirk session records, CH2/4/1.

⁹⁸ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/7.

doune upon her knees and asked hir child's health from him...'. In both these cases it was the accuser who was punished by having to appear in sackcloth and make public repentance. The fact that the cases were almost 30 years apart highlights how slowly social behaviours and attitudes changed.

Conclusion: power struggles

The uncertain antagonism between good and bad witchcraft, or charming and malefice, is illustrative of the much broader theme of dichotomy and tension. It was not the powers themselves which caused the tension, but their differing rationales. The relationships, although rarely static, were symbiotic and tension was only one manifestation. This level of mutual rivalry is related to the concept of duality as part of a wider cosmology and can be seen in the obvious oppositions of, for example, central and local; church and state; God and devil; religion and magic; elite and popular; fantasy and reality; insiders and outsiders; religion and science. The rivalry between the power of science and religion, and indeed scepticism and superstition, has been cited as explanation for the changes in attitude towards witchcraft and witches and charmers. It has been hypothesised that it was the development of scientific rationale, which ultimately proved that witchcraft and other preternatural powers could not exist, that brought a halt to accusations and prosecutions, and at the same time removed fear and suspicion from society.⁹⁹

But it was not as clear cut as this. Intellectual authorities had their

⁹⁹ Lecky, W *Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (London, 1865); Russell, B *Religion and Science* (London, 1935) and Williams, C *Witchcraft* (London, 1942) who argues that it was the acceptance of Cartesianism and Humanism in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which changed attitudes towards demonic and other preternatural powers. All these theories are quite dated and have been revised by later writers such as Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton* and Tourney, G 'The physician and witchcraft in Restoration England' *Medical History*, 16 (1972), 143-55, 'The medical origins of the European witch craze', 271-84 lays the blame for the outbreak of witch hunting on the development of medical science itself.

own theoretical disputes, and their relationship with, and attitude towards, magic was often part of a greater struggle to impose dominance over each other. This can be illustrated by the rivalry between science and religion. Science attempted to validate regularity by dismissing the irregularity of nature. Christianity held as a central tenet the belief that God had ultimate responsibility over everything – man, nature and the preternatural. However in the seventeenth century science and medicine, as we recognise it today, were still in their infancy. Many scientists, in some cases to avoid accusations of atheism, still acknowledged that God was ultimately responsible for everything including nature, particularly things that they could not explain. Some physicians would still cite spiritual causes of illness when they were unable find any explanation using their scientific model. At this time much of the tension which developed between the different groups was apparent only among a select few. The majority of the population adapted and utilised practices and beliefs which were more hybrid in nature, combining pragmatism with custom.

This difference in attitude towards the power of witchcraft and charming was only one aspect of the division between elite and popular cultures. The cultural gulf between elites and the rest widened in the seventeenth century, and yet witchcraft and charming epitomised both the contrast and the congruence which was experienced by society as a whole. The application and potential benefit of witchcraft and charming power were utilised by most of society and the theoretical debates were left to a small number. The popular concept of magic, as epitomised by charming, had a practical role in daily life whether or not it was perceived as a threat by a small number of ecclesiastical and secular elites.

Chapter 6 – The Elite and Popular Discourse of Witchcraft and Charming

Introduction

The discourse of early-modern witchcraft and charming – and its parallel activity, magic – is a paradox. At one level it provides a perfect example of the dichotomy between elite and popular culture and yet at the same time it highlights their mutuality. The definitions, explanations and foundations of charming and witchcraft in both cultures were grounded on a strongly-held belief in the reality of the phenomenon, but by the seventeenth century were expressed in different terms and mores. Elite discourse emphasised the importance of demonological exegesis, whereas popular belief gave more consideration to the potentiality of harm. Importantly, both belief systems were essentially informed by the same rationality which affected seventeenth-century cosmology: society's belief and understanding of the state of things. Before considering the fine detail of the evidence and terminology of elite and popular discourse, the categories and groups of society and the boundaries of this discourse require some further definition and clarification. As charming and witchcraft are not the only examples of this polarised opposition, they are therefore not the only focus of this analysis. The parallel areas of religion and medical science were also important strands of intellectual and popular thought, and, as such, reflected many of the same perplexities associated with magic. Religious belief and practice has an obvious affiliation with the two, but medical science – or at least understanding of the cause and effect of disease – despite a more apparent association with elite culture, also had a firm grounding in popular rationality and application. In practical terms illness and disease affected all levels of society and for some magic, or at least charming, provided some acceptable

explanations for their misfortune as it permitted access to possible remedies.

The general separation of elite and popular culture has been examined in its broadest sense,¹ as interpretations and attitudes towards witchcraft were not the only examples of the cultural chasm experienced in early-modern European society. Many aspects of behaviour and custom illustrate this division and increased cultural distancing between upper and lower levels of society. Different political, religious and economic changes influenced society throughout this period as the elite population moved further away, both physically and symbolically, from the rest. As a group, the elites consisted of the monarchy, court and greater or lesser nobles, but also lawyers, ministers and theologians, as well as an increasing number of professional medical practitioners. They were clearly a group bound by shared socio-economic similarities and status, but undoubtedly they also developed shared culture and customs. These 'leaders' of society also dominated the formal control of laws and manners, in both secular and ecclesiastical spheres. They defined and redefined acceptable behaviour, and gradually established formal standards of social control which were, to a great extent, contingent on particular cultural mores of the elites, rather than those of the rest of the populace. This cultural distancing has been identified as resulting in shifts in, for example, language, custom and religious practice in feudal and non-feudal societies in many European countries apart from Scotland.² The vocabulary used by the elites became increasingly specialised and pejorative, particularly in reference to popular customs, such as celebratory or protective rituals which were regarded with suspicion and alienation.

However, this theory of acculturation – the systematic process of

¹ See for example Burke, *Popular Culture*, which examines the process of cultural reform in both catholic and protestant countries.

² Burke, *Popular Culture*, *passim*, 277 for example.

altering attitudes and values of the masses by an educated elite³ – has been criticised as being too simplistic when applied to witchcraft accusations and prosecution. By implying a homogeneity of culture and population, this theory belies the variety of traditions and cultures which were experienced in different countries.⁴ Gregory suggests that this contrast between elite and popular produces stereotypical interpretations, Briggs also criticises this cultural duality theory for not addressing the complexity of different circumstances.⁵ There is, however, still some relevance in the general thesis. Despite the importance of local diversity and variety, which is a strong element of this analysis, there is some generic Scottish evidence from the seventeenth century which would support the general model of an increased gulf between the two groups. Alterations in religious doctrine and organisation; removal of the court and crown to London; increased professionalisation of medicine and the law as well as religion; shifts in the use of language and vocabulary; the increasing gulf between highland and lowland culture and widespread economic pressures, all fit the pattern of a cultural, social and economic withdrawal of elites. The abolition of many public and private festivals and customs, either by deliberate order of the church or secular government, as seen for example in 1555 when the Parliament abolished the performance of folk plays: ‘in all tymes cumming na maner of persoun be chosin Robert Hude nor Lytill John, Abbot of Unresson, Qunis of Maij’⁶ or by general disinclination, resulted in a very different culture in the late 1600s from that of the previous century.⁷ The restrictions on dancing, guising, weddings, funerals and other bacchanalian or even more mundane, non-bacchanalian celebrations may

³ Burke, *Popular Culture*, 207.

⁴ Gregory, ‘Witchcraft, politics and “Good Neighbourhood”’, 31-66. See also Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 324-5.

⁵ Briggs *Witches and Neighbours*, 339

⁶ *APS*, vol II, 500.

⁷ See Hutton, *Stations in the Sun*, for an examination of the number of festivals and customs which disappeared during the early-modern period.

have increased in the seventeenth century but had a much longer history. In 1574 parliament declared a general ordinance against all sorts vagabonds and entertainers.⁸

It is important to recognise that the distinction between elite and popular was not simply a product of post-renaissance society, even if the gulf between them increased. In medieval society the elites of various countries often had more in common socially, culturally and economically with each other, than with the local population. The medieval cult of honour and chivalry, a cultural identity of elites, was a pan-European trend rather than simply the product of a single country. It may be argued, therefore, that this partition of social cultures was not a new phenomenon in the seventeenth century, but was part of a preexisting continuum of cultural change and development. Although the participation in social festivals such as May plays or days of misrule was shared, it was also carefully controlled and dependent on status or occupation, which reinforced the division.

When considering the enigma of cultural attitudes towards witchcraft, it is still possible to apply aspects of the cultural polarity theory. As a simple explanation for the rise and fall of prosecution, in the form of deliberate punitive campaigns, it has somewhat limited relevancy, but within broader cultural definitions and concerns about witchcraft practice and belief, there is clear evidence of some elite: popular dichotomy. There is little doubt that in Scotland, and elsewhere, the minority elite-led, demonological explanation of witchcraft relied heavily on the demonic pact, whereas the majority, populace-led explanation emphasised maleficium. It also appears that the feature of demonic pact was imposed onto accusations as part of the process of prosecution as a secondary, or later, addition to the primary issue of maleficium. This explanation has

⁸ *APS*, vol III, 87.

been well documented and defended.⁹ Both interpretations clearly reflected the cosmology of contemporary society which accepted the reality of witchcraft and other magical and occult practices. But the differences in definition and understanding are seen by the contrast in the content of accusations. Accusations of malefice or charming were the backbone of popular discourse, but the elite definition of demonic pact took precedence in ecclesiastical and secular investigations and ultimately dominated the final official verdict. It may seem a likely explanation that since elite theory featured so strongly in official systems of social control, then elite culture must have been responsible for episodes of prosecution. It is, however, too neat a theory and it is not sufficiently sophisticated, since it does not take account of the influence of popular culture as a powerful social force in its own right.

In general the principle of elite dominance over the final verdict, as a common feature in the seventeenth century, has broad support¹⁰ but it should not be overstated or claimed as a full interpretation. It should be remembered that this impression has been influenced by the type and content of the documentary source material which is extant. The sources on which historians base their explanations are themselves products of the elite, rather than the rest of the population. They are written accounts and, as only a minority of the population was literate, they were unlikely to have been produced by the popular masses. Also, the content of the documents themselves undoubtedly reflects the agenda and involvement of elites. This unavoidable bias has led to interpretations of the source material which concentrate on elite beliefs. In many, none-the-less valuable, analyses of witchcraft sources, there has been an over-emphasis on the influence and agenda of elite belief as an explanation for

⁹ See for example Briggs, *Communities of Belief*, 14; Cohn, *Inner Demons*, xiii, 147, 254; Kieckhefer, *European Witch Trials*, 4-8; Lerner, *Enemies*, 24; Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 27-8;

¹⁰ Purkiss, *The Witch*, 130; Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 27.

persecution. Even the term 'witch-hunt', as used by Larner and Levack, presupposes an importance of elite discourse which can be seen in their analyses of ecclesiastical and secular control. However, Larner certainly acknowledged the division between elite and popular beliefs and she observed that the power of witchcraft to harm or heal was not related, in popular belief, to the devil.¹¹ She also commented that 'we know more about how the seventeenth-century Scottish peasant saw the Devil than we do about the way in which he saw God'.¹² Nevertheless, her analysis of seventeenth-century demonic concerns was firmly grounded on both elite documentation and theory, with very little actual evaluation of 'peasant' values or ideas. She correctly identified the challenge, but failed to address it adequately. It is possible to do so, with certain qualifications. Because of the lack of any alternative it is necessary to use the elite sources, but they can be analysed carefully to identify evidence of popular custom and belief. Popular theories and belief about witchcraft practice can be seen in the content of the accusations levelled against the accused by their neighbours, rather than by the ministers, elders, lawyers and judges.

During the early-modern period, elite and popular cultures co-existed as separate, if not entirely independent, elements. There was undoubtedly a degree of overlap but the concentration on the 'public' discourse and disputation about witchcraft as a crime, at the expense of 'private' concern and interaction, has contributed to this overemphasis on the elite model. The elite-led, social control model is not without its merits, but there is a tendency to read the history downwards if this paradigm is used. Because of the differences in interpretation of witchcraft, it has been accepted that as elites attempted to impose change from above there was a time-lag effect on the behaviour of the masses. However, if the

¹¹ Larner, *Enemies*, 141.

¹² Larner, *Enemies*, 134.

hypothesis were reversed then it is possible to suggest that change only occurred when popular culture and the rest of the population allowed it to do so. In other words, the masses took on elite values and customs as and when they required them, not the reverse. The fact that the demonic pact did not feature as a strongly-held belief in popular culture, but malefice did, illustrates that the two cultures were fundamentally separate and remained so.

Witchcraft belief was not unique and this pattern of co-existence was mirrored in other aspects of cultural and social behaviour and belief. Magic, religion and medical science are systems of belief which can be analysed in a similar fashion as they demonstrate the difference between the official doctrine and what was deemed as acceptable practice by the rest of the population. Magic was a component of witchcraft, religion and medical science, and it is therefore a somewhat artificial distinction to claim it as a separate belief and practice. However, the term itself can cause a certain amount of uneasiness. In present-day cosmology and language magic is seen as some form of trickery or dangerous occult practice, and certainly as a system of belief and practice it is regarded as being in direct opposition to religion and science. Prior to the sixteenth century this opposition was not quite so clear cut, as a sharp boundary between natural and supernatural, which informed all of these practices, did not exist. The term magic itself was used selectively, either with a qualification, such as natural or demonic; or as part of other vernacular technical terminology, such as necromancy or sorcery. The world was viewed and experienced by all levels of society – elite and popular masses alike – as being a combination of reality and non-reality; and all practices and beliefs were part of this same abstract. Physical and mental existence were the same, and the rationality or validity of each was not questioned or criticised in

the way they were by the seventeenth century.¹³ This questioning of the world view by some of the elite resulted in the separation of natural and supernatural; of magic and religion and of the profane and the sacred. The segregation of religion and magic has been discussed in depth by Thomas and others¹⁴ and the consensus appears to suggest that as Christian religion became formalised and organised then the significance of magic was reduced. In the middle ages magic had its own rationality¹⁵ but this altered gradually; not so much the rationality or internal logic of magic, but certainly its acceptability to the rest of society. Religion, and later science, controlled by a section of elites, took on the responsibility of claiming to have a monopoly on truth and reducing the acceptability of magic. This positivist analysis follows the line of argument suggested by Burke¹⁶ and even Foucault¹⁷ that the age of reason, which developed in the seventeenth century, altered both the imagination and psychological security of society.

Even before this later partition, magic, in a similar fashion to witchcraft, was categorised by elite and popular discourse using the distinction of either 'high' or 'popular' and 'natural' and 'demonic'. High or elite magic, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries included disciplines such as alchemy and astrology and was regarded as a form of natural magic. This class of magical practice had some overlap with what would later be regarded as rational science such as Isaac Newton. At the other extreme, popular magic had demonic connotations and as such was

¹³ See Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief*, for a full discussion, especially 423-452.

¹⁴ See for example: Clark, *Thinking with Demons*; Flint, *The Rise of Magic*; Geertz, H 'An anthropology of religion and magic' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VI:I (1975), 71-89; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*; Kieckhefer, 'The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic' *American Historical Review*, 99:3 (1994), 813-36; Penner, H 'Rationality, Ritual and Science' in *Religion, Science and Magic: In Concert and In Conflict*, Neusner, J, Frerichs, E S, and Flesher, P V M (eds) (Oxford, 1989); Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*.

¹⁵ Kieckhefer, 'The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic', 813-36.

¹⁶ Burke, *Popular Culture*, *passim*.

¹⁷ Foucault, M *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 1970), Part 1, 54; *Madness and Civilisation* (London, 1989).

seen to be an opposite force to religion. This polarised opposition combined with overlap was the fundamental paradox of all three systems of doctrine. Were they separate discourses and, if so, what separated them? There is some argument that magic and religion were so intertwined that they were actually part of the same spectrum of belief – if perhaps diametrically at opposite ends.¹⁸ Yet another argument suggests that magic and science were more closely linked in order to provide a counter-balance to the hegemony of religion.¹⁹ Both arguments imply that magic had an epistemology and rationality of its own; yet magic has been categorised by both religion and science as superstition and empty ritual. To contemporary, and later, elites, magic was superstitious because it involved practices which were antagonistic to Christian worship and rational science. Magic invoked demonic powers and was therefore unacceptable to a Christian society. On the other hand, magic was also thought to have consisted of empty rituals which had been removed from any intrinsic belief system and had no actual power themselves.²⁰ However, the existence of rituals implies that there was a system of belief upon which they were based. Symbolic actions simply could not exist without a foundation of principles. Flint argues that rituals of all forms – magical or religious – were essentially irrational, or at least non-rational, because medieval and early-modern society thought that the rituals themselves had power. But surely the argument should be that rituals, including charming, were indeed rational because ritual and belief were intimately tied together. A ritual action was believed to cause or invoke the power to cause some desired effect or result. What are pilgrimages and prayers if not a ritual expression of belief? Many of the healing rituals

¹⁸ For example Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 235; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 15-16; 39.

¹⁹ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 235; Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 7-8.

²⁰ Penner, 'Rationality, ritual and science', 14.

described by contemporaries as charming practices were very similar and incorporated forms of pilgrimage and prayer, indicating yet again the ambiguous boundaries between religion, magic and healing.

Magic, by its nature, was always a secret or occult practice, but the differentiation into high or natural and demonic or unnatural magic developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²¹ Prior to this all magic was deemed to be demonic. This did not necessarily refer to devilish powers derived from Satan, but more accurately from less specific, non-Christian demons or deities.²² These non-Christian deities were part of a belief system that Christianity replaced but could not abolish entirely. Many rituals and rites continued to be carried out, even after their understanding or rationality had been forgotten, abandoned or substituted by Christian doctrine. All forms of occult practice including divination, hydromancy, necromancy, astrology, finding lost property and love potions were deemed to be demonic, but many would appear to have had their origins in a pre-Christian cosmology. With the development of the theory of natural magic, in particular alchemy and astrology, some practice was permitted a degree of acceptability because it claimed not to invoke any other spirit or force and also, as a further justification, was based on contemporary scientific principles. For example, astrological medicine and the theory of the four humours were acceptable systems of diagnosis and treatment of symptoms at this time. Cosmological influences were believed to have direct effect on physical and emotional equilibrium.²³ These systems of medical practice and belief were approved of by society, particularly those elite who had most access to these procedures. The

²¹ Kiekhefer, *Magic*, 12.

²² Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 102; Jolly, K L 'Magic, miracles and popular practices in the early-medieval West: Anglo-Saxon England' in *Religion, Science and Magic*, Neusner, J; Frerichs, E S and Flesher, P V M (eds).

²³ Hamilton, *The Healers*, 36, 64; Loudon, I (ed) *Western Medicine* (Oxford, 1997), 13, 32, 43. Also Webster, 'Alchemical and Paracelsian Medicine' in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Webster, C (ed) (Cambridge, 1982).

theoretical basis appealed to the educated and distanced natural magic from any accusations of association with demons. In other words, natural magic overlapped with scientific knowledge, as it was a form of 'rational' magic. Popular or demonic magic did not have this degree of protection.

Despite the differentiation in linguistic terms, the concepts of magic, witchcraft, religion and science were still problematic. The acceptability or otherwise of the force and effect of natural and supernatural power, as well as the boundary between them, was a constant problem for medieval and early-modern society and especially for the church and scientific circles. For example, the church accepted and approved of the reality of miracles because the Bible provided evidence for the veracity of these events. Miracles were believed to be the result of God's power and were therefore good; but *magia* or *mirabilia*, on the other hand, were the work of demons and were unquestionably bad. Nevertheless, both explanations were founded on the principle that there was some power which was beyond nature, or at least the physical reality of nature. The term supernatural itself suggests that the boundary between temporal and spiritual reality in medieval and early-modern society was fluid. Pre-Cartesian society did not separate body and soul, nor corporeal and spiritual existence. Nature was not always visible, but it had an invisible corollary. If society believed in the power of God, which was invisible and supernatural, they also logically believed in demons, which were also invisible and supernatural.

Demons and other supernatural figures featured in both elite and popular culture, although not necessarily in identical forms – or indeed forms that later generations would recognise. For example, fairy figures were found in both elite and popular discourse but elite, and some later, analysis recast them as demon-figures.²⁴ In contemporary popular usage fairy figures were not unequivocally bad. Indeed, as part of a cosmology

²⁴ Purkiss, *The Witch*, 160.

which stressed duality, fairy figures epitomised this ambivalence by representing both good and bad.²⁵ The claims by some charmers in the seventeenth century that 'the guid neebours' had visited them and given them special knowledge and power were made by people who understood their significance. Fairies were blamed for problems which occurred at vulnerable times – in particular illnesses of mothers and babies just after birth – or they were responsible for teaching healing skills and knowledge. Both these features illustrate the ambivalent nature of fairy belief. The whole concept of a nether, or other, world, was crucial to their cosmology; and fairies, and fairy belief, as a concept, permitted an intermediate area between these worlds. These representations could cross between visible and invisible existence and signified good or bad powers. It was a sublime compromise which reconciled and combined different belief systems. The use of charming rituals undoubtedly fell into this ambivalent and confusing middle ground. Special rituals were required to remove the invisible force which had caused an episode of ill health. Popular culture understood that biblical miracles were good and demonic magic was bad; but at the same time believed in the power of healing charms because it was understood they were not specifically demonic, and were in fact consistent with Christian ritual.²⁶

Conclusion

By the seventeenth century, instead of advancing towards increased enlightenment, as positivists would suggest, in reality cosmology became more complex. As elite and popular cultures became increasingly distanced from each other the whole area was complicated, rather than

²⁵ Kiekhefer, *Magic*, 53, 107-8; Warner, M *From the Beast to the Blonde* (London, 1995), 14-16, 77-8.

²⁶ Jolly, K L 'Anglo-Saxon charms in the context of a Christian world view' *Journal of Medical Science*, 11 (1985), 279-93. See also Jolly 'Magic, Miracles and Popular Practice' in *Religion, Science and Magic*, Neusner et al (eds), 172.

simplified, by the opposition and overlap which developed between religious and scientific philosophies. As a result, the intermediate ground, which included witchcraft, magic and fairy beliefs as well as charming rituals, was attacked by both sides. The church attacked these beliefs for being heretical, and science condemned them as being irrational. Yet there is no doubt that popular charming rituals, as a form of magical practice, met the criteria for both disciplines by incorporating the rationality of both areas into a practical form. As the century progressed and prosecution and defence arguments became more sophisticated, then the content of the rituals themselves came under increased scrutiny. Charming rituals used either words and actions, or words or actions alone. Actions alone represented empty rituals with little power, which were less worrisome to the authorities, but words were much more significant and were regarded with increasing concern by church authorities in particular. This of course brings the argument back full circle to the dichotomy between elite theory and popular practice of witchcraft which epitomised seventeenth century society.

Chapter 7 – Processing Charmers and Witches – the Culture of Scots Law and the Methods of Prosecution

‘Ye shall not suffer a witch to live’ *Exodus* 18:22

Introduction: Secular and ecclesiastical judicial organisation and jurisdiction

To understand the attitude to witchcraft and charming in the seventeenth century it has to be acknowledged that they were not only beliefs and practices, but also crimes. There are many unusual aspects to the problem of witchcraft and charming, not least the fact that, since they were perceived as criminal activities, those accused of it have entered the domain of historical knowledge. The whole sphere of witchcraft accusation and persecution was as unique as the crime itself. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witchcraft was perceived as a *crimen exceptum* because established rules of proof and guilt were, not surprisingly, harder to apply in such a complex situation.¹ As a behaviour and belief, witchcraft, charming and magic were all part of society’s cosmology. However, as attitudes and behaviours shifted gradually, the whole area was redefined, in particular by theological and judicial authorities, and was no longer seen as part of the accepted norm, but instead was a practice and belief which needed to be eliminated. Thus the process of criminal definition, in which both secular and ecclesiastical authorities colluded, evolved. Yet this partition created a dichotomy, because although learned or elite authorities perceived the practice of witchcraft as criminal, it was still accepted as part of popular culture.

As witchcraft, and to a lesser degree charming, became identified as a criminal behaviour, then the process of accusation and prosecution was

¹ Lerner, ‘Crimen Exceptum?’, 49-75.

established and refined. From the initial identification and reporting to the authorities, to a possible final outcome of capital punishment, individuals went through a complex process of investigation and trial. That it was problematic and full of unsatisfactory anomalies and even contradictions was clear even to seventeenth-century contemporaries.² For example, in the case of Grissell Gairdner who was tried in 1610 at the Justiciary Court, her lawyer, Mr John Russell, tried to object to the appointment of certain men onto the assize, or jury, because they already bore the accused ill-will.³ In another case, the defence lawyer for Janet Cock from Dalkeith, Mr Andrew Birnie, objected to several points in relation to natural and unnatural causes of disease.⁴ Seventeenth-century secular and ecclesiastical powers based their policies on accepted sources of authority, but the variety of accusations and prosecutions suggests that despite increased centralised control the criminal processing of witches remained dependent on the dynamics of local personalities and procedures.

As the law in Scotland during the seventeenth century was not controlled solely from the centre, it is pertinent to examine local situations and circumstances, rather than only national ones, to establish a fuller understanding of events. The whole theoretical ethos of law in Scotland also changed during this time. Scots' law depended greatly on custom and usage more than statute⁵ but, by the second half of the seventeenth century, this began to change with the production of Stair's *Institutions* in 1681 and Mackenzie's *Institution of the Law of Scotland* in 1684. During the period examined, judicial procedure was to a large extent practical rather than purely theoretical and abstract. Law and order were founded,

² For example Sir George MacKenzie *Pleadings in Some Remarkable Cases*. Although his later scepticism was by no means typical, there are illustrations from defence lawyers arguing about the legality of evidence, accusation and even the use of witnesses.

³ Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol III, part II, 95-8.

⁴ *Proceedings of the Justiciary Court, 1661-69*, vol I, 16.

⁵ Davies, 'The courts and the Scottish Legal system', 121.

and were still dependent, on a tradition of feudalism. Justice was administered on a face-to-face personal basis by superiors or elected representatives. The acts of law which were passed by the parliament were often restatements or clarifications of existing customs and practices rather than new statutes. There were also other bodies which could administer and define laws and had their own jurisdictions, such as the church and local courts, all of which contributed to a highly varied and complex system. The processing of an accused witch in Scotland was therefore likely to be subject to the vagaries of both the system and those involved, and closely related to society and culture.

The crime of witchcraft

Witchcraft and charming was defined as criminal by both ecclesiastical and secular judicial authorities. Although both bodies regarded their power as sovereign within their own jurisdiction, by the seventeenth century there was so much overlap and intertwining of the two that it was often difficult to determine whose legislation or jurisdiction dominated. Both authorities outlined behaviour and practice which was deemed unacceptable but, more importantly, in tandem with this identification of unacceptable activity the authorities needed to create a practical process for punishing those involved. The activity already existed and was practised within society but it only became a crime when it was recognised by an authority as exceeding the boundaries of acceptable custom. By categorising the practice as a crime then an attendant process of punishment was a necessary result.

Witchcraft was categorised as being either black or white. Black witchcraft was used to cause harm either by conjuring or manipulating an evil power using sorcery. White witchcraft covered more beneficial actions

such as healing, divination or protection and was actually more problematic. Ecclesiastical law compounded this definition by including an occult relationship with the devil. A common feature of both kinds of practice was that it was often carried out secretly. Therein lies one of the crucial difficulties with the criminalisation of witchcraft: essentially what was a private behaviour or interaction was being discussed, and judged, in the public arena. And yet it was not even as straightforward as that. There were other questionable practices which overlapped with the boundaries of the criminal definition of witchcraft, but which were openly acknowledged and practised. These ranged from charming, divination and locating stolen or lost goods to astrology and alchemy; and attitudes to their practice and practitioners varied greatly. It is important to recognise from this diversity of practice and beliefs that relationships and customs were multi-faceted and multi-layered. An individual may have been known by the rest of his or her community or neighbourhood to possess special skills or knowledge of, for example, charming, but the level at which this was recognised publicly was not always overt, particularly given the potential of severe punishment. It may have been an open secret, as for the most part the necessary collusion in a level of secrecy provided a degree of security for all those involved. However this tacit acceptance was precarious and the situation could alter dramatically when an individual was seen to require some form of censure.

The demonic pact, which involved renunciation of Christian baptism, was an extension of the ecclesiastical concept and was later incorporated into the secular definition. Sorcery used evil powers, but those who used witchcraft were regarded as being in a dependent relationship with the devil and this, therefore, was a more serious practice. This demonological strand would be seen in Scotland in later

accusations, ecclesiastical and secular, which occurred after 1590, and particularly in the seventeenth century. The presence of the devil as a figure of power – in some form or another – was a continuous thread in ecclesiastical doctrine. Any enemy or rival of Christianity was associated with a demon or devil, and so, to ecclesiastic authorities, witches shared a common heritage with heretics who had been persecuted throughout the history of Christianity.⁶ To some extent the theological basis of the definition of the crime of witchcraft required a demonological theory. The inversion of official theology which emphasised the power and status of the devil resulted from attempts to rationalise and explain evil within Christian terms. Later, secular authorities would graft this demonological interpretation onto their definition and would accept the veracity of evidence promulgated by ecclesiastics such as confession, devil's mark – an insensitive spot or mole which was believed to have been caused by the devil – and naming by other accused persons.

The secular court in Scotland was divided into several types of court and levels of jurisdiction.⁷ Non-royal courts included Baron, Sheriff and Burgh Courts. Royal Courts included Session Courts and Justiciary Courts up to Privy Council and Parliament, and for a short time Justices of the Peace. Each of the courts had different jurisdictions, yet often overlapped. They dealt with either civil and criminal cases, or both, and some administered business law. Baronial Courts dealt with problems of good neighbourhood and administration. They had the same jurisdiction as Sheriff courts in both civil and criminal cases. Sheriff Courts were originally administered by royal representatives and dealt mainly with debt and administrative duties. They were abolished during the Cromwellian administration, but were reestablished to their original

⁶ See Stanford, *The Devil, passim* for a discussion of the development of the role of the devil.

⁷ For a more detailed description see Davies, 'The courts and the Scottish legal system'.

jurisdiction after the Restoration. Most of the cases dealt with by Burgh Courts were civil, many associated with debt and property; some were administrative and others were minor criminal, or non-civil, cases such as riot, theft and vagrancy. By the seventeenth century, Baron Courts were not used to try criminal cases. Burgh Courts could try cases which were also part of the jurisdiction of the church such as slander, sabbath breaking and witchcraft. Courts of Regality, a level of Burgh Court, had a more hybrid status: in civil cases they had the same power and jurisdiction as Sheriff Courts, but in criminal cases their powers equalled those of the High Court. Finally there was yet another form of court within each barony, the Birlaw Court, which was administered by individuals chosen by the tenants themselves. These civil courts were used to settle disputes between neighbours and to punish unacceptable behaviour. However there are – not surprising in a pre-literate society – few surviving documentary records from Birlaw Courts with which to fully assess the degree and content of their jurisdiction.

Royal courts included the Session and Justiciary Courts. The Session Court dealt with civil justice, and the Justiciary Court was the highest criminal court in the country and originated from the office of Royal Justiciar. The post of Lord Justice-General was held by the Campbell earls of Argyll until 1628, although most of the judicial work was done by justice deputes in Justiciary Courts. After 1652 the Cromwellian administration abolished all 'heritable jurisdictions'; commissioners were appointed in their place and justices of the peace were reintroduced. This system worked reasonably well until 1659, but the old system was reinstated with the Restoration in 1660. The High Court of Justiciary was established in 1672 when justice deputes were abolished. The High Court sat in Edinburgh during the session, and held Circuit Courts in three

outlying districts, or circuits, during April or May. Prosecution resulted from an indictment, or dittay, which was submitted to the sheriff by certain individuals with power and status. Often the evidence was extremely limited and many cases were abandoned before they reached trial. There was a predominance of moral indiscretions reported to the courts, as many of the local men of note were the ministers and elders who dealt with these offences as part of the jurisdiction of church discipline, illustrating the co-operation between the two powers. This secular court, however, also dealt with the most serious crimes: the pleas of the crown – murder, rape, robbery, fire-raising and treason – as well as witchcraft, injury and riot.

The Privy Council had legislative, executive and judicial powers and it was involved in controlling the activities of the lower courts. Many lower courts required the issue of a writ from the Privy Council before they could continue with a trial. This executive and legislative authority was required in cases of witch prosecution before preliminary accusations could progress to trial through other secular courts. For example, on 28 September 1628 the sheriff depute of Stirling and the lairds of Keir and Powmair were permitted to hold courts in order to try Stevin Malcolme ‘sometime of Leckie’ and Agnes Henderson from the parish of St Ninians, who were already being held in the tolbooth at Stirling, for the crime of witchcraft.⁸ The Privy Council also had judicial power and some witches were tried by the council itself, as in the case of Janet Anderson in Stirling in 1617 and 1621.⁹ There were several cases in 1649 from the Haddington area which were also tried at Privy Court level. Agnes Hunter, Margaret Dickson and Issobell Murray, all from Penston, appeared before the Privy

⁸ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol II, 353. There is a Steven Maltman who appeared at Stirling presbytery on 10 April 1628, also of Leckie, which suggests that they were the same individual.

⁹ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol III, 345-7.

Council in June 1649.¹⁰ The case of Manie Haliburton and her husband Patrick Hepburne from Dirleton was also heard in June 1649.¹¹

At the highest level, Parliament passed legislation associated with law and order, and general social behaviours and practices. It heard pleas in regard to the application of the law and could also grant commissions for trials and inquiries. The first witchcraft act was passed in 1563, and thereafter Parliament issued declarations relating both to the application of the law, and confirmations and renewals about the extent of the legislation. Thus the act in 1563 said that:

... na maner of person nor persounis of
quhatsumever estate, degree or conditioun ... use
ony maner of witchcraftis, sorsarie or necromancie
... nor that na persoun seik ony help, response or
consultatioun at any sic usaris ... under the pane of
deid...¹²

In 1574 a general ordinance was passed which outlawed anyone from using juggling, palmistry, or other forms of divination, as well as outlawing minstrels, Egyptians and singers.¹³ By 1581 Parliament acknowledged the problem of the continued practice of visiting wells as a form of pilgrimage, and declared that anyone found to be carrying out this practice was to be fined.¹⁴ All of these acts and practices, although not directly related to witchcraft, illustrate a gradual increase in centralised social control which developed during James VI's reign.

Commissions for trial were granted by Parliament in a similar fashion to the Privy Council. A commission was given on 3 May 1661 to Patrick Broun of Colstoun, Mr Alexander Hay of Baro, Mr Johne Butler of Kirkland or Kirkton, Mr Johne Dougall of Nunland, Mr Richard Cairnes of Pilmure, Patrick Young and Alexander Swintoun, previously bailies of

¹⁰ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol III, 190-1.

¹¹ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol III, 194-5.

¹² *APS*, vol II, 539.

¹³ *APS*, vol III, 87.

¹⁴ *APS*, vol III, 212.

Haddington, and David Kyll current bailie of Haddington, or any five of them, to try Elizabeth Crafford, Agnes Cuthbertsone, Jonnet Home, Cristine Waderstoun, Jonnet Wilson, Catherine Coupland and Issobel Ker of Haddington.¹⁵ Another commission was given on the same date to George Seton of Barnes, Patrick Broun of Colstoun, Francis Hepburn younger of Beinstoun, Mr Johne Butler of Kirkland or Kirktoun, Mr Johne Dougall of Nunland, Thomas Halyburtoun of Egliscarno, Mr Richard Cairnes of Pilmure, Patrick Young bailie of Haddington, Alexander Borthwick in Johnstounburne and Archibald Elliot in Drem to judge Nicoll and Issobel Steills, Elspeth Baillie, Issobel Ritchardsone, Elspeth Lawsonsone and Issobel Cairnes also of Haddington.¹⁶ Five of the twelve men were involved in both commissions. Patrick Young was certainly an elder in the Haddington kirk session in 1649 and Seton of Barnes, Broun of Colstoun, Hepburn of Beinstoun, Halyburton of Egliscarno¹⁷ and Cairnes of Pilmure were all local lairds or ministers, highlighting the degree and importance of personalised local influence.¹⁸

The commissions and trials which were held at these courts were almost always associated with cases which involved diabolic pact, and which may have initially been investigated by the ecclesiastical system. The other system of justice available in the seventeenth century was the ecclesiastical one; however, because both powers clearly required each other and both covered similar areas of jurisdiction, any separation is to a degree artificial. The legislation covering witchcraft and related practices is an ideal example of this necessary mutual co-operation; nevertheless ecclesiastical disciplinary procedures were established and functioned, initially, on an independent basis. Church discipline did not only start

¹⁵ *APS*, vol 7, 199. Johne Butler and Richard Cairnes were ministers.

¹⁶ *APS*, vol 7, 199.

¹⁷ Egliscarno is likely to be an alternative spelling of Eagles Cairne in the parish of Bolton.

¹⁸ *NAS*, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

with the establishment of the reformed church in 1560, but it did mark the beginning of a formal model of ecclesiastical discipline with clear Calvinist principles based on the Confession of Faith.¹⁹ The enforcement of discipline and policing of the behaviour of the whole community was one of the three indicators of the model church desired by the reformers; the other two were preaching and the administration of the two accepted sacraments.²⁰ Thus the stress laid on discipline and punishment in the First Book of Discipline was justified as being necessary in order that the congregation, and the national church as a whole, was as pure as possible. The whole of the population was to be subject to the law of the church, including rulers – monarchs and nobility – and ministers as well as the ordinary populace.²¹

The hierarchy of the church organisation during the greater part of the seventeenth century consisted of the kirk session, presbytery, synod and General Assembly. The kirk sessions comprised ministers and elders who administered the church affairs and poor relief, and tried and punished misdemeanours. The meetings were generally held on a weekly basis. There were five categories of crime that the kirk could deal with: fornication, unseemly behaviour, slander, sabbath breaking and ‘miscellaneous’, which included witchcraft, charming and other related practices. The penalties which the kirk could impose were essentially public penance on the stool of repentance, appearing in sackcloth or a period of restraint in the joughs. A less physical penalty was a monetary

¹⁹ For a broad discussion and analysis of church discipline see Graham, *The Uses of Reform, passim*. Also Parker, G ‘The ‘Kirk By Law Established’ and the Origins of ‘The Taming of Scotland’: St Andrews 1559-1600’ in *Perspectives in Scottish Social History*, Leneman, L (ed) (Aberdeen, 1988). Mitchison, R and Leneman, L *Girls in trouble: Sexuality and Social Control in Rural Scotland 1660-1780* (Edinburgh, 1998) and Leneman, L and Mitchison, R *Sin in the City: Sexuality and Social Control in Urban Scotland, 1660-1780*, (Edinburgh, 1998) discuss church discipline specifically in relation to sexual behaviours.

²⁰ Dawson, J ‘“The face of ane perfytt reformed kyrk”’: St Andrews and the early Scottish Reformation’ in *Humanism and Reform*, Kirk, J (ed) (Oxford, 1991), 413-4.

²¹ Cameron, J K (ed) *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh, 1972), 165-6, 173.

fine, although for many of the population this would have been extremely difficult to pay.²² The kirk also had some secular duties in relation to poor relief and education, which were also part of their responsibilities.

The presbytery was, for much of the time, the next level of referral. It consisted of ministers and elders, and in particular the ruling elders in later years, from several parishes. The boundaries of ecclesiastical presbyteries did not coincide with civil boundaries and the number of parishes included in each presbytery varied. The presbytery met regularly, often monthly, and as well as discussing church affairs could consider awkward discipline cases which had been referred to them from kirk sessions. The penalties that the presbytery could impose were more serious in their long term effect. Miscreants could be excommunicated or barred from communion which, as the church was such a dominant social force, may have had serious consequences for individual freedom. The requirement of a testament of good behaviour from parish ministers, and the system of communication between ministers, made it difficult for offenders to simply disappear and settle elsewhere. It is clear that some who failed to appear before the presbytery were excommunicated in their absence, but this penalty was used relatively rarely.²³ For example Moreis Scobie was excommunicated by the Stirling presbytery on 22 August 1610 after he failed to appear to hear his punishment for confessing to charming sick people.²⁴

An awkward area of church disciplinary rule was the degree of authority which the church had over landowners and lairds who composed the body of lay elders. During the first half of the seventeenth century, the elite members of the congregation were summoned to answer for their misbehaviour. However the punishments meted out were often

²² Davies, 'The courts and the Scottish legal system', 124-7.

²³ Graham, *The Uses of Reform*, 44-8, 66, 172; Mitchison and Leneman, *Girls in Trouble*, 7.

²⁴ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4 .

less severe or were ignored. In the 1580s lairds refused to appear before the presbytery of Stirling to be reprimanded for fathering illegitimate children.²⁵ However, at times, the kirk sessions and presbyteries did manage to impose their discipline on reprobate lairds. The Gargunnoch kirk session heard the case of Margaret Mitchell on 15 March 1646.²⁶ Margaret Mitchell was the servant of Lady Leckie and she confessed to fornication with the laird of Leckie. She was fined 40 shillings and had to make public repentance for three Sundays. On 4 April 1646 John Leckie of that ilk confessed his fornication with Mitchell and was also expected to make public repentance and pay a fine, although the amount was not recorded in the kirk session records. Interestingly the same John Leckie of that ilk was chosen as the ruling elder on 5 April 1649.²⁷ Another illustration of the attitude towards lairds can be seen in the case of the Lee Penny. In 1638 the assembly at Glasgow discussed the censure of the laird of Lee by the ministers of Lanark about his use of the Lee Penny for curing cattle.²⁸ The assembly examined the laird who reported that the stone was dipped in water which was then given to diseased cattle. Since no words were used during this procedure 'such as charmers and sorcerers use' the assembly saw no grounds for offence or punishment other than an admonition to use the stone with less scandal in the future. Of course it is possible to speculate that this limited censure reflected the laird's influence amongst the higher echelons of the church authorities compared to that of the local ministers.

It was at the level of kirk and presbytery that the overlap and cooperation between laymen and ministers was most apparent. The other

²⁵ Graham, *The Uses of Reform*, 274-6.

²⁶ SCA, Gargunnoch kirk session records, CH2/1221/1.

²⁷ SCA, Gargunnoch kirk session records, CH2/1221/1.

²⁸ Simpson, J Y 'Notes on some Scottish magical charm stones or curing stones' *PSAS*, vol IV, (1860-62) 211-224; Black, G F 'Scottish Charms and Amulets' *PSAS*, vol XXVII, (1892-3) 433-526. The Lee Penny is a small red stone set in silver and is preserved by the Lockhart family.

levels of church court were the synod and General Assembly, where the ministers dominated. The synod met less frequently than presbyteries and the Assembly only once a year, when it was permitted to meet. During the years when the General Assembly did not meet – 1618-1638 and 1656-1690 – the synods had some increased power but dealt more with legislation about disciplinary procedures and worship than actual cases of discipline. The role of the General Assembly was much more political than disciplinary; although it was also concerned with organisation, doctrine and the religious observance of the population as a whole. The Assembly discussed the power of the church in relation to both spiritual and temporal matters and which realm took precedence. This continued discussion resulted in repeated petitions to parliament to extend legislation or jurisdiction in connection with both ecclesiastical and secular crime. In 1641, the General Assembly petitioned for a renewal of the 1563 Witchcraft Act, that it should also be extended to include charmers, sorcerers and consulters of witches, and that there should be a general commission for trying those involved.²⁹ However, Parliament was not to be finessed by such opportunistic posturing and although it eventually approved the plea from the Assembly, it did not do so until 1644. There were the small matters of a rebellion in Ireland, the outbreak of the Civil War in England followed by the war of the Covenant in Scotland. The recalled Covenanter-dominated Parliament of 1644 was less dependent on the support of the ministers than it had been in 1641, and so the limited ratification which was granted came with codicils attached, whose subtext was a subtle undermining of the absolute authority of the church. Thus the order for ‘apprehending, trying and executing of witches and punishing of charmers and consuleres’ was permitted, but ministers and other divines were ordered to consult with lawyers and physicians

²⁹ *APS*, vol V, 645-6.

about the matter and to present their findings to parliament.³⁰

During the 1650s all forms of court were abolished by the occupying force under Cromwell and secular support for church discipline disappeared temporarily. By the 1670s and 1680s, with the introduction of an episcopalian form of church government, there was once again a breakdown of this cooperation and unity between secular and ecclesiastical bodies. Although the bishops had little direct influence on the system and outcome of church discipline at parish level, the increasing rivalry between the supporters of the two systems resulted in a purge of ministers in 1688, as the episcopalians were in ascendance. This general unsettlement during the century may have had some effect, not so much on the pattern or frequency of witchcraft practice and involvement, or indeed on official policy, but more on the pattern of pursuance by individual sessions and presbyteries. By the end of the period the church and state were still unquestionably intertwined but there is no doubt that both were less interested in pursuing accusations of witchcraft.

The interpretation of the crime itself was as complicated as the prosecuting procedure. The authority of the Bible was accepted and quoted by both groups, but both also cited the authority of other recognised sources. For example 'A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones; their blood shall be upon them' (Leviticus ch 20, v 27); Deuteronomy chapter 18, verses 10-11 or Exodus chapter 22, verse 18 'Thou shall not suffer a witch to live'³¹ were among the biblical extracts cited but prosecutors also founded their judgments on Delrio,³² James VI,³³ and

³⁰ *APS*, vol VI, i, 197.

³¹ In other translations 'witch' has been more accurately translated as 'soothsayer'.

³² Delrio, *M Disquisitiones Magicae*, 1599.

³³ *Daemonologie*, 1597.

Sprenger and Kramer, authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*.³⁴ Despite the beliefs of these influential authors in the explanation of demonic pact as the single most important feature of witchcraft and sorcery, it is interesting to note that the original witchcraft act of 1563 made no reference to diabolic influence. It referred only to users of witchcraft, sorcery and necromancy but did not define what these practices involved.³⁵ The crime of witchcraft from an ecclesiastical perspective was a crime against God, otherwise heresy. In secular law, although heresy against God was an important point, it was reinterpreted as heresy against the monarch and state, in other words treason. Although there were common foundations, the two authorities approached the issue from different perspectives and with different agendas.

In the *Malleus Maleficarum* it is explained that witchcraft was different from other forms of heresy because it involved:

... not merely by a tacit compact, but by a compact which is exactly defined and expressed, it blasphemes the Creator and endeavours to the utmost to profane Him and to harm his creatures...³⁶

The demonic pact is described by James VI in more detail:

he [the devil] first perswdes them to addict themselves to his service: which being easely obtained, he then discovers what he is unto them: makes them to renunce their God and Baptisme directlie, and gives them his marke upon some secreit place of their bodie...³⁷

The acceptance of the demonic pact was clearly established by the seventeenth century, but it was not until 1649 that an act was passed which specifically named consultants with devils and familiars.³⁸ This was an attempt to overcome an area of confusion associated with the application

³⁴ Kramer, H and Sprenger, J *Malleus Maleficarum*, (trans Montague Summers) (London, 1928), *passim*.

³⁵ *APS*, vol II, 539.

³⁶ *Malleus Maleficarum*, 20.

³⁷ *Daemonologie*, 33.

³⁸ *APS*, vol VI, ii, 152.

of the original act. Because consultants with devils and familiars were not specifically included in the wording of the 1563 act, it was felt that some individuals attempted to escape prosecution, and so the new act ordained that anyone who consulted with devils was liable to the same punishment as witches, sorcerers and necromancers. Even this act did not fully explain the legal position or define the demonic pact or what it involved, and yet by this time, in both ecclesiastical and secular courts, confession of the demonic pact and location of the devil's mark were both crucial points of evidence of guilt. The crime of witchcraft was thus a combination of both statute and common law, which helped to make investigations and trials extremely complicated, and open to the vagaries of local and personal dynamics.

It is clear that as a crime witchcraft had features which made it exceptional; not least that it was not governed by accepted principles of proof, interrogation and procedure. There were three particular features which illustrate this distinction: the use of torture; the admittance of women as witnesses; and acceptance as evidence the word of individuals – or their relatives – who claimed to have been harmed by the accused.³⁹ The latter two – which often involved the appearance of female witnesses – were fiercely debated,⁴⁰ but despite the attempts of defence lawyers to exclude biased witnesses or other women, both were usually permitted. There was no statute which explained the legality, or otherwise, of this situation, but the Law Lords decided that according to common law women could be admitted as witnesses in cases which dealt with the occult and death, not because the two were necessarily linked, but because women were most likely to have been involved in the care of a dead or

³⁹ Larner, 'Crimen Exceptum', 56.

⁴⁰ *Proceedings of the Justiciary Court*, vol 1, 196; vol 2, xiv.

dying person.⁴¹ The appearance of relatives allegedly injured by the accused as the pursuer and/or main crown witnesses was not unusual. For example, the pursuers in the case of Issobel Greirsoune of Prestonpans in March 1607 were Adam Clark, a smith in Prestonpans; Margaret Myller, relict of Williame Burnet, and Robert Peddane and Margaret Donaldsone, his spouse.⁴² All four were allegedly affected personally by the accused. Clark, after a disagreement with Greirsoune, reported an apparition of the devil along with numerous cats which appeared at night and frightened himself, his wife and their servant, who continued to be emotionally affected. Margaret Myller accused Greirsoune of causing the death of her husband. Her husband had named Greirsoune as the cause of his decline before he 'dwynit and pynit away, in the said unknawin seikness, for the space of thre yeiris'. Robert Peddane and his wife accused Greirsoune of 'casting ane greit seiknes' on Peddane, which he then recovered from on payment of a debt owed to Greirsoune. His wife was then taken ill and Greirsoune was again blamed. The episodes occurred between one and fourteen years before the trial. Greirsoune was found guilty and executed at the Castlehill in Edinburgh. The lack of any independent witness to events did not appear to give rise to any comment. This type of witness who was closely associated with the afflicted was quite typical.

There were several routes and other stages of investigation to be completed before the final act of a judicial trial at a criminal court. Interrogation and searching for the devil's mark, procedures used in witchcraft investigation and prosecution, were only part of the early stages of witchcraft accusation and prosecution. A more exact starting point

⁴¹ NAS, JC 2/14 cited in Lerner *et al*, *Source Book*, 281. Women were also frequently involved as witnesses in cases of suspected illegitimate or premature births. As midwives or helpers at the birth they were expected to either encourage the mother to name the father of the baby, or they would examine the babies to assess if the baby was premature or fullterm ie conceived before the date of marriage. See Mitchison and Leneman *Girls in Trouble*, 86-7 and on women as witnesses in general, 23-4.

⁴² Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 523-526.

might be when the first accusations were made, which was usually to the kirk session. This may have been the *de jure* first stage but it was not the *de facto* earliest point. The real initial stage must take into account social relationships and interactions which comprised daily life in the seventeenth century. A reputation or *mala fama* of unacceptable, or questionable, behaviours, built up over several years, would appear to have been crucial in many cases. Episodes of fighting, slandering, fortune telling, knowledge and practice of charming, known association with other accused witches, were all contributory factors to the build-up of a questionable reputation, which might eventually result in an initial complaint. The individual could be accused of any number or combination of these practices. However, one complaint did not make a guilty verdict or an immediate application for a secular trial. The complaint might be dealt with, or reacted to, in several ways, both by the individuals involved and the ecclesiastical authorities. It is clear from kirk and presbytery records that the church increased its social control over society after 1560.⁴³ As the range of disciplinary complaints widened, the numbers being disciplined increased, and although much of the impetus may have come from the kirk officials, many of the reports also came from people living in the community. On occasion, during the periods of peak prosecution, there may have been a semi-orchestrated campaign to root out witches, but for the rest of the time it was neighbour accusing neighbour for personal motives.

At this stage the accusation may have been nothing more than a slander and on many occasions remained so. However, the procedure could then take several routes. The accused might make a counter-action and accuse the other of slander. Naming and shaming in the seventeenth century was not a simple option for either party, but it was a relatively

⁴³ Graham, *Uses of Reform, passim* but especially 209, 290-94.

common one. One means to negate the effects of slander was to undertake a counter-action. Those who took a complaint to the church were expected to produce witnesses to back their version of events; and they were expected to pay a deposit of £2 Scots. This financial outlay was perhaps a means of ensuring that only serious complaints progressed as turning to the church to settle neighbourly disputes was clearly a financial, as well as personal, risk. In Haddington, in May 1650, Issabell Rid (Reid) and Issabell Wyghtman were accused of calling Catherine Thomson 'king of witches'.⁴⁴ Issabell Rid was found guilty and was punished by being put in the jougs. Use of the jougs – a hinged iron collar attached to a wall or post – was one form of public punishment used during this time; another was the branks which was an iron frame put over the head with a piece of iron projected into the mouth.⁴⁵ Later the same month, Catherine Thomson complained that Marjorie Rommanes had called her a witch. Marjorie denied the accusation and reported that she could produce witnesses to support her. The bill was proven, but it is possible to speculate that Catherine Thomson may well have been quite unpopular with her neighbours to have been slandered in such a fashion more than once. However, the fact that she took her case to the church and won suggests that she must have been either reasonably confident about her own reputation or she had support within the church since she took quite a financial gamble. In another case, in April 1657 the kirk session at Haddington was given a bill of complaint from Margaret Denhulime against another woman for cursing and blaspheming.⁴⁶ Margaret was ordered to produce 40 shillings or £2 Scots before the bill would be heard. By May the kirk session noted that Margaret had yet to present her bill or else she would be seen as a

⁴⁴ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

⁴⁵ Harrison, J G 'Women and the Branks in Stirling, c. 1600 to c. 1730' *Scottish Economic and Social History*, vol 18: part 2, (1998), 114-131 discusses cases of punishment using the branks in more detail.

⁴⁶ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/3.

slanderer. By the middle of that month neither woman had appeared, and the kirk session clearly decided that they were beyond any church discipline, as both were to be referred to the secular magistrates. What happened to them is not recorded.

The options available for kirk sessions were to adjudicate cases themselves; hand them up to the presbytery, or refer them to the civil magistrate. Before referral, the collection of evidence from witnesses was required. The accused was then interviewed and various procedures, often involving some degree of torture, would be used to procure a version of events from them. The accused would be questioned; often they were deprived of sleep or suffered other physical discomforts and, if available, experts would be summoned to examine them for the devil's mark. Helen Baillie was summoned before the Haddington kirk session in July 1652 accused of mutual flyting or slandering. Effie Broune was reported to have said 'if she [Helen Baillie] had not the mark she [Effie Broune] should pay for the sighting of hir'.⁴⁷ In other words Effie Broune would pay for a pricker to examine Helen Baillie. The full extent of the role of the pricker in finding large numbers of accused guilty is certainly unclear and had, even for contemporaries, a questionable legality. It is clear that they were involved in many cases despite the concerns expressed by the authorities.⁴⁸ In later years the prickers themselves were imprisoned and either banned from pricking or only permitted to do so on licence from the Privy Council. In 1661 John Henderson was called by the Privy Council following the death of Margret Taitt, who died after being tested by Henderson.⁴⁹ Another notorious pricker, John Kincaid, originally from Tranent although he carried out his practice throughout the country, also caused some comment. Kincaid was imprisoned for nine weeks in 1662 on

⁴⁷ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

⁴⁸ Neill, W N 'The Professional Pricker and his test for witchcraft' *SHR* 19(1922), 205-213.

⁴⁹ *RPC*, 3rd series, vol I, 16.

the order of the Privy Council, after complaints had been made about his procedures.⁵⁰ In 1679 David Cowane, a drummer, also from Tranent, was allowed to use pricking only on licence from the Privy Council.⁵¹ It is interesting to note that lay individuals could call on a pricker to be involved, and that it was not just the kirk personnel who used their services.

It is important to remember that although there was a typical formula which applied in the majority of cases, there were also instances which did not follow the same sequence. The typical scenario meant that once enough evidence was accumulated to incriminate the accused in diabolic witchcraft and demonic pact, a commission would be applied for from the Privy Council or Parliament. This meant that firstly, commissions had to be requested in relation to particular named individuals, and secondly, that the ecclesiastical court required the permission of the secular authority to proceed. Commissions could also be granted directly to laymen who held positions of authority within a local area, although there was usually an ecclesiastical involvement in the background. For example the application for a commission granted to investigate Elizabeth Crafford, Katherine Coupland, Cristine Watherstoun, Jonnet Wilsons and Margaret Bannatyne, was attested by Mr Robert Ker and Mr Patrick Skougall who were ministers.⁵² However, despite this apparent cooperation, it was the thorny area of commissions and their permits which provided much of the rivalry between the two bodies. Following the limited success of their petition to Parliament in 1641 for a permanent commission of investigation, in 1646 the General

⁵⁰ *RPC*, 3rd series, vol I, 187, 210.

⁵¹ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VI, 1678-80, 645, although this case was relatively late. Sir George Mackenzie was fairly sceptical about the prickers' art and regarded them as quite untrustworthy.

⁵² *APS*, vol VII, 235. This commission was granted on 24 May 1661. Elizabeth Crafford, Cristine Waderstoun (Watherstoun), Jonnet Wilsons and Catherine (Katherine) Coupland were also named in a commission granted on 3 May 1661. See note 15 above.

Assembly tried another approach. This time they requested that the 1563 Witchcraft Act should be extended to include charmers as a separate group, as they were not specifically mentioned in the act.⁵³ Four years later, in 1650, the General Assembly then applied for a general commission for witchcraft trials because of the large numbers involved and the length of time it took to process each case.⁵⁴ This general commission was rejected but the number of technically illegal investigations, interrogations and imprisonments which were being conducted by the church authorities was of great concern to the Privy Council. In 1662 a proclamation was issued prohibiting the apprehension of suspects without due warrant or permission.⁵⁵ This illustrates the rivalry over control of proceedings between the two bodies that existed at the same time as some mutual cooperation.

Once a commission for trial had been granted then the accused would progress to a secular trial. As the commission usually included local landowners then the actual trial process was conducted by the lay authorities. Ministers would only appear to testify about the accuracy of the confessions. By this stage the moral and legal authority had shifted onto the secular authority. A trial might be conducted by the commission itself, or the case might advance to the judiciary court; either local Session Courts or the High Court of Justiciary. By this stage, although execution was not the only penalty, nor was guilt always proven, the percentage of cases which ended with death was certainly high and figures of as many as 2000 executions have been calculated.⁵⁶ However, as the records kept for the latter two courts are more complete than those kept by commissions,

⁵³ *Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*, vol I, 1646-7, 123.

⁵⁴ *Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*, vol II, 1648-9, 414.

⁵⁵ *RPC*, 3rd series, vol I, 198.

⁵⁶ Figures based on Larner *et al*, *Source Book* which has several errors, omissions and duplications making exact national calculations difficult.

any statistical analysis of the outcomes is necessarily restricted. It is not possible to assess fully the influence that proximity to a centre of secular power had on the number of cases dealt with through this system, but it is possible to speculate. Certainly the number of cases from the Haddington presbytery which were processed through the secular system is much greater than those from the Stirling presbytery. Relatively few cases from Stirling were heard at either the Session or High Court. This regional or local variation is a key theme and serves to illustrate the difficulties associated with attempting any national analysis. If local and individual anomalies are not taken into account then the analysis is greatly reduced in value; and is further endorsement for qualitative analysis of available evidence as opposed to incomplete quantitative evaluation.

It is clear that more people were accused of witchcraft than of charming. However, given the well-documented ecclesiastical and secular attitudes towards charming as a crime, the number accused of charming was lower than expected, although there may be quite acceptable explanations for this. Despite the strongly clerical attitudes of protestant writers such as Gifford⁵⁷ and James VI,⁵⁸ who attempted to portray charmers as being just as great a threat as witches, it would seem that in reality charmers were not pursued or prosecuted with as much vigour as witches. Briggs confirms that the impression gained from the Scottish evidence was not particularly unusual. He observes that charmers or cunning folk were, somewhat surprisingly, not persecuted in great numbers in protestant countries.⁵⁹ Indeed, it was in catholic countries where charmers and their like were more likely to be prosecuted because folk healers or charmers offered a system of magical healing powers which rivalled that of catholic priests. The motives and justification for the

⁵⁷ Gifford, G A *Dialogue concerning Witches and Witchcrafts* (London, 1593).

⁵⁸ *Daemonologie*.

⁵⁹ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 126-7.

accusation and punishment of witchcraft would appear to have been very different from those associated with charmers. The burden of proof related to charming was in some ways more demanding than it was for witchcraft, yet its punishment was less severe. The absence of any references to the devil as a feature of charming made it easier to punish, yet at the same time harder to explain. Another factor may have been fear of punishment for the accusers themselves as it has also been shown that those who made accusations of charming and charmers were often reprimanded by the church authorities,⁶⁰ which perhaps reduced the inclination to accuse without firm evidence. On the other hand, the legal process of witchcraft accusation and culpability was quite clearly defined and, once local elites were involved in commissions of inquiry, the eventual outcome was undoubtedly more predictable than in cases of charmers. Clearly, the relationships and boundaries between charmers and witches were ambiguous but generally their position was not as vulnerable as that of witches, since they appear to have operated more openly. The lower percentage of accused and punished charmers may also be accounted for by the widespread belief and participation in 'charming' rituals by the general population themselves. The criticism of charming and charmers by the church authorities may have led to some confusion in the general population, as the figures imply a reluctance to blame or apportion guilt as far as charmers were concerned – especially when other members of the population might have found themselves involved in, and accused of, charming as well.

Conclusion

It is clear that the typical case scenario predominated, yet there is enough evidence to suggest that it would be wrong to imply that witch prosecution

⁶⁰ This point is also discussed in chapter 5, 105-6.

was a straightforward conveyer belt of uniformity. Accusations were not all the same and charming was clearly perceived as being different from witchcraft. When individuals were called before kirk sessions accused of charming, but not of demonic practices, the punishment handed out was usually public repentance and sackcloth; but it was identifying the distinction between charming and demonic witchcraft which caused problems for the authorities. The variation in procedure and outcome indicates that not only was there some bending of the rules or difficulties in reaching a clearly defined verdict, but that there was also some reluctance on the part of the authorities to convict immediately. Whether that was due to the time and cost of the proceedings, or to a genuine concern about guilt or innocence, is harder to prove, but there are cases where guilt was not a foregone conclusion. Secular juries appear to have attempted to consider cases in relation to their understanding of both the evidence and law following the directions of the lawyers and judicial authorities. Church committees also considered whether cases involved the devil and demonic powers or if they were simply cases of charming or slander or some lesser misdemeanour which they could deal with themselves. Of course this limited reservation has to be seen in contrast with those cases which were investigated and tried without due concern for the letter or spirit of the law, and which, without doubt, resulted in dreadful atrocities and eventual execution. Nevertheless, what it does demonstrate is that the attitude of the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, as well as the general population, towards witchcraft and charming, and their punishment, was extremely complex.

Chapter 8 – The Church, Magic and Charming

Introduction

Church records can reveal personal and local details as well as information about religious doctrine. They can illustrate how local communities interacted, what practical role individuals might have had, provide information about how seventeenth-century society viewed illness and healing and also what function the church had as a disciplinary authority in different parishes and presbyteries. The kirk and presbytery minutes include details of witchcraft and charming accusations which did not progress to the secular courts, as well as some preliminary discussions about those which did, suggesting that the role and the attitudes of the church may not have been absolutely fixed or uniform. This difference – particularly in regard to the distinction between witches and charmers – is interesting and merits more consideration than it has been given previously.

The church and healing

The church provided comfort for many suffering spiritual and physical anguish, but as the need arose, much of the population would turn to other sources of help: often a local healer or wise-woman (or man) who had special knowledge of healing. This functional explanation would certainly provide a reason why this group might be regarded as a rival to the church. The theological justification of the attitude of the whole church in general is of great importance, but what has proved to be even more significant are specific local church records. These show a more varied and flexible attitude to the accused that would have been anticipated from the official declarations of the church authorities.

Before considering the material found in the church records the

general relationship, common to both Scotland and Europe, between religion and magic, of which witchcraft and charming were part, will also be considered. Some understanding of the church in Scotland, both before and during the seventeenth century, is also necessary, in order to provide the context for the attitudes which prevailed. There will also be some comparison between the rituals of charming and witchcraft and of religious worship. Scottish church records have been examined for cases which include reference to healing, and the form and content of the advice has been used to illustrate concepts about disease and healing. Religious scepticism or atheism may not have been widespread in seventeenth-century Scotland but, equally, demonological pursuit may not have been as straightforward as has been previously assumed. Witchcraft beliefs were not uniform and some aspects may have indeed provided a practical function for society. The devil may have been only one of many demons and fears which concerned society, and some aspects of witchcraft belief may, paradoxically, have provided a means to diminish anxiety.

It is pertinent to examine both the relationship between the church and healing, and between the church and magic, both of which help to contextualise society's beliefs and practices and provide a background for contemporary explanations for the causes of illness. Society's interpretation and acceptance of witchcraft and charming manifested itself in two ways, both through participation in and prosecution of the practice, although both are interdependent. Thus, incidence of persecution necessarily implies that belief existed at many levels of society. However, although persecution of named witches by means of a judicial system, either ecclesiastical or secular, depended on the preexistence of belief, this criminalisation of certain groups in society distorts our understanding of these events. It is the relationship between religion, magic and witchcraft, and in particular those aspects which

can be seen to have had a healing or medicinal use which requires further examination.

The concept of sacerdotalism, special priestly powers, in the medieval and renaissance periods meant that healing power and the pre-Reformation church were synonymous, both through the power of the priest figure and by the rituals carried out by the population in general. The priest could offer sacramental healing, which provided not only spiritual relief but physical healing. The lay person could also actively seek help by appealing for intercession from saints through the medium of prayer and donation, and also by going on pilgrimages. Although conducted and sanctioned by the church organisation, there were features of these ceremonies which, due to their mystique and ritual, may have been beyond the comprehension of ordinary men and women. Faith rather than reason provided salvation, and the power and knowledge which the priest and the church had may, therefore, have been recognised as being supernatural but not necessarily understood. Thus, any hypothesis about a society that accepts the power of religion and the supernatural must surely imply that magical forces and their effects were a necessary aspect of its set of beliefs.¹

Priestly healing powers were symbolically magical, but were essentially seen as a source of good, which ultimately derived from God. Similarly, the justification of the efficacy of miracles was founded on this same premise. Those other than priests who claimed to have knowledge of magical powers were known by a variety of terms such as wizards, witches, wise-women or charmers. Whatever their title, they were not necessarily all regarded as having evil intent, but the possibility that maleficium, or harmful magic, might exist was certainly accepted by society. The distinction between good and evil is well supported by scripture, and with the changing

¹ See Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, especially chapter 2.

interpretations of religion throughout the history of the world, the concept of evil was often interpreted as being different or supporting an alternative, or heretical, form of belief system. Heresy and evil were often thought to go hand-in-hand, and with different generations different groups or sects were persecuted and accused of horrific crimes. Theologians hypothesised that if non-priests who practised ritual and professed knowledge did not obtain magical power from God then, *ipso facto*, the source and knowledge must have been evil. By the middle ages, the most common explanation was that the source of these powers was the devil. According to James VI:

...the Lawe of God, wherein are all Magicians, Divines, Enchanters, Sorcerers, Witches, & whatsoever of that kinde that consultes with the Devill, plainelie prohibited, and alike threatened against.²

From the Christian view of the world, the relationships between heresy and the devil, heresy and witchcraft,³ and witchcraft and the devil, evolved over time within their own logic. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, theological and judicial demonological exegesis stated that witches had a dependent relationship with the devil: the devil was the master and the witch the servant. According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*;

...the devil makes use of a witch, not because he has need of any such agent, but because he is seeking the perdition of the witch...⁴

... witchcraft, not only differs from all other heresy in this, that not merely by a tacit compact, but by a compact which is exactly defined and expressed...⁵

Witchcraft was undoubtedly a crime against religion, but a crime which would eventually also get secular backing.

² *Daemonologie*, 29.

³ Butler, *Ritual Magic*, 311-12.

⁴ *Malleus Maleficarum*, 12.

⁵ *Malleus Maleficarum*, 20.

During the seventeenth century Scottish society underwent significant change at all levels. Many of these changes related to the struggle for power between church and crown, and church and state. The origins of many of the problems lay in the previous century, and in the gradual acceptance of a reformed faith within much of Scotland. The transformation brought about by the Reformation was not only related to the changes in church doctrine and articles of faith, but also the beliefs of ordinary members of society which to some extent took longer to change. The reformed church, by abolishing the catholic sacraments, denounced the practice of praying for intercession, and condemned the worship of relics as idolatry. Instead, the reformers concentrated on personal faith and redemption. During the seventeenth century, the reformed protestant church in Scotland underwent further doctrinal and organisational changes, and the National Covenant of 1638 was one of the catalysts for another period of both civil and ecclesiastical unrest. The 1638 Covenant reemphasised the direct relationship between God and the Scottish people, without the involvement of the crown. Although this may have affected both doctrine and worship for the ordinary members of the congregation, the main issue was the existence of an episcopal church government, and the appointment of bishops by the king, rather than the form and practice of worship or the basic tenets of the faith.

The pre-Reformation church had been as much a national church as a European one, and incorporated Scottish features, as well as international trends. The liturgy was international – Sarum (Salisbury) – but after the Great Schism in the Western church religious worship in Scotland moved away from English hegemony to adopt both a national and European approach. Bishop Elphinstone's Aberdeen Breviary, introduced between 1437 and 1480,

incorporated 70 new Scottish saints into the liturgy.⁶ The Roman curia, troubled by the development of local practice and an overcrowded religious calendar, developed its own reformed liturgy – the Quignonez Breviary – in 1535 in an attempt to rationalise and streamline overcrowded liturgies such as the Aberdeen Breviary. As a result the Aberdeen Breviary was quickly outdated and never achieved full national use in Scotland. The new liturgy recommended that the reading of scripture during services be increased, not unlike the demands of the reformers. Religious observance in Scotland also included some domestic features such as local pilgrimage sites, increased dedications to Scottish saints, and a flourishing in the building of ornate collegiate churches throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁷ By the 1540s and 1550s, at the same time as the increase in dedications of collegiate churches, there was some introduction of continental cults such as those of the Rosary, the Five Wounds, and other Marian cults.⁸

The practice of pilgrimage, domestic or foreign, was common during the medieval period. The reason for undertaking a pilgrimage might be a sign of repentance for sins or crimes committed, for personal piety or, often, to relieve suffering or illness. There were several pilgrimage sites in Scotland under the auspices of the church, including St Ninian at Whithorn, Whitekirk, Isle of May, St Duthac at Tain, St Triduana at Restalrig, St Maelrubha in Loch Maree and Our Lady of Loretto at Musselburgh. The variety of sites available reflected evolving trends and practices, in that some of the shrines incorporated native saints, such as SS Duthac and Triduana, or other European saints such as Our Lady of Loretto. Some of these sites were known

⁶ MacFarlane, C J *William Elphinstone and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1431-1514* (Aberdeen, 1985), describes the Breviary, its history and use in detail. See also McRoberts, D 'Sixteenth century Scottish Breviaries' *IR*, 3, (1952), 44; Forrester, D and Murray, D (eds) *Studies in the history of worship in Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1984), especially chapter 3.

⁷ McRoberts, D 'The Scottish church and nationalism in the fifteenth century' *IR*, 19:1 (1968), 3-14.

⁸ McRoberts, D 'The Rosary in Scotland' *IR*, 23: 1 (1972), 81-86.

to help particular ailments – for example, Saint Triduana’s well was known for its reputation for curing eye diseases. These sites and practices may have been older than the Christian church in Scotland itself, and yet had been sanctioned and incorporated into medieval church ritual.⁹ But, after the Reformation, holy wells and the practice of visiting them to help disease would be criticised and condemned by the church.

Christianity was not without its critics, opponents or dissenters and throughout the pre-Reformation period there were crusades not only to recover the Holy Land, but also against heretical sects such as the Cathars or Albigensians. The heretical dualist ideas of Gnostics and Manicheans, who believed that good and evil were separate forces, also questioned some of the practices of the Roman church. Despite the crusade against the Albigensians (1209-71), heretical thinking was never completely eradicated, and culminated in the period of Reformation in the sixteenth century. Much of the doctrine and practice of the pre-Reformation church incorporated beliefs which were questioned by the reformers, such as the power of holy relics, power of saintly intercession and belief in transubstantiation. Other developments affected not only the form of religious worship and belief, but also organisational aspects of the church. The growth of humanist philosophy influenced theologians such as Luther, Erasmus, Zwingli and Calvin. The intellectual humanist theories which flourished during the renaissance resulted in a fundamental change towards accepting only that which could be shown to be true. Since much of the ritual and doctrine of the medieval church depended on a mixture of magic and faith, ultimately this philosophy was at variance with the basic principles of pre-Reformation Christian doctrine.

Protestant and reforming ideas found some limited support in

⁹ See Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 9, 84.

Scotland in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but it was certainly not a cohesive national movement. By the 1540s and 1550s, at the same time as what might be seen as a period of limited catholic vitality, there was a degree of active participation in a reformed practice of worship in the form of privy kirks.¹⁰ By 1557 a group of the nobility, the Lords of the Congregation, subscribed to a Covenant which found little support until 1559 when the pro-French, and therefore perhaps implicitly pro-catholic, policies of the Regent Mary of Guise increased opposition. With English help, and the timely death of Mary of Guise, the protestant party was able to abolish catholic sacraments and papal jurisdiction, and enforce a reformed confession of faith. Protestantism was no longer heresy by 1560, but protestant philosophy was not completely accepted or incorporated throughout Scotland. The introduction of protestantism prohibited the practice of healing by ritual or magic, either by the church or by other non-clerical practitioners. The Reformation removed the power of miracles and magic from religion and replaced it with personal piety and faith in personal salvation. However, the reality was that for most of the population the new religion did not provide acceptable cures for their illnesses or reduce their fears, and so to some extent older rituals and practices continued to be carried out.¹¹

It was to be well into the seventeenth century before the form of church organisation, government, finance or relationship with the crown were fully established in Scotland. The organisation of the church was to be more democratic than previously and this meant that theoretically the ordinary church-members would make some contribution to church

¹⁰ Kirk, J *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh, 1989), 1-15. See Lynch, M *Edinburgh and the Reformation*, (Edinburgh, 1981), 37-41 for examination of the Edinburgh evidence. Although Kirk is adamant that these groups were a 'tightly-knit cellular structure ...[which] assisted the development of a network of protestant communities' the evidence for widespread national privy kirks is fairly limited.

¹¹ For a discussion of the difference between the attitudes and practices of Anglicans and puritans towards causes and cures of illnesses in England see Harley, 'Mental illness, magical medicine'.

organisation and congregational discipline: an officially sanctioned participatory role, which was very different from the Roman church. With the removal of bishops and the authority of the Pope, the hierarchy was to consist of local kirk sessions, synods and the General Assembly. Presbyteries were scheduled to appear in the 1580s. Also, lay members of the church – the elders – were to be permitted an official voice in church organisation.

Initially these elders may have been interested nobles or lairds but eventually the role and power of lay elders would be more clearly defined and the minister, although still regarded as a person of power within his local community, found his practical power was augmented or tempered by the local elders. This form of church organisation was based on Calvin's model accepted in Geneva. Despite its introduction in the late sixteenth century it was not fully implemented in Scotland until much later. Calvin's theological theories related particularly to individual morality, and the relationship between church and state. The church was to be separate from the state and organised into local congregations, thus emphasising the importance and autonomy of local society.

It would be inaccurate to say that it was a truly national or unified presbyterian organisation in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, although ministers and elders were appointed, kirk sessions established and the General Assembly met. There was a shortage of trained reformed ministers in the first years after 1560 and many of the early appointees were reformed priests.¹² Few presbyteries were established and, although the General Assembly met, those who attended the meetings did not represent every parish in the country. The General Assembly also had its powers limited by both monarchs and regents. During the reign of James VI, bishops were reintroduced, despite the church's objection, and because the

¹² Cowan, *I Regional Aspects of the Scottish Reformation* (Historical Association Pamphlets, 1978).

Assembly required the consent of crown and parliament to meet, James was able to influence both where and when it was called. At the General Assembly held in 1618 at Perth the Five Articles were forced through: these reintroduced private baptism, private communion, observation of holy days, confirmation by bishops, and kneeling at communion which were reminders of pre-Reformation practice. The Assembly would not meet for another 20 years, and by 1638 it was a different, more radical group who made up the delegates of ministers and elders. The post-1638 Assemblies were dominated by sections of the population who came from the south-west and east,¹³ therefore despite being the recognised national church, at both local and personal level, its influence may have been more limited than its leaders may have wished. This local diversity can be highlighted by the variation in attitude towards witches and charmers by local communities.

During the reigns of the later Stewart monarchs the church and crown continued to struggle. The reintroduction of bishops created a hybrid episcopal/presbyterian church which satisfied few. Until the relationship between church and crown was properly defined, the church, to a certain extent, found its hands tied because it still required the crown's approval. The invitation to the monarch to attend the General Assembly, combined with the non-appearance of the king, and the infrequent meetings of the General Assembly, resulted in a degree of stalemate which was eventually broken by Charles I's extreme episcopal policies. In 1637 his desire to introduce a new form of liturgy and the English form of prayer book, without seeking approval from either the Scottish parliament or the General Assembly, met with revolt which culminated in the signing of the National Covenant in 1638.

The ramifications of this Covenant were political, as well as religious, and continued well into the century. By 1643 the church had established a

¹³ Donaldson, G *Scotland: James V to James VII* (Edinburgh, 1965), 200-1.

definition of its own sovereignty, and had found confidence in its authority. Following the rejection of the parliament's decision to engage with Charles there was a shift in power balance towards the elders in the church. The ruling elders appeared in large numbers at Assemblies, and influenced the church's action but their motives for revolt were as much political as economic and religious. Certain aspects of the changes which resulted from the revolt had wider social, as well as spiritual, concerns, and in particular there was a delegation downwards of social responsibilities, which were to be administered at parish level. These changes had both positive and negative effects, and contributed to an increase in local autonomy and development of the parish state where the church became both a secular and an ecclesiastical administrative body. There was a general belief that there was evidence of increased sin, specific as well as generic, throughout the period. Poverty, plague and the successes of the Royalists were regarded as overwhelming evidence of God's way of punishing sins and sinners.¹⁴

In 1650 poor relief was established as being the responsibility of the ecclesiastical parishes, and at the same time the overall concern for moral reform increased, which, it has been suggested, resulted in the crusade against witchcraft,¹⁵ being instigated. Certainly there appears to have been a peak in the number of witch prosecutions during 1649-50, but at the same time national political and ecclesiastical issues remained extremely unsettled, which may have occupied much of the energies of those at a high level in society. The outbreaks of witch prosecutions at this time do not show a neat overlap with the major covenanting areas. Although numbers of prosecutions in the covenanting areas of Fife and the Lothians were high, numbers in the

¹⁴ Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 140 although he later qualifies this on 141 by suggesting that it may not have been the sins themselves that were increasing but their identification and punishment.

¹⁵ Mitchison, *Lordship to Patronage*, 61.

south-west, another actively covenanting area, were low.¹⁶ Covenanters themselves do not appear to have been accused at a higher rate in non-covenanting areas. To suggest that the Covenant resulted in the rooting out of witches for ecclesiastical and political reasons is too simplistic.¹⁷ The effects of a rise in prices, the debasement of the coinage during the century, and the outbreak of plague in east-coast areas which have been cited must have had as much immediate effect on the ordinary population as the power struggle between church and crown, and between church and parliament. Equally the attitudes of the local kirk sessions, perhaps more so than the local minister, were an important factor in local affairs.

The moral standards of society in general were used as a political and ecclesiastical cause, as both secular and religious groups argued about who had more authority over the rest of society. Witchcraft and charming were areas which have been cited as highlighting this rivalry,¹⁸ and in particular the witch prosecutions, as throughout the seventeenth century cases were pursued through both ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction. However, each group required the other in order to authorise and consolidate the legality and justice of their proceedings. Larner's explanation was that the peaks in prosecutions might be regarded as control waves which she notes reflect not so much criminal behaviour as the reaction and action of society towards the issue.¹⁹

¹⁶ Larner, *C et al*, *Source Book* shows that between 1643 and 1650 a higher number of prosecutions recorded by the Privy Council, Justiciary Court, Committee of Estates occurred in the Lothians, Fife and the South East Borders and fewer cases, at this level in Angus, Moray, Renfrew and the South West.

¹⁷ Stevenson, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 142, although this was written in 1977, prior to Larner's national statistical analysis, and promulgated the accepted anecdotal and impressionistic interpretation of the relationship between witchcraft prosecution and the church in the seventeenth century. In contrast to this Mitchison, *Lordship to Patronage*, 89, argues that a national political explanation is *not* [my italics] viable because the national episodes of high numbers of prosecutions were accumulations of local cases which had distinct local characteristics.

¹⁸ Larner, *Enemies*, develops this hypothesis in detail; Lynch, *New History*, 278 also suggests this.

¹⁹ Larner, *Enemies*, 62.

Although church inquiries could be conducted at local level within the jurisdiction of the church authority, if a case was to be pursued through the secular courts then a commission of inquiry was still required. Those persons who requested commissions of inquiry were mostly landowners but the local minister and elders would also often have been involved. Those who were appointed as commissioners were, with some notable exceptions which included ordained ministers, nominated from many of the same groups of men. Kirk session elders, commissioners of inquiry and members of juries would appear to have been men of some status within the local community, ranging from landowners to craftsmen. The commissioners were often landowners, lawyers, local sheriffs, provosts and merchant bailies. For example, the commission of inquiry in April 1661 against several persons from Samuelston including Elizabeth Tailzeour and Agnes Williamson named Sir John Sinclair of Harmeston or Hermanston in the parish of Saltoun; Mr John Butter of Kirkland, also in the parish of Saltoun; Mr Alexander Hay of Bara in the parish of Garvald; Frances Hepburne of Bonietoun; Thomas Halyburton of Inchkairne (Eagles Cairne?) in the neighbouring parish of Bolton and William Seaton, provost of Haddington and Patrick Young, baillie in Haddington, who were both kirk elders.²⁰ Members of juries would appear to have been merchants and craftsmen; and kirk sessions and other ecclesiastical committees included many of the same type of person. The assize, or jury, for Jean Craig of Tranent accused of sorcery and witchcraft included Archibald Purves; Peter Wylie and Richard Trumble of Tranent.²¹

Is it possible to detect a change in attitude towards superstition at the same time? The doctrinal changes brought about by the Reformation emphasised the importance of personal piety and faith, and regarded catholic

²⁰ *APS*, vol VII, 123.

²¹ *Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624-1650*, vol III, 814.

religious ritual as mere superstition. The power of the clergy was still important, but the laity increased their status, not only in their personal relationship with God, but in their involvement within the church itself. The priest figure was no longer the only one with spiritual power, and the religious ceremony became a corporate act involving the whole congregation, rather than being just the province of the priest. What was regarded as superstition within a religious context changed quite dramatically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The contemporary definition of superstitious practices implied demonic worship rather than merely irrelevant or outdated.²²

The medieval church included in its worship much that might have been considered as magical. Its practices involved sacerdotal worship, which implied the presence of special, and particularly supernatural, power which was the privilege of the priest. The ritual of catholic practice involved lighting of candles, use of incense, blessing by the priest, worshipping of relics, and prayers to saints and the Virgin Mary, as well as the Trinity. Some of the later European religious cults which came to Scotland did allow for more personal contemplation, such as the Rosary and other Marian cults.

At the same time as pilgrimages to official religious shrines were permitted, visits to other forms of healing site continued. These sites, particularly those involving water, or some other natural physical feature, were popular with the general population, but were not officially controlled by the church or clerics. Visits to these sites were essentially a pilgrimage, a ritual of blessing at the site and the belief that water obtained there had some healing power. Martin Martin, in 1695, described a healing well on Islay where sick people drank the water, walked round the well three times sunwise, or *deasil*, and left a small votive offering of a pin or farthing. Beside

²² Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 475.

the well was a small chapel, where those who benefited from the water could give thanks to God.²³ Although this description is from the late seventeenth century, it serves to illustrate that it is hard to distinguish many differences between the rituals carried out at official pilgrimage sites and those of the unofficial sites, apart from the presence, or absence, of the priest figure. The official church ritual required as much a belief in magic as the unofficial practice, and to some degree both existed, if not always comfortably, side by side, despite the fact that the General Assembly and other church committees often complained about such visits throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century.²⁴ In 1581 the Scottish parliament passed an act which acknowledged there was a problem in relation to behaviour which was deemed idolatrous, among the populace, and which was partly due to the shortage of reformed ministers.

Forsamekill as pairt for want of doctrine and raritie of ministeris and pairtliie throw [th]e persuers inclinatioun of manis ingyne to superstitioun the dregges of idolatrie [th]it remanis in divers pairtes of [th]e realme be using of pilgrimage to [s]um chappellis, wellis, croces and sic [oth]er monumentis of idolatrie...²⁵

The complaints against visits were still being noted in 1602, but the effectiveness of these attempts by both the church and state to change the practices of the general population, might be assessed by the observations of the Privy Council in 1629, which issued a declaration against those who participated in pilgrimages to chapels and wells:

... quhilk is so frequent and common in this kingdom, to the

²³ Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands*, 260.

²⁴ Calderwood, *D Historie of the Kirk of Scotland*, vol VI (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1843), 172 describes (in 1602) those misdemeanours which were to be investigated as including witches, the keeping of superstitious days, setting of bonfires and pilgrimages to superstitious places such as well and chapels.

²⁵ *APS*, vol III, 212. The act ordained that any man or woman found to have attended any of the above was to be fined. If they were landed they were to pay 'one hundred pundis'; unlanded 'ane hundred markis' and if they were of yeoman status then 'forty poundis] for their first offence. If it was their second offence then the punishment was to be death.

great offence of God, scandall of the kirk and disgrace of his majesties government.²⁶

and of the Diocesan Synod of Dunblane in October 1648:

... ane general ordinance was passed that the several Presbyteries within the bounds be careful that all superstitious wells and chapels wherunto people resort may be carefullie abandoned, and diligence used for craving the assistance of the heritors and others within their bounds for restraining the said superstitions resorting, apprehending and punishing of such persons as do resort to such superstitious places...²⁷

The reformers saw pre-Reformation practice as pagan because it incorporated many older beliefs. These older practices, according to the orthodoxy of the time, were profane and heretical, rather than sacred. The enemy of the reformed church was not only the devil and witchcraft, but Rome and the papacy as well. The devil, as the enemy of the church in Scotland during the seventeenth century, might be regarded as being symbolic in more than one way. The devil as Satan, as a received Christian interpretation of the embodiment of evil, was permitted power to cause man suffering which might be spiritual or physical. This suffering could appear in the form of physical illness, or in the form of mental anguish by tempting him to reject God. Jesus, in his role as a healer, was a physician to both body and soul. As devils possessed the bodies and souls of those who were sick they could be healed by casting out the devils by His word. The bible instructed Christians that: 'They brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick'²⁸ and the seventeenth-century protestant church

²⁶ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol III, 241. The charge was issued by the Privy Council on 25 July 1629, to apprehend all Jesuits as well as those people found going to well and chapels.

²⁷ *Register of the Diocesan Synod of Dunblane*, 263.

²⁸ St Matthew, ch 8, v 16.

continued to offer healing for the sick using words and prayer, but without the ritual. But was the seventeenth-century devil actually an embodiment of a supernatural being with supernatural powers? Or was it simply a belief in an older god or belief in a doctrine which was different in some way? The theological argument about what caused illness usually agreed that it was the result of sin and God's punishment for the lack of moral discipline. Yet at the same time reformed theologians argued that personal misfortune reflected a lack of personal faith and piety which was caused by the devil.

...there are three kinde of folkes whom God will permit so to be tempted or troubled; the wicked for their horrible sinnes, to punish then in the like measure; the Godlie that are sleeping in anie great sinnes of infirmities and weakness in faith to waken the up the faster by such an uncouth forme... For why may not God use anie kinde of extraordinarie punishment, when it pleases him; as well as the ordinarie roddes of sickness...²⁹

Witchcraft prosecutions in Scotland did not incorporate straightforward charges of heresy in the accusation. But, in later trials which included diabolic pact, it can be seen that the renunciation of God was of primary importance once European demonologists had defined ecclesiastical and judicial legislation to criminalise both the practices and practitioners. In these cases, as Thomas suggests, any maleficium was secondary to the implied heresy but for some of the individuals concerned it was the reported maleficium which brought them to the attention of the authorities.³⁰ For many the belief in the power of witchcraft was still magical – with or without the devil.

It has been argued that the creation of church rituals was a deliberate attempt to encourage a shift in loyalty from older belief systems.³¹ There was a continuity in the belief of the power of certain people, places, objects and

²⁹ *Daemonologie*, 47.

³⁰ Thomas, *Religion and Decline of Magic*, 438.

³¹ Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 70.

procedures. Those who participated in these rituals, or who professed power or knowledge did so in the name of God – certainly not the devil. The visiting of a holy well or proclaiming of a spoken charm over some household produce in the hope of ensuring its survival were as acceptable to society as taking holy communion. Magical belief and practice in sixteenth and seventeenth century Scotland helped enable society to make sense of the world as it allowed some opportunity to control their, often, precarious lives.

The use of charms or amulets, either spoken words or an intermediate physical object, was quite acceptable to the pre-Reformation church, but after the Reformation the church rationalised its practices by abandoning certain forms of exorcism and blessings, and replacing them with prayers and fasts.³² According to the reformed church, having faith and understanding the bible removed the need for the mystery of ritual. However, the ordinary populace appear to have maintained their beliefs in, or need for, the mysterious or magical, despite the attitude of theological elites. This decline in the official role of magic, related to changes in religion, has been examined thoroughly by Thomas and other historians interested in popular culture.³³ In general, the decline has been seen to have occurred amongst the elite first and subsequently filtered downwards. Trends were led by the elite and then followed by ordinary folk, described as *gesunkenes Kulturgut* by Hans Naumann.³⁴ However this should not imply that the ordinary populace could

³² See Harley, 'Mental illness, magical medicine and the Devil'.

³³ Thomas, *Religion and Decline*, this theory is discussed throughout, and although has its critics is still regarded as an important work of research. Burke, *Popular Culture*, 274 suggests that the split between learned and popular culture [was] still more obvious in the case of witches as part of his thesis about the changes in culture which occurred during the early modern period, as elites gradually removed themselves from the rest of the population through their language, practices and beliefs by rejecting older customs as being vulgar. As a general thesis it may be applied as much to Scotland as the rest of Europe but it is inaccurate to suggest that there was a rational linear development to this. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 72 suggests that as far as illness was concerned in this period throughout Europe witchcraft was regarded as the most likely cause, and Scotland would appear to have been no exception to this.

³⁴ Hans Naumann quoted in *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*, Dorson, R (ed) (Chicago, 1972), 17.

not define or identify good or bad themselves, or that they required elites to set limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

If the proposal that religion and magic were symbiotic is acceptable, then it is difficult to reconcile the evidence that belief in magic declined during a period of religious development and change. However, one hypothesis might be that during this time the church tried to become rational and logical and to some extent, despite the acknowledgement of personal faith and understanding, removed itself from popular culture. The fact that belief in magic endured despite the attitudes of the church and judiciary demonstrates how important magic was to the *mentalitié* of the general population. It is therefore too simplistic to state that witchcraft and witches were the obvious enemies of the church. They were at the same time both more than this and less than this. There were certainly wider issues involved but it should be remembered that there were also local issues which affected behaviour. It is unreasonable to suggest that the evidence demonstrates that accused witches were always seen as figures of fear. Because there were many years where there very few accusations it is also feasible to suggest that these people, with certain powers and knowledge, were more often accepted by, and played an important role in, their communities. Fear may have been a common enough emotion during the seventeenth century but it was as much a fear of personal guilt as fear of others, particularly witches. For example guilt about having participated in rituals which were condemned by the church and also fear of retribution for these transgressions.

By the end of the century, the role of Providence and faith had been more clearly defined by the church. Illness may have been accepted as being the result of an individual's sin which was caused by lack of faith and by God's will, but at the same time illness was still believed to be caused by the devil. However it was also accepted that another person could, through the

agency of the devil, transfer an illness. From the evidence of the trials it is clear that witches were believed to put on illness, but can it be suggested that during years of non-prosecution they were seen as helpful members of society, whose advice was sought during difficult times? Or were they always figures of hate and fear? If the general population continued to believe that illness was caused by external forces, and continued to carry out complex rituals involving natural environmental features or elements, then the implication is that the witch, or more likely the charmer, must have been regarded as a source of special knowledge. On a practical level, once the church removed belief in healing through ritual worship from its doctrine, lay people who offered healing through supernatural or natural means continued to be acceptable alternatives. On an intellectual level, the causes and treatments of illnesses offered made sense within the cosmology of seventeenth-century Scottish society.

Examination of Scottish church records reveals much about attitudes and practices. Historians have already uncovered and commented on the material recorded in kirk, presbytery and synod as a reflection of society's concerns about sexual misdemeanours.³⁵ Evidence about emphasis on the moral discipline, or lack of discipline, of the population can be found in the many cases of sexual relationships which occurred outwith the sanctity of marriage, and which were reported to kirk sessions. Cases of riotous behaviour, along with fornication, adultery and non-attendance at church, were discussed and censured by those members of church congregations who were in positions of authority – the ministers and elders.

Cases of investigation into reputed witchcraft and charming were also dealt with at church level under the general responsibility of social discipline. The accepted opinion of historians such as Lerner and Levack is that the

³⁵See Graham, *The Uses of Reform, passim*, also Leneman and Mitchison, *Sin in the City*, for analysis and discussion about church discipline.

external events of the seventeenth century influenced attitudes towards personal and civil discipline. The Solemn League and Covenant and Civil War, the Cromwellian occupation and the Restoration show some relationship to certain peaks and troughs in prosecutions. Larner has demonstrated that the peak of 1649 overlapped with the peak of Covenant agitation, and 1661-2 with the Restoration.³⁶ Levack has suggested that 1661-2 peak can be explained by the backlog of cases which had developed during the Cromwellian occupation.³⁷ He has shown that not only was the judicial system influenced by English ideas about use of torture but the lack of meetings of the Privy Council and Scottish Parliament meant that few commissions of inquiry were permitted. The infrequency of commissions did not necessarily mean that there were fewer cases of accusation; it would appear to have been quite the reverse. The accusations were noted and a list of cases built up which were finally brought to trial several years later. For example, at Stirling on 19 May 1658 the presbytery noted:

...the said day Mr George Bennett [and] Mr Matthias Symson ar appoyntid to goe to Alloway and conferr with the persones [wh]o ar [ther]e apprehendit for witchcraft and to endevor to bring [the]m to confession...³⁸

Religious beliefs may have had some influence on accusations and their content, but it was often local politics and power which had more to do with the processes of investigation. The religious fervour of individual ministers may have influenced enthusiasm for persecution of witches, but without the secular authority of the local landowners – the heritors – many of the cases may not have progressed further than the church court. At the same time local communities were the ones who accused their neighbours. The culture and belief about the supposed, or suspected, powers of witches were

³⁶ Larner, *Enemies*, 56.

³⁷ Levack, 'The Great Scottish Witch Hunt', 90-108.

³⁸ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH/722/6.

firmly entrenched throughout all levels of society.

Magic and the supernatural, as part of religion, were important aspects of the culture of the time. Health, ill health and suffering were all part of this cosmology, and if the hypothesis is that seventeenth-century society believed that illness could be caused, and cured, by magic then can this be seen in the accusations made in the trials? Equally, did the presence of healing and the absence of harm or malefice necessarily influence the outcome of the case? The church material, while containing some reference to diabolic pacts, also contains cases of healing and curing where the devil is not mentioned at all. It would appear that many of those cases which concentrate solely on healing did not proceed to the secular level and the absence, or non presence, of the devil made a difference to the outcome.

It has been suggested³⁹ that the ordinary population were less concerned about, or aware of, the diabolic pact. Their concerns were of a more pragmatic nature and included possible maleficium or harm inflicted on themselves, goods and gear – that is their crops, animals or animal produce – and this distinction was reflected in the form and content of witch accusations as opposed to the content of confessions. It is therefore feasible to suggest that those trials which involved the local community and were investigated at local level, without involvement of the central secular authorities, would therefore be less likely to include diabolic pact in the accusations or confessions. From the evidence examined this has been corroborated.

Those cases which were investigated by the church include accusations of witchcraft and charming, but did not always contain confessions of diabolic pact or attendance at sabbats. Trials which progressed through to the secular justice system had frequent reference to diabolic pact and renunciation of baptism, but did not always mention any of the charming

³⁹ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 27; Lerner, *Enemies*, 107.

aspects of witchcraft. For example Margaret Tailor from Alloa was tried at the High Court of Justiciary in 1658.⁴⁰ The accusations against her included association with other known witches, meeting with the devil who wore grey clothes and a blue bonnet, and infanticide but, importantly, there was no mention of taking-off illnesses using charming. Margaret Tailor and several others were discussed by the Stirling presbytery in July 1658.⁴¹ The presbytery minutes include details of the confessions of several of the women who described meeting the devil and having carnal dealings with him. One of the accused, Jonet Black, who appeared at the High Court with Tailor, confessed that she 'did never any evill to man or beast by charmes'. Yet the conclusion of the church authority was to refer the case to the secular authorities because of the confessed diabolic pact. This case illustrates neatly the type of accusation, and confession, which the church felt necessary to refer to secular control.⁴²

The records of parishes in Stirling and Haddington have been examined with particular reference to information about consultations with persons accused or named as witches or charmers. Details were also found about healing practices and rituals, which may not always have required the intervention or advice of someone with specialised power. The rituals fall into categories relating to place – a particular river, well or route; time – time of day, or day of the week; manner – which can be distinguished by the way in which the ritual is carried out – usually alone and in silence. One example of a ritual which was carried out, clearly with the intent of assisting the afflicted, but did not meet the approval of the church authorities, can be seen in the case of 11 people who were called by the Stirling Presbytery in June 1607 to answer for: '... committing idolatrous superstitions in passing in pilgrimage to

⁴⁰ NAS, JC 26/26.

⁴¹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/6.

⁴² A manuscript copy of Margaret Tailor's confession, and the others, is held in the NLS, MS 1909.

Christ's well and using of divers superstitius ritis [th]er at...'.⁴³ Later the same month they told the presbytery that they had visited the well in order to:

..gait thair heall of thair disaisis and take sum of the watter and left sum thing behynd everie ane of thame at the well. The brethrein findis thay have commited superstitione and....they are orderit to mak public repentance at thair next sabbath...

This is very similar to the healing ritual observed by Martin in 1695, almost a century later.⁴⁴ Both examples demonstrate clearly that there was a continuity and survival of beliefs and practices.

In July 1610 Morris Scobie confessed to the presbytery that he: '..charmis the sick folk that send for him...'.⁴⁵ He reported that he used a spoken charm which he had: '...lernit of Sir Andro Hudstone ane preist in Glendeven...'.⁴⁶

The Lord is blessed that heirin in baith merrie in harit and hand,
The lord is blessed that herin is he salbe they warrand,
God if his gudeness that he cal call and he sendis hestallie,
The fusone of middilyird God send it hame to the.
The Lord he can, the Lord he zid syne hestallie, Quha hes
bein heir, this nyght he sayes quha hes hier this day, The
Elriche King hes being heir this nyght, and rest fra me away,
The pouar of woman and mankyne, and bayth sone gratn
thow me.
The fusone of mirrie middilyird he hes tane fra me away,
Grant me the gift sone againt that I granted to the, Or ellis
thow sall have hell to thy dwelling and damisday atzo' dur,
The father, the sone and the holy gaist and him I laive with
the.⁴⁶

Eventually Scobie was excommunicated in August 1610 after his failure to attend meetings of the presbytery. However, it was not only Scobie whom the church were concerned about, but also those who had consulted him for the

⁴³ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4.

⁴⁴ See page 166, note 23.

⁴⁵ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4.

⁴⁶ middilyird: this world which was seen as a half-way between heaven and hell. Elriche, eldritch: fairies, elves, belonging to fairies or elves, fairy or elf kingdom.

curing of their children: '...to the great dishonour of God and slandir to his kirk...'. The concern expressed at the guilt of the whole community was further observed in July 1612 when the presbytery noted that:

...charming is verie frequentlie usit in thir bounds. For removing [th]ereof the brethrein ordains ilk eldership within thir boundis to tak inquistione [wh]air any sic thing is comitted and as they find to tak order [th]airwith as apperteinis and to dischairge the samin publictlie in pulpet...

but the effect of this attempt to change behaviour and practices would appear to have been quite unsuccessful, as there were still several references to charming in later years.

Another example is Steven Maltman, a parishioner of Gargunnoch, who was called to appear before the presbytery in 1628 and was accused of charming and witchcraft. The case and details are fairly typical of other cases found in the records. The said Steven Maltman confessed that:

...[ei]ght or nyne yeirs bygan he had sett himself to charming sindrie diseases and being demanded [wh]enso he had his skill of healing and ...had learned the practickes [wh]ilk he used confessed [tha]t he had theme of the fairye folk...⁴⁷

The accused appears to have been consulted to cure several persons from neighbouring parishes, including Adam Wilson, burgess in Stirling; Janet Christie in Logie; a child of David Allan in West Grange; and John Forrester in Kippen. This case may have progressed to the secular courts as a Steven Malcolme from the Stirling area was recorded by the Privy Council on a charge of witchcraft in the same year.⁴⁸ As the presbytery made no further reference to Maltman, no assessment can be made about its involvement in the later trial. Charming was still being reported and investigated by the church authorities in Stirling as late as 1671, well after the major peaks of

⁴⁷ SCA, Stirling presbytery record, CH2/722/5.

⁴⁸ RPC, 2nd series, vol II, 353. There are no details about the outcome of the trial.

witch prosecution, which does suggest that a distinction was made between witchcraft and charming by church and society.

The transference of disease, or cure, through an intermediate medium or *Zwischenträger*⁴⁹ is a common feature of the charming rituals advised by the accused witches. In 1633, Janet Tailor⁵⁰ of the parish of Alloway was called to appear before the presbytery and confessed that for about 30 years she had let herself be known as a charmer of diseases. The outcome in this case is later noted in the details of another case, in the same source; Tailor was burnt for witchcraft on 3 April 1633.⁵¹ Some of the details are similar to those given in the case of Steven Maltman, including a prayer or charm in the name of the father, son and holy ghost, but it is the use of the intermediate medium which is more specific in this case. Janet Tailor, when requested to help John Sibbett's wife, asked for several items of her clothing to be brought to her: 'and bring with him ane sark, ane curtch ane coller bodys, and ane mutch'. These items were charmed and the patient was instructed to wear the sark for 24 hours, whereupon she would be cured. John Sibbet was carefully advised to lay the 'diseas upon ane stock or ane stone...' rather than lay it upon some living creature. Tailor also used south running water, which was used to wash the afflicted, but in addition she advised the cutting of the nails of the hand and feet. Many of these charming features or motifs had much in common with medieval religious observance, such as belief in the power of relics, of blessings and in the reality of the transformation of the spiritual into the physical through the process of transubstantiation. Also the cutting of hair and nails and the washing of the diseased person echoed the actions of Jesus himself.

From the cases cited above, it is clear that there were trends and

⁴⁹ This term is used by the American folklorist Wayland Hand, see Hand, *W Magical Medicine* (California, 1980), 18-23.

⁵⁰ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁵¹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

features which were common to the cases investigated by both the secular and ecclesiastical authorities, but that there were also major differences. Witch prosecution in Scotland was not solely due to the religious changes which had occurred in the country. There is no doubt that the whole process of accusation and prosecution had wider, often political, implications as well. In the seventeenth century, Scottish society evolved and adapted to many changes of political and religious nature. However, many of these momentous changes would appear to have had more effect at a centralised level than at local level. The national problems which occurred throughout the century had less effect on the day-to-day existence of the majority of the population. Nevertheless, witchcraft practices and beliefs, and the changes in attitudes towards them, demonstrate that Scottish society and culture, both elite and popular, was neither isolated nor indeed particularly unique.

The form and content of trials which progressed through the secular system was heavily influenced by both religious and intellectual theories, and by the seventeenth century accusations had developed into a standardised format. The main feature of the evidence was the diabolic pact. The language used and the outcomes provide clear evidence of the attitudes of the judiciary and the juries, but by its very nature the secular material has limitations. Most importantly it is of limited use in any attempt to analyse the wider aspect of witchcraft beliefs for society as a whole. The information found in the secular records reflected elite intellectual opinion and it is difficult to assess from these sources how much the opinion of the ordinary population differed from that of the elite. However, the secular material is certainly useful as a comparison to the evidence found in church records.

Conclusion

Church records provide evidence not only for the widespread influence of belief in magic and witchcraft, but also that it was often regarded as having beneficial effect. For the majority of the population the intellectualised debate about the reality and power of the Devil versus God had less immediate interest. Of more personal concern were the various devils, demons, fairies, elves and spirits which were relatively common motifs in folk beliefs. Since these were often morally ambiguous they were not regarded with the same degree of fear. In functional terms magic fitted in with the understanding of nature and it may not have been all that dissimilar to older religious beliefs and practices. It certainly allowed society to explain the causes of illness, but significantly permitted them an option to find a cure. The complex response and attitude of the church to charming, as opposed to more easily-recognisable witchcraft, may be explained by the the changing attitudes towards sin and disease. As the reformed church became more firmly established the philosophy that personal sin, or lack of 'Godly discipline', caused God's punishment in the form of misfortune and disease. The only cure was to ask God's forgiveness through prayer. Illness was not caused by another person nor could it be removed by them. In 1670 the Haddington presbytery noted that it was the role of the minister to:

...visit ye sick... [and] endeavours to awaken in them a sense of their sins that they may confess, repent and be humbled for them and that recourse to God through Jesus Christ, for pardons and stirr them up to resolv if God shall lengthen their days. To live more Christianlie; exhorting them to pactions under the hand of God and cheerful submission to his will...⁵²

This illustrates the official position and attitude of the church towards both the cause of illness and the church's role in providing assistance.

Illness was due to lack of personal faith and piety, and only God could

⁵² NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/7.

restore them to a state of well-being. The responsibility for recovering health lay with individuals and their ministers and in their relationship with God.

Chapter 9 – Gender, Accusations and Feminist Historiography

*How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags*¹

Philomathes: ...*what can be the cause that there are twentie women given to that craft, where ther is one man?*

Epistemon: ... *the reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer than men is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Devill...*²

*All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable*³

Introduction

How easily our images of witches are created, exaggerated and incorporated into our shared psyche, both in physical and metaphorical terms. The myth of the female witch has been used throughout history as a useful hook upon which to hang the multiplicity of ideas and agendas which have been promulgated both contemporaneously and retrospectively. The *Malleus Maleficarum* may, it has been suggested,⁴ have had less immediate effect and dissemination than previously acknowledged, but the content and the philosophy behind it were undeniably centred on equating witchcraft with being female and this viewpoint was certainly used by others. Other later opinions such as those of Perkins and Bodin, as well as James VI, claimed, albeit perhaps somewhat briefly, that it was the significant moral weaknesses of women which made them particularly vulnerable to the overtures of the devil.⁵ Even the medical authorities of the period considered that the female sex

¹ Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act IV scene 1.

² *Daemonologie*, 43.

³ *Malleus Maleficarum*, 47.

⁴ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 21-2.

⁵ Bodin, Jean *Demonomanie des Sorciers* (Paris, 1580), fo 225; Perkins, William *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, 1608), 168-9.

was more vulnerable than the male; their tendency to melancholic imbalance of the humours was taken as evidence of their physical and mental weaknesses. By the early modern period vulnerability to devilish temptation and causing harm and distress were accepted as being part of the female condition. This was not a new explanation: according to Aristotle women's bodies were inferior. They were cold and wet, and more likely to become unbalanced.⁶ In contrast another commonly-held belief was that women were nature's healers, a role which had been hijacked by men firstly through the organisation of the church and, later, the medical profession.

This point of view continued to be accepted, without comment, by later generations who attempted any analysis of the phenomenon of witch hunting. However, by the mid twentieth century with the advent of feminism, the self-same evidence and opinion became useful as ammunition in another argument: that of the female witch as innocent victim. She, the victim, was the object of organised misogynist attack, the perpetuator of mystical, mother-earth type knowledge, the natural healer and nurse, whose power made her a threat to a male-dominated society. This interpretation garnered support during the 1970s when historians, male and female alike, began to analyse the statistical evidence which, although recognised as showing a higher percentage of female defendants, had previously attracted little comment. Not only were the documented opinions somewhat anti-female, a well recognised observation, but the statistics themselves appeared to suggest that this philosophy was indeed reflected in the prosecutions. The question was: did this confirm that witchcraft or charming was practised by women more than men and so support the philosophical and theological arguments of the period, or were accusations and prosecutions at local level influenced by learned

⁶ Quoted in Purkiss, *The Witch*, 121.

male opinion? Whatever the case, both aspects were incorporated into feminist arguments during the 1970s and 1980s.

Men and women witches and charmers

In January 1658 Margaret Anderson confessed to the Haddington kirk session that: 'she is the devils servant and had renuncit her baptisme'.⁷ To compound Margaret's sin she also confessed to several episodes of adultery and fornication. In contrast, Andrew Aiken was asked by the Stirling presbytery in January 1636⁸ about his skill in taking-off witchcraft:

upon thirttie yeirs ago Thomas Ferguson in Skeithie who now is dead taught him to tak off witchcraft aither aff beast or bodie by saying of yr words following fyve times. Threw bitters hed he bitten, with hart and tongue and eye almaist, and wheir thrie [bitters] boit may be, the father sonne and haly gaist...⁹

Do either of these two scenarios fit our preconceptions or the images suggested either by Shakespeare and James VI, or alternatively the feminist icon? Which, if either, is typical? The female servant of the devil or the male healer? The real picture lies somewhere between these examples in a whole spectrum of cases, which, at the same time as illustrating just how varied the cases were, also somewhat complicates the issue.

In this chapter the vexed question of whether witchcraft was a gender-specific practice, or crime, will be considered, or whether it is actually more accurate to suggest that the *perception* of the crime of

⁷ NAS, Haddington kirk session, CH2/799/3.

⁸ SCA, Stirling presbytery records CH2/722/5.

⁹ There are several versions of this charm recorded throughout both Scotland and England. Barbara Rosen quotes a version from Anne Whittle in Lancashire in 1613 in *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, (Massachusetts, 1991) 363. There is also a similar charm used by Janet Anderson, Stirling, 1617 RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 345; and Bessie Stevenson, Stirling 22 March 1659, NAS JC 26/26.

diabolical witchcraft was gender biased, but that the *practice* of witchcraft, in its various forms, was less so. It should be remembered that the word witchcraft was, and is still, a complicated label which requires qualification. Indeed, neither the definition nor connotation of the term has remained static over the centuries. Thus, the focus of this analysis will include those accused of sorcery, necromancy and charming, as well as witchcraft itself as, from the evidence, most individuals were accused of all, or a combination of, these practices. By extending the linguistic boundaries and definitions of the cases examined it has been seen that although gender was certainly an important feature its influence was not quite what had been anticipated.

In order to put this analysis into a historiographical context, some broad theories have been put forward from different perceptions. These range from the -isms of feminism, Marxism and functionalism, to the -ologies of sociology and psychology, but in this case it is the feminist theories which will be considered more fully. All have their merits and demerits, and all have their disciples and sceptics, but it is the task of those who follow both to gain from their knowledge and learn from their errors. The chapter has a number of focuses, based on analysis of the evidence from the two localities of Stirling and Haddington. It should be remembered that it is not intended that any conclusions made from these local studies can, or should, be extrapolated easily on to a national level. The point of local studies is to highlight differences and anomalies; to illustrate specifics which may not fit simplified national patterns, but which result in a healthy rereading of what may be seen as perceived orthodoxy.

The gender factor may now seem an obvious observation and question to consider about witchcraft and its associated practices; but it was

not always thus, and the fact that it is at least on the agenda is the result of the work carried out over the last twenty years. It is certainly true that the majority of those accused and persecuted for witchcraft in general in Scotland, and elsewhere, were women. The statistics illustrate this clearly, but although historians of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries recorded and analysed the evidence they made little comment on the figures.¹⁰ It was not until the 1970s that feminist authors began to produce work which considered this question and which prompted much debate. Unfortunately, in some cases, personal beliefs may have caused problems with historiographical methodology and interpretation of the material, thus leaving some authors vulnerable to attack from other traditional, according to feminists, 'his'-torians.¹¹ Nevertheless their ideas encouraged further consideration of the evidence and the argument, and some more recent works, while still maintaining a feminist position, have attempted to redress the balance.¹²

The early feminist writers had a mission: to show from the statistics and other evidence that witch accusations were a concerted conspiracy against innocent women because of their gender. It was a campaign of terror and witch hunts were, according to Marianne Hester, essentially a form of systematised sexual violence against women, because the majority of those accused were women, and the males, who dominated the ideology of the system, saw all women as sexually inferior.¹³ Jeanne

¹⁰ Historians from this period are many and too numerous to list but a sample are Dalyell, *Darker Superstitions*; Mackinlay, *J M Folklore of Scottish Lochs and Springs* (Glasgow, 1893); McLagan, *Evil Eye*; Black, *Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft*.

¹¹ I use the feminist breakdown of the word here to illustrate how they perceive male dominance in all aspects of academia and language.

¹² Barstow, *Witchcraze*; Daly, *M Gyn/Ecology: the Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London, 1979); Dixon, *L Perilous Chastity* (Huaca, 1995); Ehrenreich and *English Witches, Midwives and Healers*; Hester, *Lewd Women*; Purkiss, *The Witch*; Wiesner, *Women and Gender*; Willis, *Malevolent Nurture* are some of the recent, and less recent, major works which have been produced from a feminist perspective.

¹³ Hester, *Lewd Women*, 200.

Achterberg¹⁴ suggests that monotheistic Christianity emphasised the maleness of God and the son at the expense of women's position. Mary Daly, with her interpretation of pain and passion, dwells on the suffering which was both the result, and the objective, of the patriarchal system during the continuum from the early-modern period to the present day.

Some were so concerned with proving their points that they moulded the evidence to fit their narrative, rather than the other way round. For example, an inaccurate, rather than a completely erroneous, point from one secondary source is quoted by others without proper understanding of the language or sources used. Both Barstow and Wiesner quote the example from Christina Larner's *Witchcraft and Religion: the Politics of Popular Belief*¹⁵ of Margaret Lister, from Fife, who was accused in 1662 of being a 'witch, a charmer and a libber'. Both repeat Larner's point that the last term 'carries the same connotation and negative assessment of *liberated* (my italics) women as it does today'.¹⁶ This is a prime example of history being written backwards, imposing twentieth-century ideology and interpretation on seventeenth-century evidence. We are really unable to judge fully what Margaret Lister's contemporaries thought about her without considering firstly what she was accused of, and secondly what was really meant by the language used. In this case lib, libbe, libe, lebbe all derived from the Old English term lyb: a potion.¹⁷ In the seventeenth century it meant a potion, a simple or compound drug, which was used chiefly as a healing charm, but may also have meant a love potion. A libber was someone who had knowledge about these potions and their use. The term also appears not to have been gender-specific and applicable only to women, liberated or otherwise, as it was

¹⁴ Achterberg, *Woman as Healer*, 66-68.

¹⁵ Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, 85.

¹⁶ Wiesner, *Women and Gender*, 229.

¹⁷ DOST.

used in Scotland to refer to the practices of both women and men.¹⁸ This etymon may well disappoint those who have perpetuated it, but it does serve to remind the historian of the care that is required when examining primary sources.

Recent works have aimed at a less polemical objective, but have maintained a clear focus on the gender question. Among these are Diane Purkiss's recent work *The Witch in History* which, at the same time as deconstructing earlier works, emphasises the importance of the narrative of contemporary evidence: what it can tell us about witch figures, and what it symbolised to both women and men. She despairs of feminist writers who concentrate so much on the wider pain and emotive aspect of the subject, but are silent on the specific details about what those accused said and did.¹⁹ What is revealed in these details is that it was not all women who were accused, but those women who demonstrated particular characteristics or who behaved in certain ways which were deemed unacceptable to the rest of their society.²⁰ The accused were seen as bad by others and, importantly, they may also have thought of themselves as bad.

This leads onto the difficulty that feminist writers have with the uncomfortable area of women witnesses. If, at local level, the primary instigators of accusations were others from the same community, then they clearly included other women. Janet Tailor in 1633, herself accused of witchcraft, accused Helen Keir of witchcraft and also Barbara Henderson of witching another.²¹ Isobel Smith told the Haddington presbytery in 1648

¹⁸ Certainly the *DOST* also records a term *lib*, *libbe* from the Old English *lybban*: to castrate, cut or geld, which may suit a feminist agenda. Its earliest recorded use, according to the *DOST* was 1700, which was some years after Margaret Lister's case. The *Concise Scots Dictionary* suggests that this latter definition was used from the sixteenth century.

¹⁹ Purkiss, *The Witch*, 14.

²⁰ Purkiss *The Witch*, 92; Hester, *Lewd Women*, 200; Karlsen, *C The Devil in the Shape of a Women* (New York, 1987), 144-5; Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*, 206, 217; Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, 9, 28. See also Garrett, C 'Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3:2 (1977), 461-70.

²¹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records CH2/722/5.

that she had consulted Agnes Anderson about her child's illness.²² In 1649 Agnes Hunter, at this time under suspicion of witchcraft herself, confessed that she had met the Devil in time of Pasche – Easter time – with 'Johne Dickson, Grissell Andersone, [and] Margaret Dickson'.²³ In contrast, in December 1621 witnesses who appeared against Janet Anderson included John Livingstone, John Wardan, Patrick Mungwall and John Ferguson.²⁴ No obvious pattern can be discerned from these few examples, but what is clear is that for the accusations to have been made certain events and conditions must have occurred for both women, and men, to either accuse others or confess themselves.

As far as the accusations made by men are concerned, they do not provide any surprises, but it is the female-to-female accusation which is more difficult to explain, particularly if the feminist argument of a male-organised, inspired and executed campaign is followed. James Sharpe has revealed in his examination of Yorkshire cases that a large percentage of women witnesses appeared, and were involved in searching for the devil's mark.²⁵ His sample of 20 cases from Yorkshire revealed 30 alleged witches, 27 women and 3 men, but witnesses who gave evidence included 19 men and 21 women.²⁶ Sharpe suggests that the male-oppression: female-repression equation is not adequate, and an important factor is the female:female disputes which evolved into witchcraft accusations.²⁷ But feminists have an explanation for this: that those women who accused their sisters were, in fact, marginalised themselves and so turned on

²² NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

²³ RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 191.

²⁴ RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 346-7.

²⁵ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 174. See also Sharpe, 'Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth Century England: Some Northern Evidence', 179-199. See also Gregory, 'Witchcraft, Politics and "Good Neighbourhood"', 31-66; Holmes, 'Women, Witnesses and Witches', 45-78.

²⁶ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 173 and 'Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth Century England: Some Northern Evidence'.

²⁷ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 178.

others in the fear that they might be accused next.²⁸ Although there might be some truth in their point, it is likely to be too difficult to prove unequivocally; and it somewhat implodes their argument that witchcraft accusations were the result of men's fear of the power that women had over them. This interpretation suggests that some women were weak and frightened, and went along with an accusation only with the encouragement and support of men. In other words they were powerless, and betrayed their sisters. But surely the belief in the potential of those men or women accused of witchcraft or charming most importantly gave them position and power in their communities. Their reputation might have been due to their separateness or unconventionality, but the belief in their power was held by communities as a whole, by both men and women.

There is some concern about these polarised, stereotyped female figures. On the one hand we have powerful, knowledgeable, and perhaps skilful, but essentially threatening females; at the other extreme there are the frightened, manipulated women, unable to stand up to either other women or men. This is too simplistic and is far from being an accurate or fair representation of early-modern, let alone twentieth-century, women. Sharpe's²⁹ suggestion that those women who accused other women were in fact demonstrating their own power and initiative has been questioned by Holmes, who argues that women witnesses were still manipulated by men who continued to maintain a monopoly of power.³⁰ The view that both the accused – as victim – and the accuser – as another form of victim – were innocent pawns manipulated by their husbands/fathers/brothers/sons must be questionable; but how can it be shown otherwise? There is no doubt that women argued with, and accused, other women of

²⁸ Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 9; Hester, *Lewd Women*, 200; Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion*, 86.

²⁹ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 182-5.

³⁰ Holmes, 'Women: witnesses and witches', 45-78.

misdemeanours without always being prompted by men. The official systems of authority were controlled by men, but that does not mean that they could not be used by women. The consequences of any accusation levelled against one woman by another would be well understood by all those involved. Kirk session and presbytery records provide snapshot impressions of local communities, and their tensions, concerns and habits, which is not available elsewhere.

The paradox of the status and visibility of women in the seventeenth century is analogous to the whole picture; the dichotomy between central and local powers and the separation between public and private spheres. Women worked with their husbands in running their households and holdings; as younger or single women they were often farm servants and occasionally, as widows or older women, kept a school, alehouse or printing press or they were involved in crafts and trades. However, in many official aspects of seventeenth-century life they were invisible. Until the crime of witchcraft entered the statutes they were not regarded as independent individuals who could appear in court, yet interestingly they kept their own family name after marriage. Only with witchcraft trials did women appear as accused and as witnesses in criminal cases. In church courts however women appeared frequently as perpetrators and victims of moral and social indiscretions. Women were also actively involved in the covenanting movement and some were martyred for the cause. For most women their private sphere of work continued without public interference, but some were thrust into the public arena as a result of ecclesiastical and secular control. The women that we know most about are those who left a record of their existence in the public domain, either due to their economic and legal independence or because their private lives became the focus of censure.

In the kirk records, cases of deviant male and female behaviour are found which include accusations of non-attendance at church; milking or harvesting during time of holy service; indulging in games and festivities – Penny weddings, guising and lykewakes – drinking, fornication and illegitimacy, all of which were frowned upon by the protestant church. None of these was at all unexpected, given the reputation for strictness of the Scottish Calvinist ethos, but it is not these general issues which concern us here. What is of more relevance are the cases related to witchcraft accusations which include reports of diabolic pacts, sabbat meetings, incidence of maleficium, indulging in what might be categorised as quasi-magical rituals not sanctioned by the church, and consultations and practices of charming in order to procure healing and health, as well as cases of naming someone as a witch. All of these often appeared under the blanket term of an accusation of witchcraft or charming which was levelled at women and men, by each other, and it is only with closer reading that a more accurate breakdown of the activities practised is revealed. What can be seen in the records is that it appears that there was a prevailing atmosphere of anxiety and distrust. This atmosphere was perhaps due to, or encouraged by, the strict attitude of the church and its ministers and elders, and their desire to impose control on society. Thus the general feeling of fear was then also focused onto a feeling of guilt.

However, we should not be lulled into believing that without the moralising influence of the church, communities would have lived happily side by side, without any tension or rivalry. On the contrary, life in the seventeenth century was full of political and economic, as well as religious, tension. A capitalist mentality and economic system may not have been in full swing by this time but neither was life in small

communities entirely harmonious. Mutual support and dependency may have been an important part of society's norms at this time, but the rights and responsibilities that went along with it were carefully observed and controlled. Disputes over land, crops, animals and personal survival led to jealousies and public accusations. Slandering of reputations was a common practice, and was certainly not the prerogative of men, being indulged in just as often by women. Cases of slander and counter-slander – mutual flyting as it was called – appear frequently in church records, and as expected, the terms of abuse were not very complimentary and included whore; whore-monger; thief; bitch-faced carlin; witch's gait or gyte (bastard); warla carill – warlock carle (man) – and, not surprisingly, witch.

In 1652 Marion Forrest appeared before the kirk session of Haddington because she had slandered her neighbour.

Comperit Marion Forrest bering complint upon be the sd Janet Sutton for calling of hir, odious witch. The sd Marion confessit the same and becaus of hir wronging of hir neighbours good name qlk she was not able to prove, she was shairplie rebukit and ordanit not to do the lyk herefter either to hir nor no other...³¹

This example illustrates that in the absence of any other evidence, simply calling someone a witch was not enough to convince the authorities. The burden of proof, in this case, was on Marion Forrest. In April 1650 Isabel Ayton appeared before the kirk session, having called Helen Cockburn a witch. Just over a week later Helen Cockburn was reprimanded for calling Isabel Ayton a witch, a simple case of tit-for-tat name-calling.³² Another example is that of Helen Baillie and Christiane [blank] who appeared before the Haddington kirk session in July 1652 accused of mutual flyting. Helen Baillie had been called a devil out of hell and Effie Broune was

³¹ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/2.

³² NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

reported to have said ‘...if she [Helen] had not the mark she should pay for the sighting of her ...’. Margaret Sinclair said ‘...Helen Baillie was up and doune lyk ane mad lyone caling everie bodie witch, steving³³ to bloode from above the breathe...’.³⁴ The threat to have someone searched for the devil’s mark may not have been all that unusual, particularly as searchers or prickers were used quite frequently in the Haddington presbytery area.³⁵ Reference to the devil’s mark demonstrates that elite interpretation and definition of guilt had disseminated into popular language and culture. The fact that the searching process was usually carried out under the instructions of the authorities appears not to have prevented ordinary members of the community from using it as a threat. Equally the counter-threat from Baillie illustrates another popular belief about proof of guilt which was that cutting, or scratching, a suspected witch would relieve any symptoms believed to have been caused by the suspect.³⁶ The session found them both guilty of mutual flyting, clearly recognising that the dispute was a heated public episode in a private row, involving several individuals.³⁷ What is also interesting is that the women involved understood and referred to features about witchcraft belief from both elite and popular culture in their mutual confrontation. Although the majority of cases of mutual flyting and name-calling from the Haddington presbytery area involved women, there was still a small scattering of men involved, for example a bill of complaint was given in during September 1661, from Thomas Strong:

...against Rbt Lindsay for calling him ane warla carill
and affirming that he went thrie tymes withershins
about, with some sheit about his heid and the sd Rbt

³³ Steving or stave: to aim blows at or strike with a stick to cause blood to flow (17th cent).

³⁴ Cutting above the breath, nostrils or windpipe, was a well recognised method of identifying witches.

³⁵ See chapter 12, 316, 318 for a comparison of the use of prickers in the Stirling and Haddington presbyteries.

³⁶ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 159-60 for a discussion of this practice in England.

³⁷ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

appearing denied the alledgance ...

Both parties were summoned to appear, and as Thomas Strong had two witnesses to confirm his version of what Robert Lindsay had said about him, the session decided that the case was serious enough for Robert Lindsay to be referred to the civil magistrate.³⁸ Another example, from Canongate kirk session in Edinburgh, from February 1657 involved John Cock and William Braidie. John Cock, a tailor, gave in his bill of complaint against William Braidie saying that he [William Braidie] had: '...cald his mother a witch and that he offered to break his head...'. The bill was again proved by two witnesses and Braidie was referred to the civil magistrate.³⁹ Being called a witch was a serious accusation, but clearly the authorities recognised that the word was also just as likely to be used as a term of insult, which had quite a different definition from that used in demonological terminology. It is also clear that women were quite likely to call each other witches, or whatever, as part of a private dispute which at a later point became public. These examples illustrate that women were not simply the willing, or unwilling, accomplices in a male plot to destroy female power, but were instead active participants in a society where wars of words were acceptable means of expressing emotion and resolving disagreements.

Clearly the term 'witch' did not have a simple or straightforward definition in the seventeenth century, but as a result of the need for later generations to impose meaning and constructs on the language and experience of the past, much of the alternative meaning and associated vocabulary has been removed and lost. As has been shown above, we cannot read every mention of the word witch in documents as literally meaning that that person was regarded as, or was, a practising witch. It is also important to recognise the concomitant terminology which was used.

³⁸ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/3.

³⁹ NAS, Canongate kirk session records, CH2/122/4.

Bewitching, forspoken, ill-spoken, charming and skaithing, evil eye, as well as the better known terms such as sorcery, divination and necromancy which are found in the contemporary documents. These specific terms are only revealed when we look at what was actually being said about the accused, and also by them; and that it is almost more important than simply how and what happened. Therefore, careful reading of the material, beyond superficially noting of the names and fates, reveals much more about the interaction and beliefs of those involved.

Accusations and gender

To turn to the main issue of gender, it is acknowledged that documented elite opinion singled out the female as the main culprit. The other known fact is that, despite the recognised problems of measuring the exact numbers involved, the majority of cases in Europe and North America, which received some form of official intervention indeed involved women. Even allowing for incidence of miscalculation and over-estimation of the total numbers the ratio of women:men accused stands at about 80% women to 20% men, with the occasional variation. Therefore, even from these crude statistics it can be seen that witchcraft accusations had a gender bias, but that they were not gender specific. This is not a new observation, but it is one that sits uneasily, as does the issue of women witnesses, with a radical feminist agenda. In the first place, what we should consider carefully is: of what were these individuals, male and female, being accused? And secondly, were there any differences or similarities in their accusations which might explain the differences in the figures?

Christina Lerner's figures for Scotland suggest an average of 80% women to 20% men in secular trials.⁴⁰ However, these figures varied at

⁴⁰ Lerner, *Enemies*, 91.

certain times: in years of low prosecution the male percentage was 20-28% but in peak years, that is the years of overall high prosecution, it was as low as 11-12%. A general figure has been given⁴¹ that estimates, for Europe as a whole, a ratio of 25% men to 75% women. But not only does this give no indication whatsoever of local and national variation, it gives no indication of the type of trial or accusation made. Were these accusations all about nefarious practices of black witchcraft and sorcery, or did some of the cases fall into the more complex area of white witchcraft or charming?

In most areas the male figures were lower, but there are also areas where the proportion was higher. In parts of England – Essex and Yorkshire in particular – and America, figures as high as 90% women have been suggested.⁴² In south-west Germany the proportion was 25% men to 75% women in the 1620s and in the Alps 22.5% to 77.5%.⁴³ In Geneva and Jura the majority were women,⁴⁴ and also Norway where 80% of the accused were women.⁴⁵ In Lorraine 28% of the accused were men and in Luxembourg 31%, still the minority.⁴⁶ However, figures from Iceland with 90% men; Estonia and Finland, with 60% and 50% respectively, lie at the other end of the spectrum.⁴⁷ It also has to be remembered that these figures are averaged out over several years, and are found in regions of differing religious and political environments, thus trying to impose patterns and analogies is a futile exercise.

For some writers on the subject, the higher figures have provided useful ammunition for their well-rehearsed arguments about gender bias.

⁴¹ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 260.

⁴² McFarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*; Karlsen, *Devil*, 142; Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*; Sharpe, 'Witchcraft and women in Seventeenth-century England: some northern evidence' and *Instruments of Darkness*, 108.

⁴³ Briggs, *Witches*, 261.

⁴⁴ Monter, E W *Witchcraft in France and England* Huaca, 1976, 120.

⁴⁵ Naess, H E 'Norway: the Criminological Context' in *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds), 377.

⁴⁶ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 261.

⁴⁷ Ankarloo and Henningsen (eds) *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, Estonia – 266, Finland – 321, Iceland – 386.

It is certainly also true that others who approach the argument from a different perspective, attempt to prove that even if the number of men accused was smaller, those who were accused were not treated any less favourably.⁴⁸ This latter observation may well not be true for Scotland, as men do not appear to have been searched or pricked to the same extent as women, but Briggs's general point is far from simplistic and merits some further consideration. He suggests that men might have been more capable of avoiding prosecution, and this explanation is more likely than the former one. Also, it appears that attitudes towards those regarded as cunning folk, male and female, known more typically as charmers in Scotland, although the definition is not an exact parallel, were confused and they were sometimes later seen as bad, particularly males.⁴⁹ The relevancy of this point to the Scottish material will be considered later along with the analysis of the accusations about charming which were found in the evidence.

Returning to the overall statistics for Scotland, the general picture has to be read in conjunction with an understanding of particular periods: thus for years where witch accusations were not at their highest, the percentage of men accused was 20-25% and even higher; but for the peak years of prosecutions the percentage dropped to approximately 11-12%.⁵⁰ The peak years have been identified by Larner as 1597; 1629-30; 1649 and 1661-2. Between 1600 and 1610, which included non-panic years, only 64% of the accused were women, but between 1660 and 1669, which included the panic period of 1661-2, 93% were women.⁵¹ This may imply that when there was a period of national panic, which may have been sparked off by external, catalytic events such as the signing of the National Covenant or

⁴⁸ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 261.

⁴⁹ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 261.

⁵⁰ Larner, *Enemies*, 91.

⁵¹ Quaife, *Godly Zeal*, 80.

the Cromwellian Commonwealth and the restoration of the monarchy, women appeared to have been the preferred targets for centrally inspired and controlled campaigns. If it is accepted that these episodes were deliberately executed, a point which is itself open to debate, then perhaps the suggestion that women were the main target of an orchestrated campaign by the authorities does have some credence. There is however a problem, and not just one that applies to assessing the evidence in relation to witchcraft cases. The evidence which is available is, on the whole, limited in several crucial areas. Thus some factors such as age, social status or marital status cannot be fully established. This certainly makes it difficult to assess the economic status of the accused or to establish social-economic hypotheses which might, for example, establish a link with economic or social crises which occurred during the century.

Also the theory of state-led social control of women does not account for the other years when, notwithstanding that the overall percentage was smaller, women were still the majority of those accused. When there was no peak, no obvious panic or external factor, and when there was less interference from central authorities, women were still seen as the main culprits by others in their communities. Another interpretation put forward recently is that the witch hunt in Scotland was a women hunt only indirectly but it was still a deliberate attack on women. Men were accused almost by accident because of their family associations or their participation in female associated healing practices.⁵² In other words peak years may be anomalies from which we attempt to analyse ordinary society's general beliefs and attitudes towards witchcraft. However, they confuse the broad picture by their very uniqueness. A fairer impression may be gained from examining the interim years as well; indeed the form and content of accusations found in these years may be

⁵² Goodare, 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland', 288-308.

more typical and demonstrate the accuracy of these views.

Local studies: Stirling and Haddington

According to Larner's sources, there were approximately 238 cases of witchcraft, mentioned in several official sources for the Haddington area, including the burgh itself and peripheral parishes.⁵³ For the presbyterial district of Stirling, again including peripheral parishes, the figure was in excess of 70.⁵⁴ However given that Larner did not include church records these figures are not an accurate assessment. Not only were some cases of accused witches missed, cases of charming were also omitted. Since Larner's figures were also duplications as well as estimations an attempt has been made to calculate a more exact figure. A total of 431 cases of witches and charmers have been identified in the Haddington and Stirling presbyteries: 345 from Haddington and 82 from Stirling. The Haddington cases start as early as 1601 and continue to 1679. The case of Elizabeth Crauford of Samuelston was referred to the Parliament in May 1601 and Elizabeth Chousley's case was heard by the circuit court as late as 1679. The earliest case from the Stirling district was 1611, when the case of Issobell Mckie was heard by the Privy Council. Elizabeth Heswith's case at the High Court of Justiciary case in 1683 was the latest from Stirling. At this stage it would be hard to come to any worthwhile conclusions from these observations, therefore further analysis is required.

These crude numbers give no indication of gender differences, but further breakdown confirms that women were the majority of those

⁵³ Larner *et al*, *Source Book*, *passim*.

⁵⁴ The figures are sometimes estimates, as some of the references in the sources do not list every case individually and refer only to numbers of people or, even less accurately, 'several persons'. As a result some of the later analysis may appear not to equate. This is because those cases where there is no specific reference to gender have been ignored from the closer analysis. It will also be revealed later that some of the individuals are mentioned more than once, thus the final figures are somewhat different from Larner's. But for this stage a straightforward breakdown of Larner's cases has been made.

accused. However there are noticeable variations within the two areas. Using Larner's numbers 84% of those accused in the two areas were women and 15% men. Using the recalculated figures the percentages show 79% women accused compared to 21% men. Broadly speaking these figures confirm general observations, but is it possible to explain their significance? Clearly the 5% difference indicates that local variation was a relatively significant factor, although the fundamental attitude towards women and witchcraft was similar. However, apart from crude totals these figures say nothing about what happened and who was involved. Part of this problem lies with Larner's list itself. In the *Source Book* every case that it is mentioned anywhere is listed and treated as unique for the purposes of her survey. It is clear that in some cases it was, or likely to have been, the same person or persons who were mentioned in various sources, as their prosecution progressed through different courts. For example, Margaret Dumpherston; Elspit Blak, Margaret Duchal, Jonet Blak, Bessie Paton, Margaret Tailzeor; Katharine Penny or Rany and Kathren Blak, all from Alloa, are mentioned as having appeared at the High Court in 1658, but they are all listed again under the general category of 'other cases'. An Elspeth Black and Katharine Black, from Alloa, also appeared at the high Court in 1659, but again are listed as different cases. Although there are difficulties with inconsistent spelling of names and a lack of further independent corroborative evidence, making it unwise to state categorically that these are the same people, taking them as being quite different cases somewhat skews the totals.

Larner's list also gives no indication or details of what the individuals were accused of, and who accused them. Also, the whole area of ecclesiastical courts and their influence over moral discipline, which is one of the cornerstones of Larner's, and others', argument, is also rather

glaringly absent as a source of evidence from the *Source Book*. Thus, in order to achieve a more accurate assessment and analysis of the material and statistics, a closer look at the available trial accounts and church enquiries has been undertaken. There are two provisos to be observed with this: firstly, that for many cases the trials accounts have not survived, and so to some extent the cases are necessarily only a selection. Secondly, although it has been acknowledged that the church played a crucial role in the prosecution process, it does not necessarily imply that all cases discussed by church committees progressed to civil trial, or that the opposite is true. There is also much variation in the amount and type of details found in the various accounts. Some of the evidence is no more than a note of the accusation, both in church and civil records, whereas others include detailed information about the accusations and who made the complaints. In the civil records the legal accusations tend to reflect more elite concerns and interpretations concerning diabolic pact and renunciation of Christian baptism, although the actual accusations made by the witnesses reflect the anxieties of those individuals involved, in particular accusations of maleficium. The official depositions often used the standard formula of witchcraft and sorcery, with very occasional reference to sooth-saying, divination and charming. On the other hand, the church records include more of the latter categories, in particular charming – essentially using rituals for some beneficial purpose – was discussed at greater length in order to distinguish precisely its exact boundaries and whether cases should be referred to other, that is the civil, authorities. Certainly demonic witchcraft was an issue which concerned the church but it was not the only misdemeanour. It is these cases which illustrate that witchcraft was not the straightforward crime it has been previously perceived to have been, nor was the outcome always a

predetermined guilty verdict.

The fullest records have been examined and the figures broken down in a variety of ways in order to establish a more exact local profile. For the two areas the criminal cases found in the Justiciary Court, Circuit Court, Privy Council and Parliament, and the ecclesiastical cases found in kirk and presbytery records, where available, have been analysed by content. This includes accusations of witchcraft, sorcery and charming either individually or grouped together, or indeed unspecified. The gender of those who were accused was noted. Cases of slander and mutual flyting were considered as the terms of abuse often included some form of reference to witch or associated terms although, as has been discussed already, since these cases were often mutual arguments which did not develop into formalised accusations they were not analysed statistically. The details of the witchcraft or charming accusations were then broken down into whether they involved curing or causing illness (malefice), either animal or human, and what form the illness or cures took.⁵⁵

Information relating to those who made the accusations suffers from lack of standardised details in the records. It should be noted at this point that for the purposes of this study those groups of men who appealed to parliament or privy council for permission to hold commissions of inquiry have not been examined in great detail, apart from some occasional cases. For the most part they consisted of church ministers or elders and local men of some standing, such as landowners, town council members or officials. These men of authority in either kirk or secular terms required secular permission in the form of a commission to set up a criminal trial. Their purpose was quite clear and official: they were part of the formal legal process, for the prosecution, not the defence. Although they were involved in the accusation process, and were often

⁵⁵ These statistics will be analysed further in the chapter on magical healing procedures.

listed as witnesses to confessions, they were not usually the instigators of the complaint. There is no doubt that this group of men would appear to support the argument that male-dominated and controlled systems of authority used the crime of witchcraft to impose control over women members of society. The fact that in general women did not appear in courts and were disciplined by the male members of their families before the Reformation and subsequently their presence as witnesses was, although exceptional, allowed in these cases, is worth noting.⁵⁶ This area of elite male influence has previously been examined both by Larner and, more recently, by Goodare⁵⁷ and therefore an alternative approach to the role and personnel of the accusers has been taken here.

Of more interest are the accusers who came from the same communities and same social groups. Briggs⁵⁸ notes that in Lorraine there was a marked difference in the type and content of allegations between men and women. Women appeared to make more accusations about human illness and death. Men made more accusations relating to animal, with occasional reference to human, disease. He also commented that women's complaints appeared to have a longer history than the men's, and often referred to incidents which occurred many years previously.

Briggs's observations were based on a small study, which clearly makes it difficult to infer absolutes, but it is interesting to assess whether a similar pattern can be discerned from the two Scottish areas examined. For example, in the case of Janet Anderson from Stirling, from 27 February 1617, John Wardan confessed that he had gone to the said Janet for advice about his sister. In the same case Patrick Mungwall from Falkirk sought advice about his wife's sickness and John Ferguson, also from Falkirk,

⁵⁶ See Wasser, 'Violence and the Central Criminal Courts in Scotland, 1603-1638' for a discussion of this.

⁵⁷ Goodare, 'Women and the Witch-hunt in Scotland'.

⁵⁸ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 264.

requested help for his sick child.⁵⁹ It would appear that this case illustrates the exact antithesis to Briggs. However, here the accused was seen to have been using charming rather than causing maleficium, which may explain the difference. But it does not explain the absence of the mothers, who must surely have been involved at some stage, unless they were not present or dead, although there is no way to prove this. Another similar example is that of Steven Maltman, from Gargunnock, who appeared before the Stirling presbytery on 10 April 1628. Witnesses who appeared, and described his practices, included Adam Wilson, John Forrester and David Allan. They had all consulted the accused about human illnesses.⁶⁰ This again illustrates that there was a difference in official attitude between cases of charming, and those of maleficium but, unfortunately, tells us little about the attitude of any women involved. However, two years previously, in May 1626, Steven Maltman appeared before the Gargunnock kirk session to answer a complaint from Jane Lockart that he had told her how to restore milk to her cows by kneeling at her door during the day and 'seek her milk from all eardles and unearldes wights'.⁶¹ This again demonstrates the opposite to Briggs's theory that men more than women were concerned about animal disease. However there is no reason to suppose that women might not have required advice about their livestock as cows and dairy produce was quite likely to have been a female-dominated sphere because of its relation to the domestic and reproductive areas.

Another case from the Stirling area, where women appeared as witnesses, is that of Janet Tailzeor, of Alloa, who was accused of maleficium by both men and women during the inquiry held by the

⁵⁹ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 346-7.

⁶⁰ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁶¹ SCA, Gargunnock kirk session records, CH2/1121/1. Eardles, eardlie: earthly, Unearldes, unearldie: unearthly. Wights, wichts: supernatural spirits.

Stirling presbytery in 1633. John Sibbett's wife, Margaret Dawson and another widow from Tullibodie; as well as David Davidson, Andrew Heal, William Chalmers, John Demperston, James Thomson and William Anderson all appeared as witnesses.⁶² The men accused Janet Tailzeor of harming their children, and the women's complaints were that their husbands, or themselves, had been harmed by the accused, which again would not seem to be the expected pattern. Two theories may be applied here: one is that the men who were thought to be harmed could not appear for themselves, particularly difficult if they were dead, and so the complaint had to be made by someone else, usually the relict (widow). Another theory might be that the men appeared as accusers on behalf of their wives, or in place of their wives, but certainly with their encouragement. The women may have preferred to remain in the background, only appearing as witnesses when there were no men available. We should not read women's participation as being merely the result of men's manipulation. The appearance of women witnesses in witchcraft cases was restricted to events related to the occult or death since they – women – 'are most proper to be about a dyeing person'.⁶³

On 5 July 1677, Robert Douglas of Barloch accused four individuals of the deaths of his two sons and requested a commission for their trial.⁶⁴ The accused were John Gray, his spouse Janet McNair, Thomas Mitchells and his spouse Mary Mitchells. However, the Privy Council record notes that it was the dilation (accusation) that the accused were witches from Janet Douglas, the boys' mother, that started the process, her husband only became more involved at a later stage, on a formal level during the legal process. Here the female figure is very much present; although invisible as

⁶² SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁶³ Debate about the admission of women witnesses in the case of Alison Ker, 1674 (JC2/14) quoted in Lerner *et al*, *Source Book*, 281-2.

⁶⁴ RPC, 3rd series, vol V, 187.

a witness she is visible as the instigator of the accusation of maleficium.

At Haddington on 19 April 1643⁶⁵ the presbytery heard evidence from James Mill that he had sought the advice about his health from Margaret Diksone two years previously. However, during the previous harvest he had reprimanded her daughter for pulling wheat whereupon, it was reported, Margaret had cursed him. William Baxter and John Thomstone were witnesses to the event and later James Mill's beasts were taken with: '...such a kynd of trembling and disease and some of them was dead since she spake those words...'. This case is quite an interesting one in that it appears to combine both charming and maleficium. In this instance the male witnesses appear to confirm Briggs's theory that men complained about loss of their animals which were their property and means of living. However another witness, John Sharp, gave details of the charming ritual that the accused advised him to use, to cure his daughter. Isabell Johnstone, another witness, also gave evidence about a healing ritual for her child which Margaret Diksone had told her about. The problem is, of course, the nature of the evidence itself and how diligently the details were recorded. There is no intention to imply that this case is any more typical, only that its occurrence should remind us to listen just as carefully to the details, as to the general statistics.

Margaret Vaith, from Haddington, was accused on 17 June 1649 of causing the death of animals.⁶⁶ Francis Cokburne told the kirk session that she had caused the loss of his cow's milk. David Couper reported that he had heard that Robert Waterstone blamed Margaret Vaith for the loss of two calves. James Thomson said that Margaret Vaith had caused his cows to give blood instead of milk; further examples of male concern about loss of property and livelihood. But included among the witnesses was Elspeth

⁶⁵ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁶⁶ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

Dobbie, who also reported that her cows lost their milk and two calves died because of Margaret Vaith. She reported there had been no malice or dispute between them prior to this. This is clearly a case of maleficium and eventually Margaret confessed to meeting the devil and her case was referred to the Privy Council.⁶⁷ It also demonstrates that both men and women made accusations about animal welfare.

Other cases of diabolic pact usually included other formulaic features in the accusatory process which were more often seen in cases of women witches. In particular the frequent reference not only to the presence of the devil but to sex with the devil. Men who were accused of witchcraft and association with the devil did not confess to sexual relations with the devil. For example, in 1603 James Reid, of Musselburgh, confessed that he had learned his skill from the devil and that he had received money from him but made no mention of any sexual encounter.⁶⁸ Thus this particular aspect of demonic witchcraft accusations was gender-related. Accusations of charming contain no references to the devil or sex, but a complaint which involved the devil, sexual intercourse and renunciation of baptism usually involved sabbat meetings and incidence of maleficium as well. Another aspect of demonic witchcraft accusations was that they were rarely limited to one individual and often extended to several women and perhaps a man or two. Cases of charming, on the other hand, rarely involved more than one person. There is no evidence to suggest that sabbats conveniently involved covens of thirteen, and thus formed anti-Christian inversions of the Last Supper, but this form of accusation and confessions did tend to include references to others, whatever the number or motive. Margaret Duthill named Elspeth Clark, Bessie Paton, Margaret Tailzeor and Katherine Hainy in July 1658.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 197-8.

⁶⁸ Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 421.

⁶⁹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/6.

Margaret Duthill confessed to having practised maleficium: she caused the deaths of Bessie Vertie, Jonet Houston and John Demperston's daughter, who had called her a 'witch theiff'. Along with the other women she had dragged William Morrison to the river and almost drowned him, after he had refused Jonet Black some snuff. The inquiry then included statements from all the other women who confessed more or less the same details, and the case was referred to the civil magistrate.

This case certainly illustrates the involvement of women in accusations, but not in the manner previously illustrated. In this case, the women themselves were the accused, and so their motives in accusing others may well have been quite complicated. Perhaps they bore each other grudges which had accumulated over the years, and having been accused themselves took the opportunity to take others with them. Agnes Clarkson, from Dirleton, was accused of witchcraft in June 1649. She confessed that she knew the piper's mother, who had been burnt as a witch and who had enticed her to meet the devil at several sabbat meetings, where she renounced her baptism and took a new name. All the features of this confession are quite typical but Agnes also told the authorities that since she was to be tried then she would cause others to be tried as well. Consequently she named three other individuals, one man and two women.⁷⁰ Alternatively, these individuals may have been part of a group of acquaintances who, over the years, had indeed indulged in plotting revenge over those who had annoyed them and truly believed that the rituals they undertook could cause harm through supernatural means.

An area which provides some interesting details, which may appear to be of little relation to witchcraft and charming, is that of slander and mutual disputation. As has been noted, the fact that people accused one

⁷⁰*RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 189-90.

another in verbal disputes illustrates the behaviour and attitude of contemporary society, and gives background to the more serious accusations. It is difficult to say whether this reflects the personality or behaviour of the individuals found in the area, or whether they illustrate the behaviour of the church committees in the respective areas. According to the kirk records it would appear that there were fewer mentions of flyting or slander in the Stirling presbytery. It is, however, highly unlikely that the population of Stirling and its peripheral areas were better behaved and had fewer disagreements, or, alternatively, that those living in or around Haddington were more prone to socially unacceptable outbursts. What is perhaps more plausible is that either the church in Stirling had other concerns and did not involve itself to such an extent in these cases, or those who did have disagreements were not referred, or did not turn, to the church authorities in order to resolve their differences. The latter is perhaps the more likely, and the Haddington cases only illustrate a different attitude, in that one, or both, of the parties felt so aggrieved that they took their problem to an official authority for settlement, perhaps hoping that their behaviour would be sanctioned. The Haddington cases only disprove the anachronistic fantasy that women were quiet and neighbourly citizens, united together by the oppression of male authority in some Utopian sisterhood. The pages of historical writing may be mostly silent about women, but it would be wrong to ascribe the same degree of silence to the women themselves. They were more than capable of pointing out someone else's faults, often those of other women, and retaliating in like fashion. Women appeared to have little hesitation in so doing, despite the fact that more often than not both parties were deemed responsible. What can be taken from this difference in attitude between the two presbyteries, in relation to the general argument, is that this may

explain some of the difference in witchcraft accusations and prosecutions. The Haddington presbytery was perhaps simply more interventionist and more active in imposing moral and social discipline than the Stirling presbytery.

Female and male witches and charmers

The percentages of those from both localities who were accused of either witchcraft or charming revealed that 80% (333) were women and only 17% (73) men, with 3% (12) whose gender was not recorded in the primary documents. However, a breakdown of the numbers into either witchcraft or charming, rather than grouping the two together, shows more divergence. The figures show that for those witchcraft accusations where gender was recorded female to male percentage was 82% (303) female to 15% (55) male. (See figure 2, p 211) This statistic is entirely in line with Larner's calculations for Scotland and with other European evidence. Larner suggested that there were approximately 20-25% men accused in years of low prosecution and 11-12% in those years where there was widespread prosecution of epidemic proportions.⁷¹ Sharpe's figures for the south-east of England, although covering a longer time scale than examined here, demonstrate a female percentage of 89.7%.⁷² Other historians have confirmed similar patterns for other areas of Europe, although with some slight variation. Levack collated evidence from several works and has confirmed that, overall, female prosecution exceeded 75% in most areas of Europe but in Namur (Belgium), Essex (England) and in Hungary, figures were as high as 90% and in Russia, Estonia and Finland prosecution of women was below 51%.⁷³

The analysis of the figures related to the two presbyteries shows that

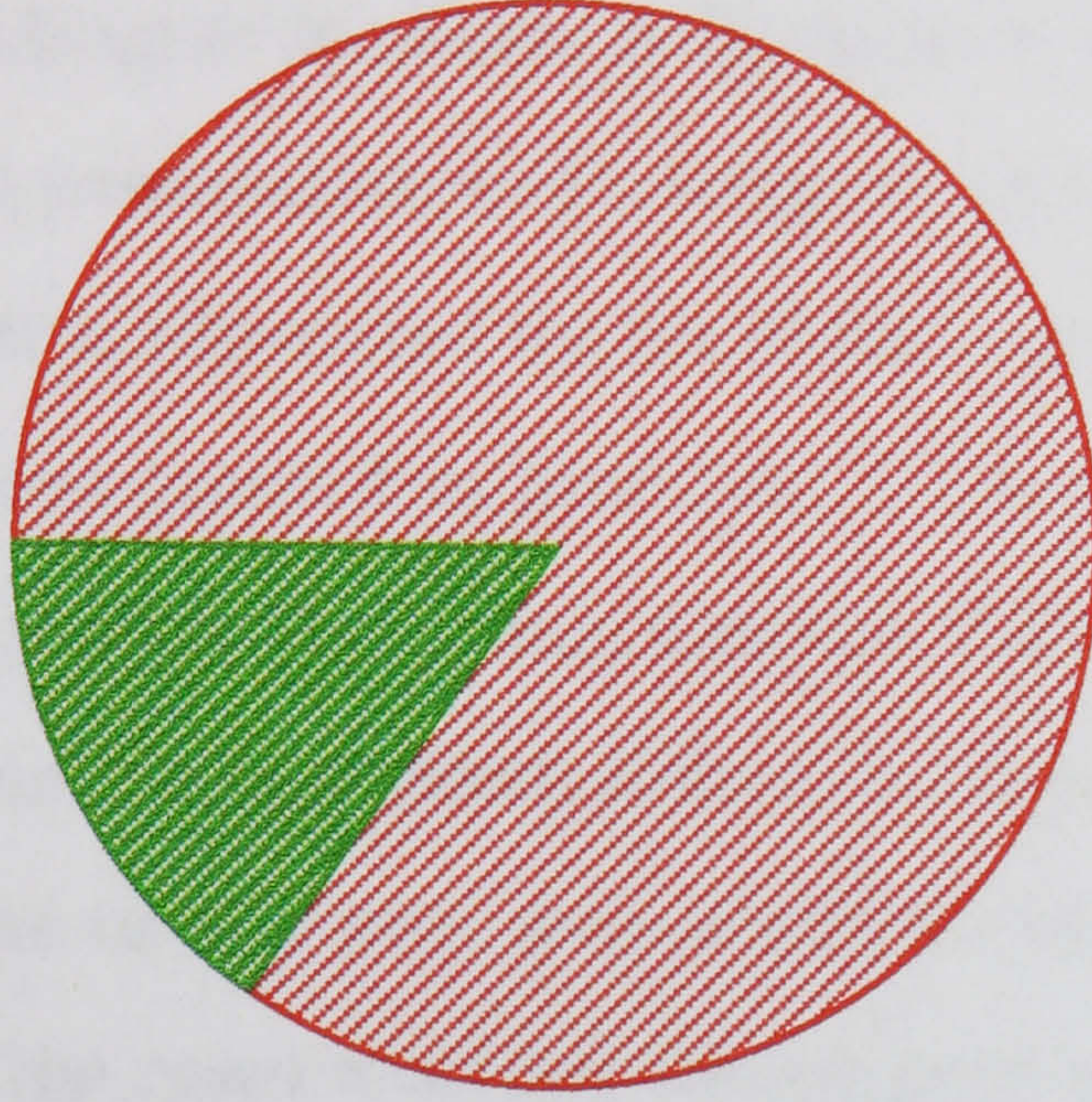
⁷¹ Larner, *Enemies*, 91.

⁷² Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 108.

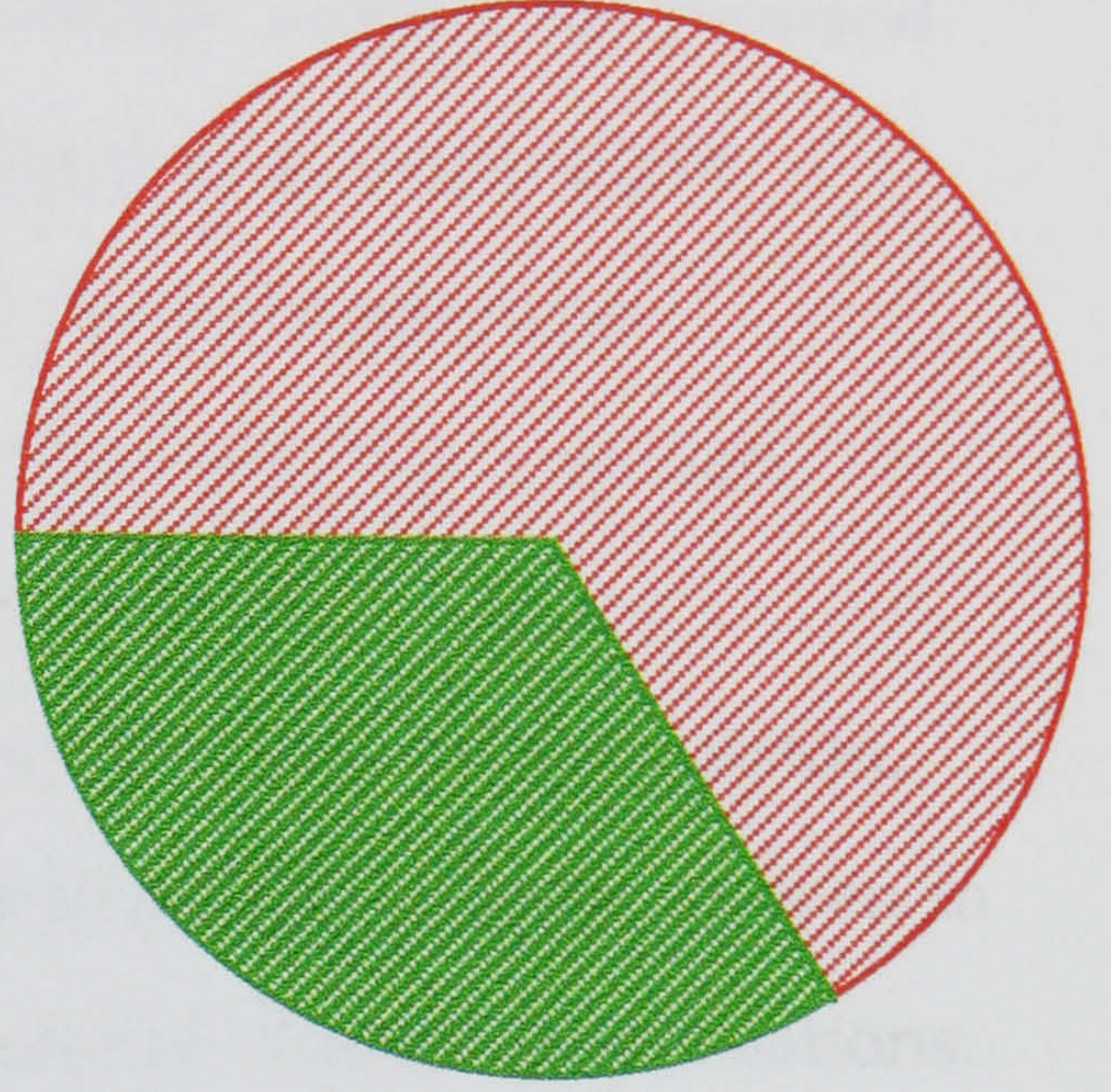
⁷³ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 132-4.

Figure 6: Pie Charts Illustrating the Gender Relationship Between Witches and Charmers

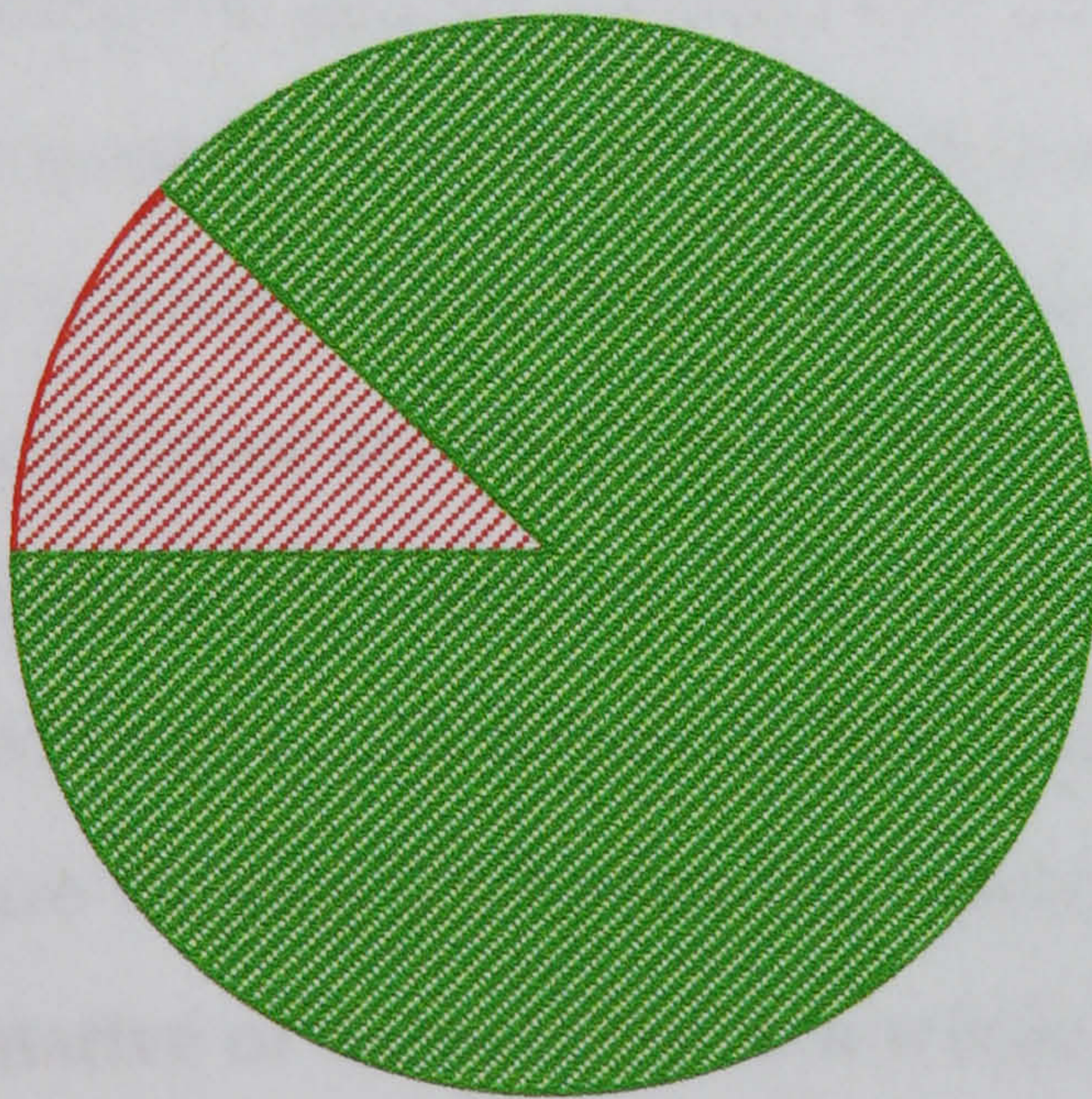
Female Witches
Male Witches



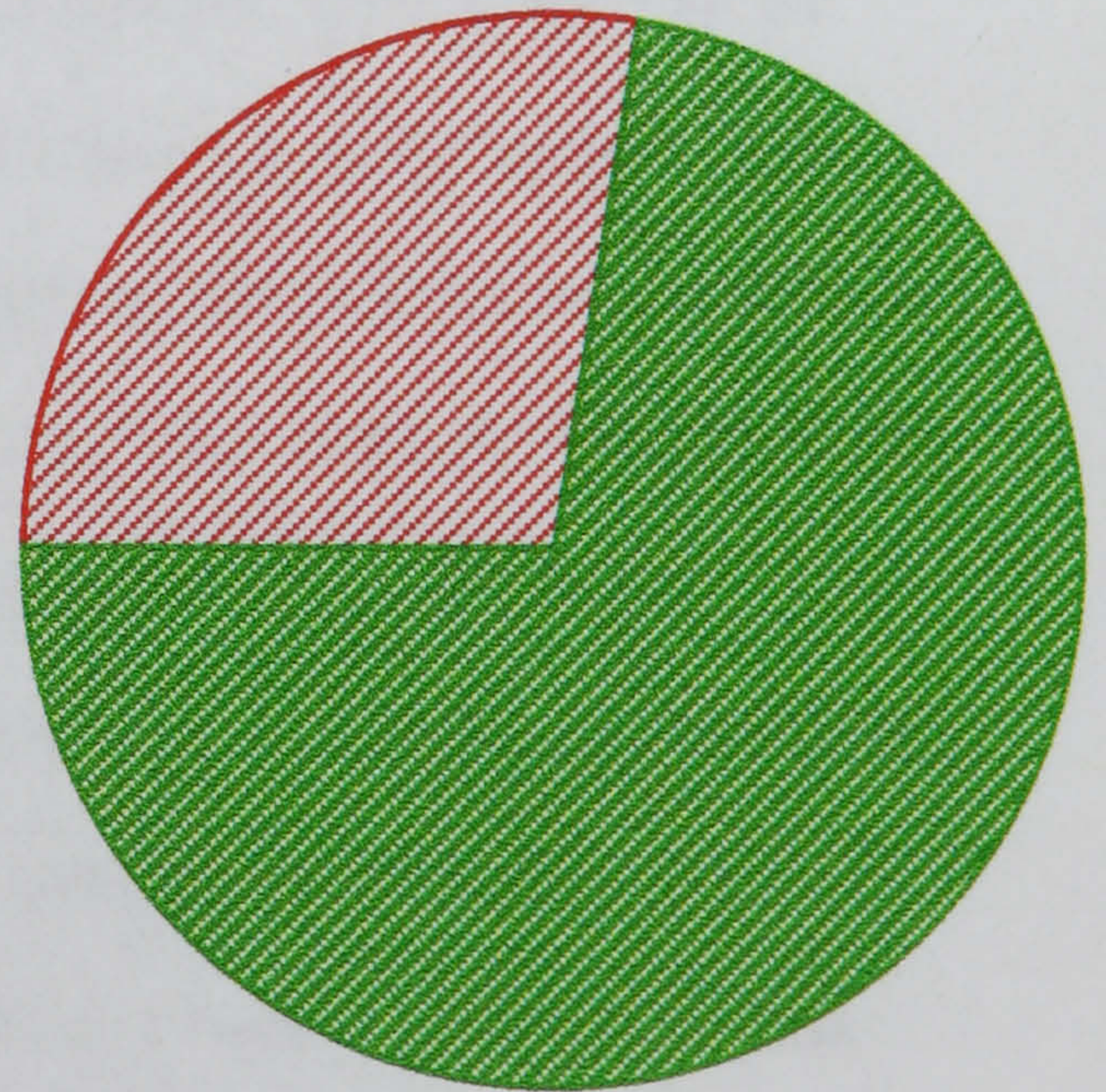
Female Charmers
Male Charmers



Female Charmers
Female Witches



Male Charmers
Male Witches



the gender figures were very similar. 85% (41) of those accused of witchcraft from the Stirling area were women and only 15% (7) men. In the Haddington presbytery the percentages were 81% (262) women and 15% (48) men, with 4% (12) unspecified. The statistics from both the Stirling and Haddington localities both confirm the national pattern for Scotland. A typical commission to investigate confessions and accusations of witchcraft is illustrated by the names listed in the parliamentary commission granted in June 1661.⁷⁴ The case of Jonnet Wast, Issobell Cathie, Issobell Thomsone, Cristine Blak, Jonnet Kemp, Susanna Bannatyne, Barbara Scott, Robert Scott and James Welsh of Samuelston, where one or two men were accused along with several women, is seen in many of the cases recorded during peak episodes of witchcraft accusations. A similar pattern can be seen in the large Stirling case of 1659 where five women and one man from the same community were accused. Kathrin Black, Elspeth Black, Barbara Erskine, James Kirk, Elizabeth Crockett and Jonet Millar were all from the parish of Alloa.⁷⁵ Yet in most other years only one or two people were named at a time.

When the same calculation was applied to those who were accused of charming the gender division was rather different. The majority of those accused of charming from both presbyteries was still female with 66% (41) women, but in this case the percentage of men who were accused was much higher at 34% (21). (See figure 6, p 211) Sixty-seven percent (18) of charmers from Haddington area were female and 33% (9) male compared to 66% (23) female to 34% (12) male from the Stirling presbytery. (See figure 12, page 297) Since the two areas examined were fairly representative of the country as a whole, it would seem likely that this ratio would be reflected nationally. As this statistic shows quite a marked

⁷⁴ *APS*, vol VII, 248.

⁷⁵ *NAS*, JC 26/26.

difference from that of witchcraft accusation, it merits some further consideration. One problem with this figure is that it breaks the long-held preconception that either all healers or charmers were women or that women healers were synonymous with witches. The former claim has already been firmly disproved by other writers such as Briggs who points out that both male and female cunning folk – otherwise charmers – were accused throughout Europe and that in some cases male healers came in for more extreme treatment.⁷⁶ From the Scottish evidence it would appear that men accused of charming were not treated more or less harshly than women, and indeed it would seem that many cases of male charmers, although not all, remained just that and did not advance to the more serious stage of accusation of malefice and witchcraft. There were of course exceptions to this, as seen in the cases of James Reid from Musselburgh and Thomas Greave from Kinross.⁷⁷ Both were accused of sorcery and of healing all kinds of sickness. Reid was accused of charming but Grieve was accused of witchcraft, and both men were found guilty and their bodies burnt at the Castlehill in Edinburgh. However, the evidence does demonstrate that knowledge of healing in the seventeenth century was not the monopoly of women. In both areas male and female charmers were consulted by and advised their neighbours, and even people from outside their own individual communities, about diseases and treatments. It also clear that charming and witchcraft were not exactly synonymous.

This figure does pose the question that if the percentage of male and female charmers was more, although not entirely, equally balanced then why was there such a big difference among those accused of witchcraft? It may have been the case that men were able to defend themselves against accusations or that the authorities looked more favourably on their

⁷⁶ Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 278, although he does not give any specific examples.

⁷⁷ Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 412-22; vol III, part II, 555-8. There appear to be no comparable examples from either Haddington or Stirling.

behaviour, given that men for the most part dominated the different authority groups. Perhaps the male-dominated official authorities needed to maintain the *status quo* of a patriarchal society and so were reluctant to prosecute other men – whatever their status. However, it should be remembered that most of those men who were accused of either charming or witchcraft were not part of the elite establishment. Those men from both localities who were accused of witchcraft or charming were ordinary members of their communities. The occupational status of the accused was rarely mentioned, unless it was exceptional, but it must be presumed that the majority were cottars or servants, but certainly members of the ordinary population. In some incidents, particularly those cases which involved multiple accusations, the men accused were part of, or connected to, a kinship network. This was the same situation for many of the women accused in these circumstances. There were some notable exceptions involving individual men where the accusations appear to have had distinct political overtones, such as Gideon Penman or Robert Erskine of Dun,⁷⁸ although again none of these cases came from either Stirling or Haddington. Another point which cannot go unnoted is that the evidence which specifically related to charmers showed that many – male or female – were treated equally by the church authorities. In other words, they were all reprimanded, fined and instructed to make public repentance, and gender made no difference to their punishment.

Another explanation is that the elite definition of witchcraft emphasised the role and position of women and that the pattern of secular prosecution of witches reflected this. The practice of charming, on the

⁷⁸ Robert Erskine of Dun was accused, with his sisters, of murdering his two nephews by witchcraft in 1613. See Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol III, part I, 260-4. Gideon Penman, sometime minister at Crichton in Midlothian, was accused of witchcraft in 1657. See record of the synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, CH2/252/3 and *RPC*, 3rd series, vol V, 494. Major Thomas Weir confessed to witchcraft in 1670, see Arnot, *H Celebrated Criminal Trials, 1536-1784* (Glasgow, 1812), 403.

other hand, would appear to have not been so gender-defined or elite-led. The accusations levelled against charmers came from social equals and did not involve commissions of inquiry. The two practices were closely related, but at the same time were perceived by society as distinct and treated accordingly. Since the percentages of female and males accused of witchcraft or charming are so different it would seem that being a charmer, male or female, was highly unlikely to have been a necessary, or absolute, precondition of an accusation of witchcraft.

This difference highlights the likelihood that cases of charming were regarded quite differently from cases of witchcraft, by the general population and the church authorities alike. In cases of witchcraft, maleficium was the outcome, but it was well recognised that the means to achieve this was through paction with the devil. The devil was the source of the knowledge and power, and the witch was in his thrall. In cases of charming, where there is no mention of the devil, the knowledge and power were held by the charmers themselves. It is also unlikely, contrary to anecdotal or generalising theories, that most individuals who were regarded as charmers were later accused of witchcraft, or that women were accused of witchcraft simply as a result of their healing or medical knowledge.⁷⁹

Of the cases found in the church records which made clear reference to charming and healing, both men and women were clearly involved. It would appear therefore that the power and knowledge to cure were not the sole prerogative of women, as has been suggested in some sources. They may well have assisted in helping more human distress than animal, but that may have been a result of the perception about what was regarded as being part of the female sphere as opposed to the male sphere.

⁷⁹Ehrenreich and English, *Witches, Midwives and Healers*. A well-argued case against the Ehrenreich and English thesis can be found in Harley, 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife Witch', 1-26.

Animals and their produce as a means to support a family were likely to have been a male preserve, as opposed to a more domestic sphere, including family illness, which was the woman's responsibility. Certainly of the charmings identified from the two areas slightly more men treated animals than women – seven men to five women. However, it is clear that there were also examples where this was not the case and animal welfare and dairy produce were very much in the female sphere. Interestingly, it should also be noted that very few of these cases were associated with childbirth except in relation to loss of milk or a baby which was reluctant to suck. This sphere of female responsibility involved different associations, language and rituals which were also the concern of the church although for separate reasons.⁸⁰

It can be seen that gender did play an important role in witchcraft and charming accusations and practice. That this would be a foregone conclusion is perhaps obvious: however, what has not been apparent from previous examinations of Scottish material are the subtle differences in behaviour and attitude. The evidence supports the theory that accusations and practice were gender-related, but were not gender-specific. It is also clear that the whole area of witchcraft practice has been simplified over the years, which has had the effect of removing some of the subtle gender differences, and perpetuating the theory that the accusations were elite-led and male-instigated. Elite demonological interpretation of the practice of witchcraft identified women as being the main protagonists; but it is also clear that the rest of society perceived certain women as having the

⁸⁰ Childbirth and the closely associated baptism customs are mentioned in the sources, but in the church records it is the baptism customs which cause the organisation more concern as clearly this is an area which the church wanted to control itself. Thus for example Helen Bull, in Dirleton, on 23 June 1647, was rebuked by the presbytery for laying pieces of bread on children's chests when they were being baptised. She protested that it was an old custom which she had always used, but the presbytery instructed the brethren to inquire diligently in their parishes about other examples of such practices. NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

potential to cause harm. However, that this power was seen by the authorities to derive from the devil was not the main concern of neighbours and communities. Woman's power in the seventeenth century may not have been of a physical form, but there was clearly an underlying strength of a spiritual and emotional sort, which was likely to be present among all women, and not only at certain times of peak prosecution. Women were powerful and could deal with each other most of the time. However, in certain conditions they resorted to the intervention of the authorities in order to resolve the problem. It may be true that a certain amount of personal interest by the male-dominated authorities in those cases may have contributed to local differences in numbers, but the belief in the practice and the power needed to be present in the communities beforehand.

But diabolic witchcraft, which usually involved sorcery, is only part of the whole practice. The examination of the practice of charming has shown that the gender argument again requires further redefining. Although the cases examined show that a larger percentage of the accused were women, the male representation in this group cannot be ignored. Healing of both animals and people, using some form of special knowledge, spiritual or supernatural, would appear to have been practised by both men and women. It would also appear, however, that male charmers were not prosecuted later for diabolic witchcraft, whereas some of the women charmers were accused of both healing and harming. The difference was that once women were accused of malefice, then it was claimed that all their power came from the devil, even their healing power. It was not the fact that the women practised charming so much, but that episodes of harm became the catalysts for accusation. Charming was merely used as further evidence of their involvement with the devil.

The difference between the figures in the two presbyteries reflects not so much the differences in the local communities, but the different attitudes by the authorities. The Haddington presbytery may have been more proactive both in witchcraft matters and social control than Stirling, but both areas still accused a larger percentage of women than men. The gender proportions were the same whether communities were encouraged and led by male-dominated ecclesiastical authorities in persecuting witches or not. Numbers may have been greater in the former case, but the perception of the general population remained the same. This does support, to some extent, the well-rehearsed argument that in certain areas the persecution of certain women was inspired by certain powerful male individuals, ecclesiastic or secular. However, since this neat explanation cannot be fitted into all aspects of witchcraft and charming belief and practice it only emphasises how inadequate national theories can be. Local autonomy and variation was important, as were the men and women of these local communities. The gender question is an important one, but instead of considering its influence from the perspective of male-dominated prosecution downwards, it can also be considered from the perspective of social equality and the men and women who were more personally involved.

Conclusion

The analysis of the two presbyteries has provided some interesting material in relation to the gender question. The figures for witchcraft prosecution confirm earlier analysis yet the statistics related to charmers reveal a surprising difference. These latter figures alter our perception that charmers, or healers, were only women and demonstrate that men had a greater level of participation in this area than had been previously

acknowledged. The analysis has also confirmed that contemporary society had different perceptions about the practice of witchcraft and charming, and the gender ratios have highlighted the distinction.

Chapter 10 – Health and Disease: Theory of Medicine and Healing

... recipe, thre sponfull of the blak spyce,
With ane grit gowpene¹ of the gowk² fart:
The lug³ of ane lyoun, the guse⁴ of ane gryce⁵ ;
ane unce of ane oster⁶ poik⁷ at the nether⁸ parte,
annoyntit with nurice⁹ dounge, for its is rycht nyce
myngit¹⁰ with mysdirt¹¹ and wuth mustart ...
[Robert Henryson, *Sum Practysis of Medecyne*] c1490

Fillet of a fenny snake, in the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog, wool of bat and tongue of dog;
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting, lizard's leg and howlet's wing;
For a charm of powerful trouble, like a hell-broth boil and bubble ...
[Second witch *Macbeth*, Act IV, scene 1]

Introduction

Medicine is one of the main themes of this research and therefore some examination of its history and rationale is necessary in order to give a broader understanding of society's attitudes towards disease and cures. It is also important to place early-modern orthodox medicine into the context of a society which still practised magical procedures in the belief that these would provide as much relief and cure as the treatments prescribed by physicians and surgeons. This chapter is a comparison of the two strands of medicine, one rational and the other magical, and will examine the principles and systems of knowledge which informed them.

¹ gowpen; gowpin: hands cupped together (late 15-20th century).

² gowk; golk: cuckoo (late 15th century-).

³ lug: ear of man or animal (late 15th century-).

⁴ ?guse: goose (late 16th century-).

⁵ gryce; gryse; grice: young, suckling pig (late 14th century-).

⁶ oster; oyster: oyster (15-17 century).

⁷ ?poik; pock; poke: bag or pouch (15/17th century).

⁸ nether: lower, under (late 14th century-); posterior (17th century).

⁹ nurice; nourice; nuris: child's nurse, wet nurse, or foster mother (late 14-20th century); to nourish (15-20th century).

¹⁰ myngit; ming; meng: mix, blend (late 14-19th century).

¹¹ mys[dirt]; mice: mouse [dirt], (15th century-).

Orthodox and magical medicine

The ingredients listed by Henryson in *Some Practysis of Medecyne* might well appear to be a strange, and rather unpleasant, concoction of animal and vegetable materials but then they might be dismissed as being the result of either mere poetic exaggeration or the ignorance of fifteenth-century pharmacy, rather than taken as a realistic account of actual practice. On the other hand, the recipe recited by the witch in *Macbeth* will only serve to confirm ideas about what witches did, and used, when concocting their spells. Shakespeare's imagery only confirms our deeply-held belief that the practices of physicians and witches were worlds apart. One was entirely justified, laudable, rational and beneficial, while the other relied on superstition and fear and its outcome was certainly mostly malicious. These explanations may well have a grain of truth in them but are not the full picture. They do not explain the documentary evidence which reveals that physicians and other medical practitioners¹² were still recommending the use of similarly extensive, and occasionally extremely unappealing, ingredients in pharmacological prescriptions some two hundred years later in the seventeenth century.

Medicine and magic

There is a reasonable amount of documentary evidence available relating to medical care, which can give a fairly well-balanced picture of seventeenth-century theory and practice. Due to its covert nature, however, accurate recorded details about magical practices are, not

¹² For this particular discourse it shall be taken that by the seventeenth century the 'medical profession' in Scotland had evolved into a tripartite system of physician, surgeon/barber-surgeon and apothecary and thus will be referred to as such. However there were others who may have taken some medical subjects as part of their university studies, in particular university-trained ministers. These individuals often offered some limited medical advice as part of their parochial duties. For a fuller examination of the practice and profession of medicine at this time see Dingwall, *Physicians*; Hamilton, *The Healers*. Thus where the discussion refers to all of these practitioners as a group, without distinction, the term 'orthodox medical practitioner' will be used.

surprisingly, somewhat patchy and incomplete. Theories and details recorded in elite demonological texts should not really be regarded as being of any greater independent value than Shakespeare. Other particulars are likely to have described only some of the overt practices of such individuals and so again reveal only a limited impression of any system of knowledge and belief. However, these sources of evidence do provide a range of material which to date has been somewhat overlooked.

These descriptions of advice about healing and charming have been examined with reference to the treatments used by orthodox practitioners. Although it was unlikely that there was direct overlap between the two systems, there is enough evidence to support the hypothesis that charming did have its own epistemology, founded on experience and belief. The foundations and principles may not always have been the same as those of orthodox medicine, but given that access to the medical profession, even in the seventeenth century, was still relatively restricted and at the same time the participation of the church in healing was declining, this system of health care was, for many, the only option. In order to do this several categories of healers will be identified: the charmers, the orthodox medical practitioners and other non-professional healers. Attitudes towards disease and healing will also be outlined, particularly with reference to the language of disease and treatment. The nature of orthodox medicine will be compared to that of charming, their specific rationality and their shared objectives.

The differences between both the sources and the healing methods employed might appear so great that direct comparison of, for example, diagnosis, disease and treatment by charmers with orthodox practitioners would prove too problematic. However, this has been addressed by examining the language of disease and its treatment as well as the

treatments themselves. There will also be some assessment of the most common diseases identified by charmers, their causes and treatments, as well as an elaboration of the belief systems and epistemologies. For contemporary society, charming had a sound body of knowledge which, although little influenced by the acknowledged scientific authorities of the time, was quite acceptable to general seventeenth-century *mentalité*. It was also in some ways no less bizarre than orthodox medicine, and in many ways certainly less distressing.

The distinction between these two groups has already been touched upon. Although it might seem strange to the modern reader, the use of some unusual treatments by orthodox medical practitioners, and the beliefs and knowledge on which they were founded were entirely conventional. They were the result of the understanding and application of the principles of the ancient medical authorities, perhaps coupled with observation and experiment. On the other hand, according to many contemporary¹³ and later opinions, the code of belief behind charming was founded on mere superstition combined with observation and experiment. As there are no references to recognisable medical authorities, such as Galen or Hippocrates, included in the treatments used by charmers, empiricism by itself was regarded by many in authority as unreliable quackery both at the time and in subsequent years. Cullen, writing in the next century, recorded that:

...their practice is altogether at random, and if they do make any cures it is altog[ethe]r by chance, as they do not proceed with any determ[in]ed princ[ip]les or regular foundation...¹⁴

¹³ Although there is some evidence in the writings of Paracelsus that he acknowledged the wisdom, experience and value of lay healers, which was not popular with other physicians. See Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton* and 'Paracelsus confronts the saints', 403-21.

¹⁴ NLS, Acc 6605. Notes based on lectures given by Cullen in the 1760s. Cullen was specifically referring to 'Highland wives' in his lecture but their practice was very similar to that of seventeenth-century lowland charmers.

However, it is possible to argue that the principles of charming were indeed sound and that they were not merely conjured up on a whim. The most obvious and well regarded skill was of course the use of herbs, but this is not the main focus here.¹⁵ Of more concern to this work are the charms which involved rituals and words, as well as the occasional use of plants and animals, rather than pure herbalism. It is this category of healing practice, which will be examined in comparison to orthodox medical practice, as it is here that the evidence of the rationale behind charming exists.

The group of charmers, as distinct from witches, has been identified, and the main sources of material which have been examined and used for evidence are the judicial and ecclesiastical trial accounts. They reveal that these individuals were regarded as a separate group by both legal and ecclesiastical authorities. Two categories of charmers have been identified. The records show that they were either accused or identified specifically as charmers by their accusers or the authorities; or the accusations of witchcraft levelled against them reveal features of charming, which differed in intent from witchcraft or sorcery. Some individuals were, for a variety of reasons, clearly known for their healing skills. This reputation may have been acknowledged within local communities, but, interestingly, it would appear from the evidence that quite often these individuals were consulted by people from outwith their own local community or village settlement. For example, Janet Andirsone, from Stirling, was consulted by people from Falkirk and Airth.¹⁶ Elizabeth Kemp

¹⁵ As the use of clearly-named herbs, both native and imported, was common in orthodox medical treatment, it would seem likely that similar native ones would also have been used in charming. However although there are occasional clear identifications of plants or herbs in the evidence examined for this study, in most cases the references are quite vague about names of the plants, making this a source of limited use. Thus although the main focus of this study is the rituals associated with charming it should not be inferred that herbs were either insignificant or not used.

¹⁶RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 346.

and Jenet Fereis were both called before the Humbie kirk session about having taken the heavy sickness off a man from the parish of Crichton in the presbytery of Dalkeith.¹⁷ It is often unclear from the records how, or why, particular people developed their reputation or skill for healing or charming in the first instance, but for those cases which do give specific details, it would appear that there were two main explanations: those born with some particular feature which made them different and those who were taught the skills by some other, usually not at their own request, as an honour or a special gift of knowledge to be perpetuated.¹⁸ For example George Beir, from Haddington,¹⁹ when questioned about his skill of healing scrofula, told the presbytery that he had acquired the skill because he was a seventh son.²⁰ There are also cases in the kirk records of dumb children being sought out for information about lost goods.²¹ Thus an accident of birth, which made an individual slightly different from the rest of his or her community, was turned to some advantage by the person, their families or indeed the communities in which they lived. Perhaps perpetuating a reputation for healing skills gave these individuals a place in their community, from which they might otherwise have been excluded because of their very difference. Being born with a caul,²² red hair, after the death of their father, deafness, lack of speech, a physical deformity – all of which were relatively unusual – might have made these people outcasts or at least suspect in some way. Being regarded as special, in a positive way, was ultimately preferable.²³

Other charmers reported that they had been instructed about

¹⁷ NAS, Humbie, kirk session records, CH2/389/1. Although Crichton and Humbie are neighbouring parishes.

¹⁸ Hand, W 'The Folk Healer: Calling and Endowment' *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 26 (1971), 263-78.

¹⁹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

²⁰ See also chapter 5, 99.

²¹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6. See chapter 5, 99.

²² Caul: membrane covering the head of some infants at birth.

²³ See Hand, W 'The Folk Healer: Calling and Endowment', 263-78.

particular techniques by another named, or unnameable, sources. In 1621 Janet Anderson²⁴ confessed that she ‘...lernit the saide charmes fra a man callit Litill Dikie, servand to the auld Laird of Gleneglis....’ The aforementioned Litill Dikie was not referred to again during the inquiry, nor was he sought for questioning himself. It might be speculated that these persons were either deceased, or alternatively, they were referred to in such vague terms in order that they might be protected from questioning themselves. The original source of the healing knowledge did not always appear to have concerned the judicial or ecclesiastical inquiries, as long as it was not the devil. It is clear that the authorities regarded the devil as the source of malicious power, associated with witchcraft and sorcery, but that beneficial power, associated with charming, may have been derived from some other source. These other sources may still have made some of those in authority uncomfortable, particularly when other forms of spiritual or preternatural power were mentioned, such as, fairy folk.²⁵ However, since the majority of those cited in cases of charming appear to have been other humans, either deceased or some distance away,

²⁴ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 345-7.

²⁵ See chapter 5, 98 references to Steven Maltman. There is some debate about the reading of the term ‘fairy’. The motif is widely used in folkloric and literary discourse but the variety and meaning of these otherworldly beings is both numerous and complex. There are references to good fairy beings, such as brownies who would help out with some of the mundane daily domestic chores, in ballads, folk tales and stories associated with particular places, but equally these beings could have potential negative power, if thwarted or not rewarded. (See A Bruford and D MacDonald *Scottish Traditional Tales*, (Edinburgh, 1994) for examples.) There is also the Rumpelstiltskin figure, based on the ballad known as Elfin Knight (Child no 2), who promises to help but poses virtually unsolvable riddles for the girl to solve in return. This interaction or contest between mortal and otherworldly being, in this case elf or fairy, is also found in Thomas the Rhymer (Child No 37) ‘But Thomas ye maun hold your tongue; Whatever ye may hear or see; For if you speak word in Elfyn land; Ye’ll neer get back to your ain countrie’. Thomas does eventually return home having been granted the powers of prophecy and poetry. There is some question that the use of the term fairy referred to a demonic source or devil figure or perhaps the presence of a familiar (see Purkiss, *The Witch*, 154, 160), rather than a separate group; or alternatively that the motif was ‘hijacked’ by elite demonologists. The frequency of referrals to ‘guid neighbours’ in the Scottish trial accounts would suggest that the concept was widely recognised and was not restricted to this demonic interpretation. Thus the use of the term fairy in trial accounts can be read in several conceptual ways: it might be a linguistic term used as a metaphor or symbol recognised in both elite and popular culture, or it might represent actual belief in otherworldly powers.

the authorities do not seem to have been concerned enough to pursue them further. This suggests a significant variation, or deviation, in attitude on the part of some of those involved in the church than has been previously considered.

In contrast, it might seem that identification of orthodox medical practitioners would be that much easier because of official professional documentation. There are the matriculation records of the continental universities which offered medicine as a degree subject. These universities included Paris, Montpellier, Padua, Leiden and Reims, but although it is possible to identify Scottish students it is not always possible to locate them when, and if, they returned to Scotland, unless it was to either Edinburgh or Glasgow.²⁶ Therefore domestic professional records might seem to be a more useful alternative source. These include the records of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons in Glasgow established in 1599, and those of the Incorporation of Surgeons and Barbers in Edinburgh established even earlier, in 1505. And finally, although somewhat towards the end of the period examined here, the records of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, established in 1681. However, as with much historical study, the theory is somewhat different from the practice, and the wealth of information found in these records is nullified by the fact that neither Stirling nor Haddington was within the geographical jurisdiction of these organisations.²⁷ Despite the very laudable objectives of standardised training, organisation and practice, these bodies had little control over practitioners who fell outwith their geographical boundaries, thus there is little hard evidence about the numbers or qualifications of practitioners who might have been located in either of the reasonably

²⁶ Dingwall, *Physicians*, 107; Hamilton, *Healers*, 54 for further discussion of Scottish students studying abroad.

²⁷ Haddington surgeons were, technically, under the jurisdiction of Edinburgh, but this was not enforced until the eighteenth century. I am grateful to Dr Dingwall for this clarification.

well-populated burghs of Haddington or Stirling or their surrounding rural areas.

Despite the lack of documentary evidence about specific locations, certain details may be presumed, given known facts about the training and practice of surgeons and physicians of this period. Surgeons and barber-surgeons – although the latter group were eventually excluded by the surgeons – for the most part treated wounds, fractures, applied dressings and carried out blood-letting procedures – venesection. Apothecaries – who were found in even smaller numbers than either of the other groups – made up and dispensed the physicians' prescriptions, although it is likely that they consulted occasionally as well, particularly in smaller towns. Both these groups were trained by an apprenticeship system, and were part of the order of crafts found in burghs, although they had no separate organisations. Thus we can presume that both Haddington and Stirling most likely had a small number of these practitioners – or at least surgeons or barber-surgeons – within the burgh area. Certainly Haddington had a surgeon, Francis Lyall, in 1611²⁸ and an apothecary, Robert Millar, in 1670.²⁹ In Stirling, in 1609, the burgh records show that Alexander Sklaitter was suspended from carrying out surgery until the bailies and council had tested 'his knowledge and sufficiencie'. It is clear that the town council was aware that certain standards of practice were important, but testing by the ordinary bailies and council, rather than other surgeons, suggests that it was likely that the number of surgeons in the burgh was quite small.³⁰ Malcolme Forester, also in Stirling, was paid 10 merks for cutting William Muirheid's son's stone in 1620, and in 1646 Johne Buchannan was given the liberty and freedom of 'a nychtbour and

²⁸ Wallace-Jones, J 'A Haddington Surgeon's Account', *Scottish Historical Review*, 2 (1905), 102.

²⁹ Gray, W *A Short History of Haddington* (Edinburgh, 1944), 124.

³⁰ *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, 1519-1666*, 122.

burghes'.³¹ However, access to these individuals would still have been restricted to those who could both travel into the burgh itself, and could afford the cost of treatment. Some servants and workers in rural estates would have had access to orthodox practices paid for by the gentry, for example the earl of Tweeddale paid for treatment for several members of his staff by George Stirling, surgeon and Patrick Hepburne, apothecary.³² But the majority of the rest of the population was extremely limited in their choice. As many of the charming and witchcraft cases found in the records refer to population settlements outwith the burghs themselves, it might be fair to assume that in outlying, smaller villages it was unlikely that there was a surgeon or apothecary available for consultation – or if there was, it was quite likely that he may not have been fully qualified.

Given the rigidly stratified ranking of orthodox medical practitioners, which was present even in the seventeenth century, for most of the rural population there was even less chance of access to university-trained physicians, who regarded themselves as superior to the apprentice-crafts of surgery and apothecary. It has been pointed out that the number of physicians in Scotland during this century was relatively small, and that they were concentrated in areas where there was wealth or social status.³³ Physicians preferred principle over practice, and their recommendations for treatments were based on the descriptions of symptoms by the patients and their families. Restoration of humoral balance through purges and tonics was the principle behind treatment, and was achieved by treating each symptom individually. Disease aetiology based on groups of symptoms (as we would understand) would not develop until later in the next century. The standard consultation practice of physicians was often carried out by letter; personal visits were

³¹ *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, 1519-1666*, 154, 188.

³² Cited in Dingwall, *Physicians*, 162, 177.

³³ Dingwall, *Physicians*, 103; Hamilton, *Healers*, 67.

unnecessary and rare. The patient's symptoms would be described and the physician would recommend accordingly. When a member of the nobility removed himself and his family from residence in Edinburgh, or other larger town, and returned to the family seat elsewhere in the country, consultations with physicians in Edinburgh, or even as far distant as London, could be continued without interruption. This can be seen in the correspondence between Dr Edmund King³⁴ and Sir David Hay concerning the illness of the countess of Tweeddale in 1686.³⁵ He offered:

... such medicines as may have pouor (by God's blessing) to restore ane vigour & mixture to the blood ... and the animal spirits (so called) more plentifully prepared, for influvuting [?] the relax'd or obstruct'd nerves ...

Another similar example is found in a correspondence between George Hepburn and Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun.³⁶ Hepburn was consulted about the illness of John, Fletcher's son, and he advised giving the child rhubarb oil, anointing his backbone and joints, application of leeches or scarification³⁷ of his ears for the letting of two or three ounces of blood, finally his ears were then to be blocked with cotton. Unfortunately we do not know if all this was carried out as recommended, or whether it improved the condition of the boy.

The official records of the Edinburgh and Glasgow based organisations are of only limited use because, as has been pointed out, the particular areas studied here were outwith their direct jurisdiction. However, the letters and other documents found in private papers, although they cannot be used for exact, geographical comparison, can be used to give illustrations of type and content of treatments recommended

³⁴ Later Sir Edmund King, physician London in 1680s and King's physician in 1687.

³⁵ NLS, Tweeddale papers, MS 7010, f 161. See also MS 7108, f 100-107 which includes further correspondence between the earl of Tweeddale and Edmund King

³⁶ NLS, Saltoun papers, MS 17851, f 13.

³⁷ Scarify: to make a number of scratches or cuts, to lacerate.

by orthodox medical practitioners. This source has provided useful evidence about treatments, particularly physicians' prescriptions, which has been compared to the type and content of charmers' advice.

Medical care was by no means the monopoly of the professionals, as the practice of charmers illustrates, but there was yet a third group of non-professionals who offered advice and treatment. This marginal group, or source, of medical advice and opinion, was a rather disparate mix. The term lay – or quasi – professional healers has been used to identify this group but also to distinguish them from the other orthodox professionals. Despite their relative rarity these individuals still provided a valuable service and therefore merit some discussion. In some cases it was still their 'professional' position and knowledge which gave them their perceived knowledge and authority. Often the local minister could be consulted, and give advice, about health problems. It might be argued that the church was continuing its role in healing, which to some extent was seen as having diminished well before the Reformation. Although the reformed ministry distinguished between spiritual and physical healing, mostly leaving physical illness in the hands of physicians, many ministers, since they may often have been the only literate individuals in their parishes,³⁸ did attend medical lectures during their time at university and extended their practical knowledge about illness and treatments. Many had also, in common with other non-medical professionals, learnt through personal experience and the sharing of details about prescriptions which went on throughout this period. Ministers' journals often contain interesting evidence about their knowledge and practice of medicine. The journal of Reverend John Landess of Robroyston, near Glasgow, is a good illustration of this.³⁹ His journal, which is by no means unique, contains

³⁸ Dingwall *Physicians*, 32; Hamilton *Healers*, 99.

³⁹ NLS, MS 548. See also Ferguson, J 'Seventeenth Century Receipts' *Scottish History Review* (1916), 13, 219-28.

many recommended treatments and prescriptions for a variety of illnesses, including gout, headaches, toothache, quinsy and disturbances of vision.

Other sources of lay medical assistance included blacksmiths, gardeners, itinerant mountebanks and local gentry. Again, what makes some of these similar in many ways to charmers was both their relative rarity and their special knowledge and expertise gained through experience and observation. Blacksmiths,⁴⁰ who had working knowledge of fire and metals, had very specialised skills and were relatively small in number. Equally gardeners were trained and experienced in the use and lore of plants and vegetables, but on occasion appear to have extended their practice to include surgery and prescribing medicines. The case of James Dowgall, gardener, was heard by the faculty of physicians and surgeons in Glasgow on 28 January 1657.⁴¹ James was ordered to ‘...abstain in all tyme heirafter from using & excerising any pairt of the airt of chirurgaiurie or prescribing of any medicamentis of physick...’. In another case on 14 April 1673 Alexander Wilson, another gardener, was accused of similar practices and fined £40(Scots).⁴² Since they had access to, and knowledge of, horticulture it might be fair to assume that gardeners in other areas might also have carried out similar practices.

Itinerant mountebanks travelled the country offering spectacle,

⁴⁰ The Celtic smith-God Gobniu was associated with healing, and blacksmiths were seen as an honoured member of warrior-societies because of their work with armoury and weapons. The craft was also hereditary, which meant that blacksmiths might also fit into the group of healers who inherited healing skills. See Beith, *Healing Threads*, 99-100 for further discussion. Martin Martin also describes the cure used by a blacksmith from Kilmartin in Skye in his *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*, 228. A cure for ‘faintness of the spirits’ involved the patient lying on the anvil, face up. The blacksmith then took up his hammer, approached the patient as if he intended to strike them. With the dexterity of experience and practice the smith feints the blow, and the terror and relief which was caused in the patient was thought to cure them of their depression. However, as Martin puts it somewhat ironically, if the smith had not managed to redirect the blow at the last minute ‘he would be sure to cure the patient of all diseases’.

⁴¹ RCPS (Glasgow), *Minute Book*.

⁴² RCPS (Glasgow), *Minute Book*.

entertainment and the promise of cures for particular illnesses, although again their numbers were relatively small. During the seventeenth century they toured the country advertising their performances and products, although they required the permission of town councils to set up their stages.⁴³ The faculties and colleges of Edinburgh and Glasgow certainly expressed concerns about these individuals and often made objections to the councils, although the councils appeared to have issued licenses despite the colleges' interventions. The colleges also required the mountebanks to apply to them for license to practise. John Saar was fined by the College of Physicians in Edinburgh in 1682 for practising without a license from them although, as he is not recorded as having responded to his summons or paid the fine, it is perhaps questionable just how influential the college was.⁴⁴ Another John – John Pontius – toured extensively during 1633 and 1643 and visited both Edinburgh and Glasgow as well as Stirling.⁴⁵ It would appear that from time to time, in larger towns, these travelling medicine men were available for consultation and advice, but at a price.

The fifth group, identified rather sweepingly as the gentry, requires some further explanation. It was quite regular practice during this century for families and friends to exchange medical information and advice. Illness was a key emotional and social event, and during personal visits, or by correspondence, symptoms would be discussed and prescriptions, perceived as having been successful in similar situations, shared and disseminated. The main feature of this group was not just their wealth but their literacy. Prescriptions were written out, copied and passed among acquaintances, and so to have access to this source required a reasonable

⁴³ Thin R 'Medical Quacks of in Edinburgh in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' *Book of Old Edinburgh Club*, XXII, 132-159

⁴⁴ NLS, Acc 3439, Minute Book of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh, vol I.

⁴⁵ Hamilton, *Healers*, 73.

degree of literacy. An extract from a letter sent by Lady Gerard to her father George Digby in January 1674 makes reference to a particularly popular remedy for a stitch in the side. It also illustrates how certain sections of society were influenced by trends and habits, especially if it was seen to be supported by royalty, even if the recipe seems somewhat unpalatable to a modern reader:

That medicine, which my mother used to give for a stich in the side, is now they onely thing prescribed by the kings phisitians, and it is stoned horse daing, steeped in white wine some houris and then dranke, and I can assure you it is of such essence, for wholesomeness as my Lady Gambwell of Chester and her daughter drinks it every yeare all May long⁴⁶

Another example, which was passed around Edinburgh, was for the treatment of gout and convulsions. It included snails baked in an oven until 'they have done making a noise' which were then added to two quarts of earth worms washed in beer. These ingredients were then mixed with various herbs, flowers and chemicals including angelica, sorrel, agrimony, rosemary, cloves, turmeric, saffron and sweet canary wine.⁴⁷ Literate members of society also had access to early versions of self-help manuals which were circulated, sampled and copied out for later use. Examples of these include *A Rich Storehouse or Treasurie for the Diseased* which was '...first set forth for the benefit and comfort of the poorer sort of people that are not of Abilitie to goo to the physitians ...' and copied by Robert Ferguson in 1661.⁴⁸ This illustrates the continuing popularity of this source as this date is relatively late.⁴⁹ There is another earlier copy, dated 1595, entitled *Ane Gude Boke of Medicines* which contains parts of *The Treasure of Poor Men* by T Petyt.⁵⁰ The receipts and recommendations

⁴⁶ NAS, GD 406/1/2669.

⁴⁷ Cited in Dingwall, *Physicians*, 178.

⁴⁸ NLS, MS 5171.

⁴⁹ It would appear that as there were no reprints of *Treasure of Poor Men* after 1575-1580 handwritten manuscript versions were the only way to circulate the information.

⁵⁰ EUL, Dc.8.130

found in both these manuscripts are extensive and illustrate that for many, apart from the physicians and surgeons themselves, there was no problem with, and perhaps no concept of, professional demarcation. It is clear from the above selection that the idea that the only source of medical advice was official orthodox professionals is to some extent a product of the late twentieth century. Seventeenth-century society was extremely pragmatic and people took advice from whatever source was available to them and which was perceived to be successful. Although details and prescriptions recorded in letters usually concerned direct family members, there is evidence that the purchasing of medicines, and the exchange of advice was extended to include household staff as well. In the account book of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston there are details of the cost of a variety of medical and surgical procedures, some of which appear to be for his servants or tenants.⁵¹

Although the principles of social history methodology might have seemed to be the most relevant to this form of historical study, it is likely that cultural historical methodology is more useful. This approach may seem too abstract, but when the disparity of type and content of sources is remembered, interpretation of cultural mores from a range of material is not only relevant but is in actual fact less problematic. The history of science-related subjects, which to some extent this thesis is, has always had a tendency to be rather Whiggish in approach. In its desire to prove that the development of rationality, as part of science, has had a logical and chronological history, this interpretation has either ignored, or condemned, those aspects of the social world and *mentalité* of the past which did not fit later generations' ideas and models.

Thus it has been promulgated that because we cannot know,

⁵¹*Account Book of Sir John Foulis of Ravelston, 1671-1707*, Hallen, A W C (ed) (Scottish History Society, 16, Edinburgh, 1894), 62, 113. See also 229, note 32.

absolutely, the truth about certain recorded events, such as meetings with fairies or demons, then it must be assumed that there was a degree of mental disturbance. This questionable thesis has been deconstructed by Schoeneman as early as 1977⁵² and it does not require rehearsing here, other than to reiterate that it is impossible to understand fully the wider mental and cultural world of the seventeenth century, in particular that of health and disease, and to some extent only an impression can be gained. It also does past society a disservice to use our modern language and culture as the model with which to compare it.⁵³ This is not to deny that during the seventeenth century mental disturbances or illnesses were not recognised⁵⁴ but they were not discussed in the same manner as they are today. The problems of historical methodology in the history of health have been discussed by Goubert⁵⁵ who acknowledges that, in retrospect, his positivism led him to dismiss, as superstition, ideas that he did not fully understand. He also points out that the values of doctors and historians, both contemporary and past, prevent them from acknowledging that the systems they dismiss as quackery or superstition 'obey a system of values and representations that has its own authority'.⁵⁶ The point is also made, as

⁵² Schoeneman, 'The role of mental illness in the European witch hunts', 337-351. He is particularly critical of Zilboorg, G *History of Medical Psychology* (New York, 1941) and Alexander, F and Selesnick, S *The History of Psychiatry* (New York, 1966).

⁵³ There has also been some attempt to fit a medical model, of a physical kind, onto the witch hunting phase. An article by Andreski, 'The Syphilitic Shock', 7-26 argues that the introduction of syphilis to Europe coincides with major periods of witch hunting, either as a result of guilt about the disease and scapegoating women who were seen to carry it, or that the witch hunts were caused by the mania which resulted from tertiary syphilis. Although there might be some physiological basis for Andreski's argument, thus it might be unfair to dismiss it arbitrarily, it is clear that he has attempted to fit his medical model by dismissing absolutely all cultural or other historical theories and methods. It can only be restated that it is almost impossible to diagnose retrospectively given both the type of evidence available and also the very different meanings in the language used.

⁵⁴ Rosen, G *Madness in Society*, (London, 1968), 142-50, discusses the contemporary interpretation of mental illness.

⁵⁵ Goubert, J-P 'Twenty years on: problems of historical methodology in the history of health' in *Problems and methods in the History of Medicine*, Porter and Wear (eds).

⁵⁶ Goubert, 'Twenty years on', 44.

elsewhere,⁵⁷ that the language used by seventeenth-century society had different terms of reference, and so it is almost impossible to be unequivocal about meanings. The whole world view of belief and reason was very different and perception and belief were undergoing, and would continue to go through, a process of change related to many areas. The concept of time, which may appear to us to have been absolutely fixed and unalterable, underwent a major conceptual shift. The measure of time, which may seem insignificant to modern society, is crucial to some of the concepts related to this period, in the sense of what was real or fantasy; this world or some preternatural world; parallel time zones; shape shifting and so forth, all of which are mentioned in reference to witchcraft and magic.⁵⁸

In relation to the language of disease and diagnosis, it can be seen that not only were meaning and vocabulary very different from current usage, but also that understanding of the causes of disease was not, and had not been, universal and fixed. Diseases were not grouped by symptoms into morbid entities as they are today, but were treated symptomatically in order to reestablish humoral balance. The expulsion of the bad and reintroduction of the good was the foundation of rational medicine of the time, and may also have been the basis of charming, although achieved by different means. By the end of the seventeenth century this philosophy itself underwent a major alteration with the development, and rather limited acceptance in Scotland, of Boerhaave's eirenic approach.⁵⁹ During the seventeenth century, throughout Europe as well as Scotland, there was increasing debate about new medical philosophies which were evolving. Essentially these concerned the

⁵⁷ MacDonald, M 'Madness, suicide and the computer' in *Problems and Methods*, Porter and Wear (eds).

⁵⁸ Febvre, *Problem of Unbelief*, discusses this theory, and others, at length but see 428 in particular.

⁵⁹ Cunningham, A 'Medicine to calm the mind: Boerhaave's Medical System and why it was adopted in Edinburgh' in *The Medical Enlightenment of the Eighteenth Century*, Cunningham, A and French, R (eds) (Cambridge, 1990).

argument between mechanical or chemical causes for illness.⁶⁰ The new Paracelsian medical theories – based on chemical treatments – were not widely embraced in Scotland.⁶¹ Although iatromechanical theory met with some more acceptance, particularly by Archibald Pitcairne, although he did continue to treat humorally, for most of the practitioners in the country⁶² the emphasis was still thoroughly Hippocratic and Galenic.⁶³

As has been pointed out, the major principle of humoral treatment was restoration of balance using purges to remove and tonics to restore. As this rationale was firmly accepted by those involved, the treatments were carried out despite what may seem to a modern reader as rather uncomfortable side-effects. The combination of blood letting, as well as enemas, emetics, diuretics, expectorants, and diaphoretics was very likely to have left an already weak patient in quite a debilitated state. The subsequent stage of the treatment, the taking of restorative tonics, was certainly essential if the patient were to recover any strength. The earl of

⁶⁰ Another scientific debate which influenced many, including Boerhaave, revolved around the relationship between mind and body. Cartesian philosophy separating the mind, or soul, from the body, suited the mechanical approach to disease and treatment, but at the same time clashed with religious beliefs and the church. Cartesians argued that reason led to knowledge and faith to salvation and so were separate. This philosophy, which was seen as heretical by some, questioned the existence of spirits, as they could not be proved by reason but only accepted as part of faith. See Wright, J 'Metaphysics and physiology: mind, body and the animal economy in eighteenth-century Scotland' in *Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment*, Stewart, M (ed) (Oxford, 1990) and Fix, A 'Balthasar Bekker and the crisis of Cartesianism' *History of European Ideas*, 17:5 (1993), 575-88. These intellectual debates were, however, quite peripheral to the lives and experiences of the majority of the population.

⁶¹ There is some evidence that Paracelsus was quite sympathetic to magic and magical healing techniques, while mechanical theory opposed them absolutely. See Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton*, 57-8. Also Webster, 'Paracelsus confronts the saints', 403-421. This may explain why there appears to have been a greater reluctance on the part of Scottish physicians to cite witchcraft as the cause for illnesses or to become involved in debates about it.

⁶² It should be pointed out that while this thesis is concerned about lowland medicine and healing, the practice and belief in the Gaelic-speaking areas, despite religious, linguistic and cultural differences, had shared features. Thus the highly-regarded families of clan physicians, some of whose Gaelic manuscripts still survive, demonstrated a knowledge, understanding and use of such authorities as Aristotle, Galen and Vesalius. Their medical practice may have included some different empirical details, but the basic foundations had much in common with their lowland counterparts. See Bannerman, *The Beatons*.

⁶³ Dingwall, *Physicians*, 142.

Tweeddale was told by Sir Edmund King to take tincture of steel in the form of a syrup and powder, as a tonic, for two months, but he was also to take purging pills once a week.⁶⁴

The ingredients found in many of these prescriptions were mostly vegetable; consisting of plants, vegetables and fruit. For example a recommended treatment for the 'stony gravel' is found in a seventeenth-century manuscript containing some medical remedies.⁶⁵ The ingredients listed consist of garlic, fennel and wine. It is impossible to state categorically the physiological effects of these ingredients but there is evidence in Galen that garlic was used as a diuretic which would have encouraged micturation in order to expel the gravel. Fennel was also used as a purgative, and might have had a similar effect, while wine was likely to have been used to make the mixture more palatable. Other prescriptions included animals or animal products. A cure for toothache, found in Rev Robert Landess's journal,⁶⁶ included the rather surprising ingredient of frogs. These were to be boiled with water and vinegar, and the resultant liquid then used as a mouthwash. Other prescriptions involved the use of minerals, or mineral products, such as steel, iron, lead, antimony, mercury and sulphur. Some of the side-effects were often as serious as the original symptoms, in particular the use of mercury which caused painful mouth ulcers and excess salivation. This meant that the physician then had to prescribe something to counteract the side-effect.⁶⁷ The *Edinburgh Pharmacopoeia*, which was first produced in 1699 by the College of Physicians of Edinburgh, became the standard reference work for prescribing well into the eighteenth century, although the basis

⁶⁴ NAS, Tweeddale papers, MS 7108, f105 and 107.

⁶⁵ NAS, MS 5898. The manuscript book, by a James Blair, contains, among other personal details, biblical annotations and riddles, copies of Robert Small's medical recipes. The notebook was started in 1688 but the medical recipes date from c1691.

⁶⁶ NLS, MS 548.

⁶⁷ Dingwall, *Physicians*, 125.

of the treatments was firmly founded on seventeenth-century practice. The prescriptions listed in the *Pharmacopoeia* included numerous vegetable and mineral, as well as animal, ingredients, so Landess's treatment may not have been so very unusual after all. Although by the mid eighteenth century many of the animal ingredients had been eliminated they were still part of accepted practice during the seventeenth century.⁶⁸

The prescriptions and treatments circulated by the gentry, recommended by gardeners or included in the tonics sold by mountebanks, were based on the same principles and ingredients as those used by the orthodox practitioners. The diagnoses and treatments used by charmers and other healers were founded on quite different principles, the basis of which was that diseases were caused by transference. People and animals were bewitched either by a deliberate, or an accidental, act. Thus the rationale behind the treatment was to remove the disease and dispose of it safely, in case it was unwittingly passed onto another. Several charmers explained in detail how and why they disposed very carefully of any *zwischenstrager*⁶⁹ or intermediate objects, such as clothing and nail trimmings which had been associated with the diseased person in case the disease was picked up by others. Andrew Aiken told the Stirling presbytery on 14 January 1636 that he disposed of water which he used to wash a diseased person very carefully. On being asked why he replied: '...[tha]t ane part of [th]e witchcraft went with [th]e water and that gif any passed over it, they wald gett skaith by it ...'.⁷⁰ It is clear that transference was understood as being the cause of the disease. It would also appear that it was acknowledged that individuals could be bewitched unwittingly by coming

⁶⁸ Cowen, D 'The Edinburgh Pharmacopoeia' *Medical History*, 1(1957), 123-39.

⁶⁹ Hand, W 'Folk curing: the magical component' *Béaloideas*, 39-41(1971-73), 140-156. See also Hand *Magical Medicine*, 18-23. See chapter 8, 177, note 49.

⁷⁰ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

into contact with the object which was used to dispose of the disease. These objects were often buried under stones, water, boundary marks or left at crossroads which were outwith local community boundaries or were places which were visited infrequently. Physical and spiritual boundaries were both important. Crossroads, in particular, were places associated with danger or vulnerability to spiritual powers. Other boundaries were also possibly regarded as being preternatural in nature. The crossing of bridges where the living and the dead passed suggests the crossing of some liminal boundary into another time or place.

Recurrent motifs are found in the recommendations of charmers and can be grouped together. Hand's theory of time, place and manner⁷¹ is certainly of some use, but it is rather limited as it does not apply to the use of words. He identifies the importance of the three features of time – time of day, week, year; place – crossroads, boundaries, rivers; and manner – in relation to secrecy, silence, backwards movement. These features do appear in examples of charmer's treatments, however this classification is quite limited as there are many more extensive motifs to be found in the material. These include: spoken charms or the use of words; water, in various forms, used for washing; movement; numbers; fire; cutting hair or nails; threads or belts; meal – either raw or baked as bread or bannocks; animals and time of day; as well as a ritualised interaction between suspect and victim when a request would be made for the return of their health.⁷² It can therefore be seen that although the charmers may not have indulged in the polypharmacy of the physicians they still used a wide range of treatments which incorporated many different features. For example, Margaret Dickson, from Pencaitland, appeared before the

⁷¹ Hand, 'Folk curing', 141.

⁷² These will be analysed in more depth in chapter 11, 274-94.

Haddington presbytery on 19 April 1643.⁷³ She was accused of advising John Sharp about a cure for his daughter which consisted of:

...a peck of meal and take nothing from it and bake it and ... egges and ye shall take the meat out of them, and set the bread and the egshells [sic] before the fyre, and sett your daughter beside the fyre and then about midnight goe nyne tymes about the house, and quhn you com in againe say "Rys up also and goe where you should gang in the devills name, and give me my daughter againe" and if the bairne mend the bread and egges wad be away and if not the shells and bread wad be still ...

This case illustrates nicely the combination of several of the aforementioned motifs, such as meal, fire, numbers, time and words which are found in many other cases. In essence it can be seen from Margaret's instructions that the spirit, or bewitching, which caused the illness was to be expelled. This particular case might be an incident of changeling belief.⁷⁴ It is also clear that Margaret was covering herself by allowing for failure of the ritual.

Cartesian ideas of dualism were circulating in the seventeenth century⁷⁵ and these theories, which separated the spiritual from the physical and therefore questioned the reality of spirits in the form of angels and devils, clearly informed the acceptance of the diagnosis of natural causation. Yet at the same time divine retribution for personal or communal misbehaviour or sin was still accepted by ecclesiastical authorities. At the same time Paracelsian theory acknowledged, to a degree, the theory of magic, and there were other attempts to prove the

⁷³ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁷⁴ There are many traditional Gaelic and Scots narrative tales of changelings and how to expel them. One example is found in *Johnnie and the Cradle* where a bad fairy spirit takes the place of a newborn infant, and cries and wants fed constantly, much to the consternation of his parents. A visiting tailor advises them to take a girdle, burn horse manure on it and then to appear as if they were going to burn the baby. This would be enough to scare the changeling off and return the human baby. See Bruford and MacDonald *Scottish Traditional Tales*, 345-49.

⁷⁵ Shepherd, C 'Newtonianism in Scottish Universities in the Seventeenth Century' in *Origins and Nature of the Scottish Enlightenment*, Campbell, R (ed) (Edinburgh, 1982), 66.

rationality of magical-type cures.⁷⁶ Interestingly, there is no evidence to suggest that charmers turned to more orthodox humoral theory when their treatments failed to work. Perhaps the only occasion when the two systems might be demonstrated to have actively coincided is in the case of plague, when both systems laid the blame solidly on divine intervention. However, although individuals ascribed difficult illnesses to witchcraft, it was rarely analysed beyond that point by contemporaries, either charmers or orthodox medical practitioners. Although on the surface it would appear that the different systems had very little in common, it is possible to argue that there was indeed a degree of shared aetiology and rationale. It was clearly believed by both groups that an exogenous – external – force had an endogenous – internal – effect, which ultimately disturbed both the sufferer's body and soul. Those who diagnosed bewitching as the cause may have believed this force to be a spirit which needed to be expelled or cast out. Orthodox practitioners were also attempting to expel an unwelcome disturbance, albeit a humoral one. Thus although the practice was very different the principles did have something in common.

Undoubtedly both systems had their own internal logic and were based on accepted beliefs and practices. The modern reader can appreciate that, given the training and education of orthodox medical practitioners, there was a fundamental acceptance that those practitioners understood

⁷⁶ Rattray, Sylvester *Aditus Novus ad occultus sympathiae et antipathiae causas inveniendas*, Glasgow, 1658. Rattray, a native of Angus although little is known about where he practised, attempted to find the philosophical basis for the sympathy/antipathy system of medicine. This was not an original approach, as Sir Kenelm Digby's *A Late Discourse made in a solemn assembly of nobles and learned men at Montpellier ... touching the cure of wounds by the powder of sympathy*, London, 1658 shows. These works inspired the development of a weapon salve which worked on the principle of sympathetic power. The salve was applied to the weapon rather than the wound. There is a description of how to make this salve in John Baptista Porta *Natural Magick*. '...take of the moss growing upon a dead man his scull, which hath laid unburied, two ounces; as much of the fat of a man; half an ounce of mummy and man his blood: of linseed oyl; turpentine; and bole-armenick, an ounce; bray them all together in a mortar...'. Another doctrine which met some favour at this time was the doctrine of signatures which espoused the principle that medicines, or plants used, should resemble the symptoms being treated.

the principles of the treatments they used. What is perhaps harder for us to accept is that, for the most part, the principles of magic, witchcraft and charming were also likely to have been understood. Often an explanation was not necessary in order to understand. Even if they were not fully understood, the fact that were believed in and seen to work, would satisfy most of the population. An analogy might be that most of us understand very little about how microprocessors work, or how pictures appear on our television screen, but we see that they work and so accept them without thought, most of the time. Equally, generally, we accept that allopathic western medicine works without fully understanding how it does so, therefore we use it. All systems of belief and practice are to some extent legitimised by society's participation, and so have to be regarded as legitimate within their own context.

Language of disease

The language used in relation to disease in the seventeenth century was very different from that used today, even that used by orthodox practitioners. Although terms such as epilepsy are found, idioms such as 'the falling sickness' were used just as often. It is therefore difficult to assess whether the two refer to exactly the same condition or if there was some subtle difference. Other examples such as ague – periodic fever associated with shivering; canker – ulcerous tumour; chincough – whooping cough; cholera – bile; dropsy – collection of fluid in the body; flux – associated with dysentery-type diseases; gravel – kidney stones; green sickness – anaemia affecting young women; headache or migraine; jaundice – black and yellow; disease of the mother – uterine diseases; palsy – paralysis; piles and haemorrhoids; plague and pestilence; French pox –

this might be a form of venereal disease⁷⁷ and small pox are some of the conditions or symptoms listed in *A Rich Storehouse*.⁷⁸ This is by no means an exhaustive list but it gives some indication of the vocabulary used. It is clear that some of the terms or conditions listed would be understood, at least in part, by a modern reader, but there are many that seem obscure. In general, the language used appears to refer to symptoms rather than causes, except in the case of diseases of the mother, which was used to explain a multitude of symptoms suffered by women. At this time many physical and emotional symptoms were ascribed to gynaecological problems.⁷⁹ In a manuscript of medical recipes copied by John Knox of Glasgow in 1689⁸⁰ there is a description of the falling sickness which attributes the convulsive motions associated with the illness to the 'quantity and quality of the mother'. Interestingly this source describes in detail quite a number of emotional disturbances and illnesses – for example frenzy, mania, melancholy – but quite clearly attributed their causes to physiological imbalance, rather than a psychiatric model with which we would be more familiar. Both frenzy and mania were thought to be caused by inflammation of the cerebral membranes due to the overheating of the blood.⁸¹

The linguistic conventions used by those who healed by charming were neither so varied nor indeed so specific. The terms used may have referred to a specific symptom, specific diseases, a general term describing a condition or simply a general diagnosis of 'bewitching'. Thus quite a common specific, and serious, symptom, seen in women and cows, was

⁷⁷ Although this may be a venereal disease it is unclear whether it referred to syphilis as the more usual term for this was 'grandgore' or 'grangour'.

⁷⁸ NLS, MS 5171.

⁷⁹ MacDonald, *Witchcraft and Hysteria*, discusses the career of Edward Jordan who distinguished between hysteria caused by suffocation of the womb and hysteria caused by the mind.

⁸⁰ NLS, Acc 6605.

⁸¹ NLS, Acc 6605.

the loss of milk. Specific conditions or diseases included scrofula or the king's evil – tuberculosis of the lymph glands – and braxy – an intestinal disease of sheep. More general terms that were used included: the heavy sickness – which may have been associated with some abdominal swelling and may have been similar to dropsy;⁸² mawturning – nausea and sickness;⁸³ heart fevers – a non-specific condition perhaps with fever; and blasting – sudden paralysis or paralysing illness caused by witching, which according to Bessie Stevenson from Stirling she could identify because of the: ‘...gogling of their eyes and turning hither and thither to ather side...’.⁸⁴ In animal disease a sudden illness was often said to have been caused by elf-shot.⁸⁵ The animals were thought to have been injured by fairy darts. It is unclear if the fairy darts were thought to have been used by the suspected witches themselves or whether the witches requested, or commanded, the fairies to injure animals on their behalf. The most commonly-used term referred to generic or non-specific ‘bewitching’ or being ‘forespoken’. Andrew Ker told Patrick Lyle that his ox was ‘fourspokin’⁸⁶ and Bessie Stevenson also used the term in relation to one of her treatments.⁸⁷

Occasionally conditions attributed to bewitching by sufferers or their families and found in judicial trial accounts, were more descriptive of symptoms than those discussed in the cases of charmers. In 1607, Issobel Greirsoune, from Prestonpans, was accused of causing William Burnet's illness. During the sickness he:

..continewallie dwynit and pynit away, in the said

⁸² Heavy, hevvy, havy: heavy, pregnant, swollen (of river)(late 14th -19th century). Although swelling does not refer specifically to general human swelling, it is clear that the term was not used to refer only to pregnant women, as several children and males were described in the same manner.

⁸³ *SND*.

⁸⁴ *NAS, JC 26/26*. Gogling: shaking (*SND*)

⁸⁵ 27 April 1649 *Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624-1650*, vol III, 13.

⁸⁶ *NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5*.

⁸⁷ *NAS, JC 26/26*.

unknawin seikness, for the space of thre yeiris, nocht
habill to obtene ordinar cuir...⁸⁸

In 1608 Beigis Tod, from Longniddry, was accused of casting an unknown sickness, although with quite specific symptoms, onto Alexander Fairlie the younger.⁸⁹ The boy:

... vanischet away with vehement sweating and
continuall burning at the heart, quhilk seiknes
indurit with him the space of tua monethis, that
nane luikit for his lyfe...

In another example in 1649 Jean Craig, from Tranent, was accused of laying an illness on Beatrix Sandilands which caused her: '...become mad and bereft of hir naturall wit...'.⁹⁰ These cases and details are clearly different from those which involved charmers. The language used in the context of the secular court is, at one level more specific because of the legal issues surrounding the validity and acceptability of corroborating evidence, and yet is, at the same time, more colourful and emotive. However, the explanations about how the diseases were caused, and how they tried to cure them, were essentially the same as in the cases associated with charmers.

It can be seen that the two systems of treatment were not founded on the same sources of medical authority, but that at the most basic level they had very similar objectives: the expelling of something harmful and the restoration of good, or at least the return to a normal state. The Galenic principle espoused by the majority of orthodox practitioners in the seventeenth century clearly accepted that body and soul were linked eternally, and so any effect on one would affect the other. This would seem to be very similar to the foundation of the approach and treatments used by charmers and other non-orthodox healers. Both groups appear to

⁸⁸ 10 March 1607, Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 523-6.

⁸⁹ 27 May 1608, Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 542-4.

⁹⁰ *Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624-1650*, vol III, 813.

have been really quite conservative in approach and essentially practised what might be classified as pre-Cartesian ideas. The theory of separation of matter and spirit does not seem to have influenced medical practice in Scotland at this time, despite evidence that Cartesian ideas were being taught in Scottish universities from the 1650s onwards.⁹¹ Clearly the eirenic philosophy behind charming suggests a strong reliance on spiritual and temporal unity.

It is perhaps surprising that Paracelsian ideas did not meet with much approval amongst Scottish practitioners, as it has been suggested⁹² that Paracelsian medicine was the preferred medicine of the reformed Christianity of northern Europe, and Galenic medicine was more appropriate to the 'pagan influenced Romanish south'.⁹³ This generalisation would appear not to have applied to Scottish medical practitioners, despite their tradition of continental training which would suggest that they must have had some exposure to these ideas. The theory of puritan-inspired medical radicalism has been shown by Elmer⁹⁴ to be limited, and it was much more likely that most practitioners conformed to traditional practice built up over generations. It was the radical few who debated and analysed the rivalry between theoretical science and empiricism or religion. The rest attempted to carry out a service which was within their 'knowledge, outlook and ability'⁹⁵ and was accepted by their patients. The charmers undoubtedly appear to have had their own theory, which accepted the joint effects of the body and soul. They applied this theory to their healing procedures and, in general, appear to have provided an accepted and necessary service, and which reflected their

⁹¹ Shepherd, 'Newtonianism in Scottish Universities in the seventeenth century', 66.

⁹² Webster, *Great Insauration, From Paracelsus to Newton*; 'Alchemical and Paracelsian Medicine' in *Health, Medicine and Mortality in the Sixteenth Century*, Webster, C (ed), 316.

⁹³ Webster 'Alchemical and Paracelsian Medicine', 316.

⁹⁴ Elmer, 'Medicine, religion and the Puritan revolution'.

⁹⁵ Dingwall, *Physicians*, 124.

knowledge, outlook and ability. It would appear that practical medical advice in the seventeenth century was a combination of theory and empiricism.

Conclusion

Medicine and magic may not seem to have many obvious links since one was based on rational science and the other on superstition yet both had some common principles and objectives. The restoration of balance, either through humoral treatment or removal of a perceived negative power, was the goal of all healers. The epistemologies may not have been the same but all healers – charmers or orthodox, quacks or lay healers – treated on the basis of their understanding of the causes of disease. Magical medicine, as used by charmers, was accepted and used by society, not simply because it was seen to work on occasions, but because it was part of society's worldview and understanding of how things worked. The principles of charming and witchcraft may have been similar but their purpose and practice were quite different which to an extent had some features in common with orthodox medicine.

Chapter 11 – Magical Healing Procedures: Theory and Practice

Introduction

The language and treatments used by charmers have been examined closely for concepts about cause and effect of disease and treatment, as well as actual practical healing procedures, particularly in relation to what might have been regarded as magical practice. This has been done in order to construct a picture of seventeenth-century popular *mentalité* and cultural attitudes towards health and disease which were relevant to society as a whole rather than just the elite. The past is undoubtedly a 'foreign country' in both mental and emotional terms, so no attempt has been made to reconstruct the evidence using modern clinical disease or scientific concepts since these cannot apply to seventeenth-century society. Nevertheless, it should still be acknowledged that any attempt at historical analysis is bound to be informed by the culture of the present time. Some reference to late twentieth-century cultural mores may be unavoidable but this should not be intrusive nor form the principle behind the analysis.

Another problem for the historian of culture and ideas is providing a valid argument which may be based on seemingly non-quantifiable or theoretical concepts. This perspective justifies the use of a number of cases which may be of relatively small statistical consequence, but which are nevertheless culturally and theoretically significant. Those individuals – the accused charmers – whose lives, experiences and testimony are a major focus of this thesis, were neither politically nor economically important. On the contrary, they were part of the silent majority whose experiences have generally been ignored as irrelevant or insignificant, yet whose existence contributed as much to our culture – past and present – as the elite and powerful minority did.

Principles of charming treatments

As has already been illustrated, although the actual details and ingredients of the treatments recommended by the different groups of healers often differed quite markedly, the basic principles which informed them were essentially quite similar. The inference behind almost all forms of treatments can be summarised quite simply: the reestablishment of balance by the removal of negative or harmful forces and their replacement with good or beneficial ones. The analysis has therefore been based on retrievable evidence of practice by a group of identified charmers in order to confirm a pattern of treatment which was founded on this common principle.

The sources which provide the bulk of evidence are the church records, the presbytery and kirk session minute books. The records contain assorted details about accusations of charming, both from the accusers and the accused themselves. An incident of accusation or concern may be noted and those involved called to appear at a later date. Further discussions may then have taken place over several weeks, in some cases extending over some months or years, before any final resolution was reached. Steven Maltman's behaviour was discussed by Gargunnock kirk session in June 1626¹ and his case was still being argued when he appeared before the Stirling presbytery two years later in 1628.² Alternatively, some cases merited no more than a passing reference. David Diksone and Andro Mathiesone, of Yester, both made satisfactory repentance for charming in March 1629, according to the kirk session minutes, but the records contain no further details about what either of these men did, or were accused of doing, as part of their 'charming' practices.³ Although there are more

¹ SCA, Gargunnock kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

² SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

³ NAS, Yester kirk session records, CH2/357/1.

details about Agnes Anderson's appearance before the Haddington kirk session in April 1648, it was not until March 1649 that the session decided that eight days' public repentance in sackcloth was a satisfactory penalty to pay for advising Issabell Smith about how to cure her child.⁴

Clearly the meagre references to named individuals can only be used as part of a general overview about incidence of charming, rather than part of a broader analysis of actual practice and belief. The majority of the other cases do provide more detailed information and contain testimony about actual practice. It has been possible to extract particulars about symptoms, treatments, causes and prognoses from the records and analyse them further. In contrast, and perhaps rather surprisingly, information from cases of harmful witchcraft has also proved a useful source for this aspect of the analysis. These cases almost always included the demonic pact as a major feature of the accusations, but it would seem that the actual nucleus of, or catalyst for, the accusations was often related to charming. The most common cases appear to have been either failed attempts at restoring health or the identification of the accused as the source of the ill-health. These cases therefore contain some retrievable information about illness, in the form of requests for return of health, rituals and advice for the restoration of well-being as well as particulars about how the illness was caused, which are in essence very similar to the details found in the actual cases of charming.

If the assertion that society in general regarded charming as acceptable is accepted, at the same time it does not deny the possibility that those who practised the skill trod a fine line between approval and censure by other members of their communities. It is certainly quite

⁴NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

inaccurate to suggest that all of those who were accused of witchcraft were at some time also regarded as charmers or vice versa, nevertheless the two aspects were undoubtedly linked. This 'popular' strand of witchcraft accusation, which was concerned more with personal distress than demonic pact, provides evidence about society's perception of disease transference and cause as well as its understanding of the power and practice of witchcraft.

What has been touched upon only briefly thus far is the distinction made by all healers between natural and unnatural causes of illness. There is no doubt that all types of healer attempted to identify this difference. The range and variety of prescriptions and rituals used reveal evidence about this general belief in natural and unnatural causes which was widely acknowledged by all levels in society. Natural and unnatural causes were discussed and cited by theologians, jurists, demonologists, scientists, charmers and medical practitioners as being of vital importance in the understanding how illnesses were caused and how they were treated. All groups of healers made reference to this distinction at times; some to account for their lack of ability to provide assistance and others to explain their success. This again illustrates the common fundamental approach shared by all healers. The general population must have understood this distinction also, although the philosophical dilemma was perhaps less important to many individuals than the actual loss or harm suffered. In the trial of Agnes Williamson of Samuelston in 1662 for witchcraft and sorcery, her defence lawyer attempted to debate natural and unnatural causation with the prosecution.⁵ Agnes was accused of killing a horse by sorcery which, according to the prosecution, was clearly proved by both the suddenness of the disease and by what appeared to be lacerations or cuts

⁵*Proceedings of the Justiciary Court, 1662-8, vol I, 24.*

around the horse's mouth. Agnes was also reported to have uttered some strange words near the horse. The defence argued that the evidence did not prove unequivocally that the symptoms were not entirely natural. Agnes was also accused of having prevented the 'fusion of meal' which, her lawyer argued, only God had the power to control, and so might well have been a natural phenomenon. In 1597 James VI argued that:

...[witches]... can make folkes to becom phrenticque or maniacque, which likewise is very possible for their master to do, sence they are but naturall sicknesses...⁶

By 1672 George McKenzie noted in his *Pleadings in Some Remarkable Cases*, that:

...it is undeniable, that there are many diseases whereof the cures, as well as the causes, are unknown to us. Nature is very subtile in its operations, and we are very ignorant in our inquiries...⁷

It is clear that natural and unnatural causes of diseases was an area of disputation throughout the seventeenth century, which affected not only intellectual elites but also the outcome for accused witches and charmers.

The treatments recommended by named charmers found in the kirk records of Haddington and Stirling presbyteries have been identified and analysed as one group and provide a total of 62 different individuals. The sample was analysed for gender, local statistics⁸ and type and content of treatments. However this figure requires some qualification. It includes healing practices which involved more than one person, as in the case of the 11 people⁹ who went to Christ's well at Struthill in Stirling presbytery to recover their health, and also four men who left Agnes Symson tied by

⁶ *Daemonologie*, 47.

⁷ McKenzie, *Pleadings in Remarkable Cases*, 186.

⁸ These analyses are discussed in detail in the relevant chapters. See chapters 9 and 12.

⁹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4.

tethers overnight in order to recover her wits.¹⁰ Each person who was involved in these cases has been recorded separately although the ritual was the same. The total also includes two illustrations of baptismal and funereal customs which, although not strictly healing rituals, do reflect a common belief system. These rites of passage display similar motifs and sentiments to those found in charming procedures. In June 1647 Helen Bull from Dirleton was called before the Haddington presbytery and questioned about her practice of putting bread on children's chests when they were being baptised.¹¹ She replied that it was just an old custom that she was used to doing, for which practice the presbytery rebuked her and warned her that if she continued it she would be censured as a charmer. This begs the question of what was the difference and how was it perceived? The church authorities appear to have equated the rationale behind this custom with that of charming, although their concern did not result in extreme punishment. In another case Agnes Bennet was summoned before the Pencaitland kirk session in October 1651 for putting a nail on a corpse after the winding sheet, or shroud, had been applied.¹² Agnes's explanation was that she had put the nail '... betwixt the winding sheit and ye corpse qlk she said was to keep her [the dead woman] spirit from coming again...'. The use of iron to protect against both fairies and other spirits at vulnerable times was widespread and well recognised, even by elites. In a folio manuscript belonging to Francis Guthrie, bishop of Moray in the seventeenth century, there are several conjurations which describe how to call fairies, as well as how to help a bewitched person by laying a knife under them.¹³ This latter ritual was often used at childbirth

¹⁰ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/7.

¹¹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹² NAS, Pencaitland kirk session records, CH2/296/1.

¹³ NAS, GD 188/25/1/1 and 3.

to protect both the mother and the new-born baby, and its use during a burial rite, as in this case, may have been quite unusual. However, the iron nail used by Bennet may also have been a substitute or alternative for salt or earth, which was more usually put on the chest of corpses for protection against supernatural spirits. Whatever the exact reason for its use, it is yet another illustration of the hybrid system of belief by which the majority of the populace lived. It is therefore quite acceptable to include them for the present purpose.

Other cases were included in the overall total as they were mentioned in the kirk records as having been known by local communities for being charmers. They are either found in a reference within another, more detailed, case or they are mentioned simply as having been punished as charmers by the local kirk session, as seen in the cases of David Diksone and Andro Mathiesone mentioned previously.¹⁴ As there are no further details about their practices or treatments they do not provide usable material for this analysis, but their existence does require to be acknowledged. In the case of Helen Keir, who was accused and investigated for witchcraft by the Stirling presbytery in February 1631,¹⁵ another woman, Janet Menteath of Alva, was mentioned by a witness, Thomas Cousing. Janet was reported to have used charms to cure Thomas of the falling sickness which she told him had been laid on him by Helen Keir. Janet Menteith is not mentioned further in the existing records but the implication that one was a witch, and the other a charmer, indicates that there was a difference in definition and acceptability. In another example, from October 1663, Thomas Bookles was reported to have told Adam Gillies from North Berwick how to protect and cure his cows.¹⁶

¹⁴ NAS, Yester kirk session records, CH2/357/1.

¹⁵ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

¹⁶ NAS, North Berwick kirk session records, CH2/285/4.

Thomas appeared before the kirk session the following month and confirmed that he had told Adam that the ritual would help his cows, but Thomas also claimed that he had told him not to carry it out – perhaps in an attempt to protect his own reputation. There appear to have been no further investigations into Thomas’s knowledge or practice of charming.

Another example in this ‘sub-group’, and one which also involved more than one person, would appear to have been an attempted abortion which included reference to blood letting, the use of a girdle and the administration of some physick or medicine.¹⁷ This case is unusual for several reasons as the involvement of charmers with abortion and childbirth would appear to have been extremely rare. References to ‘midwives’ rather than charmers in the evidence are usually in connection with attempts by the kirk to identify the paternity of illegitimate children.¹⁸ A more typical case is that of Janet Hill who was called before the Haddington presbytery in April 1652 and questioned about the birth of Elspeth Young’s child.¹⁹ Hill, who was recorded as a midwife in the presbytery minutes, identified the father of the baby, but she does not appear among those recorded as charmers. It seems that those women who were named as midwives did not for the most part appear to have practised charming.²⁰ However, the Yester case has been included, not only because of its unusual nature, but also because of the rituals and symbolism used, which reflect features of both charming and orthodox surgical procedures. The letting of blood, regarded as the monopoly of surgeons or barber-surgeons, may have demonstrated some understanding of humoral practice at the same time as crossing a line of

¹⁷ NAS, Yester kirk session records, CH2/357/2.

¹⁸ See Mitchison and Leneman *Sin in the City, passim*; also Graham *Uses of Reform, passim*.

¹⁹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

²⁰ There are a very few references to the occupation of midwife recorded as the ‘occupation’ of some accused witches. Larner noted 12 named individuals whose occupational status was that of midwife, nurse or spey wife in her survey.

professional practice. The unidentified medicine was likely to have been herbal based, rather than any chemical-based pharmacological prescription since chemicals were not used widely in Scotland at this time, but the evidence is not unequivocal. Thirdly, the use of a girdle was more commonly associated with childbirth.²¹ Girdles wrapped around women during childbirth have a long, multicultural history and may reflect a belief in symbolic magic: moving through a circle the birthing process itself is symbolised twofold. The motifs of both the circle, and the movement of passing through, are found in other contemporary healing practices. This example therefore reflects the hybrid nature of the procedures – a mixing of the belief systems and rationales – and makes it of special interest.

As a supplementary source of evidence about the practices and beliefs of charming, examples of secular trials in the privy council and justiciary court records from the same geographical areas have been examined. In those secular cases where the evidence is more detailed, most of the accusations made by the judicial authorities emphasised the well-documented features of demonic pact and malefice. However, some of the accusations also included charming, either as part of the formal criminal charge made by the crown or contained in the charges brought

²¹ The use of a girdle or belt-like object during, or associated with aspects of, childbirth has a long history. There is some suggestion that there were Pagan or Celtic origins for the practice but the evidence is rather limited. Some rather dated antiquarian folklore studies have been done: for example Dilling, W J 'Girdles: Their origin and development particularly with regard to their use as charms in medicine, marriage and midwifery' *Caledonian Medical Journal*, 9 (1912-14), 337-57, 402-25; as the custom itself was still recorded in Scotland at the beginning of the twentieth century. See also Buchan, *Folk Tradition and Folk Medicine*. This belt or girdle motif might also be related to the belief that the untying of knots in threads or hair, or conversely the tying of knots, would ease or delay the birth. Both symbols are seen in the ballad *Willie's Lady* (Child No 6) when the pregnant wife tells her husband to go to his mother 'that vile rank witch and 'Say your ladie has a girdle, It's red gowd unto the middle; And ay at every silver hem, Hangs fifty silver bells and ten'. The woman is finally delivered of her baby and the mother-in-law complains 'Oh wha has loosed the nine witch knots, that was amo that ladie's locks? And wha has taen out the kaims of care that hangs amo that ladie's hair?'

against the accused. Charming may actually have been a main ingredient of the initial complaint, and demonic witchcraft and sorcery added later, as a necessary feature for a criminal prosecution and a more likely guilty verdict. Five of the cases found in the justiciary court records included accusations of witchcraft, sorcery and necromancy; association with the devil; association with other known witches and incidents of harming as well as healing. In 1658-9 at both the Circuit Court²² and Justiciary Court²³ Bessie Stevenson, Issobell Bennet, Issobell Keir, Magdalen Blair and Margaret Harvie of Stirling were accused of malefice, and in the cases of Issobell Bennet, Magdalen Blair and Issobell Keir, along with seven others, also demonic pact. These accusations also included some details of charming and advice about restoration of health as part of the accusation.

Other examples did not contain so much detailed information but still provided some data. Another of the above group, James Kirk,²⁴ was accused in 1658-9 although specific facts about his cases are somewhat meagre. He appears to have been accused of charming a cow using a red silk thread,²⁵ with no mention of witchcraft, sorcery or necromancy, but he was found to have the devil's mark, which was unusual for a man. As there are no further details about his charming practices Kirk, like some others, can only be included as a statistic. In order to establish as accurate as possible numerical analysis all similar, if brief, references have been included.

There was also one case from the privy council records which might be categorised as straightforward charming.²⁶ Jonet Anderson from Stirling

²² NAS, JC 10.

²³ NAS, JC 26/26/3, bundles 4, 11, 12, 22.

²⁴ NAS, JC 26/26.

²⁵ Mentioned in Goodare 'Women and the witch-hunt in Scotland', 304.

²⁶ RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 345-47.

was accused 'undir ane great sclandir of ane commone charmer' in 1617 and 1621. Although Jonet was accused of charming, witchcraft and abusing of the people – in that order – there was no specific reference to demonic pact in the inquiry. All the incidents discussed related to advice about curing illness, and it is therefore reasonable to suggest that it was the practice of charming which was the main concern of those involved. It may be of some interest to note that Janet was recorded as the servant of John Anderson, who was himself in trouble with the Holy Rude kirk session in August 1621 for committing adultery.²⁷ It is of course speculative to suggest that either the accusation against Janet was part of a wider campaign against her employer or that the accusation made about John Anderson, some four months before Janet's second appearance before the privy council, was a deliberate manipulation to increase the case against Janet. However, it is more likely that the latter option was applicable.

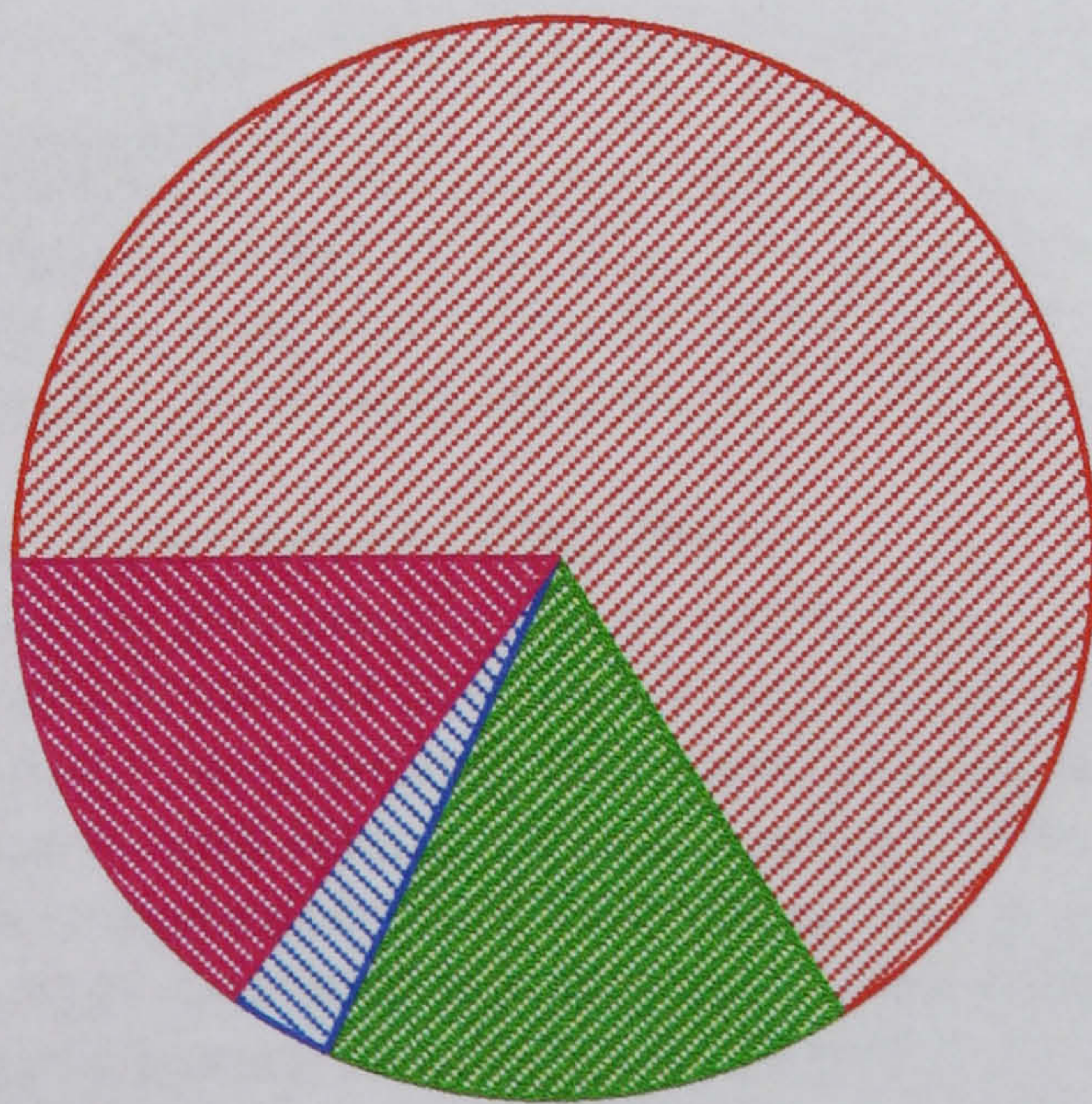
Ninety-four references to some form of charming from both presbyteries were found in both ecclesiastical and secular courts. This total includes those with no retrievable details and the two cases which appeared in both. 78% (73) of the references were to treatments for human illness and 19% (18) for animal ailments, with 3% (3) unspecified. The majority of charmers appear to have treated human ailments. 16% (10) of the cases recorded treating only animals; 3% (2) animals and humans and 66% (42) treated only humans. (In 15% (10) of cases those treated were not specified.) The majority of both men and women accused of charming treated humans – 74% (32) of women compared to 48% (10) of the men. 12% (5) of the women accused as charmers treated animals as opposed to 24% (5) of the men accused. Ten percent (2) of male charmers treated both human and animal conditions. (See figure 7, p 261)

²⁷SCA, Holy Rude kirk session records, CH2/1026/2.

Figure 7: Pie Charts Illustrating the Proportion of Charmers Healing Human and Animal Illness

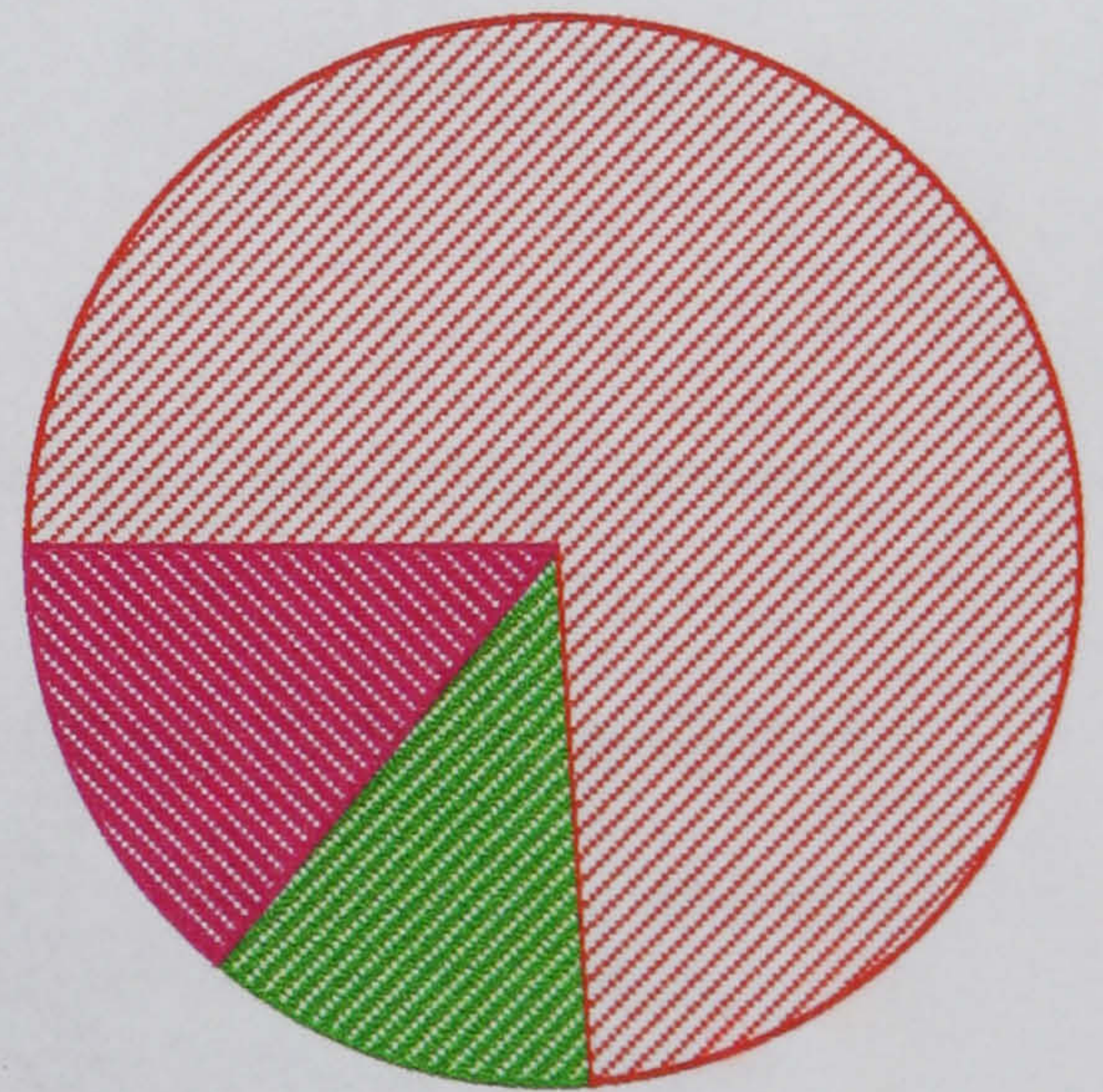
Total

Human Treatment	66.0%
Animal Treatment	16.0%
Both	3.0%
Unspecified	15.0%



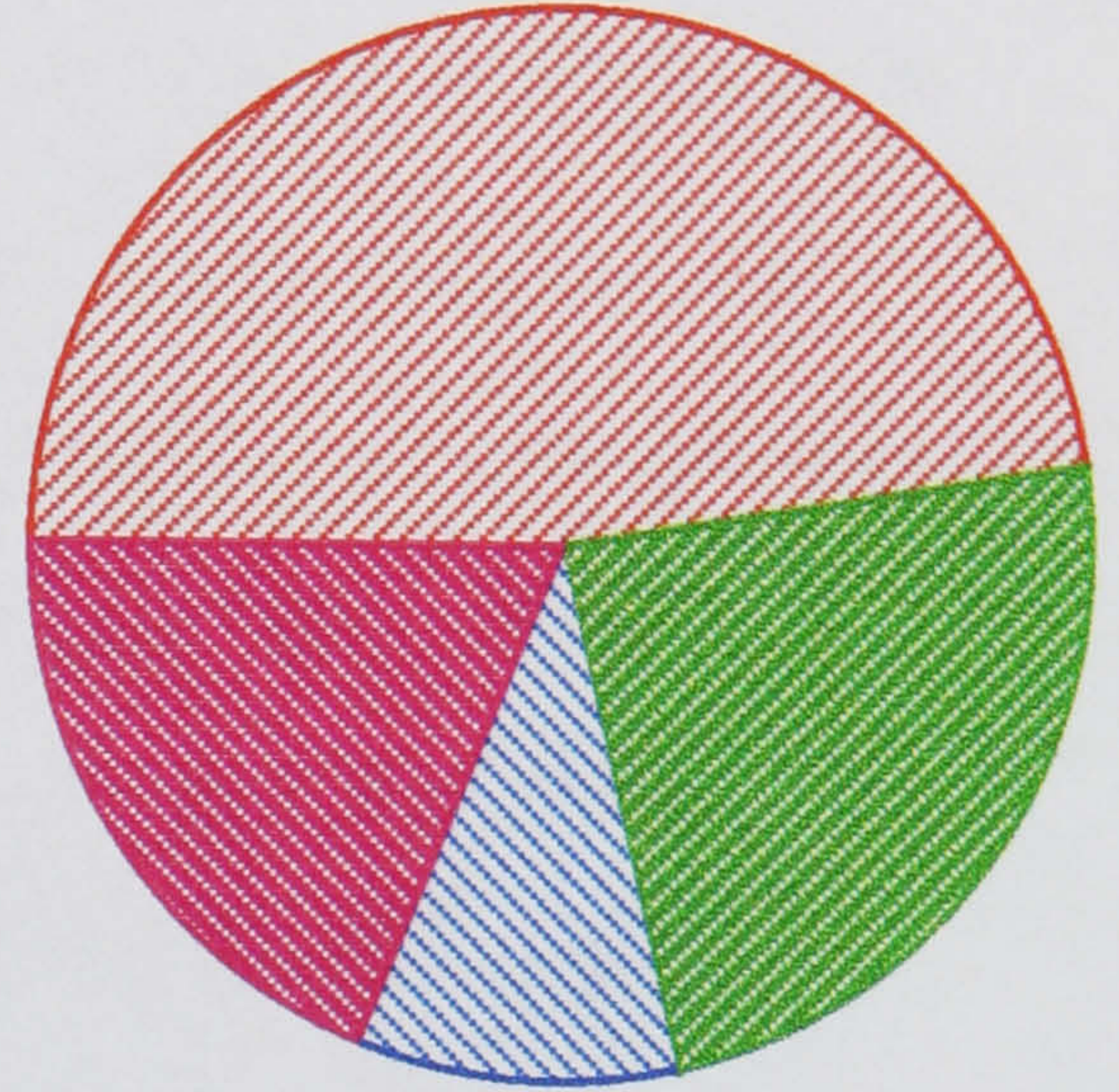
Female

Human Treatment	74.0%
Animal Treatment	12.0%
Both	0.0%
Unspecified	14.0%



Male

Human Treatment	47.5%
Animal Treatment	23.8%
Both	9.9%
Unspecified	18.8%



Rosie Graham of Gargunnoch in the presbytery of Stirling²⁸ was recorded as having treated cows and Andrew Ker of Castleton, in the presbytery of Haddington²⁹ also treated diseased cows. Thomas Carfra and Jeane Deanes, from the Haddington area carried out a treatment to cure their sheep that Andrew Youll – also named in the records – had told them about.³⁰ He in turn named George Broun as the source of his cure. In another case, Adam Gillies and his wife Christian Watson, from North Berwick³¹ were reprimanded for treating their cows, a procedure that they carried out on the instructions of Thomas Bookles also from North Berwick. Both Broun and Bookles were reprimanded. In 1649 Agnes Gourlay from Humbie,³² also in the Haddington presbytery, described a ritual which she used to restore milk to a cow and in 1653 Elspeth Wood was questioned by the Haddington kirk session about restoring milk to a cow.³³ There were only two references to individuals who treated both animal and human disease.³⁴ They were both male and both from the Stirling presbytery: Andrew Aiken of Stirling³⁵ who reported specifically that he could take witchcraft off ‘beast or bodie’ and Steven Maltman who is mentioned in both kirk and presbytery records.³⁶ Maltman appeared before the Stirling presbytery in April 1628 to answer accusations of healing humans, but two years earlier, in 1628, the Gargunnoch kirk

²⁸ SCA, Gargunnoch kirk records, CH2/1121/1.

²⁹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

³⁰ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

³¹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/7; North Berwick kirk session records, CH2/285/4.

³² NAS, Humbie parish records, CH2/389/1.

³³ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1, although part of this accusation was also that Elspeth Wood had previously caused the loss of milk.

³⁴ There was a third case, Issobell Keir, who pleaded not guilty at the justiciary court in Stirling to laying-on and taking-off sicknesses from the whole gamut of men, women, children, goods (presumably milk and mild products; ale and grain crops) and beasts – although the actual details of her case are scanty and provide no usable material.

³⁵ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

³⁶ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5; Gargunnoch kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

session discussed a report that he had recommended treatment for the loss of cows' milk.³⁷

Those who were recorded in the church records as treating only human disease included Janet Tailor from Alloa³⁸ whose cures for human illnesses were discussed by the Stirling presbytery in 1633.³⁹ The Stirling presbytery also discussed Agnes Symson's cure which involved four men⁴⁰ and also the group of 11 people who visited Christ's well.⁴¹ Isobel Wood, Margaret Dickson and George Beir all appeared before the Haddington presbytery to answer charges about charming in order to cure human diseases.⁴² Agnes Anderson reportedly advised another woman about her child's illness, and Agnes' daughter, Janet Syme, was also charged with advising another woman about how to secure her husband's fidelity.⁴³ Two similar incidents were found in the records from the Stirling presbytery: Elspeth Spittall was said to have known about a charm which took the form of a love potion.⁴⁴ Another case from St Ninian's in Stirling included a reference to causing impotence – an enchantment which is rarely mentioned in Scottish witchcraft evidence despite James VI's claim that witches:

..by staying of married folkes, to have naturallie

³⁷ There is also a privy council commission for Steven Malcolm mentioned on 28 Sept 1638, *RPC*, 2nd series, vol II, 353.

³⁸ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

³⁹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁴⁰ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/7.

⁴¹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4. It is difficult to locate Christ's well specifically, as there are no other references to it. There are chalybeate springs in Gargunnock parish. Iron-rich chalybeate springs were recognised as being useful for a variety of ailments, and were visited throughout Scotland. Alternatively, healing streams were often situated near the site of an early chapel or church. These often had a pre-Christian connection although the term Christ's well would certainly suggest later origins or a renaming of an older site that had been 'adopted' for Christian use. There was a Lady Well near Airth, whose name is also suggestive of Christian use.

⁴² NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁴³ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

⁴⁴ SCA, Holy Rude kirk session records, CH2/1026/3.

adoe with other, (by knitting of so manie knottes
upon a poynt at the time of their mariage)...⁴⁵

Isabel Paterson appeared before the kirk session in 1671, a relatively late date, and was questioned about tying three knots in a napkin which was reported to have caused George Blair's impotence.⁴⁶ Clearly these cases do not strictly meet the criterion for healing by charming, but again they have been included in the overall total as further confirmation of the extent and variety of the overall practice, and that much of the population's belief in the power of these rituals over life events was extremely important to many.

Agnes Broune's case was discussed because the Haddington kirk session had received some reports that she had carried out a charming ritual to cure and protect her child from further trouble.⁴⁷ The Yester kirk session questioned Janet Kemp, Margaret Sked, Margaret Wood and Christian Matherstone about the previously mentioned attempted abortion of Bessie Heriot's baby in 1652.⁴⁸ Elizabeth Kemp and Jenet Fareis were accused of curing a woman of the 'heavy sickness' by the Humberie kirk session in 1664.⁴⁹ In 1633 John Wallace appeared before the Clackmannan kirk session to explain his use of a left shoe as part of a charm to help his wife during childbirth.⁵⁰ In 1649 Margaret Vaith appeared before the Haddington kirk session and described her use of horse grease as a treatment for gout.⁵¹ Helen Keir,⁵² Issobell Forrester⁵³ and Elizabeth Taileor⁵⁴ were all questioned by the Stirling presbytery about

⁴⁵ *Daemonologie*, 12.

⁴⁶ SCA, St Ninian's kirk session records, CH2/337/2.

⁴⁷ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

⁴⁸ NAS, Yester kirk session records, CH2/357/2.

⁴⁹ NAS, Humberie kirk session records, CH2/389/1.

⁵⁰ SCA, Clackmannan kirk session records, CH2/1242/1.

⁵¹ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

⁵² SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁵³ SCA, St Ninian's kirk session records, CH2/337/2.

⁵⁴ SCA, St Mungo's kirk session, Alloa, CH2/942/6.

their use of charms to cure various human illnesses.

In the secular courts Issobell Keir from Stirling appeared accused of the general practice of curing the illnesses of humans and animals.⁵⁵ Another woman Margaret Harvie⁵⁶ also appeared at the Justiciary Court in 1659. She was connected to Issobell Keir's case as another witness reported that Margaret Harvie had advised her to request her sick daughter's health from Issobell Keir. These two were accused at the same time as Bessie Stevenson, Issobell Bennet and Magdalen Blair, who were also accused of helping human illnesses.⁵⁷ These five individuals all appeared as part of, or were connected to, the group of 12 accused witches who were tried at Stirling in 1659. This quite large number was unusual for the Stirling area which in general did not experience the large local hunts or even small panics to the same extent as the Haddington area.⁵⁸ It is also extremely likely that the significance of the number is coincidental, and should not be taken as evidence of the existence of any form of coven. Indeed, closer analysis reveals that those involved came from different parishes. Five came from Alloa, two from Airth, one from Holy Rude and the other four had no specific location noted. All that can be suggested is that there may have been a small local panic in Alloa. Alloa also experienced another small panic, which involved six people, the previous year but neither the 1658 nor the 1659 cases can be categorised as large witch hunts. The aforementioned were all accused of a variety of crimes including witchcraft, necromancy, sorcery, demonic pact and malefice but, importantly, all were accused of charming as well. However it would

⁵⁵ NAS, JC 26/26.

⁵⁶ NAS, JC26/26/3.

⁵⁷ NAS, JC 10; JC 26/26/3 bundles 4, 11, 12, 22.

⁵⁸ The terms localised large hunts (10-20 people accused locally) and small local panics (up to 10 people accused) have been used here following Larner's definition. See *Enemies*, 61. Analysis and comparison of the pattern of accusation in the two presbyteries will be examined in the next chapter.

certainly appear that their crimes were seen as mainly maleficium or a combination, rather than simple charming, as illustrated by the emphasis on demonic pact, renunciation of baptism and the devil's mark, which were all typical features of secular trials and so they have not been included in the overall statistics.

As a rule, cases which progressed to the level of secular trial almost invariably included demonic pact, though the case of the previously mentioned Jonet Anderson was an exception. She appeared before the privy council in 1617 and 1620 accused of charming and curing human illnesses.⁵⁹ As the records illustrate, the two practices of witchcraft and charming were generally closely linked within the judicial and ecclesiastical definitions of criminal behaviour, and were to a degree analogous. However, in this analysis it is only the examples of healing rituals which will be examined as none of the accusations levelled against Janet Anderson involved malefice, nor was she accused of demonic pact.

The general term 'bewitched' was applied to the majority of cases involving human illness, although some conditions appear to have had more specific symptoms. The same was true for animals which were most commonly recorded as having been bewitched or forespoken. The most common bovine problem mentioned was loss, or spoiling, of milk or milk products. The milk was streaked with blood, suggesting mastitis, and was therefore 'unprofitable for gruds (curds?) or butter'.⁶⁰ This was mentioned quite clearly in seven cases, and by implication in at least another two. This would have been a major loss and have a serious effect on the supply of food and income for the household. Milk would be used for butter and cheese as well for drinking. The making of butter and cheese was actually of more practical use to a household than fresh milk as, in its preserved

⁵⁹ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 345-47.

⁶⁰ Andrew Aiken's case, SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

form, it would last for longer. It could also be used in this form as part payment of rent.⁶¹ Any loss of milk was therefore of serious consequence, and the consultation of Rosie Graham by Margery Ker in Gargunnoch in July 1631 for advice about her sick cow is perhaps more understandable in the light of this explanation, although interestingly it was Margery Ker, rather than Rosie Graham, who had to pay a penance.⁶² A similar example is that of Anna Symson of Humbie, servant to Robert Hepburne, who reported that she could not get the milk to churn and so she consulted Agnes Gourlay for some charm to make it thicken.⁶³ Again the loss of the butter or cheese not only to the household as a whole, but also for the servant herself, given that she might be held responsible for her failure, makes her actions seem less surprising. To restore the churning Agnes spoke a charm, cast some of the milk on the ground and put salt and wheat bread in the cows ears; devices which all occur in other rituals. Steven Maltman⁶⁴ and Andrew Aiken⁶⁵ were both accused of restoring milk to cows in the Stirling presbytery area. In North Berwick, Adam Gillies, Christian Watson and Thomas Bookles were also reported to have put wheat and salt in the ears of their cows, although it is not specified whether they had lost their milk.⁶⁶ The features of these treatments from both presbyteries demonstrate remarkable similarity. The use of charmed water; the casting of some of the affected milk on the ground; placing salt and/or wheat bread in the cows' ears; the repeating of a movement a specific number of times and the use of a verbal charm in the form of an invocation, or prayer, all show widespread application.

⁶¹ Whyte, *Scotland before the industrial revolution*, 164.

⁶² SCA, Gargunnoch kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

⁶³ NAS, Humbie kirk session records, CH2/389/1.

⁶⁴ SCA, Gargunnoch kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

⁶⁵ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁶⁶ NAS, North Berwick kirk session records, CH2/285/4, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/7.

Another problem associated with cattle was the premature delivery of calves. Andrew Aiken, again, cured Alex McGourlay's cattle 'qlk had ye cassting evill'.⁶⁷ At Haddington, Andrew Ker's advice for curing a diseased ox was quite clearly based on the diagnosis that the animal was bewitched. Like many others there are no particular descriptions of the symptoms in this case so retrospective diagnosis is inappropriate, but undoubtedly the loss of an ox to a household would be a major economic crisis. Certainly the ox meat might be usable for food – most animals were eaten when they were past their usefulness in other areas – but more importantly the loss of a ploughing beast might cause serious production and financial problems for a farmer. It is interesting to note, though, that despite the number of cattle ailments treated and discussed, there was no mention of the term elf-shot. This was a well-known term describing disease of cattle which was thought to have been caused by fairies. There were in fact more mentions of elf-shot as a diagnosis in secular trials of witchcraft and sorcery.

The procedure used by Andrew Youll, Thomas Carfra and Jeane Deanes to cure braxy involved tying live toads about the necks of their sheep.⁶⁸ The breakshaw, or braxy, is an intestinal disease of sheep and as it was usually fatal any attempt to cure it would again seem quite appropriate.⁶⁹ The use of a live animal is also a feature of some other charms, for both animal and human disease, although in this case there was no use of a spoken charm. A more typical form of ritual to treat animals was that used by Andrew Aiken from Stirling, who has been mentioned previously. He confessed in 1636 to having cured a horse, as well as several diseased cows, and his 'ordinarie charms' involved the use

⁶⁷ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁶⁸ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁶⁹ Breakshaw, breadkshugh, braxy: usually fatal intestinal disease of sheep.

of water and words. Interestingly, as part of the cure of a diseased horse, Andrew told the presbytery that he had transferred the evil that was in the horse onto dogs belonging to the horse's owner. This again may say much about the relative value of goods and gear to seventeenth-century households. The replacement of dogs would no doubt have been easier and less expensive than a horse.

Andrew Aiken's case is quite unusual, not so much in the form or content of his charming but more in terms of the numbers he was recorded as having treated: seven humans and seven cases of animal illness. Most of the other charmers appear to have treated sick animals occasionally or the accusation related only to one specific incident or type of cure. It might be possible to suggest that Andrew Aiken's gender accounted for his association with animal cures, but his almost equal number of treatments for human disease belies this somewhat crude correlation. Twelve individuals were accused of being involved in curing animals – seven male and five female. Of the men, Andrew Aiken and Steven Maltman treated both animal and human disease.

The other individuals who treated animals appear to have been accused of single incidents, but it would be inaccurate to presume that this implied that they were either only ever involved in one case or only treated animal illness. While it cannot be shown statistically that someone who was named once was likely to have been carrying out a practice over many years, it is highly probable. It was unlikely that someone would be reported for a single incident and was quite possible that these individuals had a reputation which had built up over some years. They may also have continued to carry out these rituals covertly even after investigation and reprimand by the church authorities.

Human illness was usually described in similar general

terminology to that of animal disease. The causes or types of the majority of illnesses were distinguished by the terms 'bewitched'; 'forespoken'; the 'brash of seiknes through ane ill ee'⁷⁰ or the 'skaith of an evil mind'.⁷¹

Another term, which also meant bewitching but was more specific, was 'blasted' meaning a sudden illness or paralysis. These terms appear to be synonymous, in that they all implied that the illnesses were caused by witchcraft or some negative power. It may be that the terms referred to discrete conditions or symptoms, but because essentially all diseases were believed to be caused in the same way, different conditions or symptoms were of less importance.

Not all terms were so imprecise, though, and some more specific terms⁷² were used. The condition 'mawturned' was referred to by Bessie Stevenson, Issobell Bennet⁷³ and Agnes Anderson.⁷⁴ The 'heavy disease'⁷⁵ was mentioned by Steven Maltman⁷⁶ and Janet Tailor,⁷⁷ and Elizabeth Kemp and Jonet Fareis⁷⁸ were reprimanded for taking the heavy sickness off a young woman. 'Heart fevers' was specifically noted by Bessie Stevenson, scrofula – or 'cruells' – by George Beir,⁷⁹ abortion once by Janet Kemp, Margaret Wood and Christian Matherstone and Margaret Sked⁸⁰ and 'loss of wits' once, in the case of Agnes Symson, who was taken to the chapel at Struthill.⁸¹ The chapel and well of Struthill, in the parish of Muthill, has been recorded as having been used in a similar fashion, and

⁷⁰ Quoted by Janet Anderson, 1621, *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 346. Brash, brasche: a short bout of illness. She also referred to the waff or blast of an ill wind.

⁷¹ Quoted by Andrew Aiken, 1636, *SCA*, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁷² These terms are analysed more specifically in chapter 10, 245-6.

⁷³ *NAS*, JC 26/26/3.

⁷⁴ *NAS*, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1; Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

⁷⁵ See chapter 10, 246.

⁷⁶ *SCA*, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁷⁷ *SCA*, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

⁷⁸ *NAS*, Humble kirk session records, CH2/389/1.

⁷⁹ *NAS*, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁸⁰ *NAS*, Yester kirk records, CH2/357/2.

⁸¹ *SCA*, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/7.

for a similar purpose, to the tomb of St Fillans in Perthshire. Those who were emotionally or mentally disturbed were left bound overnight in the hope that they would recover their senses.⁸²

It is also clear that many of the charmers recognised particular symptoms and causes of diseases and at the same time acknowledged their limitations. Janet Anderson told the privy council that she could tell the difference between those who were 'witchit' and those who were 'blasted by an ill wind' but she would not tell the privy councillors how.⁸³ She was also quite clear that she could help in cases of forespeaking and ill wind but, significantly, she reported that she could not help the gravel – which was one of the most common physical complaints of seventeenth-century society. This condition was often treated by surgical intervention with incision and removal of stones.⁸⁴ Charmers do not appear to have practised surgical procedures and there are no other references to the treatment of this condition by charming rituals in the other cases examined. There were also medicinal alternatives available which might be prescribed by physicians or circulated among the literate elite. One seventeenth-century medical recipe describes taking a spoonful of the dried powder of the *fleur-de-lis* root mixed with the juice of a red onion and white wine every morning to ease the condition.⁸⁵ However, again

⁸² Groome, F H *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland* (London, c1890), 90.

⁸³ RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 345-7.

⁸⁴ There was a town lithotomist appointed in Glasgow in 1656: Euir MacNeill who was reputed to be illiterate. See Duncan, *Memorials of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons*, 54. The surgical intervention was a dangerous procedure and on occasion proved fatal. Dingwall discusses a case of a lithotomist who was sued after the failure of such an operation. See Dingwall, *Physicians*, 155. In Stirling in 1620 a Malcolme Forester was paid 10 merks by William Mureheid, treasurer, for cutting Mureheid's son's stone, see *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, 1519-1666*, 154.

⁸⁵ NLS, MS 17852, recipes of Sir Henry Bruce. Hamilton quotes another recipe for gravel from the eighteenth century which recommended mixing powdered wood lice and red onion juice in white wine. MacKay, *F MacNeill of Carskey: His Estate Journal 1703-1743* (Edinburgh, 1955), 103, quoted in Hamilton, *Healers*, 75.

these treatments do not appear to have been used by charmers.

Children's diseases were no more precisely identified than those of adults. The term 'mawturning' – general nausea – was referred to by several charmers. In one case, however, that of Margaret Dickson of Pencaitland, it was implied that the problem was perceived as being a changeling child. One incident has been discussed in the previous chapter, but in another example Margaret advised the mother to 'cast the bairn into it [the fire] for the bairne was not hers', again illustrating the belief that fairies could be frightened by fire.⁸⁶ Cases of general childhood illnesses which were believed to have been caused by transference from, and by, some other person, were treated differently from these much more distinct cases of changeling caused by fairy or spiritual possession. The cause, symptoms, treatment and outcome in the latter situation were in some aspects more similar to the removal of spirits seen in Agnes Symson's case than in other more straightforward physical ailments.

As far as the types of illness documented in the secular records are concerned, many of the terms and descriptions used would appear to equate to those recorded in the kirk documents. Jane Craig of Tranent was accused at the Justiciary Court of 'onlaying of ane feirfull seiknes upon Beatrix Sandielands ... causeing hir become mad and bereft of hir natural wit'⁸⁷ as well as causing a cow to lose its milk. Bessie Paton, who was accused of sorcery and witchcraft, was blamed for causing the death of a horse and also a cow by putting raw flesh under the animals' stalls.⁸⁸ In another case Issobel Greirsoune was accused of laying on a 'feirfull and uncouth seiknes ... be casting in of ane tailzie⁸⁹ of raw inchantit flesch att

⁸⁶ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁸⁷ *Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624-50*, vol III, 813.

⁸⁸ NAS, JC 26/26/3.

⁸⁹ Tailzie; tailyie: a cut or slice of meat (late 15th century).

[the] dur'.⁹⁰ The unfortunate William Burnet, the recipient of the meat, thereafter 'dwynit and pynit away, in the said unknawin seikness, for the space of thre yeiris, nocht habill to obtene ordinar cuir'. There is no indication of what an 'ordinar cuir' might be other than perhaps being bled, but the implication was certainly that the disease was not caused by natural means. The use of raw meat was also seen in some cures, and illustrates the significance of transference, both on and off, through an intermediate object. Its placement at thresholds or animal stalls was often seen as a protection against evil powers which could not cross over a safe boundary. The actions of Jane Craig, Bessie Paton, Issobel Greirsoune, and many others, were not particularly unusual within the cultural constructs of the time, but it was how they were interpreted in the context of other actions, behaviours or relationships which signified them as witches rather than charmers.

It is impossible to state unequivocally whether these illnesses would correlate to our language of illness, or indeed if they corresponded to the language used by orthodox medical practitioners of the time, but it is clear that society recognised ill health in the light of their understanding of possible cause and cure. The most frequent cause was cited by both the charmers and the sufferers as bewitching. The actual symptoms may have been slightly different in individual cases but generally referred to a sudden onset of illness associated with sweats, debilitation and weakness, nausea and temporary or permanent paralysis, all of which quite often continued for several days, weeks or, in extreme cases, years. As these grievous and fearful diseases were all recognised as having been laid-on by bewitching it is analogous that removal by charming was the commonly recognised and accepted treatment associated with the same diseases.

⁹⁰ Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol II, part II, 524.




Healing procedures

The healing procedures or charms recommended by charmers have been categorised and analysed as follows: animal or human disease; whether the illness treated was physical or emotional; diagnosis of disease and its cause; common features of the treatments and the frequency of their use and an interpretation of how the treatment was believed to work. In the sample analysed, 78% of treatments were for human illnesses and 19% for animals. The other 3% consisted of unknown treatments where there was no indication of whether human or animals had been charmed. 86% of human treatments were categorised as relating to physical conditions and only 6% as emotional or psychological. The other 8% of treatments were unidentifiable and therefore could not be categorised. (See figure 8, p 275)

Although a greater percentage of treatments used related to the cure of physical ailments, the principles of the causes and treatments of all the diseases suggest a common aetiology. The treatments, or charms, were then examined for the use of rituals and words; either alone or in combination. The use of a physical ritual was by far the most common feature of the charms described; 92%(85) of all treatments included some reference to ritual or routine. Thirty-eight percent (33) of the charms used a spoken charm or verse; 3% (3) used only words and 35% (31) recorded the use of word and ritual together. Physical rituals by themselves featured in further 54% (51) of the total charms. (See figure 9, p 275)

Ritual

The use of ritual alone was to some extent more straightforward for the church and judicial authorities to deal with. In simple terms these procedures were identified as superstitions perpetuated through

	Physical Illness	86.0%
	Emotional Illness	6.0%
	Unspecified	8.0%

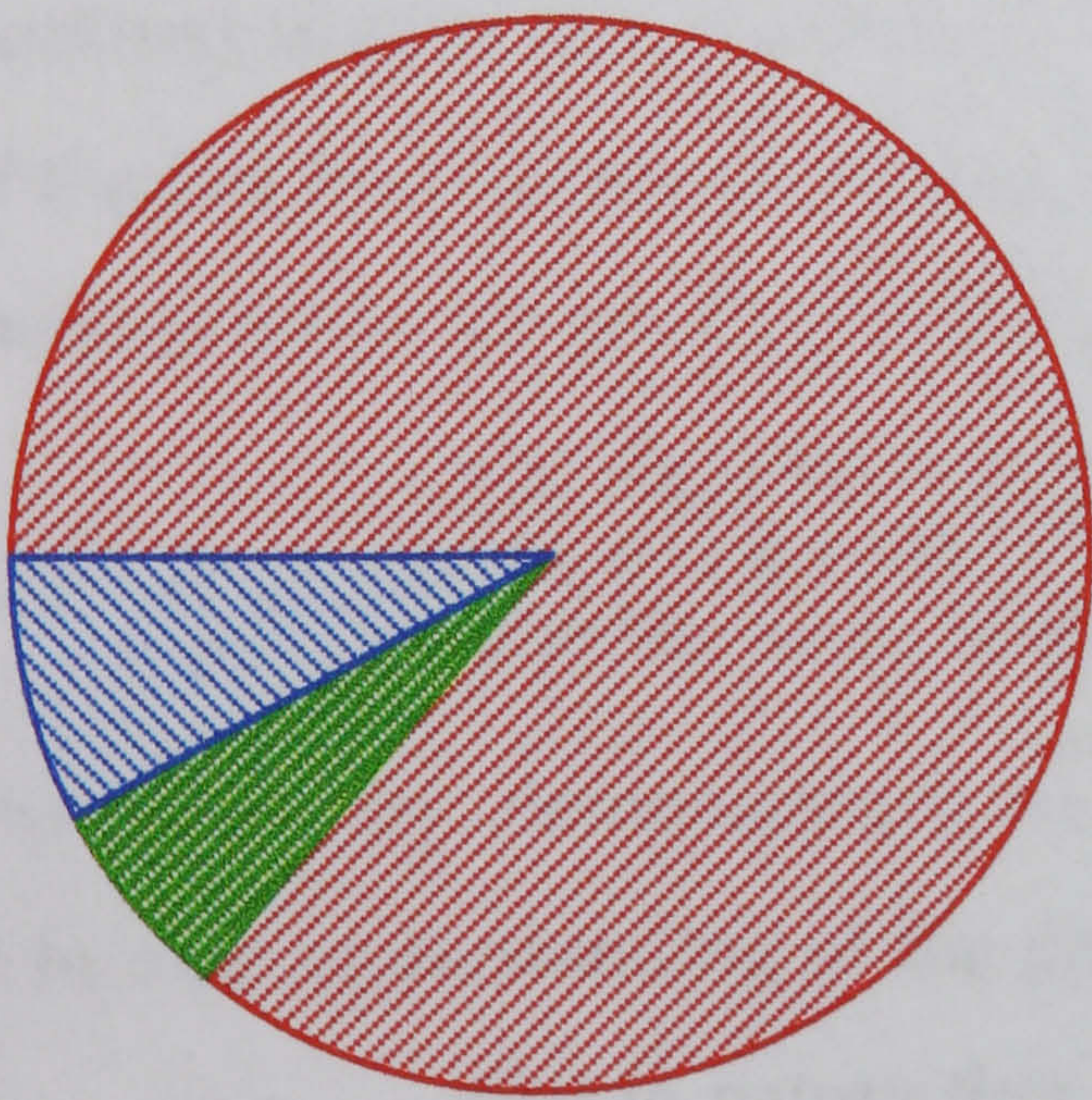






Figure 8: Pie Chart Illustrating the Proportion of Physical and Mental Illness Treated by Charmers

	Physical Ritual	54.0%
	Words and Ritual	35.0%
	Words Only	3.0%
	Unknown	8.0%

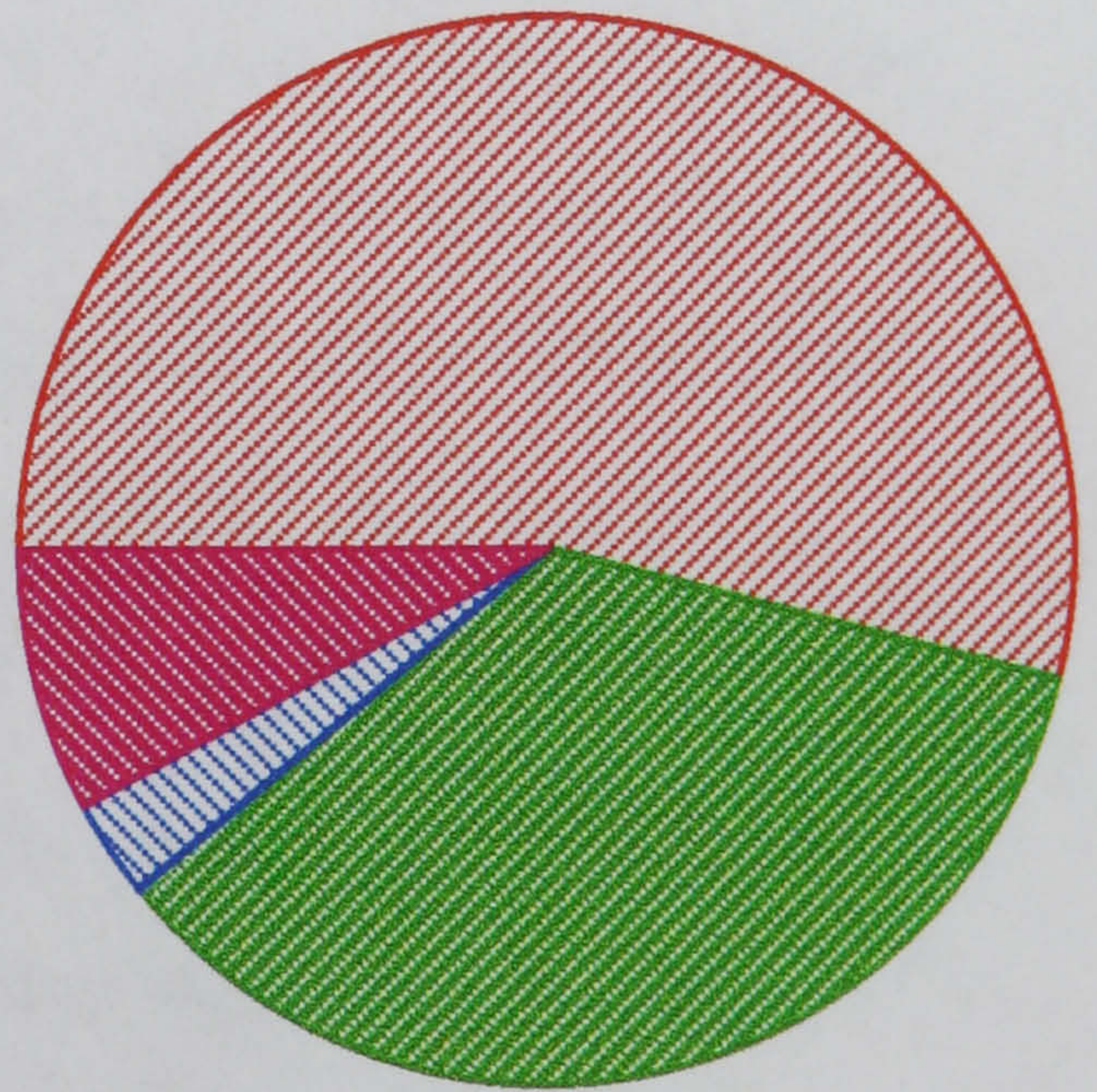


Figure 9: Pie Chart Illustrating the Proportion of Rituals and Words in Charms

ignorance. Certainly there was some concern that a ritual may have been an attempt to conjure up a supernatural spirit or power, and therefore dangerous and antagonistic to accepted religious practice, but in general their use was regarded as the result of ignorant practice and belief. In reaction to continued reports of visits to healing chapels and wells throughout the century, the Dunblane synod, of which Stirling presbytery was part, passed an ordinance in 1648 that: 'all superstitious wells and chapels whereunto people resort ... be carefullie abandoned,'⁹¹ illustrating that the church was clearly concerned about the continuation of certain superstitious practices, but at the same time distinguished them from diabolic witchcraft. Some years later, in 1663, the Haddington presbytery decided that a healing ritual carried out by Adam Gillies of North Berwick was done 'out of grosse ignorance and vaine observance'.⁹² It is interesting to note that ritual and superstition continued to be practised in local communities despite episodes of so-called witch panics and hunts. The use of ritual to procure cures for disease was not only practised by non-literate rural peasants. There are examples of elite practice and belief which were remarkably similar and which were investigated in a similar fashion. The Lockhart laird of Lee was questioned in 1638 about the healing properties of the Lee Penny. Ministers of Lanark had reported their concerns about the practice to the presbytery of Glasgow but the laird assured them that:

... the custome is only to cast the stone in sume
water and give the diseasit cattell therof to drink
and yt the same is done without using onie wordes..

The presbytery, demonstrating an acknowledgement of the limitations of human understanding of the physical world, decided:

... that in nature they are many things sain to work
strang effect qrof no humane wit can give a reason

⁹¹ *Register of the Diocesan Synod of Dunblane, 1662-88*, 263.

⁹² NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/7.

... they perceive no ground of offence and admonishes the Laird of Lee in the using of the said stone to tak heed that it be ust heirafter wt the least scandall that possiblie may be ...⁹³

The justification of the practice was that no words had been used. This seems to have been significant, not only as a means to identify any procedure as charming as opposed to witchcraft or sorcery, but also as a defence for some of those accused. Although the laird of Lee was not accused of witchcraft, his practice caused some anxiety, though his status may have provided some protection from further reprimand. Other cases which were also defined as being charming, rather than witchcraft, also caused the kirk some concern. When questioned by the Haddington presbytery in 1646 about his treatment of braxy, which involved tying a live toad about the neck of his sheep, Andrew Youll reassured the presbytery quite categorically that he had used no words along with the toad. The presbytery reprimanded Youll and reminded him that if he did not stop using this treatment he would be censured as a charmer.⁹⁴ Adam Gillies and his wife, Christian Watson, were accused of tying 11 pickles of wheat and salt around their cows' horns. Again, the presbytery, after careful consideration of the events and circumstances, decided that since no words had been used, and the couple had carried out the procedure in simple ignorance, there were not sufficient grounds to prove that they were witches.⁹⁵ Indeed, the couple stressed to the authorities that there was no witchcraft involved on their part: they had only carried out this charm in order to protect their animals from skaith – harm from witchcraft. Another point made by the couple, and one which appears to apply to other episodes, was that they had not carried it out in secret. This

⁹³ Black, 'Scottish Charms and Amulets', 433-526.

⁹⁴ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

⁹⁵ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/285/7; North Berwick kirk session records, CH2/285/4.

distinguished them from witches who practised their art covertly. Neither of these cases was taken any further or pursued through the secular court system. The absence of words, and the openness of their practice, certainly seemed to satisfy the church authorities that they had not practised witchcraft.

Words

In the 38% (33) of procedures which used words, the actual form and content of the words themselves is also of some interest. However, those spoken words which were recorded in the evidence are, to some extent, only a limited selection. The most common appear to have taken the form of incantation or invocation, but the written evidence provides more details about invocations. The use of an incantation, or formula of words to enchant, was more closely linked with witchcraft but, perhaps due to its covert practice, appeared to have to been less often repeated and recorded verbatim during church investigations. In those cases where an incantation, often referred to as a *malison*, was documented as having been used, the actual words used remained vague, either because they were uttered quietly or because the whole episode involved a fair degree of mutual cursing and angry interaction which portrayed neither party very positively. Also the words themselves may have been believed to be so powerful and dangerous that those who reported them to the authorities did not want to get in trouble themselves. Margaret Dickson of Pencaitland was reported to the Haddington presbytery in 1642 for cursing James Mill in the following manner: 'shee would see me sickd in a gutter, and my bairns made me evill hindrance'.⁹⁶ There is no doubt that this exchange resulted from a falling out between the two as Mill was angry at

⁹⁶NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

Dickson's daughter for stealing some of his wheat. In a later case, in 1649, Jean Craig's reported invocation, or wicked words, were: 'Quhat devill does thou man, soe sone up at morne'.⁹⁷ Again this curse was associated with a dispute between the accused and James Smith. In 1659, Magdalen Blair of Stirling acknowledged that she had put a malison on John Steill, although, as she pointed out to the court, he had made her pregnant and had refused to help her with the child, which may have been some justification for her action.⁹⁸ The specific words of her malison were not noted by the court. Generally there would appear to be have been a definite evil or angry intent behind the words spoken and, interestingly, in those which were recorded, the devil was not often referred to directly. The reference would seem to be more by implication than by name. It would seem that since the 'power' which was being invoked on these occasions was understood by all to be diabolic, perhaps repeating and recording more exact words was to tread somewhat dangerous grounds.

Invocations, on the other hand, were documented more carefully and yet at the same time were a greater problem for the church. The invocations were usually very similar in form and content to prayers and often included direct reference to Christian symbols such as God or the Holy Trinity. This form of verse was not unique to Scottish charmers and one typical Scottish example:

Three bitters thingis hes yow bitten, ill heart, ill ee,
ill toung all meast:
Uther three may thee beit, the Father, the Sone and
Holy Ghost

is also found in English sources. This charm was quoted as having been

⁹⁷ *Selected Justiciary Cases, 1624-50*, vol III, 813.

⁹⁸ NAS, JC26/26/3.

used by charmers such as Janet Anderson,⁹⁹ Andrew Aiken,¹⁰⁰ Bessie Stevenson and Issobell Bennet¹⁰¹ all of Stirling. The bishop of Moray also recorded it in his manuscript.¹⁰² Other examples of spoken verses included: 'Oaken post stand hail; bairn's maw turns hail; God and St Birnibane the bright, turn my bairn's maw right; In God's name' and 'He that made thee of flesh, blude and beane, restore to thee they haill againe'. Even in examples where the full words were not recorded the invocation still contained some plea or reference to God – often as an afterthought. Clark argues that both superstitious worship and simple ritual observance were regarded by theological authorities as being at the same time demonic and irrelevant worship.¹⁰³ However, he also points out that contemporary theological writers believed that those who claimed to practise beneficial witchcraft and to heal by the power of words were also the most serious miscreants. The only acceptable form of words were those prayers used by clerics and congregations – any other invocations were unacceptable.¹⁰⁴ To some extent this attitude would certainly appear to have been reflected in the Scottish evidence. The emphasis on the importance of preaching and understanding of the Word was quite well established by the seventeenth century. Instruction, prayer and examination prior to admission to communion were conducted by the reformed clergy and church elders, and the use of words as part of a charming ritual clearly caused the authorities more problems than the use of ritual alone. However, the use of ritual and word did not automatically result in an accusation of witchcraft.

⁹⁹ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 345-7.

¹⁰⁰ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

¹⁰¹ NAS, JC26/26.

¹⁰² NAS, GD 188/25/1/3.

¹⁰³ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 475.

¹⁰⁴ Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 466.

Directions and devices: water

The rituals have been analysed for type and frequency of particular motifs. (See figure 11, p 287) These ranged from the use of some other physical object in the form of water, meat, animals, items of clothing to herbs, salt, eggs, bread or meal, metal, wood and threads or belts. Sixty-seven percent of rituals included some reference to one or more of the above. Other features included specific references to movement, washing, cutting of hair or nails, laying on of hands, particular times and numbers, boundaries, special restrictions and instructions about verbal requests. The most frequent motif was water: 44% (41) of procedures included it in some form or another. South running water was specified in 10% (9) of the directions; wells in 18% (17) ; sea water in 1%(1) and unspecified in 15% (14). (See figure 10, p 283) Typically the water was used either as a drink or ablution, and was usually associated with other motifs such as clothing or numbers, although it may have been the most important feature as it was usually mentioned first. Steven Maltman treated Janet Chrystie with a drink of south running water which he had charmed by the addition of a stone.¹⁰⁵ Andrew Aiken treated both people and animals with south running water, although he washed the diseased person with the water rather than administering it as a drink.¹⁰⁶ Margaret Dickson washed both the vest belonging to John Sharp's child and the child three times in south running water.¹⁰⁷ The importance of south running water may be explained by the Indo-European tradition of left-right axis. The right side emphasised positive features, day, life and movement down or to the right whereas the left symbolised night, death, and movement up or to the left.¹⁰⁸ This positive emphasis towards both the right and movement down

¹⁰⁵ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

¹⁰⁶ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

¹⁰⁷ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹⁰⁸ Lyle, *Archaic Chaos*, 92-104.

is further underlined when orientation towards the east is taken into account. When facing east the south is on the right.¹⁰⁹ Also south running water is usually on the light or sunnier side, which again emphasises its positive nature.¹¹⁰

The use of well water was also specified in quite a similar fashion. Bessie Stevenson advised wetting mutches, or cloth hats, at St Ninian's well and then putting them back on the diseased person,¹¹¹ whereas another reference to the use of well water noted that the diseased person visited the holy well, took some of the water and left a small offering behind.¹¹² The position of wells was less likely to be associated with compass points and appears to have been associated with pre-Christian female spirits, or later, with particular Christian saints. The wells referred to in the Stirling presbytery records appear to all have been holy wells. Although there was a chalybeate, or iron-rich, spring near Gargunnock, the records contain no reference to its use for healing purposes in the seventeenth century. There were mineral springs at Humbie, Pencaitland and Salton in the Haddington presbytery, although again there were no references to visiting of springs or wells in the church records. This does not mean that they were not visited – just that the authorities made no record of it.

In many cases the use of some form of water would seem to be the most important feature, but in others it was merely one item or motif among many. For example, the use of sea water would appear to be unusual although its application was fairly standard. There are examples

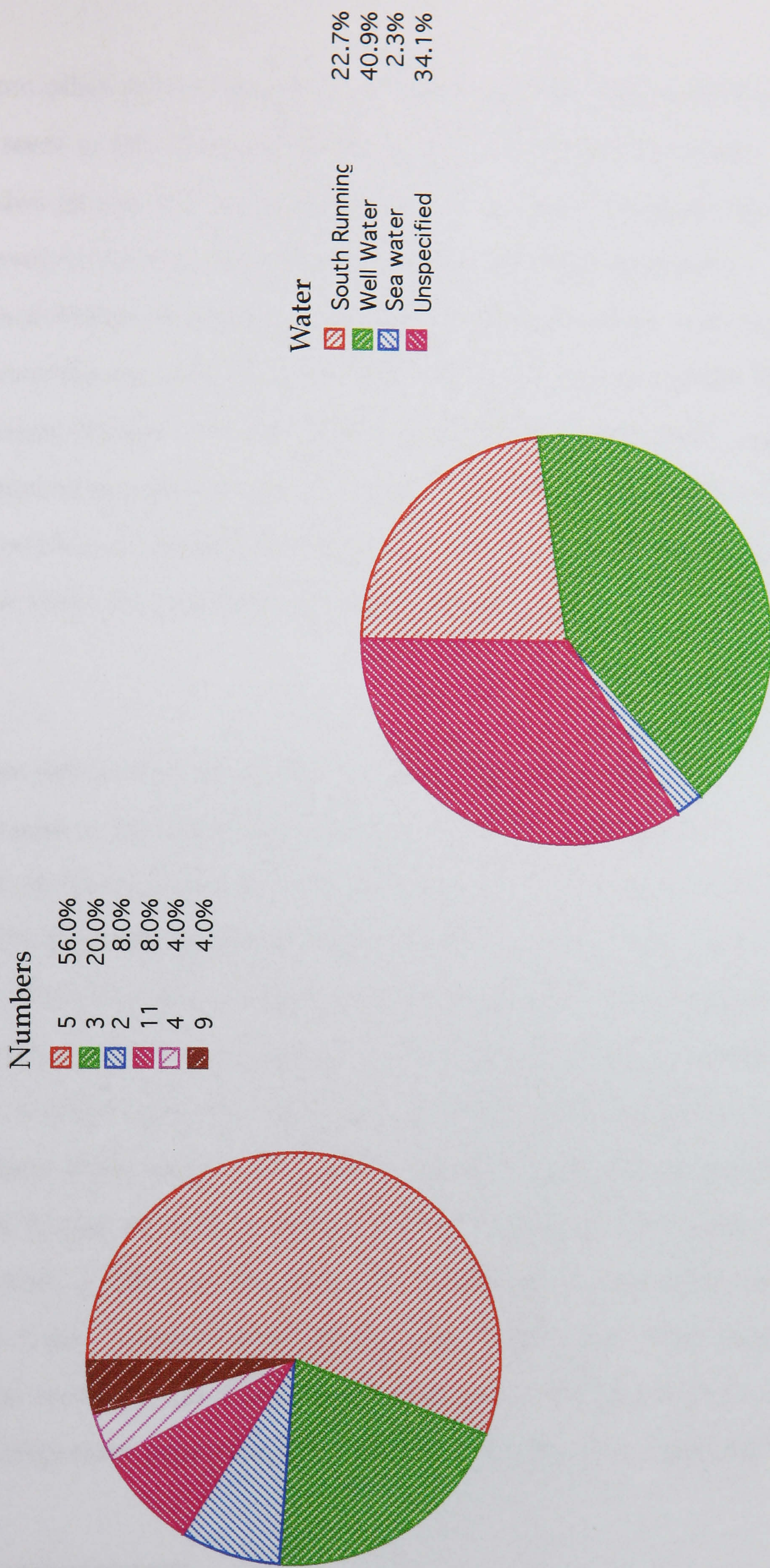
¹⁰⁹ Lyle, *Archaic Chaos*, 153.

¹¹⁰ See Dodgshon, R 'The Scottish Farming Township as Metaphor' in *Perspectives in Scottish Social History*, Leneman, L (ed) (Aberdeen, 1988), 75.

¹¹¹ NAS, JC 26/26.

¹¹² SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4.

Figure 10: Pie Charts Illustrating Breakdown of Numbers and Water Used in Charms



of cures from other parts of the country which used sea water, although they often seem to also feature the number nine. A remedy for a styne recommended letting nine waves pass over the person's head; another for jaundice involved boiling nine stones in water collected from nine waves.¹¹³ Issobell Bennet advised washing the diseased person with water collected from the sea, although nine was not mentioned as a motif. Her full instructions for the treatment of bewitched people were quite complex so water appears not to have been as significant as in some other cases.¹¹⁴ Bennet's complete charm included the use of meal or grain, a horse shoe, a hook, raw flesh, the number four and a spoken charm.

Numbers

Twenty-nine percent (27 incidents) of procedures involved some particular number (See figure 10, p 283). This was the second most frequent motif. The number five was specified most often (14%) followed by three (5%) then two and eleven (2%) and four and nine (1%) each. The frequency of five is a little unexpected as other numbers may have more obvious symbolic significance. However, although five was mentioned more often, it only featured in the rituals used by one individual – Andrew Aiken from Stirling, who spoke a verbal charm five times over the afflicted person or animal. The number three was mentioned by a greater number of different charmers. The symbolism or cosmology of numbers is a much debated area. The numbers referred to in this analysis are all prime numbers, apart from nine which is divisible by three, which is itself an important prime number. The number nine was significant in

¹¹³ Beith, *Healing Threads*, 135 although both the remedies quoted appear to have been recorded later than the seventeenth century.

¹¹⁴ NAS, JC 26/26.

Germanic magical tradition as well.¹¹⁵ The use of the number three, or triads, has obvious Christian overtones but is likely also to have even older religious significance. The three-fold structure of the human body separated the head, the middle and the lower parts. This was then related to society as a whole and the head, or top, was equated to mental thought and to priests and philosophers; the middle was seen as the source of strength and so related to warriors and the lower areas were associated with the most basic behaviours – sex, appetite and the commoners or lower orders.¹¹⁶ Three was also an important number in Greek, Celtic and Norse mythology although, as Davies points out, the origins and morphology of the number were of less importance to contemporary belief than its efficacy.¹¹⁷ The number four may relate to the Hippocratic emphasis on four; for example the four elements, the four humours and the four seasons. Five, apart from being a prime number, may have some pre-Reformation significance; as seen in the five-decade Rosary, but also may be connected to five energy centres: earth, air, water, fire and ether.

The use of three was combined with a greater variety of other motifs: threads, movements, water, spoken charm. Rosie Graham told Margery Ker to pass her left shoe under her cow's stomach three times.¹¹⁸ Isabel Paterson tied three knots in a cloth;¹¹⁹ Margaret Dickson told the Haddington presbytery that she told John Sharp to go three times round

¹¹⁵ Flint, *Rise of Magic*, 321. See also Davies, O 'Healing charms in use in England and Wales, 1700-1950', *Folklore*, 107 (1996), 19-32.

¹¹⁶ Lyle, *Archaic Chaos*, 142-155.

¹¹⁷ Davies, 'Healing charms', 29. The motif of the number three is seen in a number of folk tales and ballads. The use of three knots used to ensure a favourable wind is recorded in Scandinavian tales as well versions from Orkney, Shetland and Gaelic-speaking areas. They are similar to a story in the *Odyssey* when a bag of winds was used to help sail Odysseus's ship home. See *The Three Knots*, in Bruford and MacDonald, *Scottish Traditional Tales*, 391-395, 480.

¹¹⁸ SCA, Gargunnoch kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

¹¹⁹ SCA, St Ninian's kirk session records, CH2/337/1.

his house;¹²⁰ Agnes Anderson's remedy for mawturning involved turning the child three times head over heels between barn doors or round an oak post¹²¹ and Margaret Harvie told Margret Milne's mother to take three pieces of thatch from above Isobel Keir's door.¹²²

The other numbers appear to be associated with one other particular feature. Four and two were both used in conjunction with herbs, meal or threads. Bessie Stevenson used foxglove leaves in twos and applied them under the head, the middle and the feet of the diseased person: perhaps a reference to the three-fold structure.¹²³ This charm also illustrates the use of two and three together. In another case Issobell Bennet put a small amount of meal in the four corners of the patient's bed.¹²⁴ George Beir tied two black silk threads around the diseased person's neck.¹²⁵ The use of the number eleven appears to be quite unusual, as it was mentioned only once by Adam Gillies and his wife who tied 11 pieces of wheat and salt to the horns of their infected cattle.¹²⁶

Washing and Clothing

Washing the afflicted person or animal was mentioned in 18% (17) of procedures (See figure 11, p 287 for a full breakdown of all the specific motifs used by charmers). Janet Tailzeor told Andrew Heal to wash his sick child's hands and feet in south running water.¹²⁷ Andrew Aiken washed the whole of John Sibbald's body, again with south running

¹²⁰ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹²¹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

¹²² NAS, JC26/26/3.

¹²³ NAS, JC26/26.

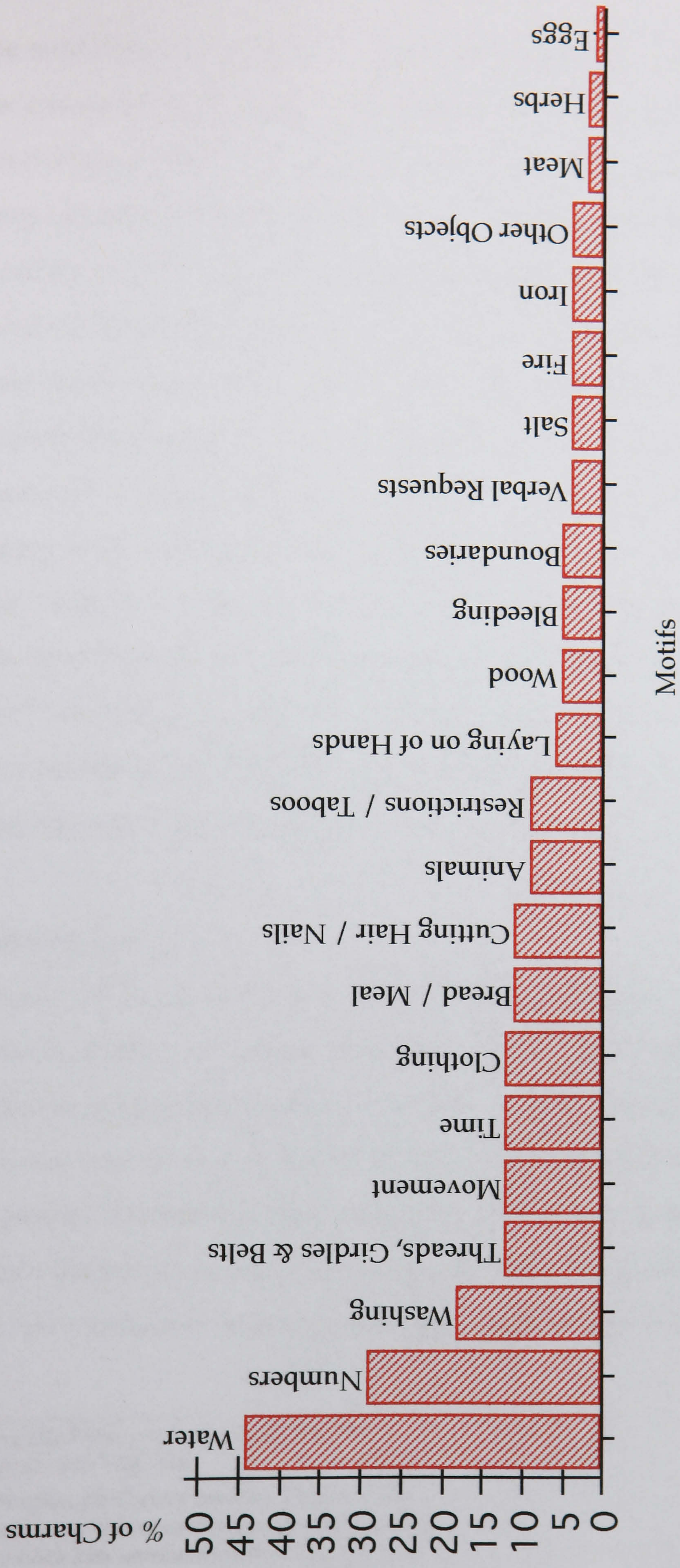
¹²⁴ NAS, JC26/26.

¹²⁵ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹²⁶ NAS, North Berwick kirk session records, CH2/285/4.

¹²⁷ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

Figure 11: Bar Chart Illustrating Motifs Used in Charms



water.¹²⁸ The washing of a person, particularly if the illness was associated with a fever or sweating, may have been a sensible procedure either to bring down the temperature or to help the person rest after the fever had broken. Items of clothing were mentioned in 12% (11) of remedies and often in association with washing. Clothing which belonged to the affected person would be blessed and returned, and either put on the person or used to wash them. Sarkes (vests) and mutches (hats) were the most frequently mentioned items, although occasionally a shoe was also used. A typical example is illustrated in the case of Janet Andirson who used a sark belonging to the ill person in all her charms. She charmed, or blessed, the sarks by touch and verbal invocation.¹²⁹ Another common method was used by Margaret Dickson who washed a sark in south running water three times.¹³⁰ Less typical was the charm used by Johne Wallace who drank out of his left shoe to help his wife during childbirth.¹³¹ Rosie Graham was the only other example of a charmer who used a left shoe.¹³²

Threads, turning and time

Twelve percent (10) of the treatments analysed made some reference to threads, belts or girdles and tethers. Bessie Stevenson's charm which was used to diagnose heart fevers used a belt and two threads. One thread was placed on either side of the belt, which was then put under the armholes of the sick person. The belt was then left in place and 'if they be soe diseased baith the threeds turne to one side of the belt'. Margaret Dickson was said to have told James Mill to go through a piece of green yarn to

¹²⁸ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

¹²⁹ RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 345.

¹³⁰ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹³¹ SCA, Clackmannan kirk session records, CH2/1242/1.

¹³² SCA, Gargunnock kirk session records, CH2/1121/1.

cure his illness.¹³³ Agnes Symson from Airth was tied with hair tethers and left out overnight in order to recover her senses.

Movement, usually encircling or turning, or a particular day or time were specified in 12% (11) of occasions, and are illustrated by Margaret Dickson's remedy for John Sharp's child. Sharp told the presbytery that Margaret had told him to go around his house nine times at midnight. Margaret told the inquiry that she had actually only said three times. In another example Janet Andirsone passed clothing from the ill person round a pillar in order to charm it.¹³⁴ In Agnes Anderson's case she instructed Isobell Smith to turn her child three times. Marjorie Wingate was reported to the kirk session of St Ninian's to have been at the well before sun rise, getting water for her father and that she was forbidden to speak to anyone.¹³⁵ Andrew Aiken told George Syme that he would be cured if he got water from Kirkland glen before 'cockcrow' or daybreak. He was also to speak to no-one while he was there, then to use the blessed water to wash himself.¹³⁶ Midnight and dawn were both important times of the day. Surprisingly, none of the charms made any reference to a special day such as a saint's day or other calendar festivals such as Beltane or Samhain. In other parts of the country the visiting of healing wells was often associated with 1 May or Beltane. The group of people who were reprimanded by the Stirling presbytery in June 1607 for visiting a healing well may have done so in May, although it is not specified in the minutes. These calendar festivals have particular association with witches and fairies and other supernatural forces, and were recognised as periods of disorder between old and new seasons. Similarly night or day break had special significance as they were also periods of vulnerability. Night was

¹³³ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹³⁴ RPC, 2nd series, vol VIII, 346.

¹³⁵ SCA, St Ninian's kirk session records, CH2/337/1.

¹³⁶ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

associated with darkness and danger and the underworld, and if the cause of John Sharp's 'changeling' child was believed to be connected with these forces, then night time was the most suitable time to communicate with them. A similar explanation might be applied to Agnes Symson's ordeal. Her condition would seem to have been believed to have had a different cause from the more typical transference of physical illness. There are similarities with the changeling case in that both 'victims' seem to be possessed by a negative spirit, not one that had been laid on by some other person but by fairies or spirits. Agnes told the presbytery that she felt something run over her several times before the tethers were loosened – a spirit perhaps? On the other hand, to procure a cure for a more straightforward physical ailment it was best to collect water at daybreak as its association with the sun and light was a positive one. This difference between cures treated in daylight, or night time, may imply a subtle distinction between the kind of illness and its cause.

Other motifs

Cutting of hair and nails, or the use of bread or meal were recorded in 11% (10) of the charms. Janet Tailzeor included the cutting of both nails and hair in her recommendations. These were to be disposed of either by being thrown into south running water, or baked in an oatmeal bannock which was then to be disposed of carefully so that 'no bodie sould gett wrong of it'.¹³⁷ This neatly illustrates both motifs, as the nail cuttings were combined with the meal.

Animals or animals parts and special restrictions, such as not speaking to anyone, both featured in 9% (8) of instructions. The use of

¹³⁷ The 'proper' disposal of objects associated with the ill person was stressed by several charmers in order to reduce the likelihood of any further transference of the disease. The belief in transference of disease is also discussed in chapter 8, 177 and chapter 10, 240-1.

animal skins, fat or faeces was certainly not all that unusual and also featured in many treatments prescribed by physicians. The animals mentioned in this sample were toads and a cat, although other examples have recorded the use of hens, cockerels and seals. Martin mentions the wearing of a girdle made of seal skin as a cure for sciatica.¹³⁸ At one time it was common for a black cock to be buried at the site where someone had suffered their first attack of the 'falling sickness' or epilepsy.¹³⁹ However neither of these treatments was found in the sources. Toads were tied to the neck of sheep infected with braxy and another remedy involved the burying of a live toad in a box under the outside of the threshold of the afflicted person's house.¹⁴⁰ As this does reflect some of the features of the burial of the cock it may reflect the same belief about the removal of the disease.

Laying on of hands was mentioned in 6% (6) of charms and reference to wood or trees, bleeding or boundaries (threshold – 3% (3); further parish or communal boundary – 2% (2)) were all mentioned in 5% (5) of the rituals. The use of touch and hands, like the use of blessed water, has religious connotations. Jesus and priests used their hands to bless and also to heal. That charmers may have been doing this would certainly have caused a degree of concern among the church authorities. Andrew Aiken laid his hands about the heart and throat of Andrew Liddell's wife.¹⁴¹ He also charmed animals by laying his hands on them. In another case George Beir, as well as tying threads round the person's neck, also touched the affected part.

Salt, fire, an object or a some form of metal were each mentioned in

¹³⁸ Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands*, 136.

¹³⁹ Beith, *Healing Threads*, 169.

¹⁴⁰ NAS, JC26/26 charm for bewitched person recorded by Issobell Bennet.

¹⁴¹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

4% (4) of occasions. The use of heat and metal, usually iron, was a fairly typical routine to remove spirits or protect against fairies and both were seen in the charm to cure a changeling child recommended by Margaret Dickson. Issobell Bennet used a horse shoe to frighten 'our good neighbours' – the fairies, and Andrew Aiken burned clothing worn by the diseased person in the fire because: 'this being an evill mind be ye fairie folk must be helpit be fyre' and it would appear that these two were closely linked in their use. The significance of these devices would suggest that in these cases the problem was caused by spirits not another human.

Boundaries were also a significant feature, both as marks of private or domestic space, but also as protective limits. This could imply either straightforward physical boundaries of an individual house, or a communal boundary such as march stone or parish limit. Within these boundaries life was generally safer and controlled, but beyond them an unknown territory existed. The placing of pieces of rowan tree above the door provided a protection from unwelcome spirits for the house and the inhabitants; the unwelcome power would not be able to cross over. On the other hand, references to boundaries may have been of a more symbolic or temporal nature. A reference to the time between night and day or different seasons might be read as a form of boundary between two different spheres or worlds.¹⁴²

The use of a verbal request for the return of the diseased person's health only appeared in 4% (4) of the rituals recorded; however, this would appear to have been quite a common feature of healing rituals as it was also mentioned in several cases of demonic witchcraft accusation. A standard interaction was to request the person suspected of causing the

¹⁴² Gell, A *The Anthropology of Time* (Oxford, 1992), 84-92. See also Rees, A and B *Celtic Heritage* (London, 1961), 89-94, for a discussion of boundaries between living and dead and order and disorder.

affliction to take the enchantment off. This exchange would appear to have been accepted practice and, as Sharpe points out, this confrontation had two possible outcomes: a reconciliation and cure may have been achieved or guilt established.¹⁴³ Of course this ritual also allowed for the perpetuation of witchcraft and charming beliefs but which may not always have necessitated recourse to any formal authority. Issobell Bennet advised people to go to another person and ask for their health to be restored. An alternative practice, which was also recommended, was to obtain, or steal, something which was the property of the suspect. The removal of three pieces of thatch from Isobel Keir's roof and a request for the return of a child's health illustrated the combination of the use of boundaries and request.¹⁴⁴ There are other cases of this practice, as in the case of Robert Douglas who sat down on his knees in front of Elspeth Meik and: 'askit his health thryse in the name of God from hir'.¹⁴⁵ Bessie Clark from North Berwick was reprimanded by the Haddington presbytery for blooding – cutting with a pin – William Whyt, kneeling before him and asking her child's health from him. In both these cases it was those who had asked for the return of health who were punished by the church because they had requested and participated in the rituals.

Meat and herbs were specified in a total of only 4% of cases – 2% (2) of each, and finally eggs were mentioned in 1% (1). Of these motifs the low percentage of reference to the use of some herb, specified or not, is perhaps surprising given the presumed importance of herbal remedies stressed in medicinal prescriptions. However, this may have been because these healers were charmers and not herbalists. They cured by charming using rituals and words, which was based on a quite different epistemology from

¹⁴³ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, 160.

¹⁴⁴ NAS, JC 26/26.

¹⁴⁵ NAS, Aberlady kirk session records, CH2/4/1.

the use of herbs. Of those treatments which included herbs only one specified which herb was used. Bessie Stevenson mentioned foxglove, which was often used in treatments for dropsy or fluid retention. Martin also mentions the use of foxglove to relieve the pains which followed fevers.¹⁴⁶ Herbs would appear to have been used by a different type of healer, either physicians and apothecaries or lay healers, such as gardeners, who used particular recipes and prescriptions which circulated around elite circles. Ordinary healers who used herbs, and who were likely to have existed, may not have been recorded as charmers as they did not cause their neighbours or church officials as much anxiety.

Conclusion

The remedies offered by the charmers in the seventeenth century were as varied as the motifs themselves, yet at the same time they demonstrated enough similarity to support the argument that charmers used knowledge and skill founded on logical principles and experience. That the treatments have many motifs or devices in common validates the thesis that individual charmers did not simply 'make up' their charms, although there may have been a degree of local or personal variation, but that there was a solid foundation and a firm belief in the efficacy of the practice, albeit a form of magical practice. Knowledge of the charms was passed on and gained through empiricism certainly, but it was neither arbitrary nor chaotic.

¹⁴⁶ Martin *Description of the Western Islands*, 224. Foxglove or digitalis was later used for cardiac conditions.

Chapter 12 – Local Analysis: Haddington and Stirling

Presbyteries

Introduction

Close analysis of the material and statistics related to the two presbyteries of Haddington and Stirling has revealed useful data which shows that there was indeed local variation and deviation from the larger national statistical pattern of witchcraft and charming prosecution, at the same time as some overlap.¹ This was of course not unexpected, but the examination has also revealed some similarities and differences between the two areas themselves. The distinction between witchcraft and charming was recognised by both elite and ordinary members of the population, and this was reflected in differences in their accusation and prosecution. The proposition that accusations were led from above, either by the state or the church, or from below, by neighbours and communities, has also been shown to be inadequate. The individual circumstances of each parish, personalities of ministers and lairds, problems and practices of local communities all had their role to play in the proceedings at different times.

The analysis

The following analysis of the two presbyteries has been undertaken from three main perspectives: a comparison of the proportion of witches to charmers who were accused; gender differences between the charmers and witches and also between the two areas, the annual pattern of accusation and then some consideration of the role of ministers, elites and prickers. The figures are a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Within the presbyteries themselves the evidence from the different

parishes has been collated to provide both an individual internal analysis

¹ The national statistics and local variation are discussed in chapter 9, 199-200, 210-12.

of each area and also a comparative assessment of the two.

There was a total of 370 recorded cases of accused witches and 62 accused charmers, which included 14 individuals who were accused of both charming and witchcraft, from the Haddington and Stirling presbyteries between 1603 and 1688. These figures have been collected from primary documentary sources and also compared with the details collected by Larner *et al.*² Several of the names and cases, particularly those of the charmers, do not appear to have been noted by Larner and so the *Source Book*, although useful, was used only to verify some details. Of the total of 418 cases, accused witches accounted for 80% (370) of the sample and charmers 15% (62). The percentages totalled is greater than 100% as this includes the 14 who were accused of both. Not unexpectedly, the Haddington presbytery accounted for the higher percentage – 83% (346) compared to 17% (72) from the Stirling area. (See figure 12, p 297)

Although total numbers are themselves neither very comprehensible nor significant on their own, they do merit some comment. The comparison of the two presbyteries has already demonstrated that Haddington had a larger, and more concentrated, population³ and so the higher numbers accused of witchcraft and charming were not entirely unforeseen. Also Larner's calculations demonstrated that the majority of all secular witchcraft prosecutions throughout the whole of Scotland came from Lothian, Edinburgh and Fife, with Tranent and Prestonpans (Salt Preston), both in the Haddington presbytery, featuring most often.⁴ The Haddington presbytery figure was therefore expected, as the population difference was calculated to be proportionally

² Larner *et al*, *Source Book* mentions a further 26 cases from East Lothian. However since these individuals could not be placed specifically in the Haddington presbytery they have not been included in the overall total.

³ See chapter 4, 66.

⁴ Larner, *Enemies*, 82. Larner's opinion was that these areas were closer to central authority and therefore the local elites were more likely to utilise the central judicial system.

Figure 12: Table Illustrating the Gender of Witches and Charmers in Haddington and Stirling Presbyteries

	Total Accusations	Total Accusations	Female Accusations	Male Accusations	Unknown Gender Accusations
Haddington and Stirling All Accusations	418	100% (418)	80% (333)	17% (73)	3% (12)
Witchcraft and Charming	14	100% (14)	79% (11)	21% (3)	0% (0)
Witchcraft	89% (370)	100% (370)	82% (303)	15% (55)	3% (12)
Charming	15% (62)	100% (62)	66% (41)	34% (21)	-
Haddington Presbytery All Accusations	83% (346)	100% (346)	84% (280)	16% (57)	-
Witchcraft and Charming	0% (3)	100% (3)	-	-	-
Witchcraft	77% (322)	100% (322)	81% (262)	15% (48)	4% (12)
Charming	6% (27)	100% (27)	67% (18)	33% (9)	-
Stirling Presbytery All Accusations	17% (72)	100% (72)	89% (64)	11% (19)	-
Witchcraft and Charming	2% (11)	100% (11)	-	-	-
Witchcraft	11% (48)	100% (48)	85% (41)	15% (7)	-
Charming	8% (35)	100% (35)	66% (23)	34% (12)	-

The gender of 12 of those accused of witchcraft was not recorded in the documents

The total number of witchcraft accusations and charming accusations includes 14 individuals accused of both

1.75% greater in the Haddington area than in the Stirling presbytery. However, a ratio of 4:1 was a slightly higher than anticipated, given the general social and economic similarities between the two areas. The figures also revealed that Haddington and Pencaitland had higher numbers of accused than Tranent and Saltpreston, and these will be examined in more detail below.

As a major main focus of this thesis is the practice and belief of charmers, a more interesting and valid approach was to compare the types of accusations: that is whether the accusations related to either witchcraft or charming. This calculation demonstrated the greatest divergence between the two areas, as the majority of the other analyses show remarkable consistency. Of those who were accused of witchcraft, 87% (322) came from the Haddington presbytery and only 13% (48) from the Stirling area. Although somewhat closer, the statistics for charmers demonstrate the complete opposite – 56% (35) of those named as charmers came from the presbytery of Stirling and 44% (27) from Haddington. (See figure 12, p 297) The statistic for the witchcraft accusations was in itself not very surprising given the already acknowledged over-representation of Haddington in both secular and ecclesiastical prosecutions, but the Stirling witchcraft numbers were lower than expected. The difference between the accusations of charming in the two areas was not unexpected, given the different populations, but the higher percentage of charming cases in the Stirling presbytery was also a little surprising. However, as will be illustrated in the analysis of the year-by-year figures, a small number of peaks can influence and alter the whole picture quite markedly. It is clear that at times there were particular local factors which affected the situation in one area, which did not occur or did not have the same effect in another. The general pattern throughout the years other than the peak

periods indicates that there were either no accusations at all, or only very small numbers. This suggests that there was probably a greater general toleration of charming and witchcraft than has previously been acknowledged.

Presbyteries and parishes

An interesting and productive exercise was to examine the numbers of cases which occurred in the different parishes within each presbytery. Not every individual could be included in this part of the analysis, as between the two areas there were 65 cases (15%) where the specific parish was not noted. This still left 85% of cases where a parish could be identified. In the Haddington presbytery the parishes of Haddington and Pencaitland were most frequently mentioned, followed by Tranent and Saltpreston (Prestonpans). Thirty-one percent (107) of all the Haddington cases came from the parish of Haddington itself and 16% (54) from Pencaitland. These two parishes were exceptional as the next highest was Tranent with 13% (44) then Saltpreston with 9% (30). The other parishes ranged from 5% down to zero (or no recorded cases) per parish. 10% (33) cases came from unspecified parishes. (See figure 13, p 300)) The estimated average for each parish in the presbytery was 7%, with all but four of the parishes producing below average numbers.

The over-representation of Haddington was not surprising given its size, population density, dominance in the presbytery and relative importance in the burgh network, but the large numbers from Pencaitland (16%), which had a much smaller population density and size, were surprising. Pencaitland was similar in size to Saltpreston which only produced 9% of the accusations. If parish population and size cannot be used as accurate indicators of local attitudes towards witchcraft

Figure 13: Table Illustrating Accusations in the Parishes of Haddington and Stirling Presbyteries

	Total Accusations	Witchcraft Accusations	Charming Accusations
TOTALS (Haddington and Stirling)*	418	370	62
HADDINGTON PRESBYTERY**			
Proportion of Totals	346 83%	322 87%	27 44%
Haddington	31% (107)	32% (102)	19% (5)
Pencaitland	16% (54)	16% (53)	11% (3)
Tranent	13% (44)	14% (44)	0% (0)
Salt Preston	9% (30)	9% (30)	0% (0)
Humbie	5% (17)	4% (14)	11% (3)
Aberlady	4% (13)	4% (13)	0% (0)
Saltoun	3% (10)	3% (10)	0% (0)
Dirleton	3% (12)	3% (10)	7% (2)
North Berwick	3% (9)	2% (5)	15% (4)
Yester	3% (11)	2% (5)	22% (6)
Bolton	2% (6)	2% (6)	0% (0)
Unspecified	10% (33)	9% (30)	15% (4)
<i>Rounding up/down error (total =102%)</i>			
STIRLING PRESBYTERY**			
Proportion of Totals	72 17%	48 13%	35 56%
Alloa	29% (21)	42% (20)	9% (3)
St Ninians	7% (5)	2% (1)	11% (4)
Airth	7% (5)	2% (1)	14% (5)
Holy Rude	6% (4)	4% (2)	11% (4)
Gargunnock	3% (2)	2% (1)	6% (2)
Clackmannan	3% (2)	2% (1)	6% (2)
Alva	1% (1)	0% (0)	3% (1)
Unspecified	44% (32)	46% (22)	40% (14)

* The total number of witchcraft accusations and charming accusations include 14 individuals accused of both

The following parishes have no recorded cases: **Haddington Presbytery: Athelstanford; Bara; Garrauld; Morham; Stirling Presbytery: Bothkennar; Denny; Dollar; Larbert

and charming then perhaps the authority and proximity of the central presbytery itself was more important. However, the recorded cases appear to have come from parishes which were both central and peripheral; with Haddington, Bolton and Saltoun in the centre of the presbytery and the others from the periphery. (See figure 2, p 62) North Berwick, Dirleton, Aberlady, Tranent, Saltpreston, Pencaitland, Morham and Yester are all on the outer boundary of the presbytery. Leaving aside Pencaitland, it would seem that individual parishes maintained their own autonomy in controlling and sanctioning charming. The records from the central parishes of Athelstaneford and Morham contained no cases of witchcraft or charming, but Garvald, which is on the outer boundary, also appeared to have had no cases. Of the parishes with no cases, Morham had the smallest area with the lowest population, but Garvald was much larger than, for example, Bolton or Humbie. Being in such close proximity to Haddington, and with a small population, Morham might have been expected to have been more likely to have been influenced by the patterns of behaviour and attitudes towards witchcraft and charming which were seen in the main parish. This would appear not to have been the case. However, negative evidence requires as much careful analysis as any other and, even if it cannot be proven categorically, it is extremely probable that charming was indeed practised in those parishes where no cases were recorded. The absence of recorded cases is more likely to be due to more mundane reasons such as poorly-organised kirk sessions and the lack of detailed records. As the kirk session records of Athelstaneford, Morham and Garvald all start after 1688 (Garvald was also joined with Bara in 1702) this latter explanation would seem the most likely.

In the Stirling presbytery parishes, the general pattern was similar, with the majority of cases located in one parish – Alloa – which recorded

29% (21) of the total cases. Thirteen percent (11) of cases were recorded from the central parishes which included the burgh of Stirling itself: St Ninian's with 7% (5) and Holy Rude with 6% (4). The percentage of cases found in the other parishes ranged from 7% to zero (or no recorded cases). With an estimated average of 9% per parish only Alloa had recorded above average accusations. Airth had 7% (5), Clackmannan and Gargunnock both had 2% (2) and Alva 1% (1) of the cases. (See figure 13, p 300) Forty-four percent (32) of cases from Stirling did not identify a specific parish but, given the pattern seen in Haddington, it would be quite probable that these cases would have come from all over the presbytery. No cases were recorded as having come from Dollar, Bothkennar, Larbert and Denny, although again this is likely to be because the kirk session records for these parishes have not survived or did not start until after 1699, rather than because there were no charmers or people who consulted them. The presbytery records show that 12 individuals went on pilgrimage to a holy well in 1607 and the minutes show that they all came from either Airth or Bothkennar, although not who came from which parish.

Like the Haddington presbytery, the Stirling cases also came from both central and peripheral parishes, which endorses the theory that local circumstances and autonomy were more important than central authority. It was not only those parishes which were nearest the centre of the presbytery where accusations were the highest, but also those on the boundaries. It is interesting to note that it was an outlying parish which had the largest total, showing some similarity with the high numbers recorded from the outlying community of Pencaitland in the Haddington presbytery. Again population size was no indication of the rate of accusation. Certainly Gargunnock and Alva – which had two of the lowest populations – recorded only 2% and 1% of cases respectively which was

not unexpected. However Airth and Clackmannan recorded 6% and 2% each but, according to the records, Larbert and Dollar, with similar populations, had no cases. This demonstrates that charming and witchcraft were not phenomena associated only with small agricultural communities or larger burgh communities, but with all types of communities.

The difference between the actual number of complaints about charming and about witchcraft within each parish was also explored. The rationale behind this approach was because accusations of witchcraft were a relatively unusual and extreme occurrence, often precipitated by external factors, whereas accusations of charming tended to reflect on-going popular concerns. Accusations of charming can be used as another measure of local attitudes. This analysis demonstrated that the majority of the parishes which recorded any type of accusation all registered cases of charming but the actual numbers of charmers accused showed less variation than the numbers accused of witchcraft. In the Haddington presbytery the cases of specific witchcraft accusations demonstrated that the majority 32% (102) came from Haddington parish. (See figure 13, p 300) Pencaitland recorded 16% (53), Tranent 14% (44) and Saltpreston 9% (30) of cases. Humbie (14) and Aberlady (13) both had 4%, Saltoun and Dirleton had 3% (10), North Berwick (5), Yester (5) and Bolton (6) had 2%. Nine percent (30) accusations of witchcraft did not specify any particular parish. Accusations of charming demonstrated less variation, Haddington had 19% (5) and Pencaitland and Humbie 11% (3) of cases. Yester 22% (6) and North Berwick 15% (4) had relatively high percentages of charmers recorded compared to witchcraft accusations made there. Yester, which had one of the lowest witchcraft accusations at 2%, had the highest percent of accused charmers with 22%. Fifteen percent (4) cases of accused

charmings had no specific parish noted. Haddington parish, not surprisingly, featured highly in both types of accusation.

In the Stirling presbytery the percentages of charming cases in each parish were Airth 14% (5), Alloa 9% (3), Clackmannan and Gargunnoch had 3% (2) each, Holy Rude and St Ninian's had 11% (4) each and Alva 3% (1). The cases of witchcraft accusation in each parish were less consistent with 42% (20) cases from Alloa alone, 4% (2) cases were from Holy Rude and St Ninian's, Airth, Gargunnoch and Clackmannan recorded only 2% (1) case each. Forty-six percent (22) cases of witchcraft accusation and 40% (14) of charming accusations did not record a specific parish. These figures are slightly less consistent than Haddington, nevertheless the accusations of charming again show less variation than those of witchcraft.

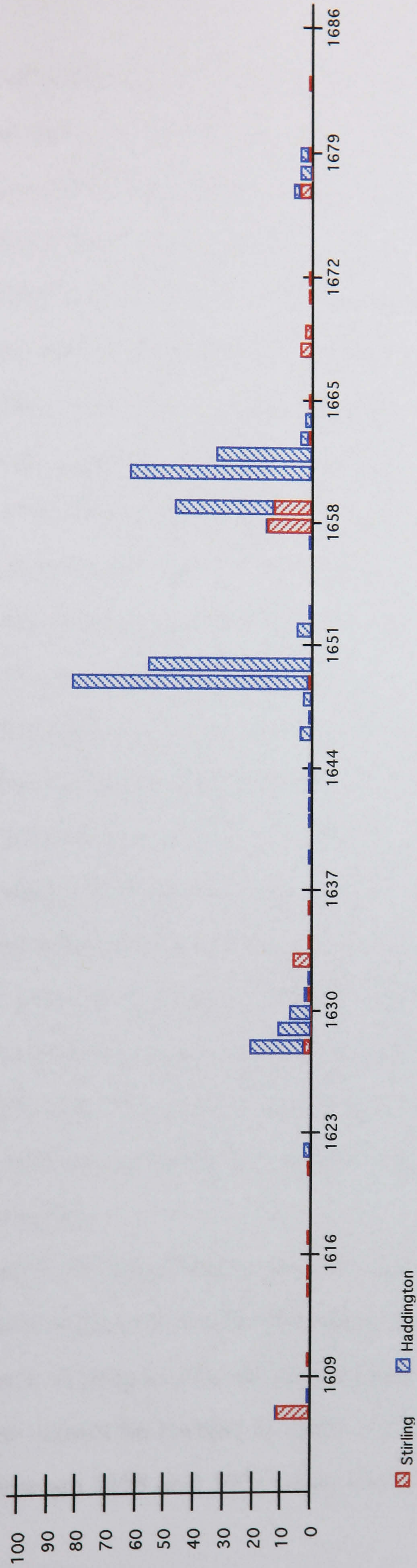
These statistics are confirmation that charming was practised throughout communities of all sizes in lowland Scotland. Although Haddington and Stirling had larger burgh populations than the other parishes their social environment was not substantially different from that of the surrounding smaller villages. The day-to-day problems and personal disputes would have been very similar to those experienced in the other communities. It has been claimed that witchcraft and, by association, charming were rural activities,⁵ and there is no doubt that these two localities confirm this, but this survey has also demonstrated that witchcraft and charming were equally prevalent in both burgh situations and also in mining communities such as Pencaitland, Alloa, Alva and Clackmannan.

Yearly variation

Another valuable approach was to examine the accusations by year, that is by a chronological linear analysis (See figure 14, p 305). The accusations

⁵ Larner, *Enemies*, 199. See also Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, 129.

Figure 14: Bar Chart of Accusations in Haddington and Stirling Presbyteries 1603-88



show a degree of similarity between the areas as far as gender and type of community, but the two areas did not show the same degree of equity when the yearly pattern was analysed. It is clear from the year-by-year numbers that there were three peak periods in the Haddington presbytery. These were 1628-9, 1649-50 and 1661-62. Although there were no accusations recorded in the year 1660, 34 witches were accused in 1659, so the 'peak' might be extended to 1659-1662. The most obvious, and well-documented and examined, of these peaks may be accounted for by the involvement of the earl of Haddington. During the clearly-defined localised large hunt of 1661 and 1662, a total of 96 witches from six different parishes were accused. Only one charmer was accused during this period; Agnes Bennet, also from Pencaitland, was questioned by the kirk session about her use of a burial ritual to protect the spirit of the dead person.⁶ The first outbreak during 1628-9 was much smaller and involved only 28 cases of witchcraft and two of charming, again from six parishes. The second episode, 1649-50, was much bigger than the 1661-2 peak, although not the 1659-1662 numbers. It involved 127 accused witches and four charmers and involved nine parishes. Although the numbers of charmers accused during these 'peak' episodes were smaller than those accused of witchcraft, they did not show such a noticeable variation from the normal pattern of charming accusations. One or two charmers accused per year was average.

This pattern of prosecution was not repeated in the Stirling presbytery. There were two smaller localised peaks. The first one in 1607 involved a group of people who all participated in a charming ritual and which therefore cannot be treated in quite the same manner. The other episode was between 1658 and 1659 when a total of 28 individuals were

⁶ NAS, Pencaitland kirk session, CH2/296/1.

accused. Although 1659 does overlap with the start of an outbreak in the Haddington area, there was no other similarity between the two presbyteries. The number of parishes involved was also much smaller. Only three parishes were involved in the 1658-9 Stirling peak. There were no obvious increases in the Stirling accusations in the years 1628-9, 1649-50 or 1661-2.

As has been pointed out, each episode usually involved more than one parish. This suggests that on some occasions there was a concerted and, perhaps, coordinated effort between some areas to suppress the practice. Haddington parish appears in all the episodes apart from 1628 and 1659, Saltpreston and Pencaitland appear in five outbreaks, Saltpreston four times, Yester three times and Aberlady, Dirleton, Bolton, Humbie, North Berwick and Tranent twice. However, when the figures are broken down into each individual community then each 'outbreak' can be seen to have had an even more localised emphasis. The majority of parish incidents fell into what Lerner identified as isolated cases; that is less than 10 people were accused. Using this model, only Haddington in 1649 and 1661-2, Humbie in 1649, Pencaitland in 1649 and 1650 and Tranent in 1659 appear to have experienced either small panics or localised large hunts. In the Stirling presbytery only Alloa experienced anything like this level of panic. Twelve of the 15 accused in 1658 and seven of the 13 accused in 1659 all came from Alloa. It is likely that there must have been a degree of knock-on effect, although it is difficult to measure this absolutely. This might be explained in some cases when ministers from more than one parish were involved in the proceedings. Robert Ker and Patrick Skougall in 1661⁷ and Harie Guthrie, Robert Wright and John Craingingelt in 1658 were all ministers who were involved in inquiries outwith their own

⁷ *APS*, vol VII, 235.

parishes.⁸ It is also interesting to note, however, that in the majority of years the rate of accusation in most of the parishes was very low or indeed zero, which in itself does not prove that the practice was not ongoing.

Unlike Stirling, the record of witchcraft accusations from the Haddington presbytery reflects the national pattern observed by Larner. Larner suggested that these episodes – 1629, 1649 and 1661 – were the result of national and international circumstances. These external factors may indeed have had some relevance, but central authorities may have had more theoretical than actual control over social behaviours and attitudes, especially in relation to charmers and charming. The result of proclamations and overtures of both the church and parliament would seem not to have been what was anticipated. The appeal from the church to extend the witchcraft act in 1641 and 1646 to include charming which ‘the rude and ignorant are much addicted unto’⁹ would appear not to have been a reaction to any particular rise in the numbers of accused charmers in the years immediately prior to this. Although Haddington did experience a slight peak of seven complaints about charmers recorded between 1646 and 1649, in Stirling there were no accusations at all. Also, the change in the law did not result in an increase in complaints at individual parish level in either presbytery during subsequent years. From the numbers accused it would appear that the eventual acquiescence by the parliament in 1649 to the demands to extend the 1563 Witchcraft Act to include the punishment of consultants, as well as practitioners, of charming may only have promoted accusations about witchcraft rather than about charming. As the general population may well have availed themselves of the expertise of charmers the threat of personal reprisal

⁸ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/6.

⁹ *Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland*, vol 1, 1646-47, 123.

may, paradoxically, have led to a decrease in accusations. In Haddington, accusations of charming decreased and those against witches increased dramatically in 1649. In Stirling, apart from one accusation of witchcraft in 1649, there seems to have been a complete absence of either type of accusation in the years immediately following the revised act.

Despite the many similarities, a major difference between the two presbyteries may be highlighted by the influence, or otherwise, of elite-led attitudes. This is easiest to illustrate by examining the episodes of peak accusation. The incident, or what might be regarded as a peak, in 1607 when 11 individuals from the Stirling area were reported for participating in a charming ritual¹⁰ is interesting because there appears to be no comparable example from Haddington. However it was not until 1612 that the presbytery:

undirstanding that charming is verie frequentlie
usit in thir bounds, for removing qrof the brethrein
ordains ilk eldership wtin thir boundis to tak
inquistiione quhair any sic thing is comitted and as
they find to tak order wt appertains and to
dischairge the samin publictlye in pulpet¹¹

The aim of the church to encourage the kirk elders to seek out charmers and charming would seem to have had little effect on the number of accusations reported to the church, as the subsequent records show no increase, and instead show an apparent decrease. Apart from the case of Issobel Atkine, who had already been reprimanded for charming in 1607, and her mother, who were both accused of charming and witchcraft in 1615, there are no other documented cases of charming until 1621. This suggests that either charmers were not present, which is unlikely, or that the general populace did not consider that their practices merited

¹⁰ The table shows 10 people from the Stirling presbytery accused of charming and 1 of charming and witchcraft. In 1607 11 individuals were accused of charming but in 1615 one of them, Issobel Atkine, was accused of witchcraft and charming.

¹¹ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/4.

reporting to church authorities. The attitude of the church appears to have been limited to the officials of the Stirling presbytery as a reaction to local practice, rather than having been imposed from above through parliament or the General Assembly.

In 1648 at a later meeting of the Dunblane synod, which included the Stirling presbytery, there is some evidence that the concerns of the General Assembly had filtered down to a local level. The synod urged that individual presbyteries should be diligent in ensuring that the practice of charming rituals was abandoned and that local heritors should assist in the apprehending and punishment of those involved.¹² Paradoxically the result of this centralised decision was a complete absence of complaints about charming until 1659 when five people were accused of both witchcraft and charming. It is also likely that the witchcraft aspect of these accusations was more important than charming, given that the previous year there had been a small localised panic involving 15 people accused of witchcraft. This earlier incident appears to have had some localised knock-on effect. Eight of the 15 accused of witchcraft in 1658 and in 1659 a further 12 came from Alloa.

Two of the 1659 charming and witchcraft cases – Bessie Stevenson and Issobell Bennett – were from the burgh parish of Holy Rude. Following the apprehending and questioning of these individuals, the kirk session noted a number of confessions from other members of the congregation who had consulted these women.¹³ In August 1659 Cristane Chrystisone had to make repentance for seeking a cure for herself and her sick child from Bessie Stevenson. James Andirsone, baxter from Stirling, gave in a supplication to the session seeking forgiveness for his sin of seeking charms from Issobell Bennett. He expressed ‘unfeigned grief and

¹² *Register of the Diocesan Synod of Dunblane, 1662-1688*, 263.

¹³ SCA, Holy Rude kirk session records, CH2/1026/4.

repentance for making use of Issobell Bennet's charms'.

In total 11 people confessed their sins of using charmers and charming to the Holy Rude session. This whole incident was clearly bound up with more than simple charming as Bessie Stevenson and Issobell Bennett and the others were not only charged with charming but also with a combination of the practices. Most of the people who confessed to the kirk session in this case also appeared as witnesses in the secular trial of the accused, but there may have been other social factors and tensions involved. Harrison, in his paper about the use of the branks in Stirling, identified some of the women involved in this case as having been branked or punished with a scold's bridle.¹⁴ His evidence suggests that not only was 1658 a peak year for witchcraft and charming accusations, but also for the use of the branks. There appears to be some evidence that there was an atmosphere of verbal violence and threats in the community at that time, and also that there was some connection between the incidents. Marjorie Wingzett (Wingate or Whzgt) appeared as a witness against Bessie Stevenson, but in later years was herself called a witch and was accused of charming. In 1663 Isobel Adie was branked for calling Wingzett a witch and three years later, in 1669, Issobell Forrester told the St Ninian's kirk session that Wingzett had advised her to go to the well before sunrise, to speak to no-one and collect water for her sick father.¹⁵ This suggests that there was some substance to Wingzett's reputation as a charmer. The case was to be referred to the sheriff but, as Harrison points out, Wingzett was a woman of relatively high social status and the accusations against her do not seem to have been taken any further. The evidence of branking as punishment for accusations against other women ties in with the evidence of public repentance for consulting charmers and

¹⁴ Harrison, 'Women and the Branks in Stirling', 114-131.

¹⁵ SCA, St Ninian's kirk session records, CH2/337/1.

suggests that during this period people's actions and words could be extremely dangerous both for others and for themselves, and any complaint taken to the authorities would not have been undertaken lightly.

The concerns of the Stirling synod and presbytery to encourage ministers and elders to seek out those who practised superstitious healing rituals and charms was not mirrored in the Haddington presbytery. The presbytery minutes make few references to the concerns of the General Assembly during the early 1640s, however in 1644, following the case of Andro Ker, who was accused of curing an ox, the presbytery instructed ministers and elders to inquire in their parishes for other information either about Andro Ker or about other incidents.¹⁶ Despite this request the next case of charming was not discussed until 1646. There were several other concerns which may have contributed to the Haddington presbytery's lack of action with respect to charming. There was an outbreak of plague in 1645 which interestingly did not result in any accusations of witchcraft as the cause. There was disquiet about certain catholics in the area and also the celebration of penny weddings where there was: 'piping, dancing, drinking, dinner & supper' as well as 'singing of bady songs and prophane minstrelling'. The presbytery also noted, in 1647, that playdays 'were kept in severall of their congregations' and ordained the brethren to suppress them diligently, especially those which were held on old saints' days.¹⁷ Although this last issue may have had something in common with the Stirling synod, in general it would seem that the different presbyteries had different problems and priorities.

Unlike Stirling, there was an increase in the number of accusations

¹⁶NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

¹⁷ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

in 1649 in Haddington, which may have been due to the General Assembly's demands. It is interesting to note that Robert Ker, minister at Haddington, attended the General Assembly in 1647 and 1648, and therefore must have been aware of the Assembly's position. Robert Ker was the son of John Ker who was the minister at Saltpreston from 1605 until he resigned in 1642. Robert took over the charge following his father's resignation until he moved to Haddington in 1647. He would certainly have been present during the earlier local peak in Saltpreston in 1628 when nine individuals were accused. This personal experience may have contributed to his attitude and involvement in the 1649 proceedings. Later, he was also one of the commissioners appointed in 1661 to investigate accusations of witchcraft.¹⁸ In Dirleton, where eight people were accused of witchcraft in 1649, the minister John Makghie also attended the Assembly in 1643-5 and 1648 and again may have been influenced by the discussions there. However, Alexander Vernor, the minister at Pencaitland, where 26 accusations were made between 1649 and 1650, did not attend the Assembly.

Despite official backing, ministers did not always meet with local approval. James Fleming, who had the charge of Yester, attended the executions of witches in Tranent in 1649 on behalf of the Assembly, but he later complained to the presbytery that he had been attacked and abused by some of the local townspeople.¹⁹ The involvement of ministers did not necessarily mean that there were accusations in their own parishes. The parish of Yester, Fleming's own charge, did not report any witchcraft accusations during this episode. In 1661 the minister of Saltoun, Patrick Sougall, along with Robert Ker from Haddington was a witness to confessions from several people from Samuelston. Yet there were no cases

¹⁸ *APS*, vol VII, 196-7.

¹⁹ *NAS*, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

from Saltoun during that year. Clearly the power and influence of ministers depended not only on their personal experience and opinion, but also on the local congregations themselves.

The 1661 episode in the Haddington presbytery has already been touched upon but it requires some further discussion. The earl of Haddington petitioned parliament in April of that year for a commission to try several people from Samuelston for witchcraft. The earl reported that his tenants had complained about incidents of malefice and, according to the earl, had threatened to leave his land. It is interesting that the earl implied that it was pressure from his tenants which persuaded him to apply for a commission, as this does suggest that the lead came from those on the same social standing as the accused rather than having been instigated from above. It might be presumed therefore that there would be some evidence of complaints about malefice in this area in the kirk minutes. Although some of the commissions listed in the acts of Parliament at this time do mention Robert Ker, the minister at Haddington, and his presence was undoubtedly influential, the kirk session records do not contain as much detail about acts of malefice as might have been assumed. In August of 1659 a complaint had been made by Adam Brotherstone about whores and witches in Samuelston.²⁰ The kirk session decided that Brotherstone's allegations about Samuelston reflected badly on the whole town and ordered him to appear again to name the 'whoores, theifes and witches in Samilstone'. There are no further references to Samuelston until March 1661 when it was recorded that Catherine Young, Agnes Williamson, Cristian Deans, Jonet Kemp and Elspeth Tailour were all incarcerated for witchcraft. Apart from Catherine Young and Jonet Kemp the other three were all mentioned in

²⁰ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/3.

the commission granted on 3 April 1661.²¹

It is, therefore, difficult to assess how accurate was the earl's observation that his tenants were complaining about witchcraft in their communities. The records are, for the most part, silent about any details of what the accused had allegedly done.²² The only case where any details of malefice or harm were recorded was that of Jonet Kemp, who was accused of causing the death of a child. Interestingly, the child's mother, Walter Couper's wife, declared that although her child took sick after Jonet Kemp would not speak to it she 'denyed that she did blame hir for the death of hir chyld'. This type of detail is both common and frustratingly difficult to decipher. Malefice would seem to have been identified by some as the cause of death of a child and yet the mother appeared to be reluctant to apportion blame. Why did the mother hesitate in blaming Kemp? Crucially, what was the relationship between the women prior to the child's illness? Were they friends or adversaries? There may have been some disagreement between them. Perhaps Kemp's refusal to speak to the child may have been a referral to the recognised public reestablishment of communication, where one party sought the restoration of health from another through a verbal request which absolved both parties at the same time. Alternatively, Kemp may have had a reputation as a charmer, although there are no other specific references to indicate this. Since consultation of charmers was regarded unfavourably the child's mother may not have wanted to implicate herself. A commission against Kemp was not granted until 7 June 1661.²³ These explanations are, of course, conjecture as there is no way to corroborate the circumstances absolutely

²¹ *APS*, vol VII, 123.

²² The Haddington kirk session records contain limited specific details of malefice and the presbytery records, which might theoretically have contained details about the case if the kirk session sought further advice before involving the civil magistrate, are missing between 1659 and 1662.

²³ *APS*, vol VII, 248.

but this example does illustrate the complexities of the situation.

Certainly the absence of examples of malefice was somewhat surprising given the earl of Haddington's claims. In his examination of the 1661-2 East Lothian episode,²⁴ Levack suggests that it was the earl of Haddington himself who was the real impetus behind the accusations. The fears of his tenants may have indeed been relevant, or perhaps exaggerated, but the sudden increase in multiple accusations which all revolved around confessions of diabolic pacts and where the devil's marks were searched for and found upon many of the accused does give the impression of an elite-inspired and elite-led offensive. The other factor in both the 1661-2 episode and the earlier one, in 1659, was the presence of prickers, particularly John Kincaid from Tranent. Twenty-nine individuals accused in 1659 came from Tranent itself, three from Saltpreston and one from Humbie and the majority of them such as Cristian Cranstoun, Barbara Cochrane and Marion Lynn, all from Tranent, were searched by John Kincaid. Although Humbie is further away, the parish of Saltpreston borders Tranent and so it is likely that those from the other parishes were also searched for marks. Kincaid was involved in the 1661 accusations until he was imprisoned in the tolbooth in Edinburgh in April 1662.²⁵ In 1649 he also searched Manie Haliburton from Dirleton.²⁶ Following Kincaid's imprisonment the Privy Council limited the use of prickers, which may be one explanation for the dramatic drop in accusations in 1663.

The numbers accused in 1662 were almost half those of the previous year and by 1663 there were no accusations of witchcraft. This dramatic rise and fall in accusations does suggest that there were certain local factors at play, but that accusations of diabolic witchcraft were more

²⁴ Levack, 'The Great Scottish Witch-Hunt', 90-108.

²⁵ *RPC*, 3rd series, vol I, 187.

²⁶ *RPC*, 2nd series, vol VIII, 194-5; Pitcairn, *Criminal Trials*, vol III, 599.

the result of the fears of authority figures. Individuals with a great deal of personal power and patronage were more important than any particular local communal anxieties. Local fears of malefice may have caused communities to blame other unpopular neighbours informally but the scale of the accusations on these occasions required the power of a formal authority structure. The individual kirk session records of those parishes where a dramatic increase in witchcraft accusations was noted contain very little detail about local or personal animosities, malefice or fears of excessive witchcraft. The cases of mutual name-calling and slander which were recorded do not appear to have progressed on to substantiated cases of witchcraft accusation. In the Pencaitland kirk session records during years such as 1649 and 1650, when there were 15 and then 31 accusations related to witchcraft, the session minutes frequently record the entry: 'session heldin being inquired if yr was any new slander & it was answered none'²⁷ which does suggest that the local kirk was either not involved or did not wish to document the incidents for some other reason. Similarly, the session records for Humbie show a remarkable lack of detail or concern about witchcraft accusations in 1649²⁸ yet the presbytery minutes for 25 July 1649 record the names of several people from Humbie, Dirleton, Haddington, Saltoun and Pencaitland who all confessed that they were guilty of the crime of witchcraft.²⁹ That the parish records do not include more details is surprising, particularly since they do document cases of slander and flyting as well as charming. This again indicates that in cases of diabolic witchcraft it was the higher level authorities, such as the presbytery or local elites, who were involved rather than the local ministers, elders and communities. The implication is that local kirk sessions may have heard the initial complaints and then passed them up

²⁷ NAS, Pencaitland kirk session records, CH2/296/1.

²⁸ NAS, Humbie kirk session records, CH2/389/1.

²⁹ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

to the presbytery but unfortunately the minutes do not always make this process clear. The first reference may be in the presbytery minutes rather than the kirk session records so it may have been that some accusations were made directly to the presbytery itself.

There is no evidence that a searcher was used as often in the Stirling area, which may be one reason for the smaller numbers accused there. In the only episode which might be comparable, the 1658 Alloa episode,³⁰ the various accused confessed to renunciation of baptism, meetings with the devil in 'broune cloathes and ane little blak hatt' or 'in the likens of ane young man in blak cloathes' or 'gray cloathes with ane blew bonnett', meetings with other women, diabolic pact and acts of malefice, in return for promises from the devil that they (the women) would never want. The confessions of the accused were made in the presence of the laird of Clackmannan and the laird of Kennet, justices of the peace, both of whom were Bruces; Mr Harie Guthrie, minister of Kilspindie; Mr Robert Wright, minister at Clackmannan; Mr Johne Craingingelt, minister at Dollar; Mr James Cunningham, and Thomas Mitchell and Johne Keirie both elders from Alloa. The involvement of individuals of this type and status was by no means unusual and it was certainly similar to the Haddington examples, but no reference was made to the skills of a pricker. However, William Moreson, Patrick Chamberis and James Meldrum, kirk elders, reported that they found a devil's mark on Jonet Blak.³¹ The mark was reportedly found on others including Margaret Tailzeor and Kathrin Penny and, like the Haddington cases, it was taken as an absolute sign of guilt. The motifs of elite demonology in these confessions do suggest that this episode was the result of the actions of local political and ecclesiastical elites. Although there may have been

³⁰ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/6.

³¹ NAS, JC 26/26/3.

some pressure from local tenants, like the earl of Haddington's tenants, who blamed the accused for their losses, there is a gap in the local kirk records for the relevant years and so evidence for local attitudes and concerns is, unfortunately, limited.

There are often gaps in evidence which tantalisingly might contain the vital piece of information needed to clinch the argument. Often the missing links have to be the result of hypotheses based on deduction and examination of the material which does exist. The detailed analysis of Stirling and Haddington presbyteries has confirmed some of the theories postulated by Larner, but at the same time has revealed interesting anomalies. There is no doubt that regional and local factors influenced witchcraft and charming accusations just as much as national and international trends, and in some cases more so. However, it should be remembered that the national figures were the result of local prosecutions and particularly in the case of the Haddington the numbers clearly made quite an impact on the national total. It is clear that the peak periods of prosecution were not the same everywhere, nor were all cases the same. However, during the years outwith the peak periods the pattern of prosecution of charming was both more consistent and comparable.

Conclusion

It was mostly in relation to numbers and times of witchcraft accusation that the two presbyteries deviated, rather than that of charming. There were some statistics for the two areas which showed a definite similarity, such as the gender differences between those accused of witchcraft and those accused of charming. In general, the two areas also demonstrated a similar attitude towards charming in relation to its practice, prosecution and punishment. The role of local elites, lairds and ministers, clearly

influenced those incidents of peak witchcraft accusation and demonological theories can be seen to have influenced accusations. Accusations of charming did not seem to involve them to the same extent, nor did charming accusations reflect elite concerns. The use of prickers was certainly more prevalent in Haddington than Stirling, a factor which may also have accounted for the difference in numbers prosecuted. Witchcraft was a serious matter to seventeenth-century society, nevertheless, charming was also both an ecclesiastical and secular crime and a practice which concerned all levels of society. However, interference by centralised powers to punish both charmers, and those who consulted them, may actually have caused a decline in the numbers reported. This analysis has shown that peak episodes of witchcraft accusation were more likely to be the result of elite interference. These involved bigger numbers, were spread over several different parishes and usually had the active participation of more than one minister, the local laird, elders and heritors and emphasised demonological theories of pact and sabbats. Charmers were usually accused either on their own or with one or two other individuals and their accusers tended to be in the same social group.

It has been shown from these two local studies that charming and witchcraft were not the same, nor was their prosecution. Attitudes towards magic in general varied in the seventeenth century and this can be seen in the difference between witchcraft and charming. This valuable distinction could only be revealed by the close examination of the local evidence. Attitudes towards charming were indeed similar in both districts, whereas the prosecution of witches was markedly different. Witchcraft prosecution was likely to be the result of local community dynamics and influences of elites but the prosecution of charmers was a different matter and showed less interference from local elites. The elites

in the Haddington area, both secular and ecclesiastical, would appear to have had more influence over, or active participation in, the prosecution of witchcraft than in the Stirling presbytery. Charming, as a form of magical belief and practice, would appear to have been more acceptable to society than witchcraft because it offered access to some form of power over misfortune and physical and mental illness.

Conclusion

It has been shown that although witchcraft and charming were connected in terms of magical practice, contemporary society perceived and defined them as being different. This linguistic and practical distinction had been obscured and ignored by later generations as witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy and charming were latterly viewed as being synonymous. This difference has been highlighted and defined, and charming, as a distinct technique, can now reclaim its position as a practice in its own right. Charming was an overt process which distinguished it from the covert nature of witchcraft. Although it was perceived to be a supernatural power there was no demonic aspect to charming and therefore it was not maleficium. A fundamental concept that surrounded the whole area, both in terms of elite and popular culture, was the issue of power; the power both of those in authority and the power of those who claimed to practise, or were accused of practising, some magical technique or ritual. Equally, the power of those individuals who accused others in their communities has also to be acknowledged as being an important feature of seventeenth-century society life. Thus witchcraft and charming accusations were to a degree a metaphor for the dynamics of all types of power which resulted from their differences and their relative struggles to dominate.

The power of both the kirk and judicial authorities has been examined, yet at the same time it has to be appreciated that these forms of official power were only part of the equation. How this power was perceived and used by individuals and their communities was just as important. In order to address this alternative proposal, attitudes to witchcraft, charming and magic have not only been examined from the top down but from the position of ordinary members of communities –

the friends and neighbours of the practitioners. The development of the kirk in Scotland has been examined, not only in terms of its organisation and doctrine, but also in relation to its position regarding healing, and specifically magical healing. This has revealed that intrinsically the attitudes of the kirk authorities towards healing rituals and charming influenced their perception of the crime of witchcraft in general. The kirk did play an important role in the identification of both misdemeanours and miscreants, but their motives for pursuing these were different from those of either the state or local elites, or indeed of individual members of a community or parish. The kirk regarded charming and witchcraft as transgressions against the moral and Christian code as much as against secular law. Essentially this was because charming offered access to healing and cures for ill health and disease that the post-Reformation church had, to an extent, surrendered in its drive to reach an ideal state of spiritual communion with God. Achieving the perfect 'Godly' society was the aim of the kirk and ministers, but the rest of society appears to have had somewhat ambivalent feelings about just what this meant in terms of changing their own behaviours and beliefs.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent zeal of certain members of the ecclesiastical authorities to prosecute unacceptable behaviour, it is also clear that the kirk did not automatically punish all those who were called witches or charmers by their neighbours. Cases were, for the most part, considered carefully and not all the responses and attitudes of ministers and elders were uniform. Complaining to the kirk about the practices of neighbours or others known to the community was not in itself unique, and the kirk clearly recognised the process of mutual flyting. Calling someone a witch did not necessarily mean that they were. On the other hand, it is also clear that at times neighbours did not name those in their

communities whom they suspected of being, or knew, were charmers, even when the kirk elders were urged to search them out. Kirk discipline may have been driven, theoretically, by the aims and objectives of the central organisation but in reality it required the cooperation of individual communities to make the complaints and to name the suspects. The contrast between the experiences of different localities highlights the importance of specific local analyses with which to compare broader national, or international, ones.

Another strong theme of the thesis has been the perception of health and disease, not only from the point of view of the kirk, but from those of both orthodox medical practitioners and the general population. It is clear that the role of physicians and surgeons may have been generally peripheral to the prosecution of witchcraft and charming in Scotland. The rivalry with the church over healing practices, rather than with orthodox medical practitioners, may explain the lesser involvement of physicians and surgeons in the accusations and prosecutions. Orthodox medicine was, on the whole, limited for the vast majority of parish communities. Charmers were only one group of possible healers who were available to society in the seventeenth century, yet for many they were the most accessible. Professional demarcation is a relatively recent development, although it certainly concerned the professional bodies of the different orthodox practitioners at the time. Obtaining health advice from a surgeon, physician or apothecary alone was far removed from the reality of the situation. Individuals practising a variety of specialist skills such as gardeners, blacksmiths, mountebanks and even ministers, as well as charmers, were all consulted about problems. The theories which informed perceptions about disease and misfortune were quite straightforward both from the point of view of orthodox professionals and

charmings. The overall eirenic and humoral philosophy of balance clearly influenced the practice of both orthodox medical practitioners and charmings alike. Orthodox professionals diagnosed and treated using the principles of humoral balance, and treatments by charmings operated on the principle of removal and transference of the power causing the illness and the restoration of the pre-disease state. Although science and philosophy developed new theories during the seventeenth century, pre-Cartesian philosophy continued to be relevant to both elite and popular culture and their understanding of health and disease.

It has been shown that the motifs in the healing procedures used by charmings display a consistency of technique and belief which demonstrate that they were founded on solid cultural and religious traditions. The overlap with pre-Reformation religious observance was not mere coincidence, and may suggest that the principles and origins of charming rituals were even older. However, this is not to imply that charming was an alternative religious belief system, but rather that most of society practised and understood an amalgamation of belief systems. David Gentilcore, in examining Italian evidence, points out that disease narratives involved family and friends much more than orthodox medical practitioners.¹ Self-diagnosis of disease cause offered the affected some level of therapeutic control in that although it was believed that witches and their power caused fear and illness, at the same time the whole system of witchcraft and charming also allowed for treatment and cure through the use of counter-magic. In catholic Italy sufferers could also resort to saintly relics or the sites of previous miracles. The protestant kirk in Scotland removed this aspect of religious worship and, as Michael Graham suggests, attempted to change perceptions about disease and

¹ Gentilcore, D 'The fear of disease and the disease of fear' in *Fear in Early-Modern Society*, Naphy and Roberts (eds).

misfortune so that those who were suffering would turn to the comfort of prayer and contemplation, rather than charms and magic.² There is no doubt that this emphasis was indeed a major part of the ethos of the kirk in its goal of achieving an ideal Godly state, an aim which required the cooperation of the secular authorities. It was, however, clearly difficult to eradicate all those practices that the kirk deemed unacceptable, particularly once the secular authorities became less involved in proceedings.

The question of gender has also been examined. The fact that more women than men were accused of witchcraft has, not unexpectedly, been confirmed, but what was unexpected was the difference in the statistics for charming. This has shown that there was a greater percentage of men accused of charming than of witchcraft, which has resulted in an interesting and challenging interpretation. It can no longer be claimed that healing and charming were the sole responsibility of women, or indeed that it was because of their healing skills that women were accused. The situation, and pattern of prosecution, was more complex than this and dependent on the varied attitudes of the ministers and elders in the different parishes as on the local communities themselves. It has been shown that in certain circumstances, in particular those cases of multiple accusations of demonic witchcraft, the elites, in the form of local landowners and churchmen, cooperated to achieve a shared goal, even if local communities were identified as being the sources of the original complaints of malefice. In accusations of charming, which tended to involve only one or two individuals, and certainly less than four or five, the accusations came from other members of the communities. These accusations may not always have worked to the benefit of those who made the accusations as they were often held responsible for their own transgressions by consulting the charmers. The goal of the kirk to punish

² Graham, *Uses of Reform*, 308.

both the charmers and their clients, since they were all equally sinners, made the consequences of turning to the kirk for assistance in personal disputes quite risky for all those involved.

The elite theory of demonic pact and renunciation of Christian baptism appeared mostly in those cases which progressed to the secular court system. Popular references to spirits or otherworldly beings appeared in the form of fairies. There is some argument that these fairy figures represented a devil figure in folk beliefs, and certainly some mentions of fairies are clearly suggestive of negative or frightening spirits. On the other hand, there are some occasions when they were more positive or, more accurately, neutral. These otherworldly beings could be both good and bad, and this dualism or opposition was a strong component of popular culture of the period. The kirk tried to expunge all vestiges of superstitious and evil behaviour but the real difficulty was in identifying it. Theologians had worked out their theory of good and evil, but the rest of society did not have quite the same ideas and continued to practise and believe in charming rituals long after the seventeenth century, despite the prosecution and execution of many.

Witchcraft and charming, as part of a belief in magic, were not simply the result of the desire of the church to remove evil from society. They were not imagined beliefs, but founded on the social and spiritual reality of early-modern society. They were practices which had their own rationale and systems of knowledge and which were recognised by society as a whole. This thesis has examined the concept and practice of charming in relation to religion, magic, and medicine, but at the same time it has also been a study of the cultural experience of disease. To begin to comprehend why charming and magical healing were culturally significant to society it is necessary to relate it to how diseases were

perceived, diagnosed and treated. Charming allowed society a means to treat disease and gave people a degree of power over their own fortunes. The examination of these two localities has also helped add a new dimension to the national picture.

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Appendix 2: list of charmers from Stirling and Haddington whose cases have been examined.

The cases are listed alphabetically by name (if known), the year they appear in the records, the presbytery and parish (if known) and the reference for the records (either church or secular records or both).

NAME	YEAR ACCUSED	PRES	PARISH	SOURCE
? , Jethro	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Aiken, Andrew	1636/01/14	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/5
Anderson, Agnes	1648/06/12	Haddington	Haddington	CH2/799/1; CH2/185/6; CH2/1026/2
Andirson, Jonet	1621/12/20	Stirling	Holy Rude (Stirling)	RPC, (2nd series), vol VIII, 345
Atkine, Issobell	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Atkine, Robert	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Beir, George	1646/05/29	Haddington	Haddington	CH2/185/5
Bennet, Agnes	1661/10/05	Haddington	Pencaitland	CH2/296/1
Bennet, Issobell	1659/03/22	Stirling	Holy Rude (Stirling)	JC 26/26

Blair, Magdalen	1659/06/13	Stirling	Unknown	JC 26/26 bundle 3; JC 10/2
Bookles, Thomas	1663	Haddington	North Berwick	CH2/285/4
Broune, Agnes	1641/03/02	Haddington	Haddington	CH2/799/1
Bull, Helen	1647/06/23	Haddington	Dirleton	CH2/185/5
Carfra, Thomas	1650/06/26	Haddington	Unknown	CH2/185/6
Chrystie, Agnes	1634/07/22	Stirling	Holy Rude (Stirling)	CH2/1026/3
Deanes, Jeane	1646/08/05	Haddington	Unknown	CH2/185/5
Dickson, Margaret	1643/04	Haddington	Pencaitland	CH2/185/5
Dikson, David	1628/11/16	Haddington	Yester	CH2/377/1
Fareis, Janet	1664/04/17	Haddington	Humbie	CH2/389/1
Galbraith, Hellin	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4

Gillies, Adam	1663/12/24	Haddington	North Berwick	CH2/185/7; CH2/285/5
Gourlay, Agnes	1649/09/23	Haddington	Humbie	CH2/389/1
Graham, Rosie	1631/05/08	Stirling	Gargunock	CH2/1121/1
Harvie, Margaret	1659/03/22	Stirling	Airth	JC 26/26
Henrie, John	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Huttone, Jonet	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Keir, Helen	1633/04/03	Stirling	Clackmannan	CH2/722/5
Kemp, Elizabeth	1664/04/17	Haddington	Humbie	CH2/389/1
Kemp, Janet	1652	Haddington	Yester	CH2/377/2
Ker, Andrew	1644/02/28	Haddington	North Berwick	CH2/185/5 & 6
Kirk, James	1658-9	Stirling	Alloa	JC 26/26 bundle 1

Lindsay, Johne	1649/04/25	Haddington	Dirleton	CH2/185/6
Maltman, Steven	1628/04/10	Stirling	Gargunnoch	CH2/722/5; CH2/1121/1
Matherstone, Christian	1652	Haddington	Yester	CH2/377/2
Mathiesone, Andrew	1629/03/15	Haddington	Yester	CH2/377/1
McFarlane, Marione	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Menteath, Janet	1633	Stirling	Alva	CH2/722/5
Mitchell, James	1668/03/11	Stirling	Airth	CH2/722/7
Mitchell, James Younger	1668/03/11	Stirling	Airth	CH2/722/7
Murray, Bessie	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Nicoll, Hellin	1615/08/09	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Nimmo, Violet	1662	Haddington	Unknown	JC 26/28

Paterson, Isabel	1671/04/20	Stirling	St Ninians (Stirling)	CH2/337/2
Russall, Hellin	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Russall, Issobell	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Russall, William	1607/06/23	Stirling	Unknown	CH2/722/4
Sked, Margaret	1652	Haddington	Yester	CH2/377/4
Skuggall, Margaret	1650/06/03	Haddington	Haddington	CH2/185/6
Stevenson, Bessie	1659/03/22	Stirling	Holy Rude (Stirling)	JC 26/26
Syme, Janet	1648/12/06	Haddington	Haddington	CH2/185/6
Sympson, Johne	1668/03/11	Stirling	Airth	CH2/722/7
Symson, John	1668/03/11	Stirling	Airth	CH2/722/7
Tailzeor, Elizabeth	1679/06/15	Stirling	Alloa	CH2/942/6

Tailzeour, Janet	1633/01/29	Stirling	Alloa	CH2/722/5
Thomson, Helen	1663/03	Stirling	St Ninians (Stirling)	CH2/337/1
Todry, Jonet	1662	Haddington	Haddington	JC 26/28
Veitch (Vaith), Margret	1649/07/12	Haddington	Pencaitland	RPC (2nd series), vol VIII, 197-8; CH2/799/1
Wallace, John	1633	Stirling	Clackmannan	CH2/1242/1
Watson, Christian	1663/12/24	Haddington	North Berwick	CH2/285/4
Wingate (Whygt), Marjorie	1669/07/13	Stirling	St Ninians (Stirling)	CH2/337/2
Wood, Elspeth	1653/07/10	Haddington	Unknown	CH2/799/1
Wood, Isabell	1642	Haddington	Unknown	CH2/185/5
Wood, Margaret	1652	Haddington	Yester	CH2/377/2
Youll, Andrew	1646/10/21	Haddington	Unknown	CH2/185/5

Appendix 3: Sample cases of charmers

An expansion of some examples of charmers illustrating many features typical of their practice, the type of accusations or complaints which were made about them and the penalty imposed on them by way of censure.

Janet Anderson

Register of the privy council, December 1621.¹

At Stirling on 27 February 1617 in the presence of the ministers, elders and deacons of the parish church of Stirling Janet Anderson, servitor to Johnne Anderson, son-in-law to Andrew Anderson, baxter and burgess, was accused of being a common charmer. She denied the accusation and was admonished by the kirk and ordered to abstain from all charming, witchcraft and abusing of the people forthwith.²

At Stirling on 20 December 1621 Janet Anderson appeared and confessed that she had been prohibited from charming by the kirk session but that she had continued to practise her skill. She confessed that Patrick Mungwall, from Falkirk had come to her with his wife's vest which she had charmed by speaking the following verse.

Three bittir thingis hes yow bittin,
ill hairt, ill ee ill toung all meast;
uther three may the[e] beit,
the father, the Sone and the Holy Ghost

Janet confessed that Agnes Wat, wife of William Burn, had brought

¹ *RPC*, (2nd series), vol VIII, 345-346. Although she was accused of witchcraft and charming in the privy council account all the details relate to charming.

² *SCA*, Holy Rude kirk session records, CH2/1026/2. This source is also cited in *RPC* (2nd series), vol VIII, 345.

Patrick Mungwall, John Wardane and John Livingstone to her. She also confessed that she learned the above charm from Litill Dik, servant to the old Laird of Gleneagles when he was charming a horse in a meadow, and she denied that she knew any other charms.

Janet confessed that a man from Falkirk had come to her with a child's vest which he had asked her to charm. She said the child had 'tane ane brash of seiknes through ane ill ee' and that she charmed the vest in the manner described above. Another man, Johne Wardane also from Falkirk, had come to her with his sister's vest and had asked her to charm it.

A tailor from Falkirk, Sandie Wear, had come with the vest of a child of the chamberlain of Kinneill, and which he asked her to charm it. He told the authorities that she asked for a knife, and Janet confessed that when she charmed the vest she had held a knife in her hand. However, she denied that she had asked for the knife but told the church that she had told Wear that he 'neid not seik this charme, the bairne wilbe ded or ye cum hame'. Her prediction came true and when she was asked how she knew the child would be dead, answered that she 'wald not receive meat quhen the said man cam fra hir'.

Janet then confessed that Robert Hodge in Airth came to see her with his wife's vest which she charmed in the usual way. She also admitted that she charmed Catherine Stevinsone, daughter of James Stevinsone, in Stirling, because before her marriage to Alexander Cunnyngham, merchant, she had been forespoken and since her marriage the woman had 'bein lang out of hir rycht mind'.

She confessed that someone had come to see her about Agnes Roy in Elphinstone in order to have her charmed, and had brought the woman's ruff with them. Janet kept the ruff but would not tell the church who had requested the charm.

20 December 1621

Janet appeared and denied that she used any other words in her charms apart from the ones already described. Nevertheless, she confessed that she had charmed Johne Levingstone's child by saying the following words over his vest: 'He that made the[e] of flesh, blude and beane, restore to the[e] thy haill againe'.

John Wardane of Falkirk confessed that Agnes Wat had taken him to Janet Anderson. He had given Janet his sister's vest. which she took and immediately passed behind a pillar, then returned it to him saying that she could do nothing for him at that time. She told him to bring a newly washed vest, which he did and she then she took his knife and made it rattle on the vest. Janet admitted to all this and said that if the woman had been 'witchit' she would have known it, but that it 'was bot ane blast of ill wind'. When Janet was asked how she knew 'who war witchit be thais who war hurt be ane blast of ane ill wind' she refused to answer.

Patrick Mungwall confessed that his wife had been sick, and although at times she seemed better, at other times she was worse, and when he was told that there was a woman in Stirling who would be able to help her he went to Janet and asked her to help. Both Janet and Patrick admitted that Janet had asked for a cloth which he delivered to her. Janet charmed the

cloth and told Mungwall that although he was quite late in asking for her help his wife would get better. When he returned home he put the vest on his wife, but later he said that he saw a white thing which looked like a woman which frightened him. The next Saturday, when he went back to Janet, he told her about the apparition, but Janet told him nothing would harm his house. When she was asked how she knew nothing would harm his house Janet refused to answer.

She continued to deny that she used any other words in her charms but when confronted she did confess that she had used the following words:

Earthles king and earthles queen, God let the nevir gait rest in kirk nor christiane beiris quhill thay restore this woman Jonet Wilsonne to hir heall againe, in name of the Father, the Sone and the Holy Ghost

John Fergusone confessed that he brought a sick child's vest to her which she crossed with a knife, but that he did not know what she had said over the vest.

Janet admitted that she could not help the gravel but she could give a charm for the 'waff of ane ill wind or forespeiking, quhilk she lernit of Litill Dikie'.

Andrew Aiken

Stirling presbytery minutes, 14 January 1636.³

At Stirling on 14 January 1636 Andrew Aiken appeared before the Stirling

³ SCA, Stirling presbytery records, CH2/722/5.

presbytery to answer charges about his skill of taking-off witchcraft and curing people and animals. He appeared before Mr James Edmonstone, Mr Henry Guthrie, Mr James Auchteroundie and Mr Patrick Bell. When Andrew was asked from whom he learned his skill of taking-off witchcraft he confessed about thirty years previously Thomas Fergusone from [?], who was now dead, taught him to take off witchcraft either from beasts or humans by saying the following words five times:

Thrie bitters hed thee bitten
With hart and tongue and eye almast
And uther thrie they beit may be
The father, sonne and holy gaist

Andrew told the presbytery that he had been asked to cure John Sibbald who he said had been witched, and that he had asked John Sibbald's mother to bring in 'ane pynt of south running water and that he did washe ye haill bodie of Johne Sibbald' and then said the above charm five times. He then told the ministers that the water which had been used to wash John was to be taken and cast over a march spot, at a place where no-one would pass. When Aiken was asked why he replied 'that ane part of the witchcraft went with ye water and that gif any passed over if they wald gett skaith by it'.

He then confessed that he took the boy's vest and buried it so deeply under the brae at the Water of the Forth that it would not be found by anyone. He told the presbytery that he did this because 'ane gud part of the diseas went with ye sark, and gif any shull find it [and] put it upon thaim, ye witchcraft wald fall to thaime'.

Aiken also told John Sibbald that if he got worse he was to go to the person

he suspected had laid the illness on him, and ask for his health from her for God's sake. According to Aiken Sibbald had not carried out his instructions to go to Effie Nicoll, which was why he was still sick. Aiken also explained to the presbytery that although he had used his usual cure of combining a spoken charm with washing, that any illness that was laid on by a woman could not be taken off by a man.

He then confessed to healing several cattle by passing them over a ditch, laying his hands on them and saying his charm five times over the beasts.

At a later meeting on 21 January 1636 Aiken confessed to healing Andrew Liddell's wife. Her father had come to Aiken to ask for his help and he had laid his hands on her 'about her hart and lykways about her [throat?] and said that she had gottin skaith with ane evil mind'. He then took the vest that she had on when she took ill and burnt it in the fire. When he was asked why he burnt the vest, rather than bury it in his usual manner, Aiken replied that 'the skaith that is gottin be man or woman may be helpit ane uther way, bot this being ane evill mind be ye fairie folk must be helpit be fyre'.

Aiken told the church how he had used a burnt Easter bannock, laid his hands on the body and spoken his charm in order to cure a sick child.

On 4 February 1636, at a third interview by the presbytery, Aiken confessed that John [?] of Blackgrange's cows were giving blood instead of milk. The said John's wife had come to him to ask him to help. He took a pint of water and put his hand into the water saying the words of his charm. He then told her to take the water and put some of it into the cows' mouths,

and to throw some of the water onto them. Aiken confessed to using this form of cure for cows in another two cases. He also confessed to curing another two men and two women by washing them with water and speaking his verse. Explaining his care in disposing of the water he said he caused the 'evill to gang with the burne that did washe her and thereafter cast it out into ane secret place whair no body was to go over'.

In another case he said he cured a child by taking him to the stable and wrapping him in a pair of [?blankets]. He used his usual spoken charm as well.

The presbytery asked Aiken if he had helped George Syme from Bothkennar. Aiken confessed that Syme had 'gottin ane waffe of evill mind'. He had told Syme to go to a well in kirkland glen and lift some water from the well before cockcrow, or sunrise, and that he was to speak to no-one on the way to the well or back. He then used the water to wash his head and breast. Aiken was also asked by the church why he had been at Bothkennar on Beltane day last year and he told them that he had collected south running water which he had sprinkled about the ground with his hands. He had also spoken his usual charm, then taken his 'guids' or livestock over the water in order to protect them until the next year.

Aiken confessed to restoring the milk to cows which he said had been 'foirspoken and hes gottin ane blast of ane evill eye' and that he had charmed or protected James [Downie's?] mill using his spoken charm.

George Beir

Haddington presbytery records, 1 July 1646.⁴

George Beir in Haddington was asked by the presbytery about his skill of curing the king's sickness or evil. He answered that he had not learned the skill from anyone but he was told by Mr James Knox from Kelso, who understood that because he was a seventh son when he came to anyone who was sick he was to lay his hands on the affected part and say the following: 'I touch thee, Lord cuir thee'. Beir told the presbytery that he had never used the cure before meeting James Knox, but that he had used it on occasion since then. He also said that he tied two black silk threads about the patient's neck. Beir had used the cure to help several people from Tranent, Samuelston, Humbie, Ormiston and Hermiston mill, and he told the church that some people had been helped by his cure and some had not. Beir also said that he had had the sickness himself and had cured himself. The presbytery ordered him to stop using the cure and summoned him to appear before them again, which he promised to do.

14 October 1646

George Beir appeared and promised that if he was found to be practising his skill of curing the cruells then he would make public repentance as a charmer.

⁴ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/5.

Agnes Anderson

Haddington kirk session minutes, 22 April 1648.⁵

Isobell Smith appeared before the kirk session and described the rituals that Agnes Anderson had advised her to carry out in order to cure her child. Agnes had then passed the child round an oak tree twice but Isobell had been scared the third time. She also told the kirk session that Agnes told her to take the child between two barn doors and turn him head over heels which would cure him.

Agnes appeared before the kirk session and told them that she had taken the child and put him twice round a tree, but she denied that she had spoken any words.

Haddington presbytery minutes, 6 December 1648.⁶

The presbytery were informed by Mr Robert Ker that Agnes Anderson confessed that she had advised Isobell Smith to take her child between two barn doors and turn it three times head over heels or turn it three times about an oak post and speak some words which Agnes would teach her to say. This ritual would cure her child of mawturning. Mr Robert Ker told the presbytery that Isobell Smith confessed that she had done what Agnes Anderson had told her to do. She had passed her child round an oak post but the third time she was scared. Nevertheless, she reported, her child had improved from that time.

⁵ NAS, Haddington kirk session records, CH2/799/1.

⁶ NAS, Haddington presbytery records, CH2/185/6.

Mr Robert Ker also told the presbytery that Janet Syme, Agnes Anderson's daughter, had told Janet Cassie that there may be a problem with her marriage to James Watson. She was advised to go to James in the morning and to look three times into his face and then three times to the ground. This would ensure that if he did not marry Janet Cassie then he would not prosper.

The presbytery found Agnes Anderson and her daughter Janet Syme guilty of charming, and Isobell Smith and Janet Cassie guilty of consulting or relying on them. The presbytery also ordered that there was to be further searching for charmers, particularly in North Berwick.

3 January 1649

Mr Andrew Makghie reported the case of Andrew Ker in Castleton who was accused of charming sick cows. He had confessed to this and was ordered to make satisfactory repentance in sackcloth for three Sundays. Agnes Anderson and Janet Syme were ordered to satisfy the congregation in a similar manner.

Haddington kirk session records, 13 March 1649.

Isobell Smith confessed to the kirk session that she had consulted Agnes Anderson to charm her child and so was ordered to make her public repentance the following Sunday in sackcloth, which she promised to do.

18 March 1649

Agnes Anderson appeared to answer the charge of charming Isobell Smith's child and was ordered to make her public repentance of eight days in sackcloth, which she promised to do. The kirk session also noted that Isobell Smith had done her repentance satisfactorily.