



Fig 11.1 The north end of the island of Bute reflected in a calm sea, looking south from Tighnabruaich (© Matthew Molony).

Chapter 11

The witches of Bute

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FEW PARTS of Scotland, in the early modern period, remained totally unaffected by the belief in, and prosecution of, witchcraft and Bute was no exception. Although the island did not experience the full brunt of the witch-hunts it did, nevertheless, produce one of the most compelling episodes in Scottish witch trial history during the winter of 1662. The witches of Bute were, by the standards of the times, relatively few but their impact was large upon a close-knit island community and, when placed within the context of the so-called ‘Great Scottish Witch-Hunt’ of 1661–62 (a nationwide search for witches, charmers and other such profaners of the law, morality and faith), the Bute confessions have a significant part to play in widening our understanding of folk belief and the complexities of witch persecution.

All of the currently known legal proceedings concerning witchcraft in Bute occurred in the seventeenth century representing, between the 1630s to 1670s, around sixty-five cases though the actual figure may exceed seventy. Accuracy on the exact numbers of those accused is impossible due to the incompleteness of the sources and the occasional vague report of unnamed witch suspects.

Two of the Bute cases which resulted in execution furnish interesting information about the beliefs and assumptions of the period. The accusations against Margaret McWilliam and Jonet Morrison take the form of clear narratives deriving from neighbourhood hostilities and long-held suspicions. What follows is not intended to be an investigation of the causes behind the 1662 witch-hunt, some exploration of which has been adventurously, if unconvincingly, undertaken by William Scott in *The Bute Witches* (2007). Rather, this discussion will sample a few key ideas and motifs that emerge from the narratives of McWilliam and Morrison, such as to what extent do their stories compare with others? What can we glean about everyday life, mindset, and folk belief in seventeenth-century Bute from these confessions?

The first recorded evidence of witch prosecution was in 1630 when it was stated that ‘several women’ were locked in the Castle dungeon at Rothesay where, allegedly, they were left to starve to death. No names or details are given and it seems likely they died without trial (*Highland Papers* 1920: 14). There was a strong element of fairy belief in the majority of cases which occurred between 1649 and 1660. In 1649–50, Finwell Hyndman of Kilchattan Bay was under investigation for disappearing with the fairies, for a twenty-four hour period, around the Quarter Days. It was reported that when she returned she had upon her ‘such a wyld smell that none could come neire her, and that she was all craised [crazed] and weary as if it were one after a farr journey’. As Hyndman could provide no satisfactory explanation for

her irregular absences, she was 'bruted for a witch or (as the commone people calls it) being with the fayryes'. Jeane Campbell of Ambrismore farm, near Scalpsie, was apprehended for charming in 1660: the Rothesay Kirk Session reported that she 'gangs with the fayres' indicating that she was most likely believed to have acquired her charming skills from the fairies. In a similar later case of 1670, James McPhee of Kerrycresach complained that his good name was being wrongly tarnished following accusations that he had a mistress 'among the furies commonly called Fairfolks' (*Kingarth Kirk Session Records*: CH2/219/1, ff17; *Kingarth Parish Records*: 19–21, 57–8; Hewison 1895, ii: 261–9; Henderson & Cowan 2001: 213).

A particularly large series of trials hit Bute in 1662, which coincided with the biggest witch-hunting episode in Scottish history with over six hundred formal accusations and approximately three hundred executions across the country (Levack 1980). On the orders of a privy council commission Bute's contribution to the tragedy of the 1662 witch-hunt was fifty-one accused, twenty-four of whom went to trial, and four were executed. A fifth suspect, Jonet McNicol, was found guilty and faced execution in 1662 but somehow managed to escape to the mainland. On her return to Rothesay in 1673 the sentence was carried out and she was executed (SSWD; Scott 2007: 246–52). At McNicol's side stood Mary McThomas, executed for charming and incest (*Argyll J Rec*: 20–1). With the deaths of these two women the record of witch prosecutions in Bute comes to an end.

It would be fair to say that Bute's experience of witch-hunting was not extensive but it was certainly intense. The impact the events of 1662 had on the local inhabitants would have been something akin to a natural disaster, impacting not only upon those who were immediately accused of witchcraft, but on their families, friends and neighbours. Witch-hunts bred an atmosphere of poison and distrust among people by which few would have been unaffected, at least to some extent, while the trials were going on. Some may also have experienced ongoing prejudice and distrust well beyond the period of the trials, never truly free from the infection of suspicion. There is some evidence for this in case of Jonet McNicol's family. She had been tried in 1662 and executed in 1673, but in 1686 the Rothesay Kirk Session heard a complaint by Donald McNicol, Jonet's son, that he was being libelled by John Ochaltrie who 'sadly abused himself and his parents calling him the child of a witch and severall other uncharitable and scandalous names'. The Session found in favour of McNicol and charged Ochaltrie ten pounds Scots, ordering him to acknowledge his sin before the congregation (*Rothesay Parish Records*: 62; Scott 2007: 301). There are no easy answers as to why the small island community experienced such a comparatively large-scale witch-hunt but the timing of events is probably not accidental given what was taking place elsewhere in the country. Also, the location of Bute and its close proximity to the mainland counties of Renfrew and Ayrshire may well have had a part to play.

In the seventeenth century, Bute lay comfortably within the Gaelic-speaking belt of Scotland, on the fringes of the predominantly Scots-speaking Lowlands. The islanders' main orientation may well have been more fixed northwards, towards Inveraray and Argyllshire, but its geographical position, situated at an interface between the two cultures, allowed for open access to Lowland exchange. In this regard, when assessing the potential cultural influences upon Bute witch beliefs, both Highland and Lowland custom and practice must be taken into consideration.

There is, of course, a fundamental question over whether witch beliefs, at folk or learned level, were substantively different in Highland and Lowland Scotland. Previous work

undertaken on Gaelic witch beliefs, when compared with other parts of Scotland, revealed very little that was particularly unique or distinctive (Henderson 2008). Greater emphasis was, perhaps, given to dream interpretation, the possession of second sight, and the harmful power of the evil eye, although these phenomena also feature in non-Gaelic contexts. As elsewhere in Scotland, Gaelic witches were mostly blamed with interference in dairy production and agricultural problems, as well as causing disease, death and general misfortune. The Devil, demonic pacts and attendance at sabbat meetings were not particularly strong traits, though the relatively high demonic content found within the Bute witch confessions is most likely indicative of Lowland influences.

How typical was Bute? In terms of gender, of the fifty-six suspects during the 1662 trials, there were forty-seven female, seven male, and two gender unknown, a ratio which corresponds with national percentages of 80–85 per cent female and 15–20 per cent male accused (SSWD). Many of the same motifs and stereotypes that appear in confessions elsewhere in Scotland are similarly present in the Bute evidence. For instance, witches interfered with agricultural production, such as causing a cow to stop giving milk or producing blood instead of milk. They were credited with causing sickness and death in animals and humans, including the death of infants. The witches killed children and horses by ‘shooting’ them, a term that refers not to gunshot but to elf-shot, a type of magical projectile in the form of an arrow or dart. There are references to demonic shapeshifting and animal transformation, while cursing and charming feature prominently. Some of the accused could cure certain illnesses with rituals, charms and herbs, often involving transference of the disease onto an animal. Jonat McNeill cured Jonat Man’s son with a charm which involved putting a string of beads around the child for forty-eight hours and then removing the string and binding it around a cat which, it was claimed, immediately died on contact with the beads (*Highland Papers* 1920: 4). Margaret McLevin had Gaelic charms to protect against the evil eye, as well as to heal children of the ‘Glaick’ (bewitchment), which she could do, she said, ‘without suffering either a dog or catt’ (*Highland Papers* 1920: 4, 9). The glaick may possibly refer to the belief in changelings, or human children stolen by fairies and replaced by a fairy child. Jonet Morrison could cure the fairy blast (*Highland Papers* 1920: 23–4; Henderson & Cowan 2001: 94–100). Gaelic was the preferred medium when charming cattle, or applying ointment to sprains and bruises in humans, and in protecting people from harm. Margaret McLevin confessed that she had a charm for the evil eye that she had frequently used on humans and animals. One such formula began *Obi er bhrachaadh* etc.; another was quoted as *er brid na bachil duin* etc (*Highland Papers* 1920: 5–6, 9). ‘Obi’ is *Obaidh*, meaning a ‘charm’ or ‘incantation’, but unfortunately the rest is obscure (MacKenzie 1892: 101).

On the other hand, no witch trial is typical, and each case brings its own special set of particular circumstances. Disruption to sailing and the harvest of the sea features quite prominently in these trials, especially as it affected the herring fishing. Margaret McLevin was able to calm rough seas and bring sailors home safely but she also created a storm by casting a pebble into the sea with the intention of sinking a boat. On another occasion the Devil lifted her up and carried her under his oxters to the rocky isle of Inchmarnock with a plan to sink a boat on its way to Arran but, McLevin revealed, this was prevented by God, who turned the boat onto another course and away from danger (*Highland Papers* 1920: 24). The interweaving of continental-style diabolism with traditional fairy belief is, as already indicated, quite marked in the Bute confessions, as are dreams and prognostications, the

evil eye, and charming. One witch had the unusual ability of inflicting an illness on a man that simulated the pains of childbirth. Concerns about the Witches Sabbat (meetings held under cover of darkness with the Devil himself in attendance) and entering into a Demonic Pact with Satan, their master, while far from absent were not especially common in many parts of rural Scotland, yet these issues are paramount in the Bute interrogations. The Devil was a consummate shapeshifter who appeared to them in various guises such as a 'little brown dog', a cat, a 'wele favored young man', a 'black rough fierce man', and as a 'gross copperfaced man'. He baptised them and gave them a new name. Issobell McNicoll first met the Devil, in the likeness of a young man, in her own house while she was making whisky. He promised that 'she should not want' and she, in turn, promised to become his servant and thus entered into a covenant with him. To seal the deal he performed an unholy baptism and renamed her Caterine.

Many told of large gatherings with the Devil and other witches, often around Halloween, thus stressing the importance of calendar customs. At these covens, or sabbats, some of the witches spoke of a 'young lasse', the daughter of Alexander Mcillmartin of Kelspoge, who had black hair, a broad face, and a merry disposition, who was 'maiden' at the meetings. Annie Heyman was also their 'maiden' and she danced 'in the midst of them' (*Highland Papers* 1920: 8). This is highly reminiscent of the trial of Isobel Goudie in Auldearn, also in 1662, who spoke of 'the maiden' as the Devil's favourite. It is difficult to determine whether this is a coincidence, elite imposition, or evidence of widespread folkloric story and tradition (Pitcairn 1833, iii: 602–16).

Perhaps it is the sheer size of the Bute witch-hunt that truly sets it apart. Large-scale witch-hunting was not common throughout the *Gàidhealtachd*, or indeed anywhere in Scotland (Henderson 2008). Out of this time of local and national crisis arise two women's narratives that serve to shine a light on ordinary lives that in 1662 became extraordinary.

From all accounts, Margaret NcWilliam was a force to be reckoned with. She was singled out in the records as one who, 'since the memory of any alive' that knew her, 'went under the name of a witch'. Over a thirty-year period, she had been accused of witchcraft, and imprisoned, in 1631, 1645, 1649, and once again in 1662. On this occasion her luck ran out for she was executed (*Highland Papers* 1920: 14–20). NcWilliam, who may have been close to sixty at the time of her death, is among one of the more disturbing confessions containing lurid stories of infanticide and devil-worship.

In the process against her in 1662, we discover that her initial brush with the law was in 1631, when the confessing witches, who were left to languish and die in Rothesay Castle prison, named her, though details are unknown. On 16 January 1645 she was accused of witchcraft and investigated by the Rothesay Kirk Session on 'the evils quhilk she threatened to doe and came to pas', on the evidence gathered by former Session clerks, and on the 'ill report and brute she has amongst her nichbouris'. However, on 13 July of that same year the Session admitted that they could reach no conclusion regarding her case but would take it under advisement. In 1649 NcWilliam was again apprehended on charges of witchcraft, imprisoned and this time searched for the Devil's mark which was, apparently, found on several parts of her body. It was said that due to the 'confusion of the tymes she was lett out upon bands' (*Highland Papers* 1920: 14–20). Discovery of the Devil's mark should have proven her guilt beyond a shadow of a doubt but if the 'confusion of the times' in 1649 allowed her to escape punishment, this would not be the case in the panic that ensued in 1662.

As with many accounts of witchcraft, the case begins with a dispute between neighbours. In the initial presumption against Margaret NcWilliam, John McFie declared that when his father and brother were flitting out of Kerecresoch to Lochly (or Lochend) with three horse loads, they had to pass through NcWilliam's field. When they came to the slap, an opening in the boundary dyke, it had been blocked up and NcWilliam herself was lying on top of it. When McFie senior began opening up the gap so that they might continue their journey a physical fight began when NcWilliam attempted to prevent him from removing the stones. They struggled until they both fell down and on rising she came over to his brother and pulled the horse's halter out of his hand, turning the horse away from the direction of the slap. However, the father got hold of the horse and led it over the slap whereupon the animal collapsed. A short time after this incident McFie took a 'sudden sickness' which lasted for a quarter of the year and which he described as 'very unnaturall, lyk a weeman travelling [travailing] with sicknes' or, in other words, simulated the pains of childbirth. Furthermore, another of his children died suddenly in the space of a few hours after contracting an illness. These calamities he suspected NcWilliam to have laid on him.

According to NcWilliam she embarked on the path of witchcraft during a troubled period in her life. She recalled that in the year before 'the great Snaw', about twenty-eight years earlier, while living in Corsmoir (Crossmore), she first met the Devil. At Candlemas, around twelve noon, she went out to the field, named Faldtombuie, beside her house. In the middle of the field there appeared a 'spreit' in the 'lyknes of a litle browne dog' that 'desired her to goe with it'. Initially she refused but it followed her down to the foot of the enclosure where it 'appeared in the lyknes of a wele favored yong man'. Again he asked if she would go with him and in return she should want for nothing. He 'griped her about the left hench [thigh]', causing her much pain, and went away 'as if it were a green smoak [smoke]'.

In May, in the same field as before, 'the devill apeired to her first in the lyknes of a catt and speared at her [asked] How do ye? Will ye not now goe with me and serve me?' This time the offer was too good to refuse and she entered into a 'covenant', or demonic pact, with him and promised to be his servant. He put his mouth upon the sore area on her thigh and it was healed. She renounced her baptism, the Devil re-baptised her, and she 'gave him a gift of a hen or cock'.

NcWilliam saw the Devil again, some ten years later, while then living at Chapeltoone (across Loch Fad from Crossmore), when he appeared to her in the kailyard. She had recently lost her horse and cows and was in great poverty when the Devil assured her 'be not affrayd for yow shall get ringes [wealth] enugh'. However, what he wanted in return was NcWilliam's seven-year old son William. He supplied an elf arrow which he ordered her to shoot at the boy who died instantly which, not surprisingly, 'grieved her most of anything that ever she did' (*Highland Papers* 1920: 14–20).

These three initial encounters with the Devil, recorded as NcWilliam's own testimony, are a curious blend of folk tradition and learned demonological theory. Reading between the lines, it would appear that as a result of the pressures she was inevitably put through during questioning, NcWilliam was drawing upon fairy beliefs, which would have been more familiar to her; her words were then warped and reinterpreted by her interrogators and coated in a diabolical smear. There are several motifs here that are common to narratives of encounters with the fairies. For instance, fairies were more likely to be encountered around significant calendar customs, such as Candlemas or Beltane, and at particular times of the

day, the hour of noon being one of them. The name of the field where she first saw the 'spreit' or spirit, Faldtombaie, has been interpreted by William Scott as the 'field of the tombs' perhaps referring to standing stones or gravestones (Scott 2007: 267). The association between fairies and the realm of the dead was well established and so may be significant in this context. The ability to appear and disappear was also attributed to the fairies. The promise of gifts from fairies usually came with a penalty attached. In this instance, the penalty may have been NcWilliam's own son whom she allegedly killed using a fairy arrow. It is therefore possible that NcWilliam believed her son had been taken by the fairies, and might still live among them, but the demonic interpretation saw it rather as child sacrifice. It may even be significant that the initial encounters happened at a time when NcWilliam was at a low point, struggling to survive. Ayrshire witch Bessie Dunlop, for example, confessed that her relationship with the fairies was first forged during a time of economic hardship and following the death of a newborn child. Her story is not wholly incompatible with Margaret NcWilliam's (Henderson 2009).

There are also some outstanding examples of textbook-style encounters with the Devil. He changes his shape from animal to human, to ephemeral green smoke. He lures his victims into service with promises of wealth and security, though frequently reneges on these promises. He physically marks his conscripts, or has sexual relations with them, which may have happened here in NcWilliam's account. Then follows a formal ritual during which the new recruit renounces their baptism and enters into a Demonic Pact. He then performs an inversion of holy Christian ritual by re-baptising and re-naming the witch. He demands sacrifice from the witch: at first the offering of an animal sacrifice was sufficient in NcWilliam's case, but later on the stakes were raised and she had to offer up her son if she wished to avoid the Devil's wrath.

We will never know if NcWilliam actually murdered her own child or, in her grief, simply blamed herself for his untimely death. She may have created the story as a cover for infanticide, or she may have come to believe, after several years of community pressure, that she was indeed evil and the Devil took her child. It is possible that she believed the fairies had stolen the child, the discovery of an elf arrow connecting these events.

The confession of Margaret NcWilliam is particularly rich in detail. She was to be accused of murdering at least one other child using the fatal elf-shot. She met the Devil in the shape of a cat who, quite matter-of-fact, asked her how she was. She renounced her baptism and promised to be the Devil's servant. In 1649 and 1662 she was searched for the Devil's mark. Three such marks were found: one on the shinbone of her left leg, another between her shoulders and a third mark upon her thigh. Her daughter Katherine was also searched for the mark and a small, white spot, insensitive to pain, was discovered on her right shoulder. And she was seen dancing on Halloween with other witches on Kilmory Hill. Specific locations were frequently associated with witches and fairies, in Scotland and beyond, a supernatural landscape coinciding with the natural landscape. For instance, John Stewart, tried for witchcraft in Irvine in 1618 regularly met with fairies on Lanark Hill and Kilmaurs Hill (*Trial... Irvine* 1855: 9). Further afield, sixteenth-century author Olaus Magnus remarked that Nordic witches gathered on the hill of Blåkulla, or Blue Hill, while older traditions associated the legendary spot as the home of trolls. In Germany witches assembled atop the hill of Brocken. Kilmory Hill may have been Bute's equivalent of Blåkulla and Brocken (Henderson forthcoming; Henderson & Cowan 2001: 39–45).

NcWilliam's reputation in the community was seriously tarnished. When Major David Ramsay of Roseland's cows stopped producing milk, giving blood instead, his suspicions automatically fell on NcWilliam, his neighbour. The trouble originated when, according to Ramsay, a stirk belonging to NcWilliam came onto his property, devouring corn. He tied up the beast to prevent further damage but NcWilliam freed it. It was then that his cows ceased producing milk. He went to see NcWilliam threatening that if she did not restore his cows' milk, 'I'll burn thee myselve' which seems to have done the trick. By the time he returned home the cows had resumed milking.

It would seem that witchcraft was a family tradition for NcWilliam's daughters, Katherine and Elspeth Moore, were also under investigation. According to fellow witch, Margaret McLevin, they sometimes operated as a team as in the attacks against Donald McGilchrist for whom 'nothing did thrive'. A quarrel erupted between McGilchrist and Katherine Moore when he accused her of stealing a child's coat. Katherine and her mother put a 'pock [poke] of witchcraft' and a cat, presumably dead, under his bed. They had enacted the same spell upon the minister, John Stewart of Kingarth, the previous Halloween, which resulted in the sickness and death of his wife. He too was made ill but 'God gave them not the liberty' to take his life as well. Similarly they placed a poke, or small parcel, of witchcraft in Provost John Glasse's stable.

Jonet Stewart complained that NcWilliam and her two daughters had inflicted her with a particularly difficult labour following a disagreement over the cutting down of rushes at the bog of Ambrisbeg. The curse upon Stewart ensured that when the time came for the delivery of her baby she was 'sorely handled being 20 dayes in labour'. She further reported that all her cows died suddenly as a result of the curse (*Highland Papers* 1920: 14–20).

Difficulties in childbirth were commonly attributed to witches, but what was not so common was afflicting men with such problems. The witching of Alexander McNeiven, following a quarrel over malt silver Katherine owed him, is a case in point. NcWilliam stepped in to defend her daughter and said that she would 'gar him repent it', or regret it. When he returned home he was struck down with a 'very unnaturall disease lyk a weeman travelling' in which agony he endured for three days. McNeiven's wife Agnes, sure of the cause behind her husband's pain, begged NcWilliam to visit her husband and thus remove the spell. NcWilliam admitted that his suffering was because he had threatened her daughter Katherine but said that by the time she returned home she would find her husband healthy once again, which she did. However, the ill feeling between the two families did not dissipate and two years later another quarrel broke out while McNeiven was at their house. NcWilliam and her daughter somehow managed to tie him to a post using a sack, to be later released from his tethers by John Moore, Katherine's son and NcWilliam's grandson. When he got home he once again fell sick and was 'pitifully tormented most unnaturally till he dyed'. Again his wife Agnes, who was sure that NcWilliam was behind her husband's illness, implored her to come to her husband's sick bed and reverse the curse. This time there would be no pity from NcWilliam who allegedly said, while 'lifting up her curcheffe', 'devill let him never be seene till I see him and the devill let him never ryse'.

Katherine Moore was accused by Jonet Boyd of stopping her breast-milk. Boyd claimed that she had a dream in which Katherine 'came violently upon her' and took a great nip, or bite, out her breast; when she awoke her milk was gone and her breast was blue where she had been bitten. Boyd, convinced by the authority of the dream, went to see Katherine

to beg for her milk to be restored which it duly was a few days later (*Highland Papers* 1920: 19–20).

Furthering the family's reputation for witchcraft, NcWilliam's grandson John occasionally took part in his mother and grandmother's evil activities. All three went to Birgidale Broch where NcWilliam 'shot' James Andrews' son. They instructed another witch, Marie More McCuill, to take away the body and leave the stock of a tree in its place. This is a clear instance of a conflation between fairy and witch lore and the demonisation of folk belief (*Highland Papers* 1920: 14–20; Henderson & Cowan 2001: 80, 106–41).

The story of Jonet Morrison is, perhaps, not as formulaic as that of NcWilliam but it is equally rich in detail. Morrison was a practicing charmer before the suspicion of witchcraft landed at her door. In the eyes of the Kirk, charming and healing were not condoned being considered morally questionable activities, even when the results were positive. Only God could provide true healing. The problem was the potential source of the charmer's power and from where it derived. If it did not come directly from God then it must come from the Devil. Previously, Morrison's skills as a healer had been accepted, or at least tolerated, but during the heightened tensions of the 1662 trials her knowledge of charms and fairylore would ensure she was strangled and burnt for witchcraft.

She first met the Devil in the twilight hours, describing him as a 'black rough fierce man' who desired her to go with him. He coaxed her with promises of a better life for she was a poor woman 'begging amongst harlots and uncharitable people'. The Devil said, 'I will make thee a Lady'. She agreed to meet with him again on the hill of Knockanrioch where he furthered his promise to make her rich and 'put thee in a brave castall quhair thou shalt want nothing and I will free thee of all the poverties and troubles thou art in'. Morrison asked the Devil what his name was and he told her it is 'Klareanough' probably meaning 'clear enough', in other words it should be obvious who he is.

Following her tryst with the Devil, she was visited in the night, while she lay sleeping with her husband, by Adam Kerr who came to her window and asked her to rise up out of her bed and let him in. However, as Kerr was actually dead, his death blamed on the witchcraft of Margaret NcWilliam and her daughter Katherine, she was understandably nervous about letting him through the door. She asked, if you be a good spirit I will let you in, but if you be an evil spirit God be between me and you. With that he went away from the window 'mourning and greeting [crying]'. The appearance of the dead was experienced by other convicted witches, such as Bessie Dunlop (1576) and Alison Peirson (1588) (Henderson 2009).

Morrison provided a great deal of detail about the witches' sabbats where she saw 'a great number of people' and the Devil who appeared to her dressed in white or as a man 'naked with a great black head'. She spoke of a sabbat meeting on the mainland near Kilwinning, potentially reinforcing the fear among the authorities that witches were highly organised cells that kept in touch with one another. This would have been furthered when she likened one sabbat meeting to a 'great army' of whom she only recognised one other local witch, Jonet McNicoll. She included a rather interesting detail about Katherine Moore who was asked by the Devil why her husband was not present. She replied that 'there was a young bairne at home and they could not both come'. This revelation challenges our assumptions about fatherhood and parenting in the seventeenth century for it is the father who is left at home looking after the baby. It is also an example of the inversion principle often connected to the

witch stereotype. Women who are witches do the opposite of expected social behaviour and fail to conform (Larner 1984: 84). In this instance, the mother has neglected her stay at home duties leaving the father to care for and nurture the child.

Jonet Morrison was a skilled healer, particularly where attacks from the fairies were concerned. She claimed that she healed three people who had been blasted by the fairies using herbs:

And being questioned anent her heiling of Mcfersone in Keretoule his dochter who lay sick of a very unnaturall disease without power of hand or foot both speichles and kenured [meaning is obscure]. She answered the disease quhilk ailed her was blasting with the faryes and that she healed her with herbes. Item being questioned about her heiling of Alester Bannatyne who was sick of the lyk disease answred that he was blasted with the fairyes also and that she heiled him thereof with herbs and being questioned anent her heiling of Patrick Glas dochter Barbra Glas answred that she was blasted with the faryes also.

Morrison made a clear distinction between elf-shot and the blast:

quhen they are shott ther is no recoverie for it and if the shott be in the heart they died presently bot if it be not at the heart they will die in a while with it yet will at last die with it and that blasting is a whirlwinde that the fayries raises about that persone quhich they intend to wrong and that tho ther were tuentie present yet it will harme none bot him quhom they were set for.

A victim of the blast, according to Morrison, could be healed using herbs or by charming: 'all that whirlwind gathers in the body till one place; if it be taken in time it is the easier healed and if they gett not means they will shirpe [shrivel] away'. Elf-shot, on the other hand, was beyond her skills to heal. A woman declared that about two years previously she had a dream about Jonet Morrison which frightened her and within half an hour of waking her young son started to tremble with 'a very unnaturall disease' which eventually killed him. Presumably as a result of the dream, the woman claimed that she asked Morrison to heal the child but Morrison diagnosed that 'it was twice shot and could not be healed' (*Highland Papers* 1920: 3, 23–4, 27). What remains unclear from this woman's premonition is whether she was anticipating the need to call upon the assistance of Morrison as a known healer or if she was, in retrospect, attributing the dream and subsequent death of her child to Morrison's witchcraft. It is also unclear if the mother believed the child had been elf-shot by fairies or by a witch.

Morrison was occasionally under orders by the Devil to 'shoot' specific targets, such as the horse of Provost John Glass but she refused to comply. She was also told to take the life of the Bailie Walter Stewart by shooting him, and again she refused. Such alleged rebellion against the Devil tells us something about Morrison's strength of character; she was not prepared to admit to murder. She was rather keener to impress upon her interrogators that she was not the cause of recent misfortunes and deaths but that the fairies were responsible. The Devil told her that it was the fairies who took away the life of John Glass's child, adding that they were minded to take his life also. Indeed Morrison reminded them that she had attempted

to cure his child of the fairy blast with herbs. She was not, however, above accusing others of such crimes, notably Margaret McWilliam and her daughters Katherine and Elspeth for shooting to death William Stephen and paralysing Adam Kerr who later died. The nature of these men's deaths bears all the hallmarks of what was once traditionally attributed to fairy attack but in the context of a witch trial took on a demonic edge and motivation.

It was fairly common, with witchcraft accusations, for the accused and their accusers, to operate around the concept of 'deep time', referring to events that took place over a long duration, while making connections between these happenings. For instance, a man by the name of Glen, who testified against Morrison, recalled a dispute between her and his wife some two years previously. Morrison was apparently displeased with the amount of goods she received from the wife and angrily told her 'I will garr yow rue it', in other words live to regret it. Within three months, as Glen's wife was going into the byre, she felt something strike her and the whole house grew dark; 'she still compleins that it was Jonet Morison that did it' (*Highland Papers* 1920: 23–7).

The imposition of 'learned', and possibly Lowland, ideas upon local folkloric beliefs about witchcraft, specifically the way fairy traditions were demonised, is evident in the trials. The proximity of Bute to the mainland allowed easier access to Lowland conceptualisations. Some of the evidence from Bute could just as easily have been recorded in East Lothian, such as the high demonic content, the pact made with the Devil, witches meeting in covens, the Devil assuming the shape of a dog, and so on. A Gaelic element can perhaps be detected in relation to the stress on charming, for notably many of the charms and spells were specifically stated to have been in Gaelic, and also fairy lore, the importance of dreams, and the evil eye, though again such material can be found in the Lowlands as well. Margaret McWilliam's life was one of conflict and strife with her neighbours. For whatever reason, she was not accepted by her community who, on more than one occasion, turned against her and thus she had built up a reputation for witchcraft over the duration of her life. Jonet Morrison had most likely operated relatively successfully as a charmer, a perceived useful member of the community, before the scourge of witchcraft and devilry cast a shadow over her activities. Her superior healing skills, in combination with advanced knowledge of the fairy world, were sufficient to warrant suspicion during a time of crisis. The sheer scale of the 1662 trials is remarkable and, beyond the obvious details the confessions and witness statements provide regarding attitudes and beliefs about witchcraft, demonism and fairies, it is also an illuminating insight into sixteenth-century human relationships, rivalries and feuds. The stories that emerge from the surviving records serve to remind us that every person who ever stood accused of witchcraft had their own unique tale to tell.

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