
Notes on some Scottish Covenanters and Ultra-Covenanters of the Eighteenth Century

PART I

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This paper consists of notes on some Covenanters and “Ultra-Covenanters” after the Revolution of 1689, i.e. on various people or small groups of Covenanters who remained separate from the Church of Scotland during the course of the eighteenth century and into the beginning of the nineteenth century. The two largest groups were the Macmillanites or Reformed Presbyterians, and the Hebronites or followers of John Hepburn. The histories of both these groups have already been covered in detail by others, but we give some notes on prominent members of these groups who merit more attention than they have so far received. Mostly, however, we are interested in more obscure groups: the Harlites, Adamites, Howdenites, and others.

From the perspective of this paper, the Macmillanites occupy the central position, with some of the groups that we consider being more extreme than the Macmillanites and others less so. The term “Ultra-Covenanter” is not used in a disparaging sense – we are not endorsing the position of any of these groups, but we are generally viewing them with a degree of sympathy. For those who believed in the continuing obligations of the Covenants – which included most people of evangelical persuasion in Scotland at the start of the eighteenth century – it was difficult to know the biblical course to follow, and there was a considerable diversity of opinion. Support for the Covenants waned

during the course of the century leaving the Covenanters much more isolated at the end than they had been at the beginning.

Our interest in this subject is partly for its own sake and partly for the light that it casts on other aspects of eighteenth-century Church history. In particular, an understanding of these fringe Covenanting groups gives a sharper context in which to consider larger groups such as the Hebronites, the Macmillanites, the Seceders, and the evangelical wing of the Established Church.

Several writers have been over this ground before, and special mention should be made of Thomson's *Martyr Graves*;¹ of Hutchison's appendix on "Active Testimony-Bearers and other Dissenters from the United Societies";² of W. J. Couper's valuable papers in the *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*;³ of William McMillan's "Covenanters after the Revolution";⁴ and of Alasdair Raffe's thesis.⁵ Another book which is

¹ J. H. Thomson, *The Martyr Graves of Scotland* (2nd edn., Edinburgh, [1903]). Most of the chapters of this book originally appeared in the *Reformed Presbyterian Magazine* and were then issued in two volumes in 1875 and 1877. Further chapters appeared as articles in the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, see *Martyr Graves*, p. xii. The second edition was edited by Matthew Hutchison and contains additional material by David Hay Fleming. Thomson (1824-1901) was Reformed Presbyterian minister of Eaglesham from 1857 to the union with the Free Church in 1876, and then Free Church/United Free Church minister of Hightae from 1877 until his death.

² M. Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: its origin and history, 1680-1876* (Edinburgh, 1893). See Appendix III, pp. 393-6. Hutchison (1828-1913) was minister from 1859 onwards of a congregation in New Cumnock which belonged to the Reformed Presbyterian Church until 1876, to the Free Church from 1876 to 1900, and thereafter to the United Free Church.

³ W. J. Couper's papers on the Reformed Presbyterian Church include: "A breach in the Reformed Presbytery, 1753", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society (RSCHS)*, Vol. 1 (1926), pp. 1-28; "The literature of the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Church", *RSCHS*, Vol. 5 (1935), pp. 227-237; Vol. 6 (1936), pp. 68-79; 183-192; 299-304 (for some reason the years 1741-1752 were accidentally omitted). Couper (1864-1938) was Free Church/United Free Church minister of Kirkurd from 1897 to 1902 and United Free Church/Church of Scotland minister of Great Hamilton Street (later Macmillan), Glasgow, from 1902 until his death.

⁴ William McMillan, "The Hebronites", *RSCHS*, Vol. 5 (1934), pp. 157-174; *John Hepburn and the Hebronites* (London, [1934]); "The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688", *RSCHS*, Vol. 10 (1950), pp. 141-153. McMillan (1883-1949) was Church of Scotland minister in Hamilton from 1912 to 1917 and in Dunfermline from 1917 to his death. He was also the author of "Gleanings from an Old Register", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 18, May 1948, pp. 24-36 and "The Baptismal Register of the Rev. John Macmillan", *RSCHS*, Vol. 10 (1950), pp. 18-30. Curiously, in neither article does he seem aware that Macmillan's Register had been published by Rev. Henry Paton forty years earlier, *Register of the Rev. John Macmillan: being a record of the Marriages and Baptisms solemnised by him among the Cameronian Societies* (Edinburgh, 1908). (Note that we consistently distinguish between the twentieth century McMillan and the eighteenth century Macmillan.)

⁵ Alasdair Raffe, "Religious Controversy and Scottish Society, c. 1679-1714" (University of Edinburgh, PhD thesis, 2007). This has subsequently been developed into a book, *The*

closely connected is H. M. B. Reid's *Cameronian Apostle*.⁶ These works have far from exhausted the subject, however, and some of them contain errors which need to be corrected. In this present paper we supplement earlier writers by collecting scattered information on some of the less-studied groups. Our gleanings take the form of notes, and we have generally not tried to give a comprehensive account of the groups under consideration, often referring the reader to what is already known elsewhere.

This paper is less complete than we would have wished. Much of the published material by or about these groups is exceedingly rare and even the National Library of Scotland does not hold all of it. Many of the pamphlets have become available electronically, but there are others that we have not consulted at all; others that we have skimmed briefly in a library; and others again where we have had to use copies with blurred or missing pages. In addition there is extensive manuscript material on the United Societies from 1689 onwards. A fuller consideration of these items would no doubt yield much more information about the various groups.

In his *Life of Peden*, published in 1724, Patrick Walker claimed that the Presbyterians in Scotland “were now divided in ten parties”.⁷ This number was disputed by Andrew Harley in a letter of 1727 who wrote that “there are not so many parties as he says, unless he count those who joyn with no body but live like lepers put apart for uncleanness”.⁸ Ian Cowan reckons that there were “at least eight identifiable parties” to be

Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660-1714 (Woodbridge, 2012). Another thesis very close to our subject is that of Mark Jardine, “The United Societies: Militancy, Martyrdom and the Presbyterian Movement in Late Restoration Scotland, 1679-1688” (University of Edinburgh, PhD thesis, 2009).

⁶ Henry M. B. Reid, *A Cameronian Apostle: Being Some Account of John Macmillan of Balmaghie* (Paisley, 1896). Reid (1856-1927) was Church of Scotland minister of Balmaghie from 1882 and Professor of Divinity at Glasgow University from 1903.

⁷ Patrick Walker, *Six Saints of the Covenant*, ed. D. Hay Fleming (2 vols., London, 1901), Vol. 1, p. 18. This book, with its very extensive notes, is indispensable for our subject. Elsewhere, in his “Life of Walter Smith” published in 1732, Walker complains that “Scotland is all one spirit of delusion, division, and confusion of Gibbites, Russelites, Harlites, Howdonites, Adamites, M’Millanites, and of glancing Glassites lately start up”, *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 69.

⁸ *Biographia Presbyteriana* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1827), Vol. 1, p. 340; *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, pp. 121-2. McMillan tries to identify the ten groups, “The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688”, p. 146. He includes the Russelites, however, whom we think had long been defunct; but we are at a loss to suggest any other candidate for the tenth group.

found by 1725.⁹ Without trying to settle on a figure – it would be difficult to say how exactly many Scottish Presbyterian Churches there were in, say, 2013, with various congregations separating from the Church of Scotland and then coalescing with others – we will try to arrange our notes to reflect the differing origins of the various groups of which records have survived. It is not possible to be entirely consistent in this because some of the groupings, especially the Howdenites, moved their position over the years.

This first part of the paper is divided into four sections. In the first section we consider some of the background: the Gibbites; the Russelites; and the main Covenanting group whose members over the years went by the various names of Cameronians, United Societies, Hamiltonians, Macmillanites, and Reformed Presbyterians (not to mention “Mountain Men” and “Covenanters”). In the second section we consider the later Russelites, namely Patrick Grant and the Harlites or Cotmuir Folk. In the third section we look at the various ministers associated with John Hepburn: M’Henry and Farquhar, the Nithsdale ministers, and John Adamson. In the fourth section we study the Howdenites. This is the group which has been least well understood over the years, and yet which was the longest lasting and arguably the most important of them all. In the second part of the paper we hope to consider those groups and people who were more closely associated with the Macmillanites, DV.

I. SOME BACKGROUND: THE GIBBITES, THE RUSSELITES, AND THE CAMERONIANS/ UNITED SOCIETIES/HAMILTONIANS/MACMILLANITES/ REFORMED PRESBYTERIANS

1. Gibbites

The Gibbites or “Sweet Singers” were a fanatical¹⁰ group who separated from larger Covenanting groups at the end of 1680 and followed John Gibb from Bo’ness. It is unlikely that the group ever numbered above

⁹ I. B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters, 1660-1688* (London, 1976), p. 145. Several of the leaders died in the 1720s, including Gilchrist (1721), Hepburn (1723), Adamson (1725), and Grant (probably about 1727), which must have diminished the number and size of the groups.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the term “fanatical” as applied to Ultra-Covenanters, see the Conclusion to Part II of this article, DV. We have no hesitation in applying the term to the Gibbites.

fifty. Gibb himself was banished to America in 1685, and is supposed to have lived until 1720, but there is no reason to think that the Gibbite movement in Scotland survived beyond 1684. It was so notorious, however, that it continued to be referred to for many years to come.¹¹

2. Russelites

The Russelites were the followers of James Russel, one of the assassins of Archbishop Sharp in 1679, who separated from the United Societies in August 1682. The fundamental difference was the Russelites' attitude to the Sanquhar Declaration of June 1680 and the Lanark Declaration of January 1682. The Russelites interpreted the "disowning" of Charles II and the "declaration of war" in the Sanquhar Declaration in the most extreme sense, whereas the main body of the United Societies wanted to qualify and explain the language used. This can be seen in the "Second Head" of the United Societies' *Informatory Vindication*, published in 1687:

We distinguish, therefore, between a hostile war and martial insurrection, and declaring a war of contradiction and opposition by testimonies, etc. As for the former, we look upon that only to be declared against the tyrant, and such as should rise with him in arms. . . . But, as for the latter, we cannot but think that it is declared against all such as any way strengthen, side with, or acknowledge the said tyrant . . . not that we should martially oppose and rise up against all such, but that by our profession, practice, and testimony we should contradict and oppose them.¹²

Those of Russelite sympathies in later years commonly identified themselves by their rejection of this Second Head of the *Informatory Vindication*.

The Russelites were mainly based in Fife and Perthshire and they formed a significant opposition party to the Society People until 1685. It would be useful to have a fuller account of them, but they do not come within the bounds of the present paper.¹³ Prominent Russelites included

¹¹ For more information on the Gibbites, see D. W. B. Somerset, "Walter Ker and the 'Sweet Singers'", *SRSHJ*, Vol. 2 (2012), pp. 85-108. Jardine maintains that the Gibbites were still active in 1689 but the reference given does not seem to bear out the claim, "The United Societies", p. 244.

¹² *Informatory Vindication* (1707 edn.), p. 68.

¹³ Considerable information on the Russelites can be found in M. Grant, *Preacher to the Remnant: the story of James Renwick* (Glasgow, 2009) and in Jardine, "The United Societies".

John Flint and Russel's brother Thomas who became Church of Scotland ministers; David Robertson and John Henderson, of whom we have no further information;¹⁴ and Patrick Grant who is discussed below. Another feature of the Russelites was a refusal to use heathen names for days of the week and months of the year (e.g., Monday, Saturday, March, June, etc.).¹⁵ We are not aware of any reference to Russel after the Revolution and it is probable that he was dead by then.¹⁶ The Russelites as a party seem to have broken after 1687,¹⁷ and Patrick Walker's reference to them in 1732, mentioned above, was almost certainly historical rather than current. The only Russelites that we know of after 1689 were Patrick Grant and his associates and the Harlites or Cotmuir Folk.

3. Cameronians/United Societies/Hamiltonians/Macmillanites/Reformed Presbyterians

The Cameronians were those Covenanters who sided with Richard Cameron in his view that it was a duty to separate from any minister who had taken the Indulgence.¹⁸ The Covenanters gathered in local "Societies", and after the death of Donald Cargill in 1681, those societies of a Cameronian persuasion came together in a General Meeting to form what was thenceforth known as the United Societies.¹⁹ The Hamiltonians were the followers of Sir Robert Hamilton (1650-1701),

¹⁴ Mr. David Robinson or Robertson is mentioned as a leading Russelite in J. Calderwood, *A Collection of the Dying Testimonies of Some Holy and Pious Christians* (Kilmarnock, 1806), p. 346, and in Robert Lawrie, *Some Remarks upon the Act and Testimony of the Reformed Presbytery* (Dalry, 1803), p. 51.

¹⁵ See, for example, *Passages in the Lives of Helen Alexander and James Currie* (Belfast, 1869), pp. 31-2. The Gibbites, too, refused to use heathen names for days and months; but the practice was evidently widespread: the English Puritan John Owen in 1671 wrote that though he did not adopt the practice himself, he thought it wrong to mock those who did, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (7 vols., 1991 reprint), Vol. 2, pp. 284-5.

¹⁶ McMillan spoke as if Russel survived the Revolution ("The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688", p. 147) and in this he was followed by Cowan (*The Scottish Covenanters*, p. 145). It appears, however, that McMillan's source was Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe's preface to "James Russell's Account of the Murder of Archbishop Sharp, 1679" and that the events referred to there took place in the early 1680s; see James Kirkton, *The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1817), p. 401. See also Jardine, "The United Societies", p. 243.

¹⁷ Jardine, "The United Societies", p. 175; *Dying Testimonies*, p. 347.

¹⁸ Patrick Walker suggests that "Cargillites" would have been a more appropriate nickname than "Cameronians", since Cargill "was of the same principle and practice a little after Mr. Cameron was born", *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 241.

¹⁹ See Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, pp. 56-9; N. M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology (DSCHT)* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 785-6.

who was prominent in the disputes among the Covenanters at the Battle of Bothwell Bridge in 1679.²⁰ Hamilton was in exile abroad during the 1680s but returned to Scotland in 1689. He played a leading part in persuading a substantial section of the United Societies – though a minority according to Patrick Walker and John Howie – not to join the Established Church.²¹ Thereafter, the remaining United Societies were sometimes referred to as the “Hamiltonians”, even after Hamilton’s death in 1701.²² Hamilton’s position in the United Societies after 1691 is well described by Robert Smith: “It was easy for me, as long as that great man Sir Robert Hamilton lived, and was able to travel among the party; for he, laying his worldly honour in the dust, out of true love to his royal and princely Master’s honour, was as a father to us all; and while he lived, things went well with us.”²³

After 1706, when the United Societies accepted Macmillan as their minister, they were often referred to as the “Macmillanites”; and after 1743, when Thomas Nairn joined them and the Reformed Presbytery was set up, they were generally known as the “Reformed Presbyterians”.²⁴ Individual “praying societies” continued at least until the 1790s (as we shall see in Part II), and the friction between the authority of the societies and that of the ministers, elders, and Church Courts is a distinctive feature of the eighteenth-century history of the Macmillanites and Reformed Presbyterians.

One work of lasting importance which the United Societies undertook was the setting up of gravestones and epitaphs for the Covenanting martyrs, and the gathering of accounts of their deaths. In October 1701, the General Meeting agreed that “all the Correspondences provide and make stones as signs of honour to be set on the graves of our

²⁰ For Sir Robert Hamilton, see John Howie, *Biographia Scoticana* (Glasgow, 1781), pp. 584–594, and the well-researched entry on him by Richard L. Greaves in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB). There is also considerable information in Jardine, “The United Societies”, especially chapter 6, pp. 194–212. A fuller account of his life would be desirable, but it is difficult to consider him dispassionately.

²¹ *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 147; J. Howie (ed.), *Faithful Contendings Displayed* (Glasgow, 1780), p. 463. Many prominent Cameronians, including Michael Shields and Patrick Walker, joined the Established Church, *ibid.*, p. 463. Walker may subsequently have become a Hebronite. The history of the Hamiltonians between 1691 and 1706 is thinly covered in the literature; see Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, pp. 124–139.

²² See *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 138–9.

²³ *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, p. 488; *Dying Testimonies*, pp. 213–4.

²⁴ Reid quotes an old lady who objected to the name “Macmillanite” on the valid ground that “We didna join Macmillan! It was Macmillan that joined us”. See *Cameronian Apostle*, p. 217.

late martyrs as soon as possible, and also that the names of the foresaid martyrs with their speeches and testimonies, and by whom they were martyred or killed, in houses or fields, country or city, as far as possible to be brought to the next General Meeting, in order for the epitaphs, and also an account of these martyrs' carriage and behaviour in the time of their martyrdom".²⁵ This led to the erecting of the Martyrs' monument in Greyfriars' churchyard, Edinburgh, in 1706,²⁶ along with many other Covenanting memorials in southern Scotland, and to the publication of *Cloud of Witnesses* in 1714.

II. LATER RUSSELITES

1. Patrick Grant

Probably the foremost Russelite after 1689 was Patrick Grant. A native of Perthshire, he must have been born before 1660.²⁷ He was one of the founder members of the United Societies in 1681, but he separated the following year with James Russel.²⁸ In 1683 he went to Groningen in the Netherlands with Russel, apparently to study for the ministry, and he continued his separate course for the rest of his life. We have no definite information of him for some years after 1689, but he may well be one of the two men referred to in the second edition of the *Informatory Vindication*, speaking of the year 1691 or thereabouts: "We had several temptations by such as were not of us, viz. Masters R. and G. to call such of ourselves as might be thought fit to the Office of the ministry, and dispense the Ordinances to us: yea, these two foresaid offered themselves

²⁵ Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, pp. 132-3.

²⁶ For an account of the Martyrs' monument, Edinburgh, by the present writer, see *The Bulwark*, April-June 2014, pp. 3-11.

²⁷ See *Three Questions Discussed: concerning I. The extent of the mediator's death. II. The extent of his mediatory Kingdom. III. The derivation of Magistracy from him as mediator. Containing animadversions on the state of the difference between the reformed Presbytery and some brethren, &c. And on Mr. Fraser's Appendix, &c. Whereunto is annexed, A short historical account of some modern sects, and their errors: with a more particular account of the rise and progress, of that error, which derives magistracy from Christ as mediator* (Glasgow, 1754), p. 159. The author of *Three Questions* was "Mr. Russel of Garbet-Hill"; see Lawrie, *Some Remarks upon the Act and Testimony of the Reformed Presbytery*, pp. 53, 68. He is presumably to be identified with "John Russel of Garbet-Hill" in the parish of Cumbernauld who was a subscriber to John Howie's *Faithful Contendings Displayed* in 1780. Russel was not a Macmillanite but he had a high regard for Macmillan (*Three Questions*, pp. 3, 135).

²⁸ M. Grant, *Lion of the Covenant: the story of Richard Cameron* (Darlington, 1997), p. 319.

to preach unto us; yet such got no reception.”²⁹ It seems quite likely that “Mr. R.” and “Mr. G.” were David Robinson and Patrick Grant.

In 1700 Grant issued his first work, *The Nonconformists Vindication*, in which he re-published the Sanquhar Declaration of 1680 and Lanark Declaration of 1682, and argued at length against the lawfulness of joining the National Church.³⁰ In 1706 he was the probable author of the *Smoaking Flax* which is discussed in the next section, and in 1707 he was again the probable author of *A Speech in Season*, against the Union with England.³¹ In 1709 he published *Rectius Declinandum*,³² written in response to Macmillan and Macneil’s *Protestation, Declinature, and Appeal* against the Commission of Assembly in September 1708.³³ The *Protestation* generated a considerable pamphlet war.³⁴ At that time, Patrick Grant was living in Scone outside Perth.³⁵

Grant’s next two publications were *Bond of Union* in 1714 and *Letter to a Friend* in 1716. Hay Fleming had seen copies of these but we have not been able to trace them.³⁶ By this time (if not before), Grant had moved in his thinking beyond mere rejection of the Revolution Settlement towards open war. “If we shall be pursued or troubled any furdher in our worshipping, rights and liberties, that we shall look on it as a declaring war, and take all the advantages that one enemy doth of another, and seek to cause to perish all that shall assault us, and to maintain, relieve

²⁹ *Informatory Vindication* (1707 edn.), p. 221.

³⁰ Patrick Grant, *The Nonconformists Vindication, or a Testimony against the Indulged Assembly of Separatists* (n.p., 1700), 64 pages. One edition is anonymous but another gives the author as “Mr. Patrick Grant”, *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 168.

³¹ *A Speech in Season against the Union, or a Smoaking Furnace and a Burning Lamp* (n.p. [1707?]), 10+2 pages. At the back of *A Speech in Season* is a two-page appendix with separate pagination entitled *We Heard that the Parliament is Sitting at Edinburgh*. This forms part of the same pamphlet (as can be seen in one of the copies in the National Library of Scotland), but it has come to be treated, mistakenly we think, as a separate publication. Presumably it was also by Patrick Grant. One of the copies in the National Library of Scotland belonged to Marion Harlaw who can possibly be identified with the Harley sister Margaret from Cotmuir, see below and Raffe, “Religious Controversy and Scottish Society, c. 1679-1714”, p. 259.

³² [Patrick Grant], *Rectius Declinandum, or a Testimonie Discovering the Nakedness of the Dissenting Parties Declinatur* (n.p., 1709), 38 pages. The Second Head of the *Informatory Vindication* is attacked on pp. 6-10.

³³ The text of the *Protestation* is given in Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, pp. 277-85.

³⁴ See the items listed in Couper, “The literature of the Reformed Presbyterian Church”, *RSCHS*, Vol. 5, pp. 230-1, and Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, pp. ix-x. Further reference is made to this pamphlet war under the Cotmuir Folk (below) and under Hugh Clark (in Part II).

³⁵ Raffe, “Religious Controversy and Scottish Society, c. 1679-1714”, p. 257.

³⁶ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 167. An extract from *Letter to a Friend* is given in *Three Questions*, p. 161.

and right ourselves of these that now wrong us; but not to trouble nor injure any but these that hath injured us.”³⁷ According to the *Confutation* of 1724 (see below), which discusses the *Bond of Union* and *Letter to a Friend* at some length, Grant’s party consisted of “at most 3 men and 3 women” in 1714.³⁸ The *Confutation* also mentions some *Remarks* that were published in reply to the *Bond of Union*, but we have not traced this pamphlet either.³⁹

Grant’s most notorious publication was his *Manifesto* of November 1723 in which he and his followers declared “War against the present Usurper on the Throne of Britain”.⁴⁰ This drew forth a lengthy *Confutation* from the Macmillanites which yields quite a bit of information about Grant. For example, we learn that his followers at that time numbered four or five men, and fewer women.⁴¹ The minute of the General Meeting of the United Societies at Crawfordjohn in March 1724 records an overture from the Linlithgow Correspondence: “That there should be some Testimony of our dislike of that Edinburgh paper called a Manifesto”; and the decision was: “It was left to the discretion of any person to answer it, as they should see fit.”⁴² Nevertheless, the *Confutation*, which is dated March 1724, was issued in the name of the United Societies, although it is not clear who its author was.

The description of the *Manifesto* as “that Edinburgh paper” is probably a reference to its place of printing. According to the *Confutation*, it was printed by William Adams. Adams had been ordained minister of Humbie in East Lothian in 1701, but he was of Episcopal sympathies and in 1707 he engaged in a pamphlet controversy with James Webster of the Tolbooth Church, Edinburgh, over the Solemn League and Covenant and the forthcoming Union with England.⁴³ Adams finally demitted his

³⁷ *Bond of Union*. Quoted in *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 168.

³⁸ *A Confutation of a Scandalous Pamphlet, Intituled A Manifesto, or the Standard of the Church of Scotland, In Answer to A Letter from a Gentleman* (n.p., 1724), 48 pages (quotation on p. 23). The *Confutation* is available on the True Covenanter website, www.truecovenanter.com, along with several other items referred to in this paper.

³⁹ See *Confutation*, pp. 17-18, where an extract from the *Remarks* is given.

⁴⁰ [P. Grant], *A manifesto, or the standard of the Church of Scotland: wherein the representative power and authority formerly owned and avowed by our ancestors, in their declarations, is espoused by the Presbyterians* ([Edinburgh], 1723), 8 pages (quotation on p. 5).

⁴¹ *Confutation*, pp. 10, 15, 24-5.

⁴² See prefatory material to the *Confutation* on the True Covenanter website.

⁴³ A brief account of the Adams/Webster dispute is given in W. R. McLeod and V. B. McLeod, *Anglo-Scottish Tracts, 1701-1714* (Kansas, 1979), Nos. 187, 222, 373, 377. When opening this work, the reader has to brace himself for the hostile reflections on strict

charge in November 1714 and became a printer in Edinburgh. In 1717 he was imprisoned for two days for printing a pamphlet *Mercy, Now or Never*. He died in 1730 aged 54. It is rather surprising that the Ultra-Covenanter Patrick Grant should have employed an Episcopalian to print a document so radical as his *Manifesto*.

Grant does not seem to have published anything subsequent to the *Manifesto* and he may have died soon afterwards.⁴⁴ The *Confutation* refers to a banner of Grant's, which may possibly be the supposedly Cameronian banner from the battle of Bothwell Bridge displayed in the Cameronian Regimental Museum in Hamilton.⁴⁵ We hope to consider the identity of this banner in a future paper, DV.

2. The Harlites or Cotmuir Folk

The Harlites or “Cotmuir Folk” consisted of the brothers Andrew and John Harley, their sister Marion or Margaret, the sisters Grisell and Mary Spritt who were former Gibbites, and others who joined them from time to time. Cotmuir was a hamlet in the parish of Dalmeny, just outside Edinburgh. Sometime before 1700 they moved to Lochend, south of Leith. In their account of their “contendings” up to the year 1700, it appears that they began to meet separately in the year 1690.⁴⁶ The second edition of the *Informatory Vindication* says that “shortly after that we [the Society People] were deprived of our leaders, through their backsliding, came over out of Ireland two women, pretending themselves to be somewhat, wherethrough some of the more simple of our number, both in the West, East, and in Fife, were ready to be endangered with them: but process of time discovering the naughtiness of these persons, and our friends being better informed concerning them, came

Presbyterians which the compilers have scattered throughout their otherwise useful volume; e.g. “Webster was a most difficult and determined Presbyterian minister. . . . He was a man unable to compromise any beliefs and unwilling to allow others to believe or act in any other way than that determined by himself. . . . Webster was not an attractive man nor are his pamphlets pleasant reading,” p. 207.

⁴⁴ For further discussion of Patrick Grant's opinions and writings at some length, see *Three Questions*, pp. 159-161; *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, pp. 124, 167, 216; Grant, *Preacher to the Remnant*, p. 271.

⁴⁵ See *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 216.

⁴⁶ [Andrew and John Harley], *The Ravished Maid in the Wilderness, or, A True Account of the Raise, Causes and Continuance of the Difference between a Suffering Party of Presbyterians, commonly called Cotmure Folk, and these that follows Mr. John Mackmillan, commonly called Mountain Men* (n.p., 1708), p. 6.

to be more cautious in meddling with them”.⁴⁷ The Cotmuir Folk’s account of their contendings is somewhat garbled and difficult to follow but it shows that the “two women” from Ireland associated themselves with the Cotmuir Folk and, in fact, were almost certainly the Spritt sisters.⁴⁸

During the course of 1690 and 1691 the Cotmuir Folk had interviews with various prominent figures in Cameronian circles such as Sir Robert Hamilton; his brother-in-law, Sir Alexander Gordon of Earlston; James Kid; and George Luke of Glasgow, who subsequently became a Hebronite.⁴⁹ Another interesting visitor to Cotmuir was the former Gibbite Alexander Montgomery from Bo’ness who had been banished to New Jersey in 1684.⁵⁰ None of these people, however, could be won over to their particular views, so they drew up their own testimony which they presented to Hugh Kennedy and some other leading Church of Scotland ministers towards the end of 1691.⁵¹ The ministers refused to take the testimony to the General Assembly, but nevertheless, the Cotmuir Folk were regarded as sufficiently notorious by the United Societies that they publicly distanced themselves from their “doting delusions” in their Declaration of August 1692 and again in November 1695.⁵²

In 1696 the Cotmuir Folk were in trouble with the Government, and in June of that year, the Lord Advocate told the Privy Council that a committee had examined two “Coatmuir Lads”, Andrew and John Harley, finding them “very Insolent and extravogant against the Government of Church and state”. After their interrogation, they were led back to the Canongate Tolbooth, where they were imprisoned, and the three women – Margaret Harley, and Grisell and Mary Spritt –

⁴⁷ *Informatory Vindication* (1707 edn.), p. 221.

⁴⁸ *Ravished Maid*, p. 6. Grisell Spritt is said to have had a husband “in the west” whom she went to visit, while Mary is recorded as going to Fife, *ibid.*, p. 7. If the Cotmuir Folk were as incoherent in their speech as they were in their writing, the United Societies must have been in disarray indeed to have been losing people to them.

⁴⁹ For Earlston, see his entry in *ODNB*; for James Kid, see Part II of this paper; and for George Luke, see McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ See Somerset, “Walter Ker and the ‘Sweet Singers’”, pp. 100, 102, and “Addenda and Corrigenda” in this volume. Of Montgomery, the Cotmuir Folk said, “this flatterer came to us, with all these fair pretexts”, *Ravished Maid*, pp. 19, 23. Other Society People, also from Bo’ness, who visited Cotmuir, included Duncan Forbes and William M’Vey; *ibid.*, pp. 14, 24; *Register of the Rev. John Macmillan: being a record of the Marriages and Baptisms solemnised by him among the Cameronian Societies*, pp. 2, 6; Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, p. 145.

⁵¹ The testimony is given in *Ravished Maid*, pp. 39-51.

⁵² *An Informatory Vindication* (1707 edn.), p. 6 of starred section and p. 239.

shouted in the street that the Privy Councillors were “Bloody persecuters and persecuting Rascalls”.⁵³

The Cotmuir Folk were still in the Canongate Tollbooth, or perhaps had been re-imprisoned, at the end of 1698 because about that time they were visited there by Elisabeth West. She thought them “good people” and spent a Sabbath afternoon with them, but afterwards regretted absenting herself from public ordinances, and did not join them.⁵⁴ Another woman, Isobel Wright or Widow Cleghorn, who died on 2nd November 1697, formed a very different opinion of them. In her “Dying Testimony” she said:

I never saw any in my time, that professed godliness, have such a practice as they; or of such exasperate spirits, and so full of revenge in all their writings and scribblings. I never saw any thing that was Christ-exalting, or self-abasing; or that was for credit of truth, or godliness, but that was for the credit of themselves.⁵⁵

In a similar vein, Robert Wodrow, in about 1710, mentions a story that he had heard that Ninian Oliphant had “been proselyted by them [the Harlites], and made to fast three dayes; and at length he found them eating in secret, and left them”.⁵⁶ Ninian Oliphant was a prominent figure in the Jedforest Correspondence of the Society People for many years.⁵⁷

After 1700, the Cotmuir Folk made a further approach to the “Mountain Men” or Hamiltonians but received another rebuff; and

⁵³ Raffe, “Religious Controversy and Scottish Society, c. 1679-1714”, pp. 165-6; id., “Female Authority and Lay Activism in Scottish Presbyterianism, 1660-1740”, in H. Smith and S. Apetrei (eds.), *Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660-1760* (Farnham, 2014), pp. 61-78 (pp. 73-5).

⁵⁴ *Memoirs or Spiritual Exercises of Elisabeth Wast* (Edinburgh, 1733), p. 96.

⁵⁵ *Dying Testimonies*, pp. 27, 38. Two letters from Sir Robert Hamilton to Isabel Wright, one dated 27th October 1692 and the other undated, are in *Christian Conduct* (Edinburgh, 1762), pp. 40-44 (see the True Covenanter website). Widow Cleghorn may possibly have been the mother of “Anable Cleghorn”, the mother of James and Marion Brown, who herself had suffered during the persecution (*Passages in the Lives of Helen Alexander and James Currie*, pp. 62, 74). Widow Cleghorn must have been born about 1625.

⁵⁶ Robert Wodrow, *Analecta* (4 vols., Maitland Club, Edinburgh, 1842-3), Vol. 1, pp. 272-3.

⁵⁷ *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, p. 387; Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, p. 130, which also describes Ninian Oliphant’s unusual marriage in 1702. For the separation of the Eskdale and Jedforest Correspondences from the United Societies between 1695 and 1707, see McMillan, “The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688”, pp. 145-6, and *Dying Testimonies*, p. 214. In December 1709 Macmillan baptised twenty-seven people in Eskdale and four in Jedforest, *Register of the Rev. John Macmillan: being a record of the Marriages and Baptisms solemnised by him among the Cameronian Societies*, p. 9.

about 18th July 1704 they had an arrangement to meet Macmillan in Edinburgh, but he never appeared, according to their complaints.⁵⁸ Their earliest supposed publication is the anti-monarchical pamphlet, *The Smoaking Flax*, published in 1706.⁵⁹ This is attributed to the Harlites by Robert Wodrow but we strongly doubt this attribution.⁶⁰ *The Smoaking Flax* is a far more coherent publication than their undoubted publication, *The Ravished Maid*, published in 1708, and it is difficult to see how the same person can have produced both. *The Confutation*, on the other hand, attributes *The Smoaking Flax* to Patrick Grant (“this is another of his Books so called”) and we presume that this is correct.⁶¹ Andrew Harley’s education obviously progressed rapidly in the years after 1708, and his letter of 1727 (see below) is quite well written.

About 1708, the Harlites formed an association with Patrick Grant, as a result of which the two Harley brothers were “ordained” to the ministry. *The Confutation* describes events thus: “He [Grant] consociated with the Two Men and Four Women, called the Cot-muir-folk, until he put the two Men in Orders, or constitute them Ministers, such as they are; for none can tell what Potestative Mission they ever had to execute that sacred Function these many Years, but only such as he gave them, and he could give but such as he had. They say themselves, That he and they went all Three into a Room, where they found themselves a Quorum, and so did constitute themselves all Three actual Ministers of the Gospel; and presently he went with them to the North, and put one in the Exercise thereof; and the other, some Years after, intruded into the same Office.”⁶² Both brothers started preaching, baptizing, and performing marriages.⁶³ Patrick Walker says that he went to hear

⁵⁸ *Ravished Maid*, pp. 32-5. Macmillan had met a deputation from the Hamiltonians in April 1704, and had then appeared before the Commission of Assembly in Edinburgh in June. He was still in Edinburgh (or had returned) on 11th July 1704. See Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, pp. 138-140.

⁵⁹ *The Smoaking Flax Unquenchable; Where the Union Betwixt the two Kingdoms is Dissected, Anatomized, Confuted and Annuled* ([Edinburgh], 1706), 24 pages.

⁶⁰ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 1, p. 272. Wodrow also mentions another “virulent paper” of the Harlites, *The Burning Bush*, which we have not been able to identify.

⁶¹ *Confutation*, p. 24. The contents of *The Smoaking Flax* are discussed at length in Jeffrey Stephen, *Scottish Presbyterians and the Act of Union, 1707* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 207-217.

⁶² *Confutation*, p. 29. The “Conclusions” of the General Meeting of United Societies for 14th January 1709 probably refer to this when they say: “Mr. Charles Umpherston is desired to write a letter to the North to inform the people anent Andrew Harlaw”. The “North” probably means Perthshire, which was the northern limit for the United Societies.

⁶³ *Dying Testimonies*, pp. 375-6.

Andrew Harley preaching in the Cowgate and that “he rambled through the whole 58th of Isaiah but his sermon had neither top, tail, nor mane”. Harley’s hearers consisted of John Harley, five women, a boy, and a girl.⁶⁴ Harley retaliated in kind by querying whether Walker had any recollection of what had passed that day because “for the most Part of the whole Time, he had a most unseemly and indecent Carriage, by Sotting and Sleeping, like one intoxicate with drink, till those that came with him, were ashamed of him”.⁶⁵

In 1710, the Harlites produced a further publication entitled *The Beam Pull’d out of the Hypocrites Eye*.⁶⁶ This was a reply to Thomas Linning’s *Letter from a Friend to Mr. John Mackmillan*, published against Macmillan in October 1709. Leaving Macmillan to answer for himself, the Harlites vigorously attacked Linning, who had left the United Societies in 1690 or 1691. Favourable mention is made of Patrick Grant’s *Nonconformists Vindication*, which is mistakenly said to have been “published seven years since”, and also of his *Rectius Declinandum*, confirming that the Harlites were very much of a mind with Grant at that stage.⁶⁷ The pamphlet concludes with a dire twelve-stanza poem in long metre against Church of Scotland “preachers”, from which we quote a couple of verses:

But had they stuken by the Truth.
And Trusted God for throughbearing,
He could have proven true to them,
And rise for their Delivering.

And for their Names that were so dear
Above GODS Glorie unto them,
They shall to Generations all
A stink on Face of Earth remain.

A further Harlite publication, written somewhat later, is probably *Grand Jugler Detected*, of which no copy seems to have survived. In 1724 Patrick Walker condemned it as a “wild, enthusiastick, deluded, demented, nonsensical” pamphlet, and Andrew Harley describes a meeting between the author of the pamphlet and Patrick Walker to

⁶⁴ *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 241-2.

⁶⁵ *Biographia Presbyteriana*, Vol. 1, p. 343.

⁶⁶ [Andrew Harley and John Harley], *The Beam Pull’d out of the Hypocrites Eye; or, the Querier Questioned* ([Edinburgh], [1710]), 12 pages.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 3, 9.

discuss this condemnation. At one stage in the reported conversation, Harley slips into the first person, which would seem to imply that he himself was the author.⁶⁸

About 1718, Grant broke off communion with the Harlites, and by this time the three Harlite women were dead.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Andrew Harley endorsed Patrick Grant's *Manifesto* of 1723 in his letter of 1727 against Patrick Walker.⁷⁰ In the same letter, Harley also mentions that he had had considerable dealing with John Adamson (see below).⁷¹ At this stage Harley still had what Walker described as an "enthusiasick Qakerish party",⁷² but how much longer he lived and his party continued, we do not know. The demise of Patrick Grant and the Harlites, however, did not mean the end of Russelite views, because the Howdenites (see Section IV) were in the process of adopting the same position.

III. MINISTERS ASSOCIATED WITH JOHN HEPBURN

1. The Hebronites

The Hebronites were the followers of John Hepburn, minister of Urr (although it appears that Hepburn was never actually inducted to the parish).⁷³ Like the United Societies, the Hebronites met in praying societies and "Correspondences" after 1690, and briefly sought union with the United Societies, by whom, however, they were rejected on account of their various laxities.⁷⁴ Unlike the United Societies, they did not regard the hearing and receiving of ordinances from the Church of

⁶⁸ *Biographia Presbyteriana*, Vol. 1, p. 339. For Patrick Walker's condemnation, see *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 24.

⁶⁹ *Confutation*, p. 29.

⁷⁰ Andrew Harley's letter "to his friend in the country" is in *Biographia Presbyteriana*, Vol. 1, pp. 335-357. A note at the end says that it was first printed in 1727. For the defence of Grant's *Manifesto*, see *ibid.*, p. 341.

⁷¹ *Biographia Presbyteriana*, Vol. 1, pp. 342, 344-7.

⁷² *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 174.

⁷³ D. Frew, *The Parish of Urr, Civil and Ecclesiastical: A History* (Dalbeattie, 1909), pp. 227-9; McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 28. Hepburn seems to have touched a raw nerve as far as McMillan was concerned, and his biography of Hepburn is excessively hostile and misses no opportunity of denigrating him. For example, McMillan refers at least four times to the supposedly damaging fact that Hepburn sought to retain his stipend after he was deposed, pp. 12, 30, 211, 215.

⁷⁴ McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 48.

Scotland as sinful.⁷⁵ The Hebronites were mainly based in Nithsdale, Annandale, and Galloway, but were also represented in Eskdale, Lanarkshire, Ayrshire, and possibly Edinburgh.⁷⁶ Hepburn spent much of his time visiting his various supporters and preaching without permission in parishes other than his own.

Hepburn's ministry at Urr was one of continual trouble and he was suspended in 1696 and imprisoned for a short while in Edinburgh and Stirling for refusing to take the Oath of Allegiance. He was then exiled to Brechin. His suspension was lifted in 1699, but he was suspended again in 1704 and deposed in 1705 "for erroneous seditions, and divisive doctrines, and schismatic courses". He was reponed in 1707 but continued his erratic course for the rest of his life. Hepburn's right-hand man was Gavin Mitchell, a divinity student, who is understood to have been the author of the principal Hebronite work, *Humble Pleadings for the Good Old Way*, published in 1713.⁷⁷ McMillan says that one of Hepburn's followers was Patrick Walker, but we have not seen any conclusive proof of this.⁷⁸ Walker certainly had a very high regard for Hepburn, and thought that James Renwick would have associated with him had he lived, but Walker's strong Presbyterian and anti-separatist principles may have kept him in the National Church,⁷⁹ and besides Walker is likely to have been living in or near Edinburgh and it is not certain that there was a Hebronite society in Edinburgh.

Hepburn died in March 1723 and many of his followers went back into the Church of Scotland.⁸⁰ Others became Macmillanites, and others continued to meet separately in praying societies.⁸¹ Thomas Boston speaks of an encounter with such a group in 1730.⁸² When the Secession Church was formed later in the 1730s, much of its support came from those of a Hebronite background.⁸³

⁷⁵ *Dying Testimonies*, p. 369.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 42.

⁷⁷ The little that is known of Gavin Mitchell can be found in *John Hepburn and the Hebronites* and we have not been able to add anything to this.

⁷⁸ McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 226. An account of Patrick Walker's life can be found in *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. xix-xxxix.

⁷⁹ For Walker's regard for Hepburn, see *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 28-9; 150, 314-5. For Walker's principles, see *ibid.*, pp. 144-5, 289-292.

⁸⁰ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 3, p. 244.

⁸¹ W. Mackelvie, *Annals and Statistics of the United Presbyterian Church* (Edinburgh, 1873), pp. 146-7.

⁸² Thomas Boston, *A General Account of My Life* (London, 1908), p. 318.

⁸³ McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, pp. 217-228.

Hepburn's own life is sufficiently described in McMillan's biography,⁸⁴ and in this section we want to consider the various ministers who were associated with him at different stages of his career.

2. M'Henry and Farquhar of Nigg

Hugh M'Henry or M'Hendrie had become minister of Dalton in the Presbytery of Lochmaben sometime before October 1694. In 1696 he was deposed for "irregularities" but was reponed in January 1699. In 1700, he was again deposed by the Commission of Assembly, and the 1703 Assembly refused to annul this sentence.⁸⁵ His association with Hepburn seems to have commenced in May 1698 when he was ministering to Hepburn's people in the south while Hepburn was in exile in Brechin. In that month, he had a conference with Sir Robert Hamilton which proved unsatisfactory as far as the Cameronians were concerned. Hamilton records:

On Wednesday last at night, we had a conference with Mr. M'Hendrie, who was all day at Mr. Hepburn's parties meeting, and at night came to us. He evidenced great kindness to us, but in conference seemed not to be very distinct in any part of our Testimony; and as to that of the magistrate, whatever he seemed to yield to us, yet, at the long-run, he seemed clear in no part of it. After we had spent the whole night with him, and our friends had been singularly helped, every one to lend in their mite in defence of truth, all the meeting unanimously agreed, that there was no joining with him; and that he appeared not to be a man, for the time, that the Lord had raised up, either to espouse or defend Scotland's covenanted reformation and buried Testimony: however, we parted with him, and he with us, very friendly, and, I doubt not, but both sides much weighted; and before parting he told us, that Mr. Hepburn's party had engaged him to preach on the Sabbath.⁸⁶

Another undated letter from Hamilton refers again to M'Henry's views on the civil magistrate and speaks of a letter he had sent from Dundee, presumably while on a visit to Hepburn in Brechin.⁸⁷ Within a

⁸⁴ See also *Memoirs of the Public Life of Mr. James Hogg* (Edinburgh, 1798), Section VI; Raffe, *Culture of Controversy*, pp. 200-203.

⁸⁵ Hew Scott (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae (Fasti)* (8 vols., 2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1915-1950), Vol. 2, p. 201.

⁸⁶ *Christian Conduct*, p. 52. Letter to Thomas Gillespie of 25th May 1698.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 56-7. Letter to James Currie and Thomas Gillespie.

few months, however, M'Henry had left the Hebronites and returned to the Church of Scotland. He is probably to be identified with the Hugh McKendry who was preaching in the vacant parish of Menmuir, Angus, in July 1699, and facing profane opposition from the Episcopalians in the parish.⁸⁸ As the Hebronite Gavin Mitchell summarizes: "One Mr. M'Hendrie, for some little time, preached among us in Mr. H[epburn]'s absence, about 1698, but upon some frivolous Grounds and chiefly (we are apt to think) out of fear of wanting sufficient outward sustenance, went off and returned not again."⁸⁹

In 1700, M'Henry resumed his courtship of the Cameronians but was rejected by them in June of that year.⁹⁰ He then disappears from view until 1703 when he petitioned the General Assembly to be restored to the ministry. The Assembly rejected his petition but ordered a collection to be made for his financial needs. Thereafter he went down to England and became an Episcopalian. William Wilson describes this part of his career:

After that he was deposed by the erastian ministers in that bounds where he was, he did separate from this erastian church, and made a great profession of love to, and zeal for our covenanted work of reformation, and willingness to join with the owners thereof. And yet when his profession was at the greatest, he still owned and contended for the owning of the pretended rulers, who then were malignant enemies to the cause of Christ, and all the true lovers thereof; and did shew himself to be so insatiably greedy and covetous of worldly gain, that he would be a minister to no party, unless they would oblige themselves to give him a certain sum of money for his maintainance. And after that he went to England, and Ireland and back to Scotland, and in every place where he did preach, baptise children, and marry people when so employed; either by nominal presbyterians, or professed prelaties, in a mercenary way, for pieces of silver and morsals of bread, &c. as he and his employers could agree. For marrying persons clandestinely contrary to the word of God and order of the church of Scotland he was imprisoned in the tolbooth of Glasgow, whereupon he declared himself to be one of the communion of the prelatie

⁸⁸ Raffe, *Culture of Controversy*, p. 231.

⁸⁹ [G. Mitchell], *Humble Pleadings for the Good Old Way* (n.p., 1713), p. 294.

⁹⁰ See McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, pp. 115-6, for further details.

church; and pled for his liberation from prison, from the toleration of prelacy and prelatic curates in this land, which he obtained; and thereby made a fair discovery of his naughtiness.⁹¹

In 1714 he made a further attempt to join the Macmillanites, but again he was rejected, unsurprisingly, and thereafter no more is heard of him.⁹²

A somewhat later companion of Hepburn's was James Farquhar of Tyrie in the Presbytery of Deer. Born in 1666, he was educated at Marischal College, Aberdeen, from 1682-4. According to one writer, he had been a Quaker.⁹³ He was ordained minister of Tyrie in 1701. In April 1706, however, he joined Hepburn, who was under sentence of deposition at the time, in the south and began preaching with him.⁹⁴ The General Assembly of that year instructed the Commission to take account of his disorderly conduct.⁹⁵ Meanwhile Farquhar was inclining to Independent views on Church government which led to his separation from Hepburn. As Gavin Mitchell put it: "One Mr. James Farquhair, once minister at Tyrie, preached some few days amongst us and sometimes with Mr. H[epburn] in whom Mr. H. and we had some Complacency, until we found that he had altered his principles about the Government, External Form and Privileges of the visible Church, by making defection to the Independent way, which when Mr. H. and We knew, We deserted him, and gave him no more Encouragement, and so he betook himself to another Shore."⁹⁶ From the "Dying Testimony" of Robert Smith, it appears that in the brief time that he was with Hepburn, Farquhar also had a conference with the Cameronians.⁹⁷

⁹¹ *Dying Testimonies*, pp. 371-2.

⁹² McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 117. McMillan thinks that it was after 1714 that M'Henry went down to England and became a Prelatist.

⁹³ [Alexander Robeson], *Mene tekel: or separation weighed in the ballance of the sanctuary and found wanting: Part I. Wherein, The conduct of the Church of Scotland, with respect to the Union and Oath of abjuration, is fully cleared and vindicated; the proceedings of the Church against Mrs. Mcmillan, Taylor, Hepburn and Gilchrist justified: the contraversie anent confederacies and associations with malignants clearly stated and discussed . . . in answer to that insolent and malicious libel, entitled, Protesters vindicated. To which is added an Appendix . . .* (Dumfries, 1717), Appendix, p. 7.

⁹⁴ L. W. Sharp (ed.), *Early Letters of Robert Wodrow, 1698-1709* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1937), pp. 288, 293; Raffe, *Culture of Controversy*, p. 202.

⁹⁵ McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 118.

⁹⁶ *Humble Pleadings*, p. 294.

⁹⁷ *Dying Testimonies*, p. 216.

In August 1709, Farquhar demitted his charge at Tyrie on account of his scruples on Church government, but in 1715 he renounced these scruples and in 1717 he became minister of Nigg just outside Aberdeen. He lived until 1756. He was a very strong man and in the early part of his ministry he had been employed in settling Presbyterian ministers in parishes where there was fierce Episcopal opposition.⁹⁸

3. The Nithsdale ministers

From about 1713 onwards, Hepburn started to associate with some ministers who were considering a separation from the Church of Scotland on account of the Oath of Abjuration of 1712. Initially there were five ministers involved, but three of them were persuaded to stay in the Church of Scotland, and only two separated: John Taylor of Wamphray and James Gilchrist of Dunscore. The story of their separation is told at length by McMillan, and here we add a few further details.⁹⁹

The separating ministers formed a Presbytery which, according to Thomas Boston who was friendly with Taylor, “lasted very short while”.¹⁰⁰ The recorded meetings of the Presbytery were at Wamphray Kirk on 8th June 1715,¹⁰¹ at Dunscore on 18th July 1715, and at Morton Mains on 14th October 1716;¹⁰² and Alexander Robeson refers, too, to a meeting at Sanquhar.¹⁰³ Robeson regarded the Presbytery as still functioning in March 1717.¹⁰⁴ It seems therefore to have lasted rather longer than Boston’s words might at first suggest. By 1718, however, it

⁹⁸ Thomas M’Crie (ed.), *Correspondence of Robert Wodrow* (3 vols., Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842-3), Vol. 2, p. 224n.; Thomas M’Crie, *Story of the Scottish Church* (Free Presbyterian Publications edn.), p. 435.

⁹⁹ McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, pp. 152-178; *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, pp. 126-7.

¹⁰⁰ Boston, *A General Account of My Life*, p. 200.

¹⁰¹ *Protesters Vindicated: or, A just and necessary defence of protesting against, and withdrawing from this national Church of Scotland; on account of her many gross and continued defections* (n.p., 1716), p. 89.

¹⁰² *The Vindication of Mr. James Gilchrist, Minister of the Gospel at Dunscore, from the Unjust and Calumnious Aspersions, wherewith he is charged, in a Lybel sent to him by the pretended Presbytery of Drumfreis, upon the 8th of July 1715 Years. 2ly. His Answers to the Grounds of their Act of Deposition. 3ly. Reasons to justify his preaching, &c. after Deposition. 4ly. His Parish’s Declaration of Adherence to him as their minister, after his Deposition* (n.p., 1716), pp. 10-11, 25 (available on the True Covenanter website).

¹⁰³ *Mene Tekel*, Appendix, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 38.

was said that “there has been nothing done by them [the separating ministers] in that capacity for a considerable time”.¹⁰⁵

The Clerk of the Presbytery was apparently a student for the ministry, John Riddoch, Ruddoch, or Riddough, who was from Ireland.¹⁰⁶ The Presbytery of Stranraer had refused him a licence, but he was a well-read young man and Robeson regarded him as the probable author of *Protestors Vindicated*. Robeson was not impressed, however, with the vast array of quotations in the book, upon which he reflects as follows:

I have not cited so many authors as my antagonist hath stuffed his book with: my *curta supellex* (narrow furniture) would not afford it: and I was not so idle, as to go to Edinburgh, or other publick libraries, to furnish myself with quotations. However I’m perswaded, the judicious and learned reader will find a vast difference betwixt his citations and mine, both as to pertinancy and honesty. . . .¹⁰⁷

Riddoch had joined with Gilchrist and Taylor in a Protest given in to the Synod of Dumfries in 1715,¹⁰⁸ and he was probably also the author of *The Vindication of Mr. James Gilchrist* (cited above). He was still associated with Hepburn in 1720 and was widely suspected of being a Jesuit.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ See *Mr. Taylor’s Case Stated, or, A Just Reply to a book, intituled A vindication of Mr. John Taylor minister of Wamfray: wherein, the conduct of the Presbytery of Lochmaben in suspending, and of the Synod of Drumfries, in deposing the said Mr. Taylor, is clearly vindicated, from the false and unjust allegiances of the said author; as also, a more full account of the procedure of the Synod and Presbytery, in that business; together, with a true narration of some gross immoralities, and unchristian practices of the said Mr. Taylor both before and since his deposition* (Dumfries, 1718), p. 77. This was written in answer to *A vindication of Mr. John Taylor, minister of the Gospel at Wamphray, from the false accusations and unjust sentences charged on, and past against him, by the pretended Presbytery of Lochmaban and Synod of Dumfreis, January 25th and April 15th 1715: with answers distinctly, 1st. To the grounds of suspension. 2dly. To the grounds of deposition at large. 3dly. Justifying his continuing in the exercise of his ministry, by the presbytery of protesters, recognoscing his process, after deposition. An appendix and postscript* (n.p., 1717), 86 pages.

¹⁰⁶ *Mene Tekel*, Appendix, pp. 38, 40.

¹⁰⁷ *Mene Tekel*, p. x.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁹ *Mene Tekel*, Appendix, p. 40; *Mr. Taylor’s Case Stated, or, A Just Reply*, p. 86. Couper, “The literature of the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Church”, Vol. 5, p. 235, also lists *A Short Answer: By Mr. William Vetch, Minister of the Gospel at Dumfries. To a Letter pretendly written by Mr. John Hepburn Division-Maker. But really by Riddough and Hunter and other Romish Emistaries; who are Defenders of his Faith, both Summer and Winter* (Dumfries, 1720), 16 pages. The “Hunter” mentioned in this title was Daniel Hunter, another student for the ministry; see [John Pollock], *An answer to the first part of Humble pleadings, or, A vindication of the Church of*

In addition to the works already mentioned, one further publication in the Nithsdale controversy which should be listed is James Hog of Carnock's reply to *Protesters Vindicated* in 1717.¹¹⁰ A subsequent pamphlet exchange then ensued between William Veitch and Hepburn from 1718 until their respective deaths in 1722 and 1723.¹¹¹

McMillan says nothing about how the Presbytery came to be dissolved, but it does not appear to have been on account of a rift between Hepburn, Gilchrist, and Taylor. It seems rather that some of them became uneasy about the propriety of such meetings. The author of the *Just Reply* says, "Some concerned in that business, as I am informed, have seen the evil of these sinful and Church-ruining practices, and are resolved to act no more in that manner for the time to come".¹¹² Meanwhile a friendship had developed between Macmillan and Gilchrist, and in 1719 Gilchrist performed the marriage of Macmillan to his second wife. Soon afterwards, on 4th May 1719, the Macmillanite General Meeting sent a deputation to confer with Gilchrist on the points of difference.¹¹³

The Nithsdale ministers showed a considerable readiness to renew the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant. Thomas Boston was present at Wamphray on Saturday 12th July 1713 when Taylor and his people signified their adherence to the Covenants,¹¹⁴ and Hepburn and Gilchrist renewed the Covenants "in a very solemn manner, under arms, with flying colours" at Dunscore in 1715,

Scotland from the unjust aspersions of Mr. Hepburn and his part: submitted to the judgment of all impartial and unprejudiced people, especially in the shires of Nithsdale, Air, and Clidsdale, with the Stuartries of Annandale and Kirkcudbright (Dumfries, 1717), p. 34. Hunter continued with Hepburn until the latter's death in 1723, see *The Last Testimony . . . of Mr. John Hepburn* (n.p., 1723), p. 22, but then joined the Church of Scotland, being licensed by the Presbytery of Dunfermline in September 1724. In 1730, he was ordained, somewhat ironically (see next footnote), as assistant and successor to James Hog of Carnock, whose daughter he married. He died in January 1739. See *Fasti*, Vol. 5, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ James Hog, *Three missives written to a minister of the Gospel: in answer to one from him, wherein the author's grounds for remaining in communion with the Church of Scotland, as to its judicatories, and the ordinances therein dispensed, are ingenuously and fairly stated; and the chief reasons of our separatists, for setting up ordinances and judicatories, distinct from this National Church, and in opposition to it, are impartially considered and repelled, as these reasons were printed in a late book intituled, Protesters vindicated* (Edinburgh, 1717), 64 pages; see Charles Moffatt, "James Hog of Carnock (1658-1734), Leader in the Evangelical Party in Early Eighteenth Century Scotland" (University of Edinburgh, PhD thesis, 1969), pp. 143-152.

¹¹¹ For details, see Couper, "The literature of the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Church", Vol. 5, pp. 234-5; McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, pp. 190-7.

¹¹² *Mr. Taylor's Case Stated, or, A Just Reply*, p. 77.

¹¹³ Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, p. 186.

¹¹⁴ Boston, *A General Account of My Life*, p. 199.

presumably in the autumn at the time of the rebellion.¹¹⁵ Taylor renewed the Covenants again on Wamphray Moor on 23rd August 1722.¹¹⁶ By this time Gilchrist had died, on 18th August 1721, at the early age of forty-six.¹¹⁷ Hepburn died in March 1723, aged about 73, so ill-health may explain his absence the previous summer when Taylor renewed the Covenants. Taylor continued his separate course until his death in 1745 but many of his followers left him about 1724.¹¹⁸ As Thomas Boston puts it, “his own party broke among themselves, and many of them left him: so that this day, tho’ he still continues his schism, his affairs and reputation are in a sorry situation”.¹¹⁹

4. John Adamson and the Adamites

Hay Fleming suggests that the Adamites took their name from William Adams, the printer of Patrick Grant’s *Manifesto* in 1723 (mentioned above).¹²⁰ It is virtually certain, however, that the Adamites were the followers of John Adamson. Adams, as we have mentioned, was the minister of Humbie from 1701 to 1714, when he resigned and became a printer in Edinburgh. There is no reason to think that he had a following; but in any case, he was no enthusiast for the Covenants but very much the reverse. Adamson, on the other hand, was a significant figure in the “ultra-covenanting” world for over a decade.¹²¹

John Adamson was born in the parish of Aberdalgie near Perth, at a rough guess about 1685. He was educated at Perth Grammar School and at St. Andrews University where he was an able student. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Perth, and preached within the bounds of

¹¹⁵ John Howie, *Reformation Principles Re-Exhibited* (Glasgow, 1787), p. vii; *Mene Tekel*, p. 60.

¹¹⁶ Howie, *Reformation Principles Re-Exhibited*, p. vii; Couper, “The literature of the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Church”, Vol. 5, p. 235.

¹¹⁷ *Some gleanings of the last words of the worthy and Reverend Mr. James Gilchrist, minister of the gospel at Dunscore, who died there upon the 18th day of August, 1721* (n.p., n.d.), 8 pages.

¹¹⁸ *A just and lawful defence of adherence to our Covenants National and Solemn League: or, A vindication of several societies in the south of Scotland: who, in adherence to our Covenants National and Solemn League, which they have renewed, were obliged to publish this testimony against Mr. John Taylor, shewing the reasons why they cannot own him for their minister, nor join in communion with him* (n.p., 1724), 56 pages.

¹¹⁹ Boston, *A General Account of My Life*, p. 200.

¹²⁰ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 214.

¹²¹ McMillan identifies the Adamites with the followers of Adamson; see “The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688”, p. 147.

the Presbytery for several years. Such, at least, is the account given by his biographer “A.S.” who was a personal friend.¹²²

Robert Wodrow’s version is rather different. He says that Addison (as he calls him), on being

put to the schools, . . . left his books and for several years continued with his father at the plough and country labours. About four or five years since [i.e. 1708-9], he took a violent inclination to return to his books, and did so, and recovered a little of his Latin, and being under a great reputation for piety, he was admitted pretty early by the Presbytery on trials. They were convinced of his want of reading and learning but were taken with his piety and considerable popular gifts; and, therefore, with a design to send him to some of the places in that country as a catechist, that needed one in the Braes of Athole, under the inspection of the ministers there, they did license him, but quickly finding his imprudence and weakness, they did not grant him an extract of his licence. He preached some time there, and has a very popular gift, but falls into mighty eccentricities. He fell foul on the English Ceremonies in the church of Perth, and disgusted many of the officers of the soldiers there.¹²³

Wodrow is certainly wrong on one point because in 1708 Adamson, already a probationer, was involved in a protracted dispute over a call to the parish of Collace, near Perth. There was another competing call and the General Assembly (or probably the Commission of Assembly) eventually ordered “both calls to be laid aside, and an orderly election fallen on anew for settling this parish”.¹²⁴

Adamson continued as a probationer within the bounds of the Perth Presbytery until 1713 when the controversy surrounding the Abjuration Oath led to his departure. Towards the end of April 1713, Adamson supplied for his namesake Alexander Adamson in Dalziel parish (modern-day Motherwell) and shortly afterwards he was present at the Hamilton communion where “he preached against the [Abjuration] Oath and mightily pleased the people”.¹²⁵ His main themes

¹²² John Adamson, *The Loss and Recovery of Elect Sinners* (Paisley, 1795), p. ix.

¹²³ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 2, pp. 242-3; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, Vol. 1, p. 481n.

¹²⁴ John Wilson, *The Presbytery of Perth* (Perth, 1860), p. 35.

¹²⁵ Two sermons from this communion were published under the title *Two sermons, preached at Hamiltoun, upon the late communion-sabbath. By Mr. J. A. minister of the gospel*

were the various iniquities of the Union of 1707, of the re-introduction of Patronage, and of the Toleration Act and Abjuration Oath of 1712. At the beginning of May 1713, the General Assembly passed an act requiring mutual forbearance among ministers regarding the Abjuration Oath. At this stage Adamson did not regard the Abjuration Oath as a sufficient reason for separating from the Established Church.¹²⁶

Immediately afterwards Adamson preached again at Dalziel. He “fell on to prove that the Pope, the King of France, the Queen, and Parliament were all in a confederacy against God and against Christ; which he proved from the spirits coming up out of the bottomless pit! And some other allusions; and he pretends to prove all he says by Scripture, and has a peculiar faculty of drawing it to allude to what he is upon.”¹²⁷ Alexander Adamson interrupted his sermon, asking him to go on to some other subject, which he did. When they heard about this, some people in the neighbouring parishes were “in such a disgust at Mr. [Alexander] Adamson for quenching his zeal, as they called it, that it was like to mar his communion, which was in view”. John Adamson, therefore, had to be invited back to Dalziel to assist at the communion in order to placate the people. He resumed his ordinary topics, says Wodrow: “the Union, Toleration, the English Service, and the Oath”.¹²⁸

At the end of May, Adamson returned to Perth and preached again in the parish of Collace. The minister who had been settled in 1709, after the earlier dispute, had died the previous December and the vacancy was not yet filled. Another man, James Ramsay, had been nominated and called, but on hearing Adamson the people decided that they preferred him to Ramsay and they applied to the Presbytery to secure him instead.

(Edinburgh, 1713), 40 pages. They are often attributed to Adamson, but he was not a minister of the gospel (nor claiming to be) at that stage, and there is nothing in them of a controversial nature.

¹²⁶ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 2, p. 243.

¹²⁷ The Macmillanite writer Hugh Clark presumably had Adamson in mind when he said, “I have heard, that one lately become a Field Preacher, is very fond of that way of arguing, and nothing but Express Scripture will satisfy him”, *A converse betwixt two Presbyterians of the Established Church an elder and a preacher. Wherein, the Presbyterian dissenters from the Establish’d Church, are vindicate from the charge of Jacobitism; their principles anent civil government, are fairly stated, and succinctly proven consonant to scripture light, and the confession of faith; and several important objections thereanent, answered. For confirmation of the weak, and information of the misinformed in that matter* (n.p., 1714), p. 41.

¹²⁸ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 2, p. 243. One of Adamson’s sermons from the communion was published, *Christ’s burial solemnized, with an eye to His resurrection. Being a sermon preached at the sacrament of Dalzel, in the year 1713, immediately after that Act of Assembly; Abjuration no ground of separation. By Mr. John Adamson. Preacher of the gospel* [n.p., 1713?], 24 pages.

The Presbytery, however, refused to alter its purpose, to the great annoyance of Adamson. He decided that the Abjuration Oath was a reason for separation after all, and he renounced the Presbytery's authority, preached a "farewell sermon" at the kirk of Rhind on Hebrews 11:38, "Of whom the world was not worthy: they wandered in deserts etc.", and returned to the west of Scotland with the intention of joining the Hebronites.¹²⁹

The Hebronites, however, were hesitant to accept him, and by November 1713 he had separated from Hepburn and was also preaching against Macmillan and against Established Church ministers: both those who had taken the Abjuration Oath and those who had not.¹³⁰ On 26th October 1713, the General Meeting of the Macmillanites issued a warning against him, and in November 1713 the Commission of Assembly of the Established Church prepared a libel.¹³¹ By July 1714, Wodrow was writing, "Mr. Adamson is raging like a madman in his sermons in Hamilton, Lanark, and Ayr Presbytery; and rails against ministers and government. He is so violent he cannot continue long."¹³² In October 1714, he was involved in a public dispute with John Steel, minister of Cumnock; with both parties publishing their version of the debate.¹³³ The following year, the General Assembly referred

¹²⁹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 2, p. 244. Adamson's farewell sermon was soon printed: *A farewell sermon to this present constitut church: . . . Preached in the church of Rind, in the presbytry of Perth, June 1713. By Mr. John Adamson preacher of the gospel* (n.p., 1713), 16 pages. Another sermon, on Hebrews 12:12-13 and presumably preached about the same time, was printed a couple of years later, *An alarming sound to sinfull sleepers: being a sermon preached to the paroch of Rhind at the time of general apostacty from God, and now published . . . / by John Adamson . . .* [n.p., 1715], 20 pages.

¹³⁰ More information on Adamson's relations with the Hebronites at this point can be seen in *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 244-5; Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 2, pp. 244, 263.

¹³¹ McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 124; Raffe, "Religious Controversy and Scottish Society, c. 1679-1714", p. 248; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, Vol. 1, p. 529.

¹³² Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 2, p. 285.

¹³³ John Steel, *An account of a late conference, on the 25th October, 1714, betwixt Mr. John Steel minister of the gospel at Old Cumnock, and Mr. John Adamson a disorderly preacher. Anent the pretended grounds of his disorderly course. Attested by Mr. Steel himself, and five elders, who were eye and ear witnesses. Whereby Mr. Adamson will be found to have discovered his disingenuity, even to a surprize. And the utter groundlessnes of his separation* (Glasgow, 1714), 23 pages; John Adamson, *Contendings for the kingdom of light, against the kingdom of darkness: being a copy of a true dispute betwixt Mr. John Steel at Comnock, and Mr. John Adamson, preacher of the Gospel, about the grounds of separation from the present church, to which is added some remarks upon a counterfeit dispute come forth under that name; the first and true dispute was write by a gentleman from their mouth, and read publickly before the company before they parted, which being compared with the connterfit dispute put forth by Mr. Steel, sheweth what undiscreeit dealing Mr. Adamson hath meet with from Mr. Steel and his elders* (Edinburgh, 1715), 33 pages.

the consideration of Adamson's irregularities to the Commission of Assembly. Sometime after this he was placed under discipline but, as Patrick Walker puts it, "the Church excommunicated him, and he gave them Groats for Pease, he excommunicated them".¹³⁴

By May 1716, Adamson was again "intruding" into various parishes round Perth,¹³⁵ and at the beginning of 1717, he declared himself to be a minister of the gospel and started to baptize and to marry. Wodrow relates how, in February 1717, Adamson baptized "two children at Hamilton, and blundered, and forgot the prayer before the action".¹³⁶ In a publication of the following month, Adamson described himself as "minister of Kinfauns" in the Carse of Gowrie, so presumably he had gathered a congregation there. Probably it was at this time that he deposed and excommunicated the Presbytery of Hamilton.¹³⁷

In June 1719 Adamson renewed the Covenants at Black Hill in the parish of Collace. William Wilson (see Part II) in his "Dying Testimony" denounced this renovation as spurious: "[Adamson] did presumptuously counterfeit the renewing of our solemn covenants, by imposing upon his party, an oath of his own devising instead of them, which he and they called, the renewing of the covenants."¹³⁸

After this, Adamson moved to Fife where he had a number of followers.¹³⁹ He supported the Marrowmen in their controversy with the General Assembly and, according to Patrick Walker, he wished to join

¹³⁴ *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 244; Vol. 2, p. 126.

¹³⁵ D. M. Bertie, *Scottish Episcopal Clergy, 1689-2000* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 3. Adamson is mistakenly listed as a possible Episcopalian preacher.

¹³⁶ K. W. H. Howard, *Marion Veitch* (Ossett, 1992), p. 562.

¹³⁷ He published two pieces in spring 1717: *Mr. John Adamson Minister of the Gospel at Kinfauns, hearing that the pretended presbytery of Hamiltoun, as they had shaken off the fear of God by perjury and apostacie, so they had cast off civility and love to their own reputation, . . . by taking advantage of my absence, to read a lying libel out of their pulpits against me, . . . wherefore I saw it necessary for the discovery of their wickedness and to declare to the world what impressions of a Deity I have upon my spirit; . . . to give in this declinator* (n.p., 1717), 4 pages (dated "At Airnbuckell, March 23d 1717"); *A letter sent from Mr. John Adamson Minister of the Gospel at Kinfauns, to the irreverent late deposed and excommunicate ministers of Hamilton and Dalziel; being both Alexanders, and their companions and brethren in iniquity . . .* (n.p., 1717), 4 pages (dated "Longlie in Hamiltoun Paroch, April 23d 1717").

¹³⁸ *Dying Testimonies*, p. 371; see also John Howie: "Mr. Adamson and a small party attempted their renovation at Blackhill, 1719, by a short bond in place of the Covenant, which seemed only an adherence to the Covenants", *Reformation Principles Re-Exhibited*, p. vii.

¹³⁹ A pamphlet at this time against John Anderson of Dumbarton is attributed to Adamson, but we have not seen a copy, *Some enquiries into Mr. Anderson's letters, concerning his ingenuity in pleading for Presbytery* (n.p., 1720?), 8 pages.

them, but they refused.¹⁴⁰ In 1723 he married a farmer's daughter in Fife, the ceremony being performed by himself. Two years later, he took ill and died in rather sad circumstances.¹⁴¹ His death occurred on 30th May 1725 at Lindores in the parish of Abdie.¹⁴² There is no record of any successor, so his followers presumably dispersed soon afterwards. He was not forgotten, however, and in 1768, more than forty years after his death, the first edition of his *Loss and Recovery of Elect Sinners* was published, to be followed by further editions in 1777 and 1795.¹⁴³ Unlike most or all of his other writings, the book is practical rather than controversial. It takes the form of a dialogue between Patience, Hasty, Anxious, and various other characters, and it displays considerable imagination. It is liberally sprinkled with unattributed poems which were presumably composed by the author.

Adamson's biographer says that "he was of large stature, tall comely personage, little eyed, sharp sighted, of a quick attentive ear, a strong healthful body".¹⁴⁴ Of the other "Ultra-Covenanters", William Wilson testified against him, as we have seen, but he was supported by the Harleys. In his letter to Patrick Walker, published in 1727, Andrew Harley says:

About two Years before [Adamson] died, I had Occasion to be particularly acquaint with him. My first Converse with him, was to this Purpose, that when the Lord raised up Witnesses, the present Generation followed always the preceding, which might be confirmed from many Places of Scripture. . . . His owning King George, was contrary to those of 1648, that would not own Charles II till he took the Covenant. He answered, That he had not will to be rash in disowning them, as long as they did not persecute, but he had just now written to the Sheriff, if he continued to persecute, he would be necessitate to disown them altogether, and it would

¹⁴⁰ Walker, *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 246.

¹⁴¹ Wodrow, *Analecta*, Vol. 2, p. 377; *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 245-6.

¹⁴² Adamson, *The Loss and Recovery of Elect Sinners* (1795 edn.), p. xii.

¹⁴³ John Adamson, *The Loss and Recovery of Elect Sinners: with the Difficulty of Their Coming Back Again to Glory* (Glasgow, 1768). Each edition was published in Glasgow and had 272 pages, but there are some differences between the first and third editions. The first two editions are excessively rare and we have not seen them. The third edition has a short biographical preface, by someone who had known Adamson, which presumably is also present in the two earlier editions.

¹⁴⁴ Adamson, *The Loss and Recovery of Elect Sinners* (1795 edn.), pp. xi-xii.

be, that once in a Quarter of a Year, that he would pray for King George, and he did not pray as others did, his Prayer was, that the Lord would make him what he should be, or take him away, and give them a better. Some Months after this, when I had Occasion to see him again, his Wife just before him, said, My Husband hath never prayed for King George, since he met with you, and he was most willing to forbear all Things in Controversy, till the Lord would give him Light; as for his Letter to the Magistrates of Perth, that he speaks of, the honest Man was provoked with such ignorant Blockheads, that could not speak Sense, nor understand Sense, I have thought indeed of him, as Mr. Rutherford said of Samson, who was a rackle-handed Saint, so Mr. Adamson was a rackle-tongu'd Saint. I could have wished, that he had studied some more Moderation, but that will never overthrow his Testimony. 'Tis well known, some of the most eminent Servants of God, have been subject to like Passions as other Men; yet how honourably doth the Holy Ghost make mention of them, in the 11th of the Hebrews, such as Samson and Jephthah.¹⁴⁵

IV. THE HOWDENITES OR "ACTIVE TESTIMONY BEARERS"

It is generally understood that the "Howdenites" referred to by Patrick Walker were the followers of John Halden or Howden, who was an upholsterer in Edinburgh in the first half of the eighteenth century. Howden himself is an obscure figure, and very little is known of him beyond his employment and a handful of passing references.¹⁴⁶ He was probably born in the 1680s and was still alive in 1749 but may have died soon afterwards. Strictly the Howdenites were Macmillanite in origin, but their history is both lengthy and erratic, and it is easiest to deal with them separately. They are commonly treated as fanatical curiosities but we will see that they were a far more significant group than is usually realized. Their history falls roughly into four stages.

¹⁴⁵ *Biographia Presbyteriana*, Vol. 1, pp. 344-5.

¹⁴⁶ An earlier John Haddow had troubled the United Societies in 1685 but, despite the similarity of names, it seems unlikely that there was any connection between Haddow and Howden; see *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, pp. 199-200. For an anecdote of John Howden at his work, see McMillan, "The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688", pp. 149-50.

There were several Cameronian praying societies in and around Edinburgh at the beginning of the eighteenth century and it was from these that the Howdenites derived. Their first appearance was on 28th October 1712, when Howden and his followers marched up Edinburgh High Street and burnt the Oath of Abjuration on the point of a dagger at the market cross.¹⁴⁷ There is no contemporary record of this action, but they refer to it in a publication issued in 1749.¹⁴⁸ At this stage they were in fellowship with John Macmillan. Hutchison dismisses their conduct as that of “fanatics”¹⁴⁹ but it is hard to see why the burning of the notorious Oath of Abjuration was any more fanatical than the 1661 burning of the Covenants at Linlithgow by public authority, or the 1682 burning of the Lanark Declaration by the Edinburgh magistrates, or the 1706 burning of an anti-Union pamphlet at the Edinburgh cross by order of Parliament, or indeed than the 1520 burning of the Papal Bull by Martin Luther.¹⁵⁰

On 24th December 1712 the Howdenites issued a proclamation against “Yule Vacance” (i.e. the vacation of the Court of Session on 25th December) and on 5th August 1714 they affixed another paper to the Edinburgh cross refusing to acknowledge George, Duke of Hanover, as the new king. George had succeeded to the throne on 1st August, the news reaching Edinburgh on the 4th. The following April the Howdenites published a *Declaration, Protestation, and Testimony* against him.¹⁵¹ In this they declared that they were “sheep without a shepherd,

¹⁴⁷ Hutchison hints that certain “Active Testimony Bearers” separated from the Hamiltonians almost as soon as Macmillan joined them in 1706, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, p. 393, and this hint is hardened into a certainty by McMillan, “The Hebronites”, p. 157n. and by Colin Kidd, “Conditional Britons: The Scots Covenanting Tradition and the Eighteenth-century British State”, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 117 (2002), pp. 1147-1176 (p. 1159). The separation was not until 1715, however, and the name “Active Testimony Bearers” is probably anachronistic before the 1730s.

¹⁴⁸ *The Active Testimony of the True Presbyterians of Scotland, being a brief Abstract of Acknowledgment of Sins, and Engagement to Duties, etc; As also a First and Second Declaration of War against all the Enemies of Christ at Home and Abroad; A Fourth, Containing a Declaration and Testimony against the Late unjust Invasion of Scotland by Charles, pretended Prince of Wales, and William, pretended Duke of Cumberland, and their Malignant Emissaries. And Five valuable [sic] Papers besides, all being the Second blast of the Trumpet* (n.p., 1749), p. 39 (hereafter cited as *Active Testimony*).

¹⁴⁹ Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, p. 395.

¹⁵⁰ See Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, p. xi; *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, p. 11; McLeod and McLeod, *Anglo-Scottish Tracts*, Nos. 92, 308, pp. 26, 90.

¹⁵¹ *The declaration, protestation and testimony of a poor wasted, desolate, misrepresented and reproached remnant, of the suffering anti-popish, anti-prelatick, anti-erastian, anti-sectarian, true Presbyterian Church of Christ in Scotland, united together in truth of duty. Published against the*

having no help of man at all, none to take care of our souls”, indicating that by this time they had disowned Macmillan’s ministry. His conduct over the accession of George I was a source of strife among the United Societies at least until the Auchensaugh *Declaration* of 1718,¹⁵² and led to the departure not only of the Howdenites but also of William Wilson, Robert Smith, and others.¹⁵³ On the other hand, the 1715 *Declaration* speaks of “our *Inform Vindication*, reprinted *Anno 1707*” and refers approvingly to its Second Head. At this stage, therefore, the Howdenites were still Hamiltonian/Macmillanite rather than Russelite in their views of the Sanquhar Declaration’s “war against that tyrant and usurper” Charles II. At the same time, however, they declare a “war of constant opposition” against all who were at war with Christ, a theme that was to become dominant in their later publications.¹⁵⁴

Immediately after 1715, there was no obvious difference of position between the Howdenites and the followers of Robert Smith and William Wilson; but Smith, who died in 1724, says that “after-divisions” soon “fell in among themselves”.¹⁵⁵ One of these was probably the adoption of Russelite views by the Howdenites. In 1727, Patrick Walker referred to a party which had separated from Macmillan (probably the followers of William Wilson) in the following terms: “There is yet a subdivision of good people scattered through the land who have deserted Mr. Macmillan since K. George’s accession, for his representing grievances and seeking redress of the same: these live altogether without gospel ordinances, and are very confident that they only are in the principles

proclamation, accession and establishment of George D. of Hanover to be King in these lands, and all his abettors and supporters, in Aprile 1715 (n.p., 1715), 28 pages (see pp. 6, 8). William McMillan (“The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688”, p. 152) attributes this 1715 *Declaration* to William Wilson, but the reference on p. 6 to the burning of the Abjuration Oath in 1712 shows that it was a Howdenite document. In any case, Wilson did not separate from Rev. John Macmillan until August 1715, as we shall see in Part II.

¹⁵² *The true copy of a Declaration: published at Auchensaugh nigh Dowglas, upon the twenty fourth day of July 1718* (n.p., 1719). The opening sentence begins: “The Declaration, Testimony and Protestation of the Witnessing Remnant of the Anti-Popish, Anti-Lutheran, Anti-Prelatick, Anti-Erastian, Anti-Sectarian, True Presbyterian Church of Christ in Scotland, united together in a General Correspondence.”

¹⁵³ *Declaration* (1715), p. 1. On pp. 26-7 the Howdenites inveigh at considerable length against the Macmillanite “Representation of Grievances” which had been submitted in 1714 to the new king; see Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, pp. 184-5; Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, p. 173; Lawrie, *Some Remarks upon the Act and Testimony of the Reformed Presbytery*, p. 26 (partly based on *Dying Testimonies*, p. 219); *Dying Testimonies*, pp. 215, 219, 230 (where Robert Smith owns the 1715 *Declaration*).

¹⁵⁴ *Declaration* (1715), pp. 4, 6, 8.

¹⁵⁵ *Dying Testimonies*, p. 219.

and practices of Christ's slain witnesses in this land."¹⁵⁶ The following year, he makes an explicit distinction between this particular party and the Howdenites.¹⁵⁷

In 1726 there was an apparent resumption of Howdenite activity in a protest by certain Edinburgh "dissenters" against Patrick Walker and others who had been involved in the re-interment of some Covenanting martyrs' heads.¹⁵⁸ These heads had been found in a garden in Edinburgh and were being re-buried at the Martyrs' monument in Greyfriars' churchyard. What appears to be a Howdenite tract, *The Last Speeches and Testimony to a Covenanted Nation*, was published at this time.¹⁵⁹ The tract has a poem condemning those involved in the re-burial as "perjur'd bloody Men burying the truth"; while the author of the preface, who calls himself "Philaethes Philadelphus Antiaspondus" (Lover of Truth, Lover of the Brethren, Against Non-Covenanters) "obtests" his readers to maintain "an Active or Passive Testimony, suited to the Capacity the Lord in his Providence has or shall put you in", to be "no more *speculative* but *active* in regard to your Duty as Subjects and Members of the Kingdom and Church of *Scotland*", and to prosecute "the ends of the Covenant, according to Light and Capacity, either in an active or passive Way".¹⁶⁰

The distinction between an "active" and a "passive" testimony goes back to Alexander Shields (if not before), and is employed by Shields as a theme running through the first part of his *Hind Let Loose* in 1687. Early in the book, he says of the Lollards that "their Testimony indeed was not *Active*, by way of forcible resistance, against the Sovereign Powers: but *passive*, by way of Confession and Martyrdom, and sufferings, and verbal contendings, and witnessings against the prevailing corruptions of the time". The "Testimony" became "active", by contrast, at the First and Second Reformations.¹⁶¹ Thus an "active testimony", in

¹⁵⁶ *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 272-3.

¹⁵⁷ *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 142.

¹⁵⁸ For more on this incident, see *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 323-7, 330-3; Vol. 2, pp. 185-6; *The Bulwark*, April-June 2014, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵⁹ *The Last Speeches and Testimony to a Covenanted Reformation: of Robert Garnock, Patrick Forman, David Farrie, James Stewart, and Alexander Russel, whose heads were brought above ground, in the providence of God, on the 7th day of October 1726, 45 Years after they were severed from their Bodies, crying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge, and avenge our Blood on them that dwell on the Earth? Rev. vi. 10* (Edinburgh, 1726), 44 pages.

¹⁶⁰ *The Last Speeches and Testimony to a Covenanted Reformation*, pp. 7, 8, 44.

¹⁶¹ [A. Shields], *A Hind Let Loose, or a Historical Representation of the Testimonies of the Church of Scotland for the Interest of Christ, with the true state thereof in all its periods* (n.p., 1687), pp. 11, 16, 60 (see also pp. 94, 209, 609).

this sense, is one that is prepared to take up arms in its defence. This restricted sense, however, did not become established in Covenanting circles for many years, and Patrick Walker, writing in the 1720s, frequently refers to an “active testimony” without any connotation of “forcible resistance”.¹⁶² The Howdenite quotation given in the previous paragraph, which presumably looks back to the *Hind Let Loose*, seems to mark the reintroduction of Shields’ terminology and the adoption by the Howdenites of the Russelite idea of being in a state of war with the rest of the nation.¹⁶³

For some reason the Howdenites appear not to have published any Declaration against George II’s accession to the throne in 1727.¹⁶⁴ In 1732, the names of John Howden and David Leslie (see below) appear as prominent Edinburgh signatories of the *Publick Testimony* presented to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May of that year regarding the Scriptural right of congregations to call their own ministers.¹⁶⁵ It is unlikely that Howden had joined the Church of Scotland, and somewhat strange to find a man who favoured an “active testimony” co-operating with members of the Established Church in petitioning the Assembly.

The second stage in the history of the Howdenites is their reappearance in 1735 in connection with the formation of a Secession congregation in Edinburgh. Robert Small relates that at the end of 1735 and beginning of 1736 the Associate Presbytery (Secession) received petitions from the “United Societies” in Edinburgh about the starting of services. The first service was held at the Braid Hills on 22nd March 1738, and ten children were baptized; and a second open-air service was held on 20th June 1739.¹⁶⁶ McMillan comments that the baptisms show

¹⁶² See *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, pp. 20, 108, 148, 222, 339, 355.

¹⁶³ A later writer defines an “Active Testimony” as being: “to set up magistrates of our own, – and to make use of force for overturning the present government”, John Thorburn, *Vindiciae Magistratus: Or the Divine Institution and Right of the Civil Magistrate Vindicated* (Edinburgh, 1773), p. 208.

¹⁶⁴ Robert Lawrie says that William Wilson’s *Declaration* (see Part II) was the only public protestation against the accession of George II, *Some Remarks upon the Act and Testimony of the Reformed Presbytery*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁵ *A Publick Testimony: being the Representation and Petition of a considerable Number of Christian people within the Bounds of several Synods in this Church, In their own Name, and in Name of all adhering thereunto, presented and given in to the General Assembly met at Edinburgh, May 4th 1732, anent grievances* (Edinburgh, 1732), pp. 13, 48. See also Howie, *Reformation Principles Re-Exhibited*, p. 293.

¹⁶⁶ R. Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1904), Vol. 1, p. 426.

that the people were not Macmillanites, because otherwise Macmillan would have baptized the children, and he suggests that the people were Hebronites.¹⁶⁷ This may have been so for some of them, but others at least were Howdenites.

During the following year, according to Small, the Secession Presbytery had

trouble with one of the [Edinburgh] praying societies, the members of which held it to be a right thing to take up arms against the Government for defection from Covenanting principles. This was a doctrine which the Presbytery could not tolerate, and after lengthened dealings with the party, which numbered about a dozen, they were excluded from Church fellowship.¹⁶⁸

The leader of the party, whom they excommunicated for giving in a paper of grievances, was David Leslie of the parish of the West Kirk (St. Cuthbert's).¹⁶⁹ The West Kirk had been the scene of a riot in 1732 when the minister Patrick Wedderspoon or Wotherspoon was intruded on the congregation. The city guard had opened fire on the crowd in self-defence and several people had been severely wounded. By a remarkable providence, Wedderspoon had died two months later at the age of twenty-five, but nevertheless the episode had done much to prepare the ground for the Secession in Edinburgh.¹⁷⁰

Someone with money and ability must now have joined the Howdenites because they re-commenced publishing, but on a far more extensive scale than before. Two prominent figures, along with John Howden, were James Leslie, whose name is associated with that of Howden in a couple of their publications, and David Leslie, mentioned

¹⁶⁷ McMillan, *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, pp. 226-7.

¹⁶⁸ Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, Vol. 1, p. 426.

¹⁶⁹ [William Wilson], *The Declaration of the True Presbyterians within the Kingdom of Scotland, against the pretended Associate Presbytery, holden in the shires of Stirling, Perth, Fife, etc. by Mr. Ebenezer Erskine and his Brethren* (n.p., 1740), pp. 35-37; *Answers by the Associate Presbytery, to reasons of Dissent, given in to the said Presbytery, at Stirling, December 23, 1742; as also, the representation and petition dictated to their Clerk, and reasons of Dissent and Secession, given in to them at Edinburgh, February 3 1743; by the Reverend Mr. Thomas Nairn* (Edinburgh, 1744), p. 18; *Act, Declaration, and Testimony, for the whole of our Covenanted Reformation, as attained to, and established in Britain and Ireland; particularly, betwixt the years 1638 and 1649, inclusive: as also, against all the steps of defection from said reformation . . . By the Reformed Presbytery. The third edition, with several additions* (Edinburgh, 1777), p. 171.

¹⁷⁰ *Fasti*, Vol. 1, p. 97.

above. In 1739 the Howdenites issued a new edition of *The Mystery of Magistracy* “with amendments and additions” and with “an appendix containing the Rutherglen, Sanquhar, and Lanerk declarations; with the Queensferry paper”.¹⁷¹

The work had originally been published in London in 1663 but had been republished in Edinburgh in 1708 without any reference to the 1663 edition.¹⁷² It was quoted with approval in the Macmillanite publication *Plain Reasons* in 1731.¹⁷³ The Howdenites were unaware of the 1663 edition and described their publication, which was based on the 1708 edition, as the second edition. One of their “additions” to the book was a “Declaration of Independence” along the following lines:

Knowing that no society of men having corruption in them can be without laws and government we shall set up government and governors according to the word of God: our governors shall be obliged to govern principally by the judicial law; we having no body of laws of our own, but some few and imperfect acts of parliament, and follow sometimes the canon, sometimes the civil, sometimes the feudal law which occasions great contention among the people especially these that are naturally litigious, to the exhausting and inhancing the substance of the kingdom to some few men and squeezing of its inhabitants. Perhaps some will raise an ignorant clamour upon us that this is a fifth monarchy; men putting odious names on good things to make us hateful as their way is: but if this be their fifth monarchy, we both are and ought to be such according to God’s word.¹⁷⁴

On 29th October 1739, the Howdenites implemented their ideas by proclaiming the “Covenanted States of the Commonwealth of

¹⁷¹ *The Mystery of Magistracy Unvail’d: or, God’s ordinance of magistracy asserted, cleared and vindicated, from heathenish domination, tyrannical, antichristian, and Erastian usurpation, despisers of dignities and condemners of authorities / By an unworthy servant and subject of Jesus Christ, the king of saints and nations. Together with an appendix containing the Rutherglen, Sanquhar, and Lanerk declarations; with the Queensferry paper* (n.p., 1739), 118 pages. Further editions followed in 1795 and c. 1797.

¹⁷² Some people thought that the 1708 edition was a new book written by John Howden; see Lawrie, *Some Remarks upon the Act and Testimony of the Reformed Presbytery*, p. 51. Howden cannot have been involved in the 1708 publication, however, because whoever published it must have known about the 1663 edition, which the Howdenites did not.

¹⁷³ [Andrew Clarkson], *Plain Reasons for Presbyterians Dissenting from the Revolution-Church in Scotland* (n.p., 1731), pp. 256-7, 262.

¹⁷⁴ See *Three Questions*, pp. 195-6.

Scotland” and issuing a “Declaration of War Against all the Enemies of Christ at Home and Abroad”, specifically “against Turk, Pope and Prelates and all their Associates and Abettors whatever”. If the original “Declaration” was printed, no copy has survived, but it was reprinted in their 1749 publication. Presumably the inspiration for this document came from George II’s declaration of war against Spain ten days earlier.¹⁷⁵ A “Second Declaration of War” followed, dated 3rd April but with the year unstated. In this they added the Secession Presbytery to their list of enemies: “Also we, in the Name and by the Authority aforesaid, declare a War against the Pestilential Sect of Seceders, for their mad and stupid Loyalty to the Idolatrous Throne of Britain, and their supporting the same with all their Might, and for their wicked and pernicious Principles, affirming that Magistracy is founded upon mere Nature, and so consequently is not the Ordinance of God.”¹⁷⁶ This “Second Declaration” must have been subsequent to the Thomas Nairn case, and therefore probably either in 1743 or 1744.

Two months after the first “Declaration of War” the Howdenites issued a protest against the public fast which had been appointed by royal authority for 9th January 1740.¹⁷⁷ These several publications were referred to and disowned by the Macmillanites in their own “Mount-Herick Declaration” of 7th May 1741: “Also some others, writing and printing papers in and about Edinburgh, in a most unchristian Manner, which we likewise disown, and hereby desires the world to impute no such Extremes unto us.”¹⁷⁸ Undeterred by this reproof (needless to say), the Howdenites published a protest against the celebrating of the royal birthday in October 1741.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ The War of Jenkins’ Ear (so called) lasted from 1739 to 1748.

¹⁷⁶ *Active Testimony*, p. 21.

¹⁷⁷ “A Declaration and Testimony against, and Inhibition of the Fast for Hell, proclaimed and appointed by the sacrilegious and malignant Powers, to be observed on the 9th of January 1740 by all the Prelatical and Erastian Synagogues in Britain.” See *Active Testimony*, pp. 42-7. The Declaration is signed “J.H.” and concludes, “On the Second of January, this Declaration was published on the Cross of Edinburgh, and on the 5th thereof on the High-Church there, and the Pier of Leith”.

¹⁷⁸ *The true copy of the declaration and testimony published at Mount-Herick, near Crawford-John, upon the seventh day of May, 1741* (n.p., 1741), pp. v-vii. A second edition was published in 2008 by the Covenanted Reformed Presbyterian Church (see the True Covenanter website).

¹⁷⁹ “A Declaration and Testimony against that sinful Practice of the observation of birth Days, for any Rulers, and especially that of the British Occupant, on October 30th.” This is dated “Edinburgh, October, 26th, 1741”. See *Active Testimony*, pp. 35-8.

In 1742-3, the Howdenites played an indirect part in Thomas Nairn's departure from the Secession Church to the Macmillanites. At the beginning of 1742, the Associate Presbytery resolved to renew the Covenants, and in their proposed Acknowledgement of Sins they lamented that "some few carry their zeal against the defections and evils of the times, to the dangerous extreme of espousing principles in favours of the propagating religion by offensive arms".¹⁸⁰ The people chiefly in mind were the Howdenites, who had briefly been associated with them, but Nairn interpreted the reference as including the Macmillanites, and he denied, rather strangely, that either they or the Howdenites held any such principles. The resulting dispute over Macmillanite principles culminated in Nairn's leaving the Secession and joining the Macmillanites in 1743.¹⁸¹ This had the important consequence that the Macmillanites were able to constitute a Presbytery and ordain ministers for the first time in their existence.

In 1746, the Howdenites published their most moving tract which was a complaint against the atrocities of the Duke of Cumberland after the battle of Culloden.¹⁸² While disowning the Jacobites, they make the point that many who had supported the House of Hanover had been very evilly rewarded for their loyalty.¹⁸³ This is confirmed by the poet Dugald Buchanan who records that the brutal treatment of his Jacobite relatives (he himself was a Hanoverian) filled him with desires for revenge and blood, and very seriously affected his spiritual state for no fewer than five years.¹⁸⁴

About this time, the Howdenites entered onto the third stage of their history. Their numbers had increased significantly and they had considerable support, not only in Edinburgh but in the Merse. Furthermore, among their circle of sympathizers, if not supporters, were several young men of ability, all of whom had connections with the

¹⁸⁰ *A Short Account of Mr. Thomas Nairn, Minister of the Gospel in Linktoun of Arnot, formerly Abbotshall, his Secession from the Associate Presbytery, with the grounds and reasons for his so doing* (n.p., 1743), p. 14; Adam Gib, *The Present Truth: A Display of the Secession-Testimony* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1774), Vol. 1, p. 257.

¹⁸¹ See Nairn, *Short Account*, pp. 19, 26; *Answers by the Associate Presbytery*, pp. 17-18; Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, Vol. 2, pp. 352-3.

¹⁸² "A Declaration and Testimony against the Late Invasion of Scotland by the two young Pretenders, viz. Charles and William," in *Active Testimony*, pp. 23-34.

¹⁸³ A summary of the *Declaration* is given in McMillan, "The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688", pp. 151-2.

¹⁸⁴ *Man's Twofold State Exemplified in the Life and Conversion of Dugald Buchanan* (Edinburgh, 1853), pp. 186-191.

Reformed Presbytery. These included John Cameron (1724-1799), Peter Reikie, and James Hall (1726-1781).¹⁸⁵ Cameron was licensed by the Reformed Presbytery by 1750 and Reikie in 1751.¹⁸⁶ Hall was not a Howdenite but he was probably esteemed by them for family reasons. He was the grandson of the Covenanter Henry Hall of Haughhead who, with Donald Cargill, had been closely associated with the Queensferry Paper of 1680. The Howdenites placed great emphasis on the Queensferry Paper because of its rejection of all un-covenanted government and its declared intention of setting up a new government “according to the Word of God”.¹⁸⁷ Hall’s father Samuel was a keen Macmillanite, and the son had been brought up in the United Societies. It does not appear that Hall ever fully adopted Howdenite sentiments but one gets the impression that he liked the attention and led them along. He was licensed by the Reformed Presbytery in January 1749 and ordained in 1750.

In 1747 the Howdenites issued by far their most substantial work, entitled *Magistracy Settled upon its only True Scriptural Basis*. It was a reply to the Associate Presbytery’s *Answers* to Thomas Nairn’s reasons for dissent in December 1742, and was over two hundred pages long, displaying considerable learning and ability.¹⁸⁸ In addition to the numerous books cited, its author or authors had access to the second part of James Fraser of Brea’s “Treatise on Justifying Faith”, which at that stage was still in manuscript.¹⁸⁹ *Magistracy Settled* was written on behalf of the eight

¹⁸⁵ Peter Reikie’s dates are unknown but he was a “young man” in 1751 and “turned in years” by 1765, so he was probably born about 1720. He was recommended to the Edinburgh Presbytery for trials for licensing by the Anti-Burgher Synod in April 1748. In 1751 he was described as “one who had been in Connexion with those who were notour for that principle of a general Redemption [i.e. the Howdenites], and scarcely well joined the [Reformed] Presbytery”. In 1743, Macmillan performed the marriage of John Reeky of Biggar (possibly Peter’s brother) to Isobel Porteous. See [John Macmillan, II], *A Serious Examination and Impartial Survey of a Print designed “The True State etc.”, by a Pretended Presbytery at Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1754), pp. 16-17; Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church*, Vol. 2, pp. 376-7; *Register of the Rev. John Macmillan: being a record of the Marriages and Baptisms solemnised by him among the Cameronian Societies*, p. 69.

¹⁸⁶ W. M. Glasgow, *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America* (Baltimore, 1888), p. 476 (where he is called Thomas Cameron); *Serious Examination*, pp. 16-17; Couper, “A breach in the Reformed Presbytery, 1753”, p. 14.

¹⁸⁷ M. Grant, *No King but Christ* (Darlington, 1988), pp. 120-1.

¹⁸⁸ *Magistracy Settled upon its only True Scriptural Basis: or, An impartial inquiry into the second part of a pamphlet, intituled, Answers by the Associate Presbytery, to reasons of dissent given in at Stirling, December 23, 1742, etc. by the Reverend Mr. Thomas Nairn / By a remnant in these lands, who, yet adheres to the Scriptural and covenanted principles, as contained in the Rutherglen, Sanquhar and Lanerk Declarations, Queensferry Covenant, and Torwood Excommunication* (n.p., 1747). For the numerous citations, see for example pp. 99, 184, 192-4, 201, 206.

¹⁸⁹ *Magistracy Settled*, p. 206.

Howdenite Praying Societies.¹⁹⁰ The leader of the Ninian's Row Praying Society in Edinburgh was Walter Tough, who in 1761 appeared as an elder with James Hall at the reconstitution of the minority Reformed Presbytery,¹⁹¹ and it seems likely that Hall and Cameron were behind the publication.

Two years later, the Howdenites published what was to be their swansong as far as that stage of their existence was concerned. This was a summary of their activities and publications since 1712.¹⁹² Some of their people had been "courting" the Reformed Presbyterians for at least a year and perhaps the 1749 publication was intended to prevent this going any further.¹⁹³ If so, the move was a failure because the following year most of them were persuaded to lay down their "Active Testimony" and join the Macmillanites.¹⁹⁴

Their accession to the Reformed Presbytery, however, was to be far from happy, and terminated in the breach of 1753. As John Macmillan, II, put it, "All the Confusions which unhappily broke the Peace of the Presbytery, and at last entirely split them into pieces, have first and last been wholly owing to our new Upstarts in Edinburgh, who have on all Occasions discovered the strongest Ambition after a popular Supremacy, and have convincingly evidenced, that their Regard for Ministers or any else, is only to continue while they submit to follow their arbitrary Dictates".¹⁹⁵

The particular bone of contention which the Howdenites and their wider circle introduced into the Reformed Presbytery was the Amyraldian doctrine on the atonement espoused by James Fraser of Brea. In 1738, Fraser's *Memoirs* had been published, to be followed by his *Lawfulness and Duty of Separation from Corrupt Ministers and Churches* in 1744. This latter work was issued by a non-ministerial member of the

¹⁹⁰ The eight Praying Societies were in Coldstream, Jedburgh, Polwarth Mill (near Duns), Clackmannan, Ninian's Row (Edinburgh), Cameron, Dalkeith, and New Tynninghame (the last two names are indistinct in the photocopy); see *Magistracy Settled*, p. 233.

¹⁹¹ A Walter Tough (probably the same man) was married by Macmillan on 24th March 1738. He and his wife Helen Portous were from Edinburgh and "had sufficient testimonials from the Societies there" (*Register of the Rev. John Macmillan: being a record of the Marriages and Baptisms solemnised by him among the Cameronian Societies*, pp. 67-8).

¹⁹² The latest date in *Active Testimony* is 25th April 1749 (p. 48).

¹⁹³ *Serious Examination*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁹⁴ James Purves, *Observations on prophetic time and similitudes. Part second* (Edinburgh, 1778), p. 14.

¹⁹⁵ *Serious Examination*, p. 13.

Secession.¹⁹⁶ In 1749, the second part of his *Treatise on Justifying Faith* was published, the first part having appeared in 1722. The book was printed by William Gray at the Magdalen Chapel.¹⁹⁷ According to Adam Gib, the publisher was “a pewterer in Edinburgh” who was “in some particular connexion” with James Hall.¹⁹⁸ Almost certainly this was Alexander Wright, “pewterer in Edinburgh”, who twice interrupted the proceedings of the Reformed Presbytery in April 1753 in support of Hall.¹⁹⁹ Charles Umpherston mentions “a Society in and about Edinburgh” who were the originators of the error of universal redemption, and this must have been the praying society to which Alexander Wright belonged.²⁰⁰ Fraser’s Amyraldian doctrine was warmly embraced by Hall, Reikie, and Cameron, and also by Hugh Innes, who was ordained by the Reformed Presbytery in November 1751. Hall, however, concealed his views when he was being licensed, while Innes and Cameron kept theirs hidden until the time of the breach.²⁰¹

The events surrounding the breach of 1753 are sufficiently described by Couper.²⁰² In April 1753, Hall, Innes, Cameron, and Reikie separated from the Reformed Presbytery, taking the Howdenites with them. Cameron soon went off to Ireland and became a prominent Arian, while Hall and Innes for a short while formed a minority Reformed Presbytery. This fell to pieces, however, probably during 1754 when Innes published a sermon commending unity and fellowship with other

¹⁹⁶ James Fraser, *The Lawfulness and Duty of Separation from Corrupt Ministers and Churches* (Edinburgh, 1744), p. iii.

¹⁹⁷ Curiously, both the minority Reformed Presbytery’s self-justification in 1753, entitled *The true state of the difference between the Reformed Presbytery, and some brethren who lately deserted them: together with a vindication of the Presbytery’s principles concerning the extent of Christ’s death: published in their name, and by their appointment*, and the younger John Macmillan’s reply to this work and to Fraser of Brea’s book, entitled *Serious Examination*, were also printed by William Gray at the Magdalen Chapel.

¹⁹⁸ Gib, *Display of the Secession-Testimony*, Vol. 2, pp. 131, 135.

¹⁹⁹ *Serious Examination*, pp. 29, 32. Wright was admitted an Edinburgh burgess and guild-brother on 22nd March 1732, see C. B. B. Watson (ed.), *Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild Brethren, 1701-1760* (Scottish Record Society, Edinburgh, 1930), p. 220. In 1737 he brought forward objections against Andrew Clarkson’s being licensed for the ministry by the Associate Presbytery, *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 235n. Macmillan “heartily and freely forgave” Hall, Innes, and “A. Wright” on his deathbed in November 1753; see Reid, *Cameronian Apostle*, p. 200.

²⁰⁰ [Charles Umpherston], *Observations on a Wolf in a Sheep-skin, or, Remarks on a paper from Societies in and about Edinburgh, wherein pretending to be true sheep, yet appear as wolves to tear and devour others, who see remarkable danger to follow* (n.p., 1753), pp. 3, 13.

²⁰¹ *Serious Examination*, pp. 12, 38.

²⁰² Couper, “A breach in the Reformed Presbytery, 1753”.

Christians, including George Whitefield.²⁰³ Some of the Howdenites continued with Hall but in 1755 many of them cast off the connection and resumed their “Active Testimony”.

Hall and Innes met again in Edinburgh on 15th August 1759 and were reconciled, agreeing an *Abstract* or statement of twelve steps of defection in the Church in Scotland since the Second Reformation of 1638, which they published. In this statement they condemn the spread of “Arminianism, in all the branches thereof”, but make no mention of Amyraldianism. They also agreed terms of communion which were the Bible, the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms, the Presbyterian Form of Church Government, adherence to the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant; and a condemnation of whatever was contrary to these, especially the twelve steps of defection.²⁰⁴ All in all, this was a remarkably sober document compared with what had gone before, and it seems that they had settled down and learnt something from their experiences.²⁰⁵ In October 1761, the minority Presbytery was reconstituted.²⁰⁶ Innes died in 1765 but the minority Presbytery continued until 1816.

At this stage the Howdenites enter on the fourth and strangest stage of their history. The 1761 Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony* speaks of them as running “to the most extravagant right hand extremes”.²⁰⁷ Howden was probably dead by now and, according to the 1777 Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony*, they came under the spell of a new leader, William Dunnet, “whom they were afterwards obliged to abandon”. Dunnet is

²⁰³ See Couper, “A breach in the Reformed Presbytery, 1753”, p. 8. According to the Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony* of 1761, the first dissentient Presbytery continued “for some years”, so possibly it lasted until 1755; see *Act, Declaration and Testimony, for the whole of our Covenanted Reformation, as attained to, and established in Britain and Ireland, particularly, betwixt the years 1638 and 1649, inclusive: as also, against all the steps of defection from said reformation, whether in former or later times, since the overthrow of that glorious work, down to the present day* (Edinburgh, 1761), p. 171.

²⁰⁴ *Abstract of the Covenanted principles of the Church of Scotland: with several steps of ecclesiastical and national defections therefrom* (Glasgow, 1760), pp. 23-4.

²⁰⁵ Not surprisingly, the Reformed Presbyterian majority took a less sympathetic view. Their *Testimony* of 1777 describes the *Abstract* as “a mank agreement” which these former brethren had “patched up” and which was “not very honourable, nor consistent with their former principles and professed zeal for maintaining the same”, Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony*, 1777, pp. 173-4.

²⁰⁶ Couper states that the Presbytery was reconstituted on 21st October 1761 (“A breach in the Reformed Presbytery, 1753”, p. 13). The Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony* of 1761 says the breach between Hall and Innes had been cemented “some considerable time ago”, but perhaps this did not include the formal reconstitution of the Presbytery, p. 171.

²⁰⁷ Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony*, 1761, p. 172.

described as a “sacrilegious usurper of the ministry . . . who, being once plunged in the depths of enthusiasm, such is his madness, that under pretence of an immediate mission from heaven, he not only daringly usurps the whole of the ministerial function, but also wickedly claims an erastian exercise of the office of the civil magistrate, in a stupid, unaccountable declaration of war, offensive and defensive, against all mankind, himself and his blind-folded confederates only excepted”.²⁰⁸

In their own literature, however, the later Howdenites vehemently deny that Dunnet had any such role among them.²⁰⁹ By this time they were moving towards Arianism and in 1771 they published *A Short Abstract of the Principles and Designs of the United Societies in Scotland* in which this doctrine was openly avowed.²¹⁰ At the same time they retained their Covenanting principles, and thus presented the peculiar spectacle of a group zealously claiming to be the only true Covenanters and yet professing heretical doctrines which the seventeenth-century Covenanters would utterly have abominated. Their new leader was James Purves (1734-1795) who was to become a prominent figure in Arian circles. In 1776 he was installed as pastor of their congregation in Edinburgh. Their subsequent history is that of Unitarianism and we leave them there. They are represented by the present-day St. Mark’s Unitarian Church, Castle Terrace, Edinburgh.²¹¹

Before passing from the subject of the Howdenites, we should notice the misleading nature of Hutchison’s account of the “Active Testimony Bearers”.²¹² The main problem is that he regards the Wilsonites

²⁰⁸ Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony*, 1777, pp. 175, 206-7. Dunnet was apparently still active in 1777.

²⁰⁹ Most of those that joined Dunnet, the Howdenites claimed, had already left them, and had subsequently ended up with the Reformed Presbyterians. See [James Purves] *Observations on the conduct of those called the Reformed Presbytery, relative to some Societies who published an Abstract of their Principles and Designs, in the year 1771: With a narration of that part of the conduct of these Societies, which the Presbytery seem most to condemn. The whole submitted to the judgment of the impartial, judicious, and candid part of mankind. And designed for an admonition to the Presbytery etc.* (Edinburgh, 1778), pp. 7-10.

²¹⁰ *A Short Abstract of the Principles and Designs of the United Societies in Scotland, who adhere to the testimony as stated for the kingly prerogatives of Jesus Christ, by the said societies* (n.p., 1771), 108 pages.

²¹¹ For further details regarding James Purves, see Couper, “A breach in the Reformed Presbytery, 1753”, pp. 9-11; entry for Purves in *ODNB*.

²¹² Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, Appendix 3, “Active Testimony-Bearers and other Dissenters from the United Societies”, pp. 393-6.

(see Part II of this paper) as belonging to this group.²¹³ There were certainly some similarities of opinion, but there were also some radical differences, and at no stage did Wilson associate with the Howdenites or own the various “Testimonies” that they emitted.²¹⁴ One major difference between them was that Wilson was a vigorous opponent of Marrow doctrine,²¹⁵ whereas the later Howdenites strongly favoured it, at least from the 1740s onward. Another important difference was that Wilson adhered to the *Informatory Vindication* in its entirety, whereas the later Howdenites stressed their disowning of the Second Head.²¹⁶ At one point Hutchison distinguishes correctly between Wilson and the “more extravagant” party who published the “Active Testimony”, but on the next page he attributes various Wilsonite tracts to this more extravagant party.²¹⁷ As we have noticed, the expression “Active Testimony” was adopted by Howdenites, probably in the 1720s, and became virtually their hallmark thereafter.²¹⁸ Hutchison’s mistake was perpetuated by McMillan in several of his writings.²¹⁹

²¹³ For example, the reference to the “Active Testimony Bearers” on p. 200 of Hutchison is to a pamphlet by William Wilson.

²¹⁴ *Dying Testimonies*, p. 327.

²¹⁵ See, for example, Wilson, *The Declaration of the True Presbyterians* (1740), p. 25.

²¹⁶ For William Wilson’s views, see Wilson, *The Declaration of the True Presbyterians* (1740), p. 13; *Dying Testimonies*, p. 327; for the Howdenites’ views, see *Magistracy Settled*, p. 20; *Serious Examination*, p. 18.

²¹⁷ Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, pp. 395-6.

²¹⁸ The American Covenanter Alexander Craighead used the expression “active testimony” in his *Renewal of the Covenants* at Middle Octorara, Pennsylvania, in 1743, but not in a Howdenite sense, see p. 33 (available on the True Covenanter website). Craighead’s sympathies appear to have been more with William Wilson at that stage.

²¹⁹ McMillan, “The Hebronites”, p. 157n.; *John Hepburn and the Hebronites*, p. 10; “The Baptismal Register of the Rev. John Macmillan”, pp. 29-30. In his paper, “The Covenanters after the Revolution of 1688”, however, he successfully distinguishes the Wilsonites from the Howdenites.

