



# Vox Clamantis

Bulletin of the Society of Saint Pius X in Scotland

August 2021

*"The will to do, the soul to dare"*

Dear Faithful,

It's always a tricky business writing an editorial of a 'news' letter. It's supposed to contain 'news' and keep the faithful informed but it has to be written sufficiently in advance to be proofread and printed, a process which necessarily takes time. It is, indeed, the very nature of modern 'news' that it changes very quickly. If I were to comment on the relaxation by the government of unreasonable and counterproductive 'guidelines' last month, or the relatively recent *motu proprio* of the Pope regarding the celebration of Mass, by the time this falls into your hands the situation might have changed completely and, most certainly, will have developed somewhat and these words will look terribly dated.

The main article, of course, is always about some events in the past – the life of a saint or an aspect of Church history, but once you get to the back page, with its careful listing of the various Masses available in the coming month, it is quite impossible to predict what extraordinary circumstances may arise which will make the keeping of that timetable impossible.

The main article this month is only indirectly linked to Church history since the Church at the time was being savagely persecuted in Scotland. Witch-hunts, indeed, are a feature of those places where fanatical Protestantism took hold. There are, however, interesting elements of the five great Scottish witch-hunts which bear looking at. Not least of these is the mass hysteria which they involved. Once the civil government had started the (snow) ball rolling, they found it extremely difficult to prevent the avalanche that followed. It is very difficult to see in our contemporaries that we are not witnessing the same sort of sociological behaviour exhibited during the witch-hunts either in Scotland then, Salem later or indeed in all kinds of bizarre events since the onset of the 'Reformation'. The perceived threat to the population then was the supernatural attacks of the devil through witches but it has been all sorts of different things down the centuries. The "Irish Fright" of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is a case in point. In England and parts of Wales in December 1688 during the Glorious Revolution, reports that Irish soldiers were burning and massacring English towns prompted a mass panic in at

least 19 counties, with thousands of people arming themselves and preparing to resist non-existent groups of marauding Irishmen. The "Halifax Slasher" was the name given to a supposed attacker of residents, mostly women, of the town of Halifax, England, in November 1938. The week-long scare began after two women claimed to have been attacked by a mysterious man with a mallet and "bright buckles" on his shoes. Further reports of attacks by a man wielding a knife or a razor followed. The situation became so serious that Scotland Yard was called in to assist the Halifax police. On 29<sup>th</sup> November one of the alleged victims admitted that he had inflicted the damage upon himself for attention. Others soon had similar admissions, and the Yard investigation concluded that none of the attacks had been real. Five local people were subsequently charged with public mischief offences, and four were sent to prison. Having terrified the populace with constant propaganda about a 'deadly virus' (one with a death rate of approx. 0.1%), the government will find it impossible to restore normality (should they wish to) even by noting that the excess death figures are now below zero.

Catholics should not allow themselves to be perturbed by any of this. Our Faith is the one constant in an ever-changing world. That is why we rejected the Council and the new mass which issued from it. Others may be anxious that 'obedience' will require them to give up the True Mass but Archbishop Lefebvre had said, back in the 1970s, that obedience stops when what is commanded is bad. We are the Pope's good servants but God's first.

With every good wish and blessing,

Rev. Sebastian Wall (Prior)



*The Church in Glasgow after the garden work-party*



# THE WITCH-HUNTS OF SCOTLAND



The early part of the history of the new Calvinist religion imposed upon Scotland is noteworthy for its extremely efficient extirpation of the ancestral Faith of a thousand years. This was not effected by a bloody martyrdom (other than the notable exception of St. John Ogilvie) but by the systematic impoverishment and disenfranchisement of the Catholic population. But there is another element of this persecution which is peculiar to Scotland (at least in its virulence) and is based in the nature of the 'Kirk Sessions', i.e., local government and the superstitious nature of Calvinism. This led to the orgies of witch-hunting and burning which took place throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is not then an article strictly speaking about the Catholic Church in Scotland, indeed, Catholicism has no such history of this type of thing. Moreover, in the mediaeval world, belief in witchcraft was considered unchristian. The modern world is very critical of the Spanish Inquisition, but it is certain that though it exercised great rigour in the searching out of intellectual heretics, it refused to accept allegations of witchcraft.

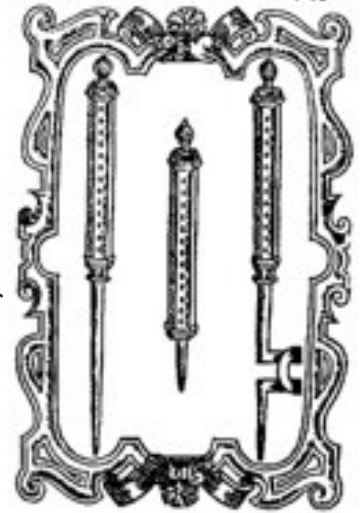
In Calvinist Scotland, however, there were no less than five major persecutions of chiefly women, most of whom were innocent of any crime. The story begins in 1589 when the future wife of James VI, Anne of Denmark, was to be brought across the North Sea to Scotland. Storms prevented the crossing, however, and the Danish authorities blamed witchcraft, influenced no doubt by the allegations of witchcraft which were already rampant in Germany. Arrests were made and two women burned as witches. James travelled to Denmark and

brought his wife back, but storms sunk one ship carrying wedding gifts. The witches, it seemed, hadn't been defeated.

The process, known as the North Berwick Witch Trials, contains all the elements of subsequent persecutions and was greatly aided by the support of the King. News came to Edinburgh in 1590 that a coven of witches in Tranent were plotting against the king. The panic around the Tranent coven began with a local healer called Geillis Duncan, a servant, whose master, with hysterical logic, feared that if she could heal, she could also kill. She was arrested. A witch-pricker investigated Duncan's

body for the Devil's Mark – a blemish which would neither bleed nor hurt when pricked with a needle. It was believed that witches made a pact with Satan in person, renounced their baptismal name, and were given a new name by the Devil who then kissed them on the body leaving his mark. Witch prickers became a new professional class. Since 'witch's marks' have no basis in human anatomy, prickers could use blunt needles or even devise retractable points to 'prove' the guilt. Others would just prick the hapless victim all over her body until, exhausted and terrified, she confessed. Thumbscrews – *pilliwinks* in Scotland – were also used as was the '*bootikin*' which crushed the feet. Fingernails were pulled out or had pins driven under them, legs were crushed, victims were strung up and whipped. Family members were tortured in front of the accused. Most broke within hours. Duncan's mark was found on her neck. She confessed under torture to being a witch and began naming names.

One of those named by Duncan was Agnes Sampson. She was brought before King James – who considered himself an expert in witchcraft – and tortured (it is said sometimes by the King himself) until she confessed. On Halloween 1589, Sampson said, she and the other witches sailed in sieves to North Berwick where they met Satan and were ordered to kill the King. Often, the more absurd the claims were the more they were believed.



'Witches' before James VI

Agnes Sampson and Geillis Duncan named Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell, as the ringleader. The North Berwick witch trials ran for two years and at least 70 were arrested for witchcraft and treason. Stewart was eventually acquitted, many others were burned at the stake.

The North Berwick case was a sensation and would influence all future witch trials in Scotland. But the government became uneasy. It had been easy to whip up hysteria among the populace, but hysteria is a bad counsellor so they demanded that particularly the use of torture to gain a confession should have some controlling force. First they instituted standing commissions to oversee its use in interrogation. By 1597 they abandoned the standing commissions and required either an act of Parliament or a privy counsellor to authorise it. Little control, however, was exercised over the local authorities which were then set up, with conviction rates of up to 95%.

The charges laid against these healers were lurid. *“the using of sorcerie, witchcraft and incantatione, with invocation of spretis of the devill, continewand in familiarite with thame, at all sic tymes as sche thocht expedient, deling with charmes, and abusing pepill with devillisch craft of sorcerie foirsaid... usit thie divers yeiris bypast.”* A knowledge of herbs or sometimes just shrewd common sense was enough to place any woman under suspicion, particularly when a personal grievance against her was also present. The 1597 witch-hunt is possibly the least documented of the persecutions. The requirement of a warrant for the use of torture was being routinely ignored and hardly any warrants, or indeed much documentation at all, are to be found. This was the Kirk trying to impose its authority in the vacuum created by the suppression of the Church. 1597 also marked the publication of *Daemonologie*, an expert manual on the finding of witches written by the King himself.

His Son, Charles, lost much support for discouraging witch-hunting which had become, in the Puritanical setting where many other more innocent pleasures were denied the populace, immensely popular. Curiously, the marauding invader, Oliver Cromwell, gained support by his zeal in hunting out witches. A third persecution began in 1628, and then a fourth in 1649. This latter was a momentous year. It saw the execution of Charles and the passing of the Witchcraft Act. The Kirk was in the ascendancy and hundreds were executed until the invasion of Cromwell in July 1650.

The final national persecution began in 1661 when again hundreds perished. The Lord Advocate of the time, Sir George Mackenzie,

who was involved in some of the proceedings, has an interesting anecdote after a certain conviction. “I went when I was a Justice-depute to examine some women, who had confest judicially, and one of them, who was a silly creature, told me under secresie that she had not confest because she was guilty, but being a poor creature, who wrought for her meat and being defam’d for a witch, she knew she would starve, for no person thereafter would either give her meat or lodging, and that all men would beat her, and hound Dogs at her, therefore she desired to be out of the World; whereupon she wept bitterly, and upon her knees called God to witness to what she said”.



**Sir George Mackenzie**

That was the last great persecution. The public lust for blood continued for half a century in isolated cases with the last witch executed in Scotland being Janet Horne in 1727 in Dornoch. She was senile, and her daughter had deformed feet and hands. Neighbours accused Horne of shoeing her daughter like a horse and riding on her to meet the Devil. Both mother and daughter were sentenced to death. The daughter escaped, but Horne was stripped naked, smeared in tar, paraded through the town in a barrel and set alight. Nine years after Horne’s death, the witchcraft laws were repealed.

The excesses to which a Calvinist nation had gone is to be marvelled at. Scotland had around a quarter of England’s population at the time (where 500 witches had been killed) but it is estimated that there were between four and six thousand witch trials with well over a thousand put to death with the actual figure probably much higher.

# Mass Schedule

	CARLUKE	GLASGOW	EDINBURGH
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> August — 10 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Whitsun		9am & 11am	9am & 11am
Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup> August	11am		
Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> August			6.30pm
Wednesday 4 <sup>th</sup> August	7.15am		
Thursday 5 <sup>th</sup> August	11am		
Friday 6 <sup>th</sup> August ( <i>First Friday</i> )		6.30pm	
Saturday 7 <sup>th</sup> August ( <i>First Saturday</i> )		11am	11am
Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> August — 11 <sup>th</sup> Sunday after Whitsun		9am & 11am	9am & 11am
Monday 9 <sup>th</sup> August	11am		
Tuesday 10 <sup>th</sup> August			6.30pm
Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup> August	7.15am		
Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> August	11am		
Friday 13 <sup>th</sup> August		6.30pm	
Saturday 14 <sup>th</sup> August		11am	11am
Sunday 15 <sup>th</sup> August — Assumption of the B.V.M.		9am & 11am	9am & 11am
Monday 16 <sup>th</sup> August	11am		
Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> August			6.30pm
Wednesday 18 <sup>th</sup> August	7.15am		
Thursday 19 <sup>th</sup> August	11am		
Friday 20 <sup>th</sup> August		6.30pm	
Saturday 21 <sup>st</sup> August		11am	11am
Sunday 22 <sup>nd</sup> August — 13 <sup>th</sup> after Whitsun		9am & 11am	9am & 11am
Monday 23 <sup>rd</sup> August	11am		
Tuesday 24 <sup>th</sup> August			6.30pm
Wednesday 25 <sup>th</sup> August	7.15am		
Thursday 26 <sup>th</sup> August	11am		
Friday 27 <sup>th</sup> August		6.30pm	
Saturday 28 <sup>th</sup> August		11am	11am
Sunday 29 <sup>th</sup> August — 14 <sup>th</sup> after Whitsun		9am & 11am	9am & 11am
Monday 30 <sup>th</sup> August			
Tuesday 31 <sup>st</sup> August	<b>Priests' retreat</b>		

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**If you require any further information concerning one of these places, or need to talk to a priest e.g. in case of emergency for the Sacraments, please ring the phone number mentioned in contact details.**