
Walter Ker and the "Sweet Singers"

DOUGLAS W. B. SOMERSET

Walter Ker was a Scottish Covenanter who was banished to East Jersey in 1685, was instrumental in the setting up of Presbyterianism in America, and lived to see the revivals there under William Tennent, David Brainerd and others in the 1730s and 1740s. This article looks at the first part of Walter Ker's life, when he was in Scotland and was associated with the fanatical group called the Gibbites or "Sweet Singers".¹ The story of the Gibbites is one of the curiosities of Scottish Church history.

1. Ker joins the "Sweet Singers"

Walter Ker was born in Torphichen in Linlithgowshire, Scotland, in 1656 or 1657.² Nothing is known of his parentage or early years, but presumably he was brought up in a Covenanting family. He was present at the Battle of Bothwell Bridge in June 1679, and about that time he was employed as a servant by Marion MacCulloch (d. 1690), the second wife

¹ A short account of the Gibbites can be found in Maurice Grant, *No King But Christ* (Darlington, 1988), pp. 158-164. Since this article was largely written, a detailed account of the Gibbites, with many excellent pictures and a lot of geographical information, has appeared on Dr Mark Jardine's blog: drmarkjardine.wordpress.com. Inevitably there is a considerable overlap with parts of the present article, but Dr Jardine's approach is substantially different.

² Patrick Walker, *Six Saints of the Covenant* (2 vols., London, 1901), Vol. 2, p. 24. Ker is sometimes described as "from the parish of Dalsersf, Lanarksire", with the implication that he was born there; see e.g., William C. Armstrong, *The Kerr Clan of New Jersey* (Morrison, Illinois, 1931), p. 5. Dalsersf, however, was simply the last parish in which he resided prior to his exile, Robert Wodrow, *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland* (ed. R. Burns, 4 vols., Glasgow), Vol. 4, p. 183.

of the prominent Covenanter Sir James Stewart of Coltness.³ Sir James had been a member of the Scottish Parliament in 1649-50 and was several times Lord Provost of Edinburgh. He was imprisoned for long periods after 1660 and also heavily fined. He died on 31st March 1681 aged 73. One of his sons, Sir James Stewart of Goodtrees, was the (joint) author of *Naphtali* in 1667 and of *Jus Populi Vindicatum* in 1669, and was subsequently Lord Advocate of Scotland from 1692-1709 and 1711-13.

At the beginning of 1681, Walter Ker became involved with a group known as the Gibbites or “Sweet Singers”, which became increasingly fanatical. Their leader, John Gibb, was a sailor from Bo’ness (about six miles north of Torphichen), known as “Meikle” John on account of his gigantic size. He was a Covenanter, and appears to have been involved in the importing of illegal covenanting books, such as *Naphtali* and *Jus Populi Vindicatum*. On 11th November 1680 the Privy Council received

a petition given in by the owners and proprietors of the ship called *The John* of Borrowstouness which was arrested on the account of John Gibb, late master and purser of the said ship, for his alleged correspondence with some rebels and traitors in Holland and bringing home seditious books, desiring that, in regard the said John Gibb was only a servant and neither has nor had interest in the ship and that he made his escape before the ship came to Borrowstouness, and the ship being in danger to perish . . . that the arrest might be taken off.

The crave of the petition was granted on 16th November 1680.⁴

About the end of 1680, Donald Cargill, the only Cameronian field-preacher still active, withdrew to England for a short while, and many of his followers were tempted to think that their leader had failed them. Gibb took the opportunity to advance himself as the head of the last truly faithful remnant left in Scotland. From the start, however, his movement had a bizarre aspect. Here is a description from an anonymous contemporary document.

Mr Donald Cargill his disciples have now set up their altar in Borrowstouness to the number of 30 or 40, being for the most part

³ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2* (Third Series, Vol. 7, Edinburgh, 1915), p. 123.

⁴ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1678-80* (Third Series, Vol. 6, Edinburgh, 1914), pp. 570-1.

women; [they] assemble in the night time sometimes in the links of Borrowstouness, sometimes in a kill logie [kiln] near the town, and in the day time in a house belonging to Thomas Knox, skipper there. They maintain strange tenets:

1. They admit none to their society but such of whose prayer they have taken trial.
2. They maintain that any person that is gifted may preach and baptize, and accordingly they have been earnest with one that is son to David Jamie, merchant in Linlithgow, to take upon him that sacred office.
3. They hold that a woman that is gifted may preach as well as a man; only they allow a woman not to baptize. Accordingly one of these holy sisters made a sermon lately at one of their meetings upon that text 2 Cor 6:11-18.
4. They will not work with their hands but they employ themselves only in reading, preaching, conference, and prayer. They eat no more bread than will keep them from starving, and they term all mechanics [labourers and artisans] limbs of Antichrist.
5. They adhere to the New Covenant,⁵ their excommunication of the King and Duke of York,⁶ etc.
6. They have at one of their meetings excommunicated one Mr Robert Steedman and Mr Michael Potter,⁷ their old rabbies [rabbis], together with other nine of their relations and neighbours in Borrowstouness, all of which are great fanaticks, and it is observable that one of the sweet quorum is sister to Archibald Stewart⁸ that was lately executed, and that she hath excommunicated Christian Dasten her mother, together with

⁵ i.e. the Queensferry paper of 3rd June 1680, also called Cargill's Covenant, see e.g. J. C. Johnston, *Treasury of Scottish Covenant* (Edinburgh, 1887), pp. 134-141.

⁶ i.e. the Torwood Excommunication of September 1680, see *Cloud of Witnesses* (Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1989), pp. 507-10.

⁷ Steedman had been minister of Carriden near Bo'ness and was deposed in 1661 for refusing to conform to Episcopacy. He and Potter both held conventicles, for which Potter was imprisoned on the Bass Rock from 1683-5. Steedman was restored as minister of Carriden after the Revolution of 1689, and Potter became minister of Bo'ness.

⁸ Archibald Stewart of Bo'ness, was executed, together with John Potter from Uphall and James Skene from Aberdeenshire on 1st December 1680. Stewart and Potter had been at Ayrsmoss with Richard Cameron in July 1680 and had signed the Bond of Mutual Defence, *Cloud of Witnesses*, p. 500. Other Bo'ness martyrs were Marion Harvey, executed with Isobel Alison of Perth on 26th January 1681, and William Cuthill, executed with Donald Cargill and others on 27th July 1681. Their various testimonies are given in *Cloud of Witnesses*. Cuthill had been associated with Gibb but later disowned him, see Maurice Grant, *Preacher to the Remnant* (Edinburgh, 2009), p. 266. For the connection of the covenanting martyrs Gogar, Sangster and Miller with Gibb, see Dr Jardine's blog under "The Notorious Traitors: Gogar, Sangster and the Sweet Singers of Israel".

John Ritchie, elder, and his wife, she being their daughter-in-law; she hath also separated from her husband John Ritchie, because he sails in a ship that pays tribute to Charles Stuart [Charles II]. 7. They give new names to them they admit in their fraternity, viz., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Solomon, Rehoboam, Deborah, Lydia, the Queen of Sheba, etc. 8. Because one of the sisters went to a penny wedding the rest caused her to do penance by sitting three nights . . . on a cold stone, and at last father Abraham absolved her by pronouncing these words, "Thou art welcome, Sarah, to the land of Goshen". Lastly, they prophesy concerning Mr Steedman and Mr Potter that the chariots of Israel shall ride through their hearts' blood, but of Mr Hamilton and Mr Park⁹ they hope better things, for they say that these two were always in darkness and that it may please the Lord to give them light, whereas Steedman and Potter have made defection from the light, and therefore being apostates there is no hope of mercy for them. And to all this I must add, they have two bloody napkins besmeared with the blood of their late martyr Mr Stewart, and at their meetings they wave them before the Lord, calling for vengeance on the shedders of that blood.¹⁰

The authorities were at once suspicious of the Gibbites, and first apprehended them in February.

On the 21 of February 1681, there were brought in from Borrowstouness a company of distracted men and women (for I know not what other name to give them); they called themselves the only true saints, declared for Cargill's covenant,¹¹ had a napkin dipped in the blood of Stewart and Potter, who were hanged and headed on 1 of December last, and weaved it in their prayers before the Lord, crying for vengeance on the murderers; and in this furious posture, worse than Quakers and enthusiasts, run up and down that town, disowned the King and all government, and followed a sailor named Gibb, who had now assumed the name of King Solomon (for they, instead of their former names, take names

⁹ James Hamilton and John Park were the curates of Bo'ness and Carriden respectively. For their pursuit of Covenanters they are characterized as "bloodhounds" in *Cloud of Witnesses*, p. 512, and as "sons of Belial" in *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 13.

¹⁰ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, pp. 704-5.

¹¹ It is noteworthy that the Gibbites were still Covenanters at this stage. They were soon to renounce all covenants.

out of the Old Testament, as Abram, etc.): And such as have husbands, not of their own opinion, they are so far from conversing with them that they will not suffer them to touch them, and if any do, they wash the place as having contracted impurity, like the Jewish ceremonial uncleanness, with a hundred such fopperies.¹²

For whatever reason, Gibb and his followers were not detained, and soon afterwards they left Bo'ness and took to the muirs. Patrick Walker gives a description of them at this stage:

These people at first were commonly called "Sweet Singers" from their frequently meeting together, and singing these tearful psalms over the mournful case of the Church, Psal. 74, 79, 80, 83, 137. Thus they continued from the beginning of the year until April; then all with one consent, that they might be free of all these foresaid things [i.e. the sins of being involved with a backsliding nation], left their houses, warm soft beds, covered tables; some of them their husbands and children, weeping upon them to stay with them;¹³ some women taking the sucking child in their arms to desert places, to be free of all snares and sins, and communion with all others, and to mourn for their own sins, the land's tyranny and defection, and there be safe from the land's utter ruin and desolations by judgments; some of them going to Pentland-hills, with a resolution to sit there to see the smoke and utter ruin of the sinful bloody city Edinburgh (but if they had fulfilled their resolution they would have been sadly weather-beaten these forty-eight years, being lately gone to their graves).¹⁴

The main party proceeded towards the west of Scotland, seeking to gather support. Initially there was considerable interest, as Wodrow records:

John Gibb, and some few that were with him, laid aside all business, pretending to spend all their time in fasting, prayer, and other acts of devotion, came out from Bo'ness taking their

¹² Sir John Lauder of Fountainhall, *Historical Observes of Memorable Occurrents in Church and State, 1680-6* (Edinburgh, 1840), pp. 28-9.

¹³ Gibb and one of his men, David Jamieson, carried pistols to deter any husbands from trying to see their wives, *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 22.

¹⁴ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 19.

way south and west. Where they came they enjoined public acknowledgments to be made by all persons guilty of compliance, hearing the curates, and the like; and Gibb, as spokesman, took on him to rebuke, reject, or receive into fellowship with them. Their zeal and seeming devotion made many run to them, and they came the length of the parish of Strathaven making proselytes.

Gibb's true character, however, soon betrayed itself. Wodrow relates how Gibb was confronted "toward Eaglesham Muirs" by three "worthy and judicious" Covenanters, James Gray of Chryston,¹⁵ James Sloss of Glasgow, and James Baird.¹⁶ The outcome was that Gibb broke out into cursings and "many other horrid expressions, which frightened the people so much that they left him."¹⁷

From this point on Gibb's followers consisted of "about twenty-six women and three men", the men being Walter Ker, David Jamie or Jamieson, and John Young. Patrick Walker says that the greater part of those who joined Gibb were "serious, exercised, tender, zealous, gracious souls, who stumbled upon that stumbling-block laid in their way, of ministers' compliance, silence, and unfaithfulness".¹⁸ Soon afterwards, in the second half of April, Cargill returned from England, and one of

¹⁵ James Gray suffered greatly for his covenanting principles. His son James had been killed at Ayrsmoss, and he himself was shipped to Jamaica on John Ewing's ship (see below) in August 1685, Wodrow, *History*, Vol. 3, pp. 220, 263-4, 391-3. On his return from Jamaica, he supplied Wodrow with information for his *History*, see James Anderson, *Ladies of the Covenant* (Glasgow, 1856), p. 139. Patrick Walker, however, did not have a high regard for him, *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 307.

¹⁶ John Howie (1735-1793) locates this incident at Lochgoin, *The Judgment and Justice of God Exemplified* (Glasgow, 1782), p. 60. His great-grandfather, who died in 1691, was the tenant in Lochgoin at the time, and his grandfather (1665-1755) was in his teens, so Howie was likely to be accurately informed on the event.

¹⁷ Wodrow, *History*, Vol. 3, p. 349.

¹⁸ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 18. The Gibbite movement evidently had considerable plausibility at first, for all its subsequent absurdities. Law records that "there was one minister's wife that turned to that way", Robert Law, *Memorials* (Edinburgh, 1818), p. 186. Patrick Walker more than once mentions that he was strongly tempted to join the movement, although he never met Gibb, *Six Saints*, Vol. 1, p. 286, Vol. 2, p. 23. One "Sweet Singer" from the upper classes was "Lady C." whom we would tentatively identify with the separatist Lady Carlops to whom Archibald Riddell wrote in 1698, Robert Wodrow, *Analecta* (4 vols., Glasgow, 1842-3), Vol. 1, p. 278; T. M'Crie, *Memoirs of Mr William Veitch and George Brysson* (Edinburgh, 1825), p. 523; Alasdair Raffe, *Religious Controversy and Scottish Society, c. 1679-1714*, University of Edinburgh, PhD Thesis, 2007, p. 164. Lady Carlops was presumably the wife of Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Burnet of Carlops and the mother of the Jacobite Archibald Burnet of Carlops, executed after the battle of Preston in 1715, *Works of Alexander Pennecuik* (Leith, 1815), pp. 114-5.

his first actions was to hold a debate with the Gibbites at Darngavil near Darmead. He had no success in reclaiming any of them at this stage.¹⁹

2. Arrest and Imprisonment

A few weeks later, about the middle of May,²⁰ the Gibbites were arrested by a troop of dragoons, probably at Wolf Craigs on the south side of the Pentland hills.²¹ *The Memoirs of the Lord Viscount Dundee*, first published in 1714, contains the following account of their arrest:

When a party of dragoons took them at the Ouffins, in Tweeddale, they were all lying on their faces, and jumped up in a minute, and called out with an audible voice, "That God Almighty would consume the party with fire from heaven, for troubling the people of God". On the road, as they went to Edinburgh, when any of their relations or acquaintances came to visit them, they spit at them, and threw themselves on their faces, and bellowed like beasts, whereof his Highness [the Duke of York, later James VII] being informed, ordered them immediately to be set at liberty.²²

In Edinburgh the men were imprisoned in the Canongate Tolbooth (at the bottom of the Royal Mile) and the women in the Correction House (at the north east corner of what is now Waverley

¹⁹ Darngavil Farm is presently a ruin. The details of the encounter are given in *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, pp. 20-3; Grant, *No King But Christ*, pp. 159-160; and Dr Jardine's blog under "Donald Cargill, the Sweet Singers and the Darngavil Conference".

²⁰ Walker places their arrest "in the beginning of May", *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 23, but the "*Blasphemous Paper*" (see below) indicates that it was the middle of May or later. In the "*Blasphemous Paper*" the Gibbites mention that they saw the dragoons coming an hour before they were captured.

²¹ Walker says that they were captured at "the Woollhill Craigs betwixt Lothian and Tweeddale, a very desert place", *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 23. Dr Jardine's blog under "The Capture of the Sweet Singers" gives reasons for identifying this with Wolf Craigs, rather than with Wool Hill, which is between Dunbar Common and the Whiteadder reservoir. Wolf Craigs is about four miles due west of Carlops, which might be significant if Lady Carlops was indeed a "Sweet Singer".

²² Henry Jenner (ed.), *Memoirs of the Lord Viscount Dundee* (London, 1903), p. lxxiv. We have not been able to identify "the Ouffins". Law, *Memorials*, p. 185, speaks of "five men and ten women" of the Gibbites "taken about Cather Moor of Borrowstounness" in May 1681. Whether this was in fact the February arrest, the May arrest wrongly located, or the arrest of another group of Gibbites, is not clear. When brought before the Privy Council the five men refused to uncover their heads until compelled "in token that they owned not their authority".

Station). At their initial examination before the Privy Council on 2nd June, the women were stubborn:

Several persons called the Sweet Singers, prisoners in Paul's Work [the Correction House], being examined, and having given no satisfaction, but on the contrary, disowned the King and his authority and the present government in Church and State, they were remitted back to prison until the Council consider their case.²³

In the prison they were visited by the widows of James Durham and William Guthrie, whom they received with abuse:

When honest women, minister's wives, came to see them, they began to rail upon them and upbraided them with the name of Jezebel, and call them reprobates. Mr Durham's wife and Mr William Guthrie's wife were so upbraided.²⁴

On another occasion they expressed their disdain for the Duke of York:

Some of their women singers were so rude as to throw out broken chandlers [candles] and other trash at the Duke of York's coach, as it passed by the Canongate prison; for which they were severely lashed.²⁵

Most of the women were soon released, however, "as their friends and husbands loved and had moyen [means]."²⁶ On 9th June, for instance, the Privy Council received a petition from John Ritchie "supplicating that the Council would cause liberate Margaret Stewart, his spouse, . . . in regard she is big with child and that he intends to transport her shortly off the kingdom". The petition was granted, although the arrangement subsequently fell through.²⁷ Similarly on 14th June William Dennistoun of Colgrain petitioned the Council,

²³ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, p. 123.

²⁴ *Law, Memorials*, p. 186.

²⁵ Sir John Lauder of Fountainhall, *Historical Notices of Scottish Affairs* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 1848), Vol. 1, p. 300.

²⁶ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 23.

²⁷ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, p. 129. Margaret Stewart was the sister of the Bo'ness martyr Archibald Stewart. She appears to have been the same person as Anna or Ann Stewart (see below).

for removing Janet Elphinstone, relict of Hugh Moir, merchant in Edinburgh, from the company of those persons called "Sweet Singers", now in the Correction House of Edinburgh, to some remoter place, in regard the petitioner and her other friends are hopeful in a short time to reclaim her from their deluded principles.

The crave was granted and she was ordered to be transferred to a prison in Dumbarton.²⁸

Meanwhile at the end of May,²⁹ the four men had issued a paper showing signs of insanity, possibly brought on by excessive fasting. In the paper they renounce the heathen names for days of the week and months of the year, the division of the Bible into chapters and verses, the metrical psalms,³⁰ the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Confession of Faith, the Covenants, the Queensferry paper and the Sanquhar Declaration, the Covenanters, the "tyrant Charles Stuart", and many other things, culminating in "all the customs and fashions" of their generation, and "all authority throughout the world".³¹ Probably the paper was drawn up by David Jamieson who was the most educated of the Sweet Singers.³² Patrick Walker says that the Gibbites were given "large money" by the

²⁸ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, p. 131. Janet Elphinstone was the "Mrs Moor" who helped Cargill and Boig escape in November 1680, *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 16; Grant, *No King But Christ*, p. 260. Her father David Elphinstone had been minister of Dumbarton from 1633-66, *Law's Memorials*, p. 186. Her mother's maiden name was Dennistoun, and she was "an only bairn", so William Dennistoun was presumably a cousin. At a general confession of the "Sweet Singers", she had confessed the sin of antenuptual fornication, *ibid.*, p. 197; *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 20. In 1686 she was married to John Flint (1660-1730), one of the Cameronian students for the ministry, W.H. Carslaw (ed.), *Life and Letters of James Renwick* (Edinburgh, 1893), p. 181. After the Revolution, Flint became Church of Scotland minister in Lasswade and then in the New North Church, Edinburgh, and he helped Thomas Boston in revising *The Fourfold State*.

²⁹ The paper was endorsed by the Clerk of the Privy Council for 1st May, but this is evidently a mistake for 1st June. The stages in which the paper was written indicate the dates on which various things were renounced. There is a slight discrepancy (probably a misprint) in these, but the two references to "the sixth day of the week, the 27th day of the fifth month" harmonize with the fact that 27th May fell on a Friday in 1681.

³⁰ Later in the paper they seem to allow the metrical psalms, but not the binding of them in the back of the Bible: they had to be bound separately.

³¹ Wodrow, *History*, Vol. 3, pp. 350-3.

³² Cargill described Jamieson as "a good scholar lost, and a minister spilt", *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 22. Jardine suggests that Jamieson may have been one of the United Societies' students at Utrecht intended for the ministry, Mark Jardine, *The United Societies: Militancy, Martyrdom and the Presbyterian Movement in Late-Restoration Scotland, 1679 to 1688*, University of Edinburgh, PhD Thesis, 2009, p. 40.

Duke of York to write this paper, while Wodrow suggests that they were influenced by “the Duke’s Jesuits”, but it is difficult to know how much substance there is in these claims.³³ Certainly the paper was taken advantage of by the authorities, and immediately published, in Edinburgh and in London, under the title “*A Blasphemous and Treasonable Paper, emitted by the Phanatical Undersubscribers*”, with the intention of discrediting the entire Covenanting movement.³⁴ In 1691 it was re-published by an Episcopalian, along with the Sanquhar Declaration and the Solemn League and Covenant, in order to “inform strangers of the seditious principles of Scotch Presbyterians”.³⁵

Donald Cargill’s response to this paper was to send a letter to the women still imprisoned in the Correction House, endeavouring to refute some of the wild Gibbite ideas. He seems to have no great hope for the men at that stage, but to have believed that the women might yet be rescued from their errors.³⁶ This letter was first published in *Cloud of Witnesses* in 1714. Cargill takes up such points as the duty of working, the duties of husbands and wives, the fact that the buyer is not responsible for the use that the seller makes of the money, the necessity of public worship when possible, the need for translations of the Bible, the lawfulness of the Covenants, and the need in this life to engage in public worship with unregenerate persons. With regard to heathen names for days and months, Cargill warns them not to place too much emphasis on such points, to the neglect of weightier matters, lest, he says, Satan “overdrive you in your progress, and leave you only to hug a spurious birth”.³⁷

The only record of the men’s examination by the Privy Council is of Walter Ker on 2nd June:

³³ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 24; Wodrow, *History*, Vol. 3, p. 352.

³⁴ The Queensferry paper and Sanquhar Declaration had been similarly printed by the authorities. Copies of the Edinburgh printing of “*The Blasphemous Paper*” are in the National Library of Scotland and the British Library; and copies of the London printing are in the British Library and the Huntington Library, California.

³⁵ Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, *Vindication of the Government of Scotland under Charles II* (London, 1691), p. 37. Wodrow says that he would have ignored “the raveries and blasphemy” of Gibb and his followers but for the fact that the publisher of Sir George Mackenzie’s *Vindication* “hath the impudence and villainy to couple Gibb’s senseless paper with the Solemn League and Covenant”, *History*, Vol. 3, p. 348.

³⁶ Law says that the women “in the Correction House refused to subscribe [the paper], but counted [the four men] devils”, *Memorials*, p. 190.

³⁷ For a fuller discussion of Cargill’s letter, see Grant, *No King But Christ*, pp. 161-3. Cargill himself was captured on 13th July, imprisoned in the Canongate Tolbooth on 14th, and executed at the Mercat Cross at the east end of St Giles on 27th July.

The Committee having called Walter Ker, one of the Sweet Singers, prisoner, he did disown the King to be king and did not acknowledge his authority; confessed that he was at Bothwell Bridge, and said he is sorry for it because the cause was not God's, and gives the reason because the King, who is the enemy of God, was owned.³⁸

By the end of the month, however, they were beginning to change their minds. On 23rd June Fountainhall records: "Four of the men called the 'Sweet Singers' . . . turning more sober, retracted part of their former extravagancies, and, before the Secret [Privy] Council, declared that they thought it not lawful to rise in arms against the Magistrate's authority, though in their printed testimony the Spirit did then suggest the contrary to them."³⁹ The same day, two female Sweet Singers, Christian Cunningham and Elspeth Lockhart, successfully petitioned the Privy Council and were set at liberty, having "renounced and abjured these damnable and seditious principles".⁴⁰

3. Release and the burning of the Bible

The four men and the two remaining women were released on 2nd August 1681: "The Lords, having considered the condition of these prisoners called 'Sweet Singers' in the Canongate Tolbooth and Correction House, namely David Jamieson, John Gib, Walter Ker, John Young, Elspeth Granger, Margaret Stewart, spouse to John Ritchie, skipper in Borrowstouness,⁴¹ do give order to the magistrates to set them at liberty, provided that under their hands they abjure their disloyal principles once owned by them."⁴² It was generally believed that the

³⁸ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, p. 123.

³⁹ *Historical Notices*, Vol. 1, p. 300.

⁴⁰ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, p. 145. The records of the Old Tolbooth (which stood at the west end of St Giles Cathedral) mention the transfer of the women from the Correction House to the Tolbooth for the hearing of their petition, *The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* (Edinburgh, 1916), Vol. 8, p. 109. The Privy Council probably met in a chamber adjoining Parliament House, behind St Giles. Two other female "Sweet Singers" whose names have been preserved are a woman "sirnamed Russell" (Law, *Memorialls*, p. 197) and "Isobel Calender" whose husband had been executed, presumably as a martyr, and who had abandoned her tiny child to follow Gibb, see *Passages in the Lives of Helen Alexander and James Currie* (Belfast, 1869), p. 28.

⁴¹ Perhaps Margaret Stewart had refused to be released on her husband's terms.

⁴² *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, p. 177.

Duke of York played the leading part in their liberation.⁴³ Another Sweet Singer, William Pender, who had probably separated from the Gibbites prior to his imprisonment, was ordered to be released on 11th August.⁴⁴

By this point almost all the women had deserted Gibb. Walker records: “The greater part of [the women] came to their right mind, after they had tasted of the bitter fruits of these demented delusions, with whom I have had edifying conversation since.”⁴⁵ The Cameronians, however, were slow to receive them back. Five years later, on 23rd September 1686 the General Meeting of the Society People appointed six men

to confer with Samuel Hall, Marion Stuart, Elizabeth Wilson, Jean Hackstoun, and Marion Young who had been in the fields with that wretched man John Gibb, to try (not judicially but privately) how great a length they went in their blasphemies and scandalous practices with the said John Gibb.⁴⁶

The following year Alexander Shields wrote that, while “the most part [of the Gibbites] have been through mercy reclaimed from that destructive way”, yet “to this day these that have come off from that way, and have offered the confession of their scandal do still complain of [our] over-rigid severity, in not admitting them to [our] select fellowships”.⁴⁷ As late as 1689, some of those who had been with “that impostor John Gibb” made a confession of their error “before a great multitude of people” while renewing the Covenants at “the black hill of Lesmahagow” on Sabbath 3rd March.⁴⁸

The men, however, and two of the women, continued with Gibb, and though they may have renounced their “disloyal principles”, they retained the rest of their opinions. Soon after their release, says Patrick Walker, they “went west to the Frost Moss, betwixt Airth and Stirling,

⁴³ “Whereas the persecuting Courts of Inquisition did always extend the utmost severity against the owners of this Testimony (the Covenants), yet they spared [the Gibbites]: and the Duke of York, then in Scotland, was so well-pleased with Gibb’s blasphemies that he favoured him extraordinarily, and freely dismissed him,” Alexander Shields, *A Hind Let Loose* (1687), p. 140.

⁴⁴ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1681-2*, Vol. 7, pp. 181, 189.

⁴⁵ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 23.

⁴⁶ John Howie, *Faithful Contendings Displayed* (Glasgow, 1780), p. 260.

⁴⁷ *Hind Let Loose*, p. 140.

⁴⁸ *Faithful Contendings Displayed*, p. 381; *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 19.

where they burnt the Holy Bible" and also the *Westminster Confession*.⁴⁹ He goes on:

Shortly after this Walter Ker turned mad, and was for some time bound in Torphichen, where he was born. He came to his right mind again, and went to Clyde, a mile beneath Lanark, to the house of Robert and Elisabeth Bruce, two old solid serious Christians, both my acquaintances, who got a hearty smack of the sweetness of the gospel in that good day at the Kirk of Shotts, where he served two years, and deeply mourned both night and day for what he had done; and wrote 38 steps thereof. He sometimes said, if there were a Christian magistrate in the land, he would go to them and confess all, and seek of them to execute justice upon him for burning of the Bible.

He believed that he deserved to be banished for what he had done. John Young, meanwhile "went into Lothian after that, and kept a school, lived retired, and spoke little".⁵⁰

The history of the remaining Gibbites is uncertain at this point. Gibb, Jamieson, the two women, and a new man, Alexander Montgomery, continued their mad career, but what they did prior to their re-imprisonment we do not know.⁵¹ On 24th June 1682 about a hundred people in Linlithgow were fined by the magistrates for "disorderly" non-attendance at the parish church. Jamieson and Montgomery were among the number. On 18th November they and a few others were imprisoned in Linlithgow for failure to pay their fines, but they might well have been released soon afterwards. On 25th October 1683 Jamieson, Montgomery, and their wives, Bessie Tod and Margaret Stevenson, were included on the list of those not attending church in Linlithgow. Jamieson is described as a "tailor" and

⁴⁹ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 24; *Hind Let Loose*, p. 140. "Frost" is presumably the modern Throsk, sometimes spelt "Frosk". Walker gives the names of the women as "Isabel Bonn, and another woman whose name I have forgot". Presumably these are the same as Elspeth Granger and Margaret Stewart mentioned above.

⁵⁰ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, pp. 24-5.

⁵¹ Alexander Montgomery was also known as Alexander Monteith. He appears twice on a list of "disorderly baptisms" in Linlithgow between July 1679 and November 1683, *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1683-4* (Third Series, Vol. 8, Edinburgh, 1915), p. 630. He had been imprisoned in the Edinburgh Tolbooth, along with some other men from Linlithgow, in February 1675, *The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* (Edinburgh, 1913), Vol. 6, p. 128.

Montgomery as a “siewwright” [sieve maker]. A subsequent document however, dated 20th November 1683, includes Jamieson, Montgomery and Bessie Tod in a list of people who “for the most part have been prisoners these eighteen months bygone”.⁵²

Certainly Gibb and some of his company were back in prison in Edinburgh by May 1683, because James Renwick complains in a letter dated 31st May that “John Gibb and his companions are freed both from death and banishment, and have their liberty to go through all the prison, and large expense allowed daily unto them, by him who they call the Chancellor [i.e. the Duke of York]”.⁵³ Patrick Walker says that Gibb, Jamieson, and the two women from the Frost Moss were “again taken and put in the Canongate Tolbooth” in Edinburgh, but he does not give a date. Presumably this happened in the first half of 1683. In the Tolbooth, says Walker,

they took such fits of seven days fasting that their voices were changed in their groanings and gollerings with pain of hunger, and then such excessive eating that these with them admired how their bellies could contain so much. Gibb was so possessed with a raging, roving devil that they could not get public worship performed three times a day, as their ordinary was in each room.⁵⁴

By this time they seem almost to have abandoned religion. A Covenanter, Helen Alexander, who was imprisoned with them about July 1683, said:

But that which was sorest to me – I was brought down from the room where I was, and put in the room where were John Gibb, and Jamieson, and one Sanders Monteith, and Ann Stewart, all vile and abominable blasphemers. That woman would have sewed her seams and wrought on the Lord’s day, and when we were praying and singing and reading, they did interrupt us. O what grief of heart it was to me to hear and see their blasphemy. They would have said that they knew of no heaven or hell, nor no God. And how beastly they were in lying with one another. And I thought or I had been another Sabbath in their company I would rather

⁵² *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1683-4*, Vol. 8, pp. 6-7, 629-32.

⁵³ *Life and Letters of Renwick*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 25.

have chosen to go to a gibbet; for this their carriage to me was like death.⁵⁵

On 13th May 1684, another Covenanter, George Jackson from Glasgow, was transferred to the Canongate Tolbooth. Walker relates that when Jackson first heard Gibb disrupting worship with his roaring, he asked, "Is this your ordinar?" Being told that it was, Jackson said that he would "stay his roaring", and having threatened Gibb without effect, he proceeded to beat his head against the wall until he was senseless. Thereafter Gibb would run behind the door with a rag in his mouth whenever worship started. Jackson was aged twenty at the time. He was executed at Gallowlee on Leith Walk on 9th December 1684.⁵⁶

4. Banishment to the Plantations

About this time, the lenience of the authorities towards the Gibbites came to an end. On 16th May 1684, the Privy Council ordered David Jamieson, along with nine others, "to be banished to the Plantations in America", instructing them to be delivered to George Lockhart, a merchant in New York, who had a ship at Leith. A bond by Lockhart, acknowledging the receipt of ten prisoners, was signed on 19th May. In the bond, however, the names of two of the other prisoners have been replaced by those of Gibb and Monteith (i.e. Montgomery), "called Sweet Singers".⁵⁷ On 27th May, Jamieson and Montgomery (but not Gibb) were listed with four other prisoners from Linlithgow who had "for several years past persisted in rebellious courses, and having been taken prisoners and had several opportunities to obtain the benefit of His Majesty's indemnity and been examined on several occasions before the Council and their committees, have persisted in their wicked principles". Once again the Privy Council ordered them to be banished to the Plantations, this time giving them to Walter Gibson, merchant in

⁵⁵ *Passages in the Lives of Helen Alexander and James Currie*, p. 8. Helen Alexander's husband, James Currie, records that "Ann Stewart said to my wife, that they must take 24 hours for prayer, and yet afterwards would blaspheme terribly", *ibid.*, p. 28. "Ann Stewart" seems to be the same as "Margaret Stewart, spouse to John Ritchie". Law says that at the general confession of the "Sweet Singers", "Anna Stewart confessed adulterie and incest; this is she who forsook her husband and adhered to John Gibb as her husband", *Memorials*, p. 197.

⁵⁶ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 25-26. Jackson's testimony is given in *Cloud of Witnesses*.

⁵⁷ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1683-4*, Vol. 8, pp. 516-7, 709-10.

Glasgow, who had a ship at Gourrock bound for Carolina.⁵⁸ On 29th May the Privy Council changed its mind once more and this time gave them to Robert Malloch, merchant in Edinburgh, who had a ship at Leith bound for Carolina.⁵⁹

In the event it was in Lockhart's ship that Jamieson and Montgomery sailed. The ship left Leith at the end of July, sailed up to Aberdeen, round to Killybegs in Donegal, Ireland and then across the Atlantic. On 12th September, six hundred miles from land, the ship lost her bowsprit and masts in the tail of a hurricane, but managed to reach Chesapeake Bay, Virginia about the beginning of October. Sailing up the Bay to Bohemia River, Maryland the passengers disembarked and travelled overland to New Jersey.⁶⁰ On arrival, Jamieson was indentured to Lockhart and "Menteith" (i.e. Montgomery) to Thomas Gordon, one of the wealthy passengers from the ship.⁶¹ Jamieson and Montgomery's wives, Bessie Tod and Margaret Stevenson, did not accompany their husbands to America. On 14th Oct 1684 they were included on a list of "disorderly persons" not attending church in the parish of Linlithgow.⁶² Probably they had abandoned their husbands on account of their immoral behaviour.⁶³

⁵⁸ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1683-4*, Vol. 8, pp. 523-4. It seems unlikely that Jamieson and Montgomery were present at this second examination; probably they were just names on a list. Gibson's ship, *Carolina Merchant*, sailed on 21st July. John Erskine of Carnock gives a detailed account of its departure, his brother Lord Cardross being one of the passengers. Twenty-seven out of the one hundred and forty people on the ship died on the voyage, see *Journal of Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683-1687* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1893), pp. 69-72, 139; Wodrow, *History*, Vol. 4, pp. 8-11.

⁵⁹ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1683-4*, Vol. 8, pp. 526-7. Malloch's ship sailed on 14th August, *Journal of Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683-1687*, p. 76.

⁶⁰ W. A. Whitehead, *East Jersey under the Proprietary Governments* (Newark, N.J., 1875), pp. 452, 459-60. Two ships left Scotland for New Jersey in July 1684. Lockhart's ship carried 160 passengers, while Thomas Pearson (or Parson)'s ship, the *Thomas and Benjamin*, sailed from Montrose with 130 passengers. Pearson's ship took a more northerly route, encountered contrary winds, and reached New Jersey about the end of October, *ibid.*, pp. 440, 458, 469, 473.

⁶¹ William Nelson (ed.), *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Calendar of Records 1664-1703* (Paterson, N.J., 1899), Vol. 21, p. 64; W. A. Whitehead, *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy* (New York, 1856), p. 40. Thomas Gordon, brother to the Laird of Straloch, Aberdeenshire, was an important figure in East Jersey, holding a number of political and legal positions, see *ibid.*, pp. 60-66.

⁶² *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1684-5* (Third Series, Vol. 10, Edinburgh, 1927), pp. 260-1.

⁶³ According to Walker, the two female "Sweet Singers" were also banished to America (*Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 26). There does not seem to be any confirmation of this in the Privy Council records but the New Jersey records mention "Margaret Sturras" as one of the

Gibb, meanwhile, was left in prison until the following year. Perhaps the beating from George Jackson had rendered him unfit to travel. On 24th July 1685 he was again convened before the Privy Council and his sentence of banishment was confirmed. At this stage he was imprisoned in the Edinburgh Tolbooth, having previously been held in the "guardhouse at the Abay". By the end of the week, he had been moved to the Canongate Tolbooth. On 31st July, the Privy Council gifted him to Robert Barclay of Urie, with a ship bound for East New Jersey but on 7th August he was given instead to John Ewing with a ship bound for Jamaica.⁶⁴ Nothing came of this latter arrangement, however. John Erskine of Carnock records that Lord Neill Campbell, brother of the Earl of Argyll, sailed for New Jersey about the beginning of August, "having got a considerable number of [Covenanting] prisoners gifted him by the Council".⁶⁵ Presumably it was on Barclay's ship that he sailed, and it appears that Gibb was on board. In October 1685, Gibb is recorded as being imported to East Jersey by James Johnstone and it seems that he was subsequently indentured to Robert Drummond.⁶⁶

In the meantime, Ker had been re-arrested, probably during the summer of 1685. This is said to have happened through the influence of Joseph Clelland, the curate of the parish of Dalserf in which Ker was residing.⁶⁷ Clelland was the curate of Dalserf from 1681-89. On

servants imported by Thomas Gordon, and also "Margrett Stuer" as one of the servants imported by John Campbell, both in October 1684. Campbell travelled with Gordon on Lockhart's ship so it likely that both these entries refer to the same woman, Margaret Stewart. She was indentured for four years and received the headland due to her in May 1690; see *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Calendar of Records 1664-1703*, Vol. 21, pp. 64-5, 189; *East Jersey under the Proprietary Governments*, p. 440.

⁶⁴ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1685-6* (Third Series, Vol. 11, Edinburgh, 1929), pp. 114, 131, 136, 329. A list of the prisoners (including James Gray) from the Edinburgh Tolbooth who were delivered to Ewing on 11th August is given in *The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* (Edinburgh, 1923), Vol. 12, p. 167.

⁶⁵ *Journal of Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683-1687*, p. 154. The Earl of Argyll had been executed on 30th June 1685 following his unsuccessful rebellion.

⁶⁶ *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Calendar of Records 1664-1703*, Vol. 21, pp. 68, 172. James Johnstone of Spotswood was the eldest son of William Johnstone, minister of Coldstream, who was deprived in 1662 and died about 1670. James Johnstone emigrated to East Jersey at the end of 1684 and died on 22nd June 1690. His letters to Scotland bemoan the lack of ministers in East Jersey; see Edith H. Mather, "Andrew Johnston and his Ancestors", *Somerset County Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 3 (1914, reprinted Lambertville, N.J., 1987), pp. 161-173; *East Jersey under the Proprietary Governments*, pp. 435, 444. Robert Drummond was probably the son of John Drummond, 1st Earl of Melfort, *ibid.*, p. 173-4.

⁶⁷ H. G. Smith, *History of the "Old Scots" Church of Freehold* (Freehold, N.J., 1895), Appendix p. ii. We have not found an earlier authority for this statement.

3rd September Ker was brought before the Privy Council, tried, and sentenced:

And in regard Walter Ker, one of the said prisoners [in the Canongate Tolbooth], will not own the King's authority, and refuses to declare anent his being at Bothwell Bridge, the Lords do banish him to the plantations in East New Jersey, and ordains him to be delivered to John Johnston, druggist, upon caution in the ordinary way.⁶⁸

John Johnstone was a younger brother of James Johnstone above and was an apothecary in Edinburgh. He is probably to be identified with the "John Johnstoun" who was briefly imprisoned in September 1684 for non-attendance at church.⁶⁹ In 1685 he emigrated to East Jersey on George Scot of Pitlochrie's ship; thus it seems certain that Walter Ker sailed with the Dunnottar prisoners on the *Henry and Francis* on 5th September. After a disastrous voyage, they reached East Jersey in mid-December and Ker was indentured to Thomas Parr, from whom he received the headland due to him for his indenture on 2nd March 1689-90.⁷⁰ In America, Johnstone acted as a medical doctor and was invariably referred to as Dr Johnstone. He was an important figure, both in New Jersey and in New York.⁷¹

5. In East Jersey and New York

Of one of the "Sweet Singers", Alexander Montgomery (Monteith), there is no further mention in the New Jersey records. Perhaps he died before the end of his indenture, or perhaps he was sold to a master elsewhere.⁷²

⁶⁸ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland 1685-6*, Vol. 11, p. 173.

⁶⁹ *The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* (Edinburgh, 1916), Vol. 9, p. 157; *Journal of Hon. John Erskine of Carnock, 1683-1687*, p. 83.

⁷⁰ *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Calendar of Records 1664-1703*, Vol. 21, p. 173.

⁷¹ For an account of the Dunnottar prisoners, Scot of Pitlochrie, the voyage of the *Henry and Francis*, and Dr John Johnstone, see the author's "The Dunnottar Covenanters of 1685", *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 112 (2007), pp. 113-119, 137-141, 174-181, 202-209, 239-244, 270-8; *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy*, pp. 69-71.

⁷² Indentures were ordinarily for four years, but other periods between two and nine years were known; see "Advertisement to all Trades-men, Husbandmen, Servants and others who are willing to Transport themselves unto the Province of New-East-Jersey in America", *Bannatyne Miscellany* (Edinburgh, 1855), Vol. 3, pp. 385-8; *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Calendar of Records 1664-1703*, Vol. 21, pp. 61-2.

Of John Gibb, too, there is little further to record. He received the thirty acres of headland due to him for his indenture on 16th February 1688-9, and he was still resident in East Jersey in November 1692. By 15th January 1694-5, however, he was described as described as a "mariner" and "now of Sussex County, annexed to Pennsylvania", though he still held property in East Jersey.⁷³ According to Patrick Walker, he continued his false religion, being "much admired by the heathen for his familiar converse with the devil bodily, and offering sacrifices to him". Walker says that he died about 1720.⁷⁴

The subsequent life of David Jamieson, on the other hand, is of considerable interest.⁷⁵ He was first indentured to George Lockhart, the owner of the ship, who had perhaps appreciated his unusual abilities, and was then sold to Josias Clarke, the chaplain of the Fort at New York, who allowed him to "teach school to redeem himself".⁷⁶ About this time he wrote an atheistical letter to his father in Linlithgow "desiring him not to trouble himself about heaven or hell, for all these things were fancies".⁷⁷ In 1690 or soon afterwards, he was employed in the office of Matthew Clarkson, the son of the well-known Puritan minister David Clarkson, who was the Secretary of the Province. Here Jamieson acquired a knowledge of law, and by 1693 he had been appointed the Clerk of the Council of New York with a salary of £50 per annum. Governor Fletcher of New York (1692-97) had the highest regard for him. Fletcher's successor, however, Lord Bellamont (1697-1701), detested everything connected with Fletcher and on 28th September 1698 he dismissed Jamieson as Clerk. In a letter to the Lords of Trade on 21st October 1698 (and in numerous subsequent letters) he accused Jamieson of being an atheist and of having two wives:

I also displaced the same day Mr David Jamison from being Clerk of the Council and Deputy Secretary: he is a Scotchman by birth and was condemned to be hanged in Scotland for blasphemy and burning the bible, but in mitigation of the sentence he was

⁷³ *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Calendar of Records 1664-1703*, Vol. 21, pp. 172, 201, 221.

⁷⁴ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 26.

⁷⁵ Our main sources are *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy*, p. 40; R. Webster, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Philadelphia, 1857), p. 302.

⁷⁶ For Josias Clarke, see F. L. Weis, *The Colonial Clergy of the Middle Colonies: New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, 1628-1776* (Baltimore, 1978), p. 30.

⁷⁷ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 26.

transported to this Province & sold a servant. He is a professed Atheist and has two wives at this time, if his true one be not dead at Lithgo in Scotland within these twelve months. This man was first in Colonel Fletchers confidence and favour above all others, and he used to commend him to every body for the honestest man he ever knew in his whole life, one or other. He has enriched himself by extortion in his office and other works of darkness, but chiefly 'tis said by the grants of lands sold by Colonel Fletcher, he having had a share for brokage.⁷⁸

In fact, Jamieson was no longer an atheist but, probably under the influence of Governor Fletcher, had become an Episcopalian. In May 1699, he was a member of the Vestry (i.e. ruling committee) of Trinity Church, an Episcopalian Church which had been formed two years previously.⁷⁹ Whether he continued an Episcopalian we do not know.⁸⁰

Sometime in the 1690s, Jamieson had started practising as an attorney, though Lord Bellamont alleges that he had no formal qualification.⁸¹ In 1707, he was one of the attorneys who defended Francis Makemie (the so-called founder of American Presbyterianism), following his arrest by the Governor, Lord Cornbury (1701-1708), for preaching a sermon in a private house in Pearl Street, New York. The house belonged to William Jackson, a shoemaker, who was one of the Covenanters imprisoned in Dunnottar Castle. The congregation numbered about ten, one of whom was Dr John Johnstone.⁸² Makemie

⁷⁸ J. H. Brodhead (ed.), *Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York procured in Holland, England and France: London Documents 1693-1706* (Albany, 1854), Vol. 4, pp. 400, 429, 442, 824. Jamieson must have married a second time in 1697. Perhaps Bessie Tod had died by this time. A daughter by his second marriage was married to a son of Dr John Johnstone's, *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy*, p. 72.

⁷⁹ *Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York procured in Holland, England and France: London Documents 1693-1706*, Vol. 4, p. 528. It was presumably in connection with the building of Trinity Church in 1697 that Patrick Walker remarks of Jamieson: "I saw his name at Doctor Nicol's commission here, for a publick collection of building of a church there [New York]", *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 26.

⁸⁰ In 1716, in a charge to the Grand Jury of Burlington County, Jamieson showed a remarkable knowledge of Scripture with "so many pertinent extracts from the Old and New Testaments that he was thought to be as much of a theologian as a lawyer", W. A. Whitehead (ed.), *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, 1687-1703* (Newark, N.J., 1881), Vol. 2, p. 114.

⁸¹ *Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York procured in Holland, England and France: London Documents 1693-1706*, Vol. 4, p. 442.

⁸² Webster, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, p. 302. Webster says that Jamieson, too, was a member of the congregation but we are doubtful on this point.

was acquitted of the charges against him but was forced to pay the substantial costs, both for the defence and for the prosecution.⁸³ Lord Cornbury's outrageous conduct in connection with the case was instrumental in his recall to England in 1708. In 1711, Jamieson was himself appointed Chief Justice of New Jersey, a position which he held until 1723. He was still alive in 1725.⁸⁴

The subsequent life of Walter Ker also merits attention, but we can only summarize the main points here. He was exceptionally zealous in promoting religion and Presbyterianism, and about 1690 he was instrumental in forming a Presbyterian congregation in Freehold, East Jersey, where he had acquired land. The first American Presbytery, that of Philadelphia, was formed in 1705 or 1706 (the first page of its records is missing), and its first recorded act was the examination for ordination of John Boyd to be the first minister of Freehold. Boyd died in 1708 and was followed as minister by the colourful Joseph Morgan, author of *The History of the Kingdom of Basaruah* (i.e. Flesh-Spirit in Hebrew), published in 1715. This is an allegory in imitation of John Bunyan and it has a claim to be the first American work of prose fiction.

In 1730, Morgan was followed as minister of Freehold by John Tennent, who died within two years, and then by his brother William Tennent, Jr. Under John and William there were extensive revivals of religion which contributed to the division of the Synod of Philadelphia into Old Side and New Side in 1741. Walter Ker took the New Side in these disputes and in October 1744 he gave his attestation to an account of the revivals written by his minister. By this time he was eighty-seven.⁸⁵ He was presumably present on Sabbath 8th June 1746 when David Brainerd assisted at the communion in Freehold, accompanied by many

⁸³ The sermon, on Psalm 50:23, was preached on Sabbath 19th January 1706-7 and was immediately published. Makemie also published an account of the case, *Narrative of a New and Unusual American Imprisonment of Two Presbyterian Ministers* (n.p., 1707), 56pp. Both these publications are included in Boyd S. Schlenker, *Life and Writings of Francis Makemie* (Philadelphia, PA, 1971). Jamieson's defence of Makemie is on pp. 223-5. Makemie's sermon is of considerable theological interest, being full of quotations from Scripture but having very little of Christ and still less of justification by faith. Doubtless Makemie professed to believe that doctrine, but in the sermon he was virtually preaching works religion. One can see in such a sermon the seeds of the Old Side/New Side controversy in America and also of the Marrow controversy in Scotland.

⁸⁴ *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, 1687-1703*, Vol. 2, p. 114; *Contributions to the Early History of Perth Amboy*, pp. 40-1; *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, 1720-1737* (Newark, N.J., 1882), Vol. 5, pp. 77, 139.

⁸⁵ Archibald Alexander, *The Log College* (Banner of Truth, 1968), pp. 228-237.

of his American Indian converts.⁸⁶ Ker died on 10th June 1748; and both his and his wife's gravestones are still in existence. He had at least five sons and it is reckoned that by 1930 he had somewhere between 25,000 and 35,000 descendants.⁸⁷

6. Conclusion

The account of the "Sweet Singers" suggests some obvious comments. One is the extraordinary changes that can occur in human affairs. David Jamieson, for instance, went from being a near-lunatic imprisoned in Edinburgh in 1681 to being the senior judge in New Jersey in 1711. Here he had to decide delicate points such as how recent English legislation against Quakers was to be interpreted in New Jersey, where Quakers were numerous and had special liberties established under previous laws.⁸⁸

Another matter worth noting is the power of religious delusion. Some of the "Sweet Singers" were deluded for a few months, and several of them for considerably longer. Most of them recovered; and what is known of their subsequent lives – especially Ker's and Jamieson's – suggests that they were not people of unstable minds. It is not easy to account for their period of delusion but it is important to recognise that such things can happen.

Another point is the way in which enemies can take advantage of comparatively minor aberrations in the Christian Church. The Gibbites were only a tiny proportion of the Cameronians, and were firmly rejected by them, but their enemies took full advantage of this bizarre movement arising in their midst. On the one hand, they discredited the Cameronians by identifying them with the Gibbites. Patrick Walker says of Cargill that "the indulged, silent and unfaithful, lukewarm, complying ministers and professors made no distinction betwixt him and Gibb, but made it their work by tongue and pen to bury him and his faithfulness in the ashes of these vile extremes".⁸⁹ In the same way, the state authorities published the Gibbites "*Blasphemous Paper*" as though it were

⁸⁶ "Life and Diary of David Brainerd", *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Banner of Truth, 1988), Vol. 2, pp. 368, 415.

⁸⁷ Armstrong, *The Kerr Clan of New Jersey*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ W. A. Whitehead (ed.), *Documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, 1709-1720* (Newark, N.J., 1882), Vol. 4, pp. 230-238.

⁸⁹ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 23.



The gravestones of Walter (above) and Margaret Ker. The inscription on Walter Ker's gravestone appears overleaf.

[Both photographs courtesy of Tim Taylor, a descendant of Walter Ker]



typical of non-indulged Covenanters. But on the other hand, the authorities showed by their differing treatment of the Gibbites and the Cameronians that they were perfectly able to distinguish between the harmless ravings of the former and the steadfast witness of the latter to certain unpalatable truths. This sort of inconsistent approach is typical of opponents of Christianity.

A final point to note is how Walter Ker went from bringing injury and disgrace on the gospel to being eminently serviceable in its cause. The period when he left Gibb and “turned mad” seems to have been a time of conviction of sin, judging by the subsequent part of his life. Walker said of him that “some of our banished worthies (who were with him in America, and came home) said to me that he exceeded all our banished, that they knew, in prevailing with some to set up the worship of God in their families, and young ones to pray, and join in societies for prayer and conference”.⁹⁰ William Tennent, likewise, said that “there was none so painful” in trying to settle Freehold with a gospel ministry as Walter Ker.⁹¹ We think that Walter Ker’s long life in Freehold would be a worthy subject for further investigation.

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Inscription on Walter Ker’s gravestone:

Here lies what’s Mortal of Walter Ker
Deceased June 10th 1748 in y^e 92 year of his Age

who long with Patience Bore life’s heavy load
willing to spend & to be spent for God
the noble Portrait in a line to paint
he Breath’d a Father liv’d & dy’d a saint
Here sleeps in peace the aged sire’s dust
Till the glad Trump arouse the sleeping Just

⁹⁰ *Six Saints*, Vol. 2, p. 25.

⁹¹ *Log College*, p. 228.