

Clergy widows in early modern Scotland*

Women were active participants in law courts across medieval and early modern Europe. Spanning the social spectrum, women engaged with courts at all levels as witnesses, defendants and plaintiffs. Representing the interests of their families, their husbands or themselves, there is ample evidence that women were regularly engaged with, and knowledgeable of, legal processes.¹ Women could use law courts to exacerbate or settle existing disputes, with court proceedings offering opportunities for women's views about communal norms to be inscribed into the documentary record.² Women could use the power of courts to protect their own reputations – frequently based on claims to their chastity – while revealing the breadth of their economic and social interests.³ Notwithstanding the dynamism of female engagement with the legal system, we would be wise to remember recent warnings that recourse to law did not necessarily imply that these women had agency or power, but that their actions were confined to operating within patriarchal systems of medieval and early modern authority rather than against them. As Cordelia Beattie commented, ‘women did not negotiate the legal system as a coherent subordinate group, with a shared mode of resistance’, but engaged with law courts in different ways based on the context of the case, their financial, social and marital position.⁴ Historians are now moving their attentions to understanding how female legal participation could be hedged by different aspects of their identity.⁵

While recent historiography has moved to address women at different marital stages, analysis of the ways in which widows addressed law courts continues to underline their unique position when engaging with law courts. Widows ‘found themselves awkwardly situated across gender boundaries’ that gave them unique privileges but that also exposed them to different forms of patriarchal control.⁶ The experience of widowhood was far removed from the stereotypes advanced by early modern drama.⁷ In a Scottish context, Rab

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¹ See Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996); Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987); James A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York* (York, 1980); For Scottish examples, see Gordon DesBrisay and Karen Sander Thomson, ‘Crediting wives: Married women and debt litigation in the seventeenth century’, in *Finding the Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Elizabeth Ewan and Janay Nugent (Abingdon, 2016), 85-98; John Finlay, ‘Women and legal representation in early sixteenth-century Scotland’, in *Women in Scotland, c.1100–c.1750*, ed. Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle (East Linton, 1999), 165-75.

² Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996), 266; Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford, 1987), 103-4.

³ J. R. D. Falconer, ‘“Mony utheris divars odious crymes”: Women, petty crime and power in later sixteenth century Aberdeen’, *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, 4 (2010), pp. 17-28; Julie Hardwick, ‘Hidden in plain sight: Female litigators, reproductive lives, archival practices and early modern French historiography’, in *Litigating Women: Gender and Justice in Europe, c.1300-c.1800*, ed. Teresa Phipps and Deborah Youngs (Abingdon, 2022), 311.

⁴ Cordelia Beattie, ‘A piece of the puzzle: Women and the law as viewed from the late medieval Court of Chancery’, *Journal of British Studies* 58 (2019), 751-67, at 764. Also, see Teresa Phipps and Deborah Youngs, ‘Introduction’, in *Litigating Women: Gender and Justice in Europe, c.1300-1800*, ed. Teresa Phipps and Deborah Youngs (London, 2021), 12-25, at 13-17.

⁵ Alexandra Shepard, ‘Worthless witnesses? Marginal voices and women's legal agency in early modern England’, *Journal of British Studies* 58 (2019), 717-34, at 719.

⁶ Julie Hardwick, ‘Widowhood and patriarchy in seventeenth century France’, *Journal of Social History* 26 (1992), 133-48, at 134.

⁷ Charles Carlton, ‘The widow's tale: Male myths and female reality in 16th and 17th century England’, *Albion* 10 (1978), 118-129.

Houston suggested that widows' legal status pertaining to property was 'effectively on a par with men', while Elizabeth Ewan and Cathryn Spence have revealed the activity of widows as litigants in local law courts and the way they could negotiate with authorities.⁸ Rebecca Mason's recent work has uncovered how widows in early modern Glasgow narrated multiple identities that served to shape their access to, and engagement with, law courts.⁹

The judicial machinery of the Reformed Churches, first developed in Geneva and then adapted and spread across parts of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, offered one type of ecclesiastical court to which women of all marital statuses frequently resorted. Robert Kingdon and Jeffrey Watt assessed the city Consistory's 'gender neutral' attitude held towards disciplinary offences, emphasising the numbers of both men and women brought before the court.¹⁰ Philip Benedict considered early modern Reformed discipline 'more evenhanded in terms of gender than we may often assume', with consistories offering a venue for arbitration, as well as discipline.¹¹ Historians looking at French Reformed courts have gone further by explaining how consistories allowed women an opportunity to 'represent and act for themselves', to be 'empowered' and to display considerable ingenuity when facing discipline.¹² Over the last thirty years, historians assessing Reformed courts in early modern Scotland have detected similar levels of female involvement. Michael Graham stressed how the kirk session, the lowest rung of the system of ecclesiastical courts in Scotland, established 'a forum for the complaints of the humble – both male and female – in which they had the opportunity to identify their causes with those of the wider Christian community'.¹³ Further research has showed the range of ways that women could engage with official efforts to enforce moral discipline, particularly around sexual offences. Whereas several historians have argued that there was no discernible double standard in approaches to gender in disciplinary cases at the parish level, Gordon DesBrisay and Helen Gair have found considerable variation between the penalties levied on men and women, especially for sexual misdemeanours, in Aberdeen and Perth, respectively.¹⁴ Other recent work has uncovered some of the ways that women could be 'active agents' in negotiating their own reputations in their encounters with the parish kirk session.¹⁵ In emphasising female involvement in Reformed Church courts, these studies focus almost exclusively on the disciplinary functions of Reformed consistories.

⁸ Elizabeth Ewan, 'Scottish portias: Women in the courts in medieval Scottish towns', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 3 (1992), 27-43, at 28. R. A. Houston, 'Women in the economy and society', in *Scottish Society, 1500-1800*, ed. R. A. Houston and Ian D. Whyte (Cambridge, 1989), 118-47, at 129-30; Cathryn Spence, *Women, Credit, and Debt in Early Modern Scotland* (Manchester, 2016), 187-91.

⁹ Rebecca Mason, 'Women, marital status, and law: The marital spectrum in seventeenth-century Glasgow', *Journal of British Studies* 58 (2019), 787-804, at 791-4.

¹⁰ Robert Kingdon, *Adultery and Divorce in Calvin's Geneva* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 126; Jeffrey R. Watt, 'Women and the Consistory in Calvin's Geneva', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993), 429-39, at 438-9.

¹¹ Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven, 2002), 480.

¹² Suzanna Lipscomb, *The Voices of Nîmes: Women, Sex, and Marriage in Reformation Languedoc* (Oxford, 2019), 7; Judith P. Meyer, 'Women and consistorial discipline: The case of Courthézon in the early seventeenth century', *Church History*, 88 (2019), 316-344, at 316.

¹³ Michael F. Graham, 'Women and the Church courts in Reformation-era Scotland', *Women in Scotland, c.1100–c.1750*, ed. Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle (East Linton, 1999), 187-98, at 196.

¹⁴ Gordon DesBrisay, 'Twisted by definition: Women under godly discipline in seventeenth-century Scottish towns', in *Twisted Sisters: Women, Crime and Deviance in Scotland since 1400*, ed. Yvonne Galloway Brown and Rona Ferguson (East Linton, 2002), 137-55; Helen Gair, 'Discipline, Reformation and community in Perth, 1577-1600', unpublished PhD thesis (Nottingham Trent University, 2020), 149; Michael F. Graham, *The Uses of Reform: 'Godly Discipline' and Popular Behavior in Scotland and Beyond, 1560-1610* (Leiden: 1996), 286-9; John McCallum, *Reforming the Scottish Parish: The Reformation in Fife, 1560-1640* (Abingdon, 2010), 207-14; Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven), 18n;

¹⁵ Alice Glaze, 'Women and kirk discipline: Prosecution, negotiation, and the limits of control', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 36 (2016), 125-42, at 134.

This article addresses the relationship between women and ecclesiastical courts in early modern Scotland, by exploring financial, rather than strictly disciplinary, cases. What follows focuses on a distinct group of women – the widows of parish clergy – and their interactions with local presbyteries following the death of their husbands. Presbyteries provided a distinct arena for certain women to engage with the machinery of Reformed Protestantism outside of the usual focus on moral discipline. As Laura Gowing has stated, ‘retrieving women from the records of institutions and processes which specifically sought to exclude them’ poses challenges for the historian, but clerical widows’ connection to the machinery of local Church government through their dead husbands, their sons and friends conferred on them a peculiar position from which to engage with ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁶ Frequently seen as objects of charity, these women had an intimate understanding of the Kirk’s rules and procedures and could vigorously assert their rights over land and money. In contrast to studies of female interaction with the disciplinary aspects of the Reformed Church in Scotland, the example of clerical widows shows women who were intimately connected with, and understood the machinations behind, ecclesiastical authority. Clerical widows operated in a greater proximity to official authority than most other women in early modern Scotland. Ultimately, however, their involvement with Church courts was bounded by the fact that the Kirk, by its nature, was a patriarchal organisation: while clerical widows held an important position following the death of their husbands, the final decisions were still made by the men who staffed the courts.

Emerging in the late sixteenth century, presbyteries became the administrative connective tissue linking local parish business to official Kirk policy. Typically meeting every week (weather conditions permitting), presbyteries sat above the parish kirk session in the Kirk’s hierarchy of courts and were staffed by a mixture of clerics and leading laymen.¹⁷ The business transacted in presbytery meetings was wider ranging than that of parish kirk sessions, offering opportunities for different kinds of interaction. In addition to serving as a court of appeal for lay disciplinary procedures, presbyteries also dealt with the assessment and discipline of clerics, the practical details of ecclesiastical finances and the administration of regional charity drives. Due to the wide gambit of their activities, the contents of presbytery records differ markedly from the minutes of kirk sessions which have been studied far more extensively.¹⁸ Firstly, presbytery records include far more detail on relationships between clerics, their families and their flocks than thought suitable to record in kirk session records. Second, presbytery minutes include references to ministers auditing the performances of their colleagues, either through parish visitations or at the weekly sermon exercise. Finally, presbytery minutes often record details of parish finances, including the size of the stipend, the value of teinds and the condition of parish manses and glebes. Taken together, presbytery documents offer an insight into the inner workings of the Kirk than kirk session minutes produced at the parish level. Presbytery meetings offered clerical widows a very different experience of Reformed authority than that permitted to other early modern women.

While the pre-Reformation priesthood upheld a vow of lifelong celibacy, the changes wrought by the Protestant Reformation encouraged ministers to marry.¹⁹ The family units

¹⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 8.

¹⁷ For a description of the practical arrangements for presbytery meetings, see *Stirling Presbytery Records 1581-1587*, ed. James Kirk (Edinburgh, 1981), xxvii-xxviii.

¹⁸ Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism*, 14-21.

¹⁹ A considerable body of work on the English Reformation has explored clerical marriage. The seminal work on the shift from celibacy to marriage remains Helen L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation*:

that emerged from these marriages were intended to serve as models of piety for local parishioners, as well as grounding the minister in the day-to-day affairs of his parish.²⁰ Historians have emphasised the significance of clerical wives and how their role was not confined to managing the household, but extended to providing pastoral comfort and support for other women in the parish, entering into business agreements and a myriad of other parish-based activities.²¹ As Ian and Kathleen Whyte's work made clear, the activities of clergy wives in early modern Scotland were not confined to the manse.²²

The prosperity and reputation of clergy wives was considered a reflection of the country's ministry. The *First Book of Discipline* stipulated that the funding of clerics must extend 'not only for their own sustenance during their lives, but also for their wives and children after them'. The reformers of the sixteenth century judged it 'a thing most contrary to reason, godliness, and equity, that the widow and children of him, who in his life did faithfully serve the kirk of God, and for that cause did not carefully make provision for his family, should, after his death, be left comfortless of all provision'.²³ Ecclesiastical courts across Scotland took such advice to heart and considered the wellbeing of clerical widows as a particularly important part of maintaining the dignity of the ministry. Following the loss of the minister's income, many clerical widows were vulnerable to falling into penury.²⁴ In April 1676, the Synod of Aberdeen recorded how 'haveing taken to ther consideratione the straittis and necessitie wherunto the relicts and childerene of several ministers are redacted many tymes', its members had decided to organise a compulsory collection among every minister in the region to support them in times of need. The clerk noted how 'besydes the commone motives of charitie', supporting clerical widows and children was essential considering 'the credite of ministers is neerlie concerned heirin'.²⁵ When thinking about the ministry, religious authorities also considered the standing of clerical wives and widows.

The desire to maintain the social standing of the ministry ensured that clerical widows frequently received alms from local presbytery meetings. Presbytery records from across Scotland are dotted with collections arranged for the widows of parish ministers who were experiencing financial hardship. Particular cases of clerical widows requiring charitable support became the focus of broad campaigns coordinated by provincial synods, occasionally reaching the very highest echelons of the Kirk's hierarchy of courts. The plight of Marjory Smith, the widow of John Marshall, minister of Brechin, was one of the most widely publicised cases of a clerical widow in poverty, as her petition was distributed around the country by an order of the General Assembly in 1648.²⁶ By 1657, her financial position had deteriorated to the point where the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale ordered another charitable collection considering 'her old age' and being 'at the poynt off sterving'.²⁷

Precedent, Policy and Practice (London, 2000). Recent work has focused on the social experience on clergy wives. See Anne Thompson, *Parish Clergy Wives in Elizabethan England* (Leiden, 2019).

²⁰ Janay Nugent, 'Reformed masculinity: Ministers, fathers and male heads of households, 1560-1660', in *Nine Centuries of Man: Manhood and Masculinity in Scottish History*, ed. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Ewan (Oxford, 2017), 39-52, at 39.

²¹ David George Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism, 1590-1638* (Oxford, 2000), 148-9; Elizabeth C. Sanderson, 'Hidden from history? Piecing together the working lives of ministers' wives and daughters 1700-1750', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 34 (2004), 28-47, at 32-4.

²² Ian D. Whyte and Kathleen A. Whyte, 'Wed to the manse: The wives of Scottish ministers, c. 1560-c.1800', in *Women in Scotland c.1100-c.1750*, ed. Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen M. Meikle (East Linton, 1999), 221-32, at 229.

²³ James K. Cameron, ed., *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh, 1972), fifth head.

²⁴ Thompson, *Parish Clergy Wives in Elizabethan England*, 194.

²⁵ National Records of Scotland [NRS], CH2/840/10, fol. 192.

²⁶ NRS, CH2/1132/18, fol. 126.

²⁷ *The Minutes of the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, 1648-1659*, ed. Chris R. Langley (London, 2016), 51-2.

Other cases led by provincial synods included clerical widows who were well connected or related to prominent clerical families. For example, in October 1643, presbyteries in Fife were ordered to ask parishioners for a charitable contribution to help Christian Scrimgeour, the widow of David Ramsay, minister of Cortachy, Forfar Presbytery. Ramsay had died young in 1637, but Scrimgeour seems to have returned to Fife, where her father was minister of Kingsbarns.²⁸ When her father died in 1643, Scrimgeour's connections ensured an urgent appeal for financial support that spanned Angus and Fife.²⁹ In some instances, scribes made the connection between charity and the widow's clerical lineage more explicit. In November 1660, the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale ordered a collection for Katherine Hamilton, the widow of Patrick Hamilton, minister at Cambuslang, because of her 'necessitie and indigent condition'. Reinforcing the idea that such collections protected the dignity of the clerical estate, as well as the women themselves, the clerk of the Synod recorded how Hamilton's case was especially urgent 'considering she is a ministers relict and a ministers daughter'.³⁰

The plight of some clerical widows held symbolic value. In particular, the widows of ministers who had suffered deprivation or were forced to flee during the Covenanting period could expect significant recompense after the Restoration in 1660, serving as symbols of the suffering of clergymen who had died before they could be rewarded for their loyalty. In October 1662, Perth Presbytery received a letter written by the Archbishop of St Andrews urging them to support Geils Moncreiff, widow of James Bennett, former minister at Auchtermuchty, 'having bein a greater sufferer' for episcopacy during the previous two decades.³¹ Presbyteries in Angus and the Mearns received instructions to collect money for Moncreiff in the same month.³² The length of time between a deposed minister's death and his widow receiving charity was often considerable, suggesting that ministers in the area continued to know these women long after their husbands had died. Margaret Sibbald, widow of James Lamont, minister of Kinnettles, Forfar Presbytery, deposed in 1649, received large amounts of charity from ministers in the region in 1664, thirteen years after her husband's death.³³ Similarly, Marion Inglis, widow to John Boig, deposed from the ministry at Kirkliston in 1646, received charitable support from Linlithgow Presbytery throughout the 1660s, with her last payment occurring twenty years after her husband's deposition.³⁴ Underlining the dignity of the clerical estate extended to ensuring widows of sufficiently high status were not embarrassed by the need to suit for charity. In these cases, ecclesiastical authorities could be extremely sensitive to circumstance and would tread carefully. In 1659, the ministers of Peebles Presbytery recorded receiving a petition for financial support from 'a ministers relict among our selvs'. The ministers were exhorted to 'go diligentlie about it and in a quiet way' so as not to defame the unnamed woman.³⁵

The widows of clerics were not passive following the deaths of their husbands and, while their status of clerical widow would remain important to authorities, they maintained social networks of their own and remained prominent figures in their region. Margaret Wardlaw, widow of Harry McGill, deceased minister of Dunfermline, married the provost of Dunfermline in January 1646 and offered a sizeable donation to the poor of the parish a

²⁸ Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*, 8 vols (Edinburgh, 1915–28), v, 94, 280.

²⁹ *Fasti*, v, 94, 280.

³⁰ NRS, CH2/252/4, fol. 83.

³¹ NRS, CH2/299/4, fol. 2.

³² NRS, CH2/15/1, fol. 38.

³³ NRS, CH2/15/1, fol. 52.

³⁴ NRS, CH2/185/7, fol. 53.

³⁵ NRS, CH2/295/4, fol. 157v.

month before.³⁶ In cases like this, the status as a clerical widow, twinned with high-status second marriages, would allow a woman to interact differently with authorities. For example, in June 1662, Janet Dickson, the widow of Hew Kerr, minister at Lyne, Peebles Presbytery, successfully petitioned the burgh council of Peebles to compensate her for crops that were destroyed by parishioners using a track that went through her land.³⁷ Like so many of their contemporaries, clerical widows continued to have recourse to law.

These women maintained connections with figures of religious authority that could endure long after the death of their clerical husband. Dying ministers appointed friends and colleagues nearby to assist their widows, such as when William Adair, future minister at Ayr, visited his dying colleague Robert Cunningham, minister at Hollywood, Co. Down, in 1637, Cunningham asked Adair ‘that he might be kind to his dear wife after his death’.³⁸ Presbytery meetings were occasionally interrupted as ministers attended the funeral of the widow of one of their former colleagues, such as in January 1653 when the ‘the most part’ of the ministers of Dunbar Presbytery attended the burial of the unnamed widow of William Forbes, former minister of Innerwick. Forbes died in 1646, meaning the ministers of the Presbytery had remained in contact with his widow for around seven years.³⁹

Clerical widows were active participants in these relationships independent of their husband’s involvement and the godly reputations of these women could be considerable.⁴⁰ Jonet Guthrie remained connected to the godly network of James Melvill, minister of Anstruther Wester, following the death of her husband, James Lawson, minister of Edinburgh, in 1584. Melvill described Guthrie as one who manifested ‘the fruicts of trew Christianitie...a remarkable mirroure of godlie weidowheid’.⁴¹ Such reputations could be longstanding. In 1637, Alison Cockburn, widow to Archibald Row, the deceased minister of Drumelzier, was described as the eldest of a group of ‘religious matrons’ petitioning authorities in Edinburgh to hear the godly preacher Robert Blair. Cockburn’s reputation as a godly woman had persisted independently of her husband who died in 1618.⁴² In August 1654, the godly lawyer, Archibald Johnston of Wariston, recorded how he ‘earnestlye recommended to the Lord’ Margaret Murray, the widow of George Gillespie, the deceased minister of Edinburgh, who had died six years prior.⁴³ Wariston corresponded with Murray, and several other likeminded godly women.

David Mullan and others have showed how networks of religious consolation could have significance outside of the spiritual realm and offered important forms of advocacy and support in other areas of day-to-day life.⁴⁴ Clerical widows were often active participants in these networks. Elizabeth Knox, daughter of the reformer and preacher John Knox, maintained personal connections with ecclesiastical figures outside of her marriage to John Welsh, minister of Ayr. At her death in 1625, Knox appointed two executors of her estate: her son Josias Welsh, then minister in Ireland, and James Inglis, minister at the parish of

³⁶ NRS, CH2/592/1/1, fol. 51.

³⁷ *Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of Peebles, 1652-1714*, ed. Robert Renwick (Glasgow, 1910), 51-2.

³⁸ Robert Wodrow, *Analecta: Or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences*, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1843), iii, 73.

³⁹ Michelle D. Brock and Chris R. Langley, *Mapping the Scottish Reformation*, <https://maps.mappingthescottishreformation.org/tenures> (accessed 7 January 2021).

⁴⁰ John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge, 1997), 98-100.

⁴¹ *The Autobiography and Diary of Mr James Melvill*, ed. Robert Pitcairn (Edinburgh, 1842), 219-20; Scott, *Fasti*, 1, 52-3.

⁴² *Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Robert Blair* (Edinburgh, 1754), 91; Scott, *Fasti*, i, 290.

⁴³ Archibald Johnston of Wariston, *Diary of Sir Archibald Johnston of Wariston*, ed. George M. Paul, David Hay Fleming and James D. Ogilvie, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1911-40), iii, 306-7.

⁴⁴ Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism*, ch. 1.

Dailly, twenty-seven kilometres to the south of Ayr. Knox's networks extended beyond the ecclesiastical world of south-west Scotland, though, as she appointed her half-brother, John Kerr, minister at Prestonpans, over one hundred and fifty kilometres to the east, as one of the oversmen appointed to see to the welfare of her children.⁴⁵ While Knox's marriage to a minister was clearly an important part of her identity, she held other connections to ecclesiastical authority in her own right. The deeply embedded nature of clerical widows into the wider ecclesiastical world is best illustrated by the selection of overseers of the children of less well-known clerical widows. Isobel Cramond, the widow of Patrick Lyon, minister at Barry in Brechin Presbytery, was appointed executrix of her husband's estate in 1658, with James Cramond, her brother and minister of the neighbouring parish of Fearn, appointed as an overseer of the children.⁴⁶ Like so many clerical widows, Isobel Cramond was enmeshed into the world of ecclesiastical authority in the region by her familial ties, as well as her connections to her dead husband.

Social connections can also illustrate the extent to which some clerical widows continued to be associated with dissenting social networks long after the death of their husbands. In her testament of 1665, Isobel Rind, widow to Francis Aird, minister at Dalsersf, listed James Naismith, deposed minister of Hamilton, William Jack, deposed minister of Carluke, and William Hamilton, minister at Glassford, who would be deposed later in the year, as three of the five tutors to her young daughter. Capping off this extraordinary list of leading presbyterians in and around Hamilton, Rind appointed John Oliphant, the indulged minister of Stonehouse, to raise her daughter.⁴⁷ Similarly, the unnamed wife of Thomas Ross, the ejected minister of Tain and Morinnis, turned to a wide network of other dissenters, including Alexander Brodie of Brodie, for shelter and 'anie opportunity to hear the gospel' outside of the established Church after the death of her husband in 1679.⁴⁸ Clerical widows could act as important nodes in dissenting networks, such as when the widow of the presbyterian James Guthrie held conventicles in her house after her husband's death.⁴⁹ Above all, widows' involvement in these activities reflects their continuing interaction with clerical networks after the death of their husbands.

Maintaining connections with ecclesiastical authorities was financially important for clerical widows, particularly in the years immediately following the death of their husbands. As John McCallum has noted, the wills of clerics contained references to considerable amounts of unpaid stipend and efforts to recover these payments often fell to their widows.⁵⁰ It was accepted practice by the early part of the seventeenth century for widows of clerics to be entitled to the entirety of her husband's stipend for the year of his death, plus any stipendiary payments that were outstanding. In 1595, the General Assembly ordered that the widows of ministers who died after Michaelmas (29 September) were entitled to the preceding year's stipend and half of the following year's payment.⁵¹ Such ideas were enshrined in acts of Parliament, too, including a 1644 act that noted that 'law and custom of this kingdom' dictated that one year's stipend of a vacant parish 'falls to the widow, bairns or

⁴⁵ NRS, CC9/7/20, Glasgow Commissary Court, Elizabeth Knox (1625), fols 531-2.

⁴⁶ NRS, CC3/3/6, Brechin Commissary Court, Patrick Lyone (1658), fol. 318.

⁴⁷ NRS, CC10/5/7, Hamilton and Campsie Commissary Court, Isobel Rind (1665), fols 270-1.

⁴⁸ *The Diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie*, ed. David Laing (Aberdeen, 1863), 407-8, 456.

⁴⁹ James McSeveney, 'Non-conforming presbyterian women in Restoration Scotland: 1660-1679', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Strathclyde, 2005), 109-10; Janay Nugent and L. Rae Stauffer, 'Scotland's "holy households": Wives and children of Reformed ministers', in *The Clergy in Early Modern Scotland*, ed. Chris R. Langley, Catherine E. McMillan and Russell Newton (Woodbridge, 2021), 70-88, at 81.

⁵⁰ John McCallum, 'Poverty or prosperity? The economic fortunes of ministers in post-Reformation Fife, 1560-1640', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62 (2011), 472-90.

⁵¹ *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland, 1560-1618* (Edinburgh, 1839), 846-56.

executor of the minister' before it was put to any other cause.⁵² Contemporaries were aware of these arrangements, evidenced by the occasional references to these acts of the General Assembly and Parliament in local presbytery books. In 1656, Perth Presbytery noted that 'according to the laudable acts of this Nationall Church' the widows (or other heirs and executors) of clerics who died after Whitsunday were entitled to payment of the full stipend for the year of the minister's death.⁵³

Despite the apparent clarity of these customs, such payments were not always immediately forthcoming. The widows of clerics could be owed money for a considerable time after the death of their husband. Jonet Campbell, widow to David Milne, minister of Dundonald, Lanark Presbytery, was owed a proportion of teinds following her husband's death in 1617 but was unable to claim them before she died in 1618.⁵⁴ Similarly, Margaret Erskine, widow to James Schewan, minister at Navar, Brechin Presbytery, was still owed a significant amount of money by prominent parishioners perhaps as much as a decade after the death of her husband. The funds were still outstanding at the time of her own death in 1635.⁵⁵ It is perhaps unsurprising that the ministers of Lanark Presbytery lamented how questions over dead ministers' stipends were 'indecent and scandalous' and risked bringing the ministry into disrepute.⁵⁶

Delays in payment suggest that widows attempted other forms of brokerage and persuasion before resorting to the ecclesiastical courts. In 1645, Jean Leverance, widow to the former minister of Lamington and Wandel, informed Biggar Presbytery that the final year of her husband's stipend remained unpaid, three years after his death.⁵⁷ Clerical widows lobbied local landowners or other stakeholders to contribute towards outstanding stipendiary payments before approaching the local presbytery for assistance. Christian Seaton, widow to Robert MacGill, former minister at Alva, Stirling Presbytery, petitioned the Synod of Perth and Stirling in October 1657, over eighteen months after the death of her husband, asking the ministers to 'deall with the heritors of that paroch' to pay her husband's outstanding stipend. Ecclesiastical authorities could verify widows' claims for unpaid stipend. In the case of Christian Seaton, the Synod of Perth and Stirling added the caveat that 'in cais' the ministers 'prevaill not towards an aggriment' with local landowners, they promised Seaton an extract of their deliberations 'that sche may mak her owne use of it', presumably in a civil court.⁵⁸ Such notes give us a passing insight into how ecclesiastical courts engaged with other legal jurisdictions, although presbytery books rarely offer any indication of any subsequent proceedings before civil law courts.

Clerical widows suffering extreme hardship could ask local authorities to pay not only outstanding stipendiary payments but also give them access to other parts of the stipend during the vacancy of the parish. In so doing, they combined their accepted position as a target of charity with their proximity to the parish stipend. Following the death of her husband Andrew Kinnear, former minister at Stirling, the burgh council of Stirling, 'out of the love and respect' they bore to their former minister and his 'relict and five young children', advanced a quarter of the year's stipend in 1662 to his widow.⁵⁹ The clerical widow's status in the community gave her access to a form of charitable supply that was not

⁵² *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. Keith M. Brown et al (St Andrews, 2007-2021), 1644/6/211, <https://rps.ac.uk> (accessed 11 July 2018).

⁵³ NRS, CH2/299/3, fol. 400.

⁵⁴ NRS, CC9/7/15, fol. 367.

⁵⁵ NRS, CC3/3/5, fol. 386.

⁵⁶ NRS, CH2/234/1, fol. 262.

⁵⁷ NRS, CH2/35/1, fol. 31.

⁵⁸ NRS, CH2/449/2, fol. 285.

⁵⁹ *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Stirling, A.D. 1519-1666*, ed. Robert Renwick (Glasgow, 1887), 247.

available to other women. Even in more contentious cases, clerical widows could attempt to request more of the parish stipend following the death of their husband. In January 1652, Alexander Watson, son to the deceased Robert Watson, minister at Grange, personally presented a supplication to Strathbogie Presbytery pleading on behalf of his mother, Euphame Anderson, for access to the parish stipend to support her other ‘fatherlesse children...that they might [be] brought up in the feare of god’. Robert Watson had been suspended on disciplinary grounds in 1651 and had then died before his case was formally investigated, so it was unclear if Anderson was owed the full year’s stipend. Anderson’s suit for charity in requesting a disputed portion of the stipend was only possible because of her distinct status as a clerical widow and her on-going connections with ecclesiastical authorities.

Clerical widows who served as executors to their husband’s estates also maintained a claim to the costs incurred in renovating the manse during their husband’s lifetime. The sums of money involved in these transactions were considerable: providing the clerical widow with an important financial cushion, but also presenting a sizeable financial burden for the new minister of the parish. While acts of Parliament stipulated that any of the executors to a minister’s estate could claim repayment of these costs, the most common demands for such payments were from the widows of clergymen.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Synod of Argyll noted in 1649 that such repayments were ‘often-tymes’ the ‘most portion [clergy widows] have to look after their husbands decease’.⁶¹ Widows’ claims to the costs incurred on renovating the manse ran the risk of bringing the woman into dispute with her husband’s successor.

Unsurprising considering the value of repayments for the manse, clerical widows were active in petitioning presbyteries to protect their fiscal interests. In April 1656, for example, the Synod of Perth and Stirling received a petition from Marie Mastertoun, the widow of Francis Omev, minister of Logierait, ‘concerning her grievance’ against her husband’s successor in the parish, Thomas Ireland.⁶² Such petitions reflect a widow’s understanding of ecclesiastical court procedure and the complex arrangements concerning clerical stipends. In March 1658, upon settling a dispute with the new parish minister, Margaret Dalziel, widow to David Gudlatt, the former minister of Ecclesmachan, told the ministers of Linlithgow Presbytery of the ‘custom of this nation’ that newly-entered ministers reimburse the widow and executors of the former minister for the costs he had expended on the manse and glebe and argued for her ‘good and undoubted right’ to those funds.⁶³ The fact that the agreement occurred over twenty years after Gudlatt’s death and his successor’s installation as minister reflects the complexities of such negotiations. The high proportion of clergy wives from either landed or clerical backgrounds may have increased their familiarity with the ecclesiastical legal system.⁶⁴

Clerical widows would often rely on clerical advocates, many of whom were sitting members of the presbytery, to deliver their requests for financial recompense.⁶⁵ Such clerical advocates were usually drawn from the immediate vicinity of the parish in which the widow’s husband had served. For example, Thomas Powstie, minister of Leslie, submitted a petition ‘in name of’ Agnes Christison, the widow of James Wilson, the deceased minister of neighbouring Kinglassie, to Kirkcaldy Presbytery in June 1631.⁶⁶ The parishes of Leslie and

⁶⁰ For an example of a ministers’ daughters petitioning for repayment, see NRS, CH2/185/5, fols 107, 230.

⁶¹ *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll 1639-1651*, ed. Duncan C. MacTavish, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1943), i, 181.

⁶² NRS, CH2/449/2, fol. 241.

⁶³ NRS, CH2/242/5, fol. 117.

⁶⁴ Whyte and Whyte, ‘Wed to the manse’, 223-4.

⁶⁵ For more on petitions being delivered by intermediaries, see Alasdair Raffae, ‘Petitioning in the Scottish church courts, 1638-1707’, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 8 (2018), 323-36, at 327-8.

⁶⁶ NRS, CH2/224/1, fol. 46. Wilson died the previous year, see Scott, *Fasti*, v, 96.

Kinglassie shared a boundary, with only eight kilometres separating the two parish churches. Two examples from Haddington Presbytery reveal a similar tendency for ministers to support the petitions of clerical widows in neighbouring parishes. In August 1642, James Fleming, minister of Yester, requested a visitation of the parish of Baro ‘in name of’ the widow of David Ogil, the former minister there, ‘that she might have repetition of the charges debursed therupon be her husband’.⁶⁷ We see similar clerical support in the case of the widow of Ogil’s successor. ‘Mistress Dickson’, the widow of John Dickson, former minister of Bara, petitioned Haddington Presbytery in January 1661. The petition, while signed in the widow’s name, was presented by Laurence Charteris, minister at nearby Yester, a parish around eight kilometres away from John Dickson’s former charge.⁶⁸

Clerical advocacy for a widow’s petition could span longer distances, but presbytery records rarely left any indication of the motives behind the selection of a particular intermediary. As we have already observed, kinship and friendship ties between clerical widows and ministers could crisscross presbytery regions. David Campbell, minister of Menmuir in Angus ‘represented’ a ‘desyr’ from the unnamed widow of Thomas Montgomerie, former minister at Logy, that ‘shee may sustain no wrong nor prejudice’ in any of the Presbytery’s efforts to plant the parish with a new minister.⁶⁹ As we have seen, it is certainly possible that Montgomerie’s unnamed widow could have maintained a friendship with Campbell across the twenty-four kilometres distance that separated them, but petitions presented in this manner do not include the reasons why a particular minister might present a petition on a widow’s behalf. Clerical widows’ proximity to the ecclesiastical world gave them personal access to members of the local presbytery, many of whom served as advocates for the widows’ petitions. Ministers from adjoining or more distant parishes may have felt an obligation to support the widows of their former colleagues.

Occasionally, the opaque language used by presbytery clerks makes it difficult to discern the extent of clerical widows’ involvement in the process of petitioning.⁷⁰ Unlike other courts where female participation was common, it is unclear if clerical widows were present at the meetings discussing their cases or if they continued to rely on intermediaries to advocate for them. For example, Lilius Geddes was present at an arbitration meeting in Stobo on 28 March 1645 to discuss outstanding debts owed to her dead husband Alexander Greig, former minister of Drumelzier. She subscribed a document outlining the terms of the financial settlement she agreed with Robert Fleming, the new minister of the parish, but she was seemingly not present at the meeting of the presbytery that confirmed the arrangement.⁷¹ It is likely that like Geddes, other clerical widows participated in the discussions around their cases, but that presbytery clerks were uninterested in recording if they were present at presbytery meetings. During the installation of the new minister of Saline in September 1659, Margaret Baram, widow of the former minister James Oliphant, ‘supplicat’ Dunfermline Presbytery for the repayment of building expenses incurred by her late husband. Considering the Presbytery was convened in Saline that day, it is likely that Baram was at least nearby when her supplication was considered, but she is not recorded as being present in the Presbytery meeting itself. More typical is the case of Janet Dickson, widow of Hew Kerr, former minister of Lyne, in January 1660. Dickson ‘desired’ the Presbytery of Peebles to

⁶⁷ NRS, CH2/185/5, fol. 157.

⁶⁸ NRS, CH2/185/6, fol. 376.

⁶⁹ NRS, CH2/40/1, fol. 67.

⁷⁰ Tracing the provenance of other petitions for charity recorded in kirk session or presbytery records is challenging. Chris R. Langley, *Cultures of Care: Domestic Welfare, Discipline and the Church of Scotland, c.1600-1689* (Leiden, 2020), 35-40; John McCallum, *Poor Relief and the Church of Scotland, 1560-1650* (Edinburgh, 2018), 185-6.

⁷¹ NRS, CH2/295/3, fol. 40.

survey the parish manse ‘that she may be peyit for it’, but the presbytery clerk made no reference to her being present at the meeting, if her petition was delivered in writing or if it was presented orally by another minister.⁷² Such vague phrasing is commonplace in references to clerical widows’ petitions in presbytery records.

Despite the frequency of petitions from clerical widows, presbytery minutes give the impression that the women had little influence on the judgment of subsequent proceedings. The discernment of disputes over parish stipends, the costs of renovating manses and the negotiation of any settlement was dictated entirely by the men who sat in the local presbytery. As Katie Barclay has observed, the negotiation around female involvement with early modern patriarchy often served to strengthen it.⁷³ In similar terms, clerical widows’ attempts to negotiate with ecclesiastical authorities served to reinforce and legitimise the authority of the Reformed Kirk and the men who staffed it. In 1631, Margaret Spence, widow of James French, former minister at Penicuik, consented to nominate three ministers from parishes in Dalkeith Presbytery for the ‘arbitriment’ of stipendiary payments owed to her husband and disputed by the new minister John Sinclair. Spence and Sinclair were allowed to select their three representatives.⁷⁴ While arbitration arrangements were subject to change – the same presbytery referred to the ‘laudable practise’ of asking the clerical widow and the new entrant to a parish to nominate four ministers from the region ‘for composing of questionis’ regarding a manse and glebe in 1635 – the trend of relying on male figures of authority to settle the dispute was a constant.⁷⁵ In the case of Janet Dickson in Lyne, noted above, the ministers of Peebles Presbytery agreed to her petition, but offered her little input in the final judgement, appointing several ministers and two ‘honest understanding workmen’ to value her husband’s renovations to the manse.⁷⁶ Dickson had little choice but consent to the arrangement. Clerical widows played an important role in these deliberations but the decision ultimately lay with male figures of authority. In the case of Margaret Baram in Saline, while the Presbytery deputed two ministers to ‘take in from the said relict the particular accounts of the said expenses’, the final decision on Baram’s financial settlement was taken by the men of the Presbytery.

The limits of clerical widows’ negotiations with ecclesiastical authorities are also underlined by the way presbytery clerks recorded their identities. For the purposes of petitioning for a stipend or money owed towards the costs of renovating the parish manse, clerical widows were rarely named in the surviving records. Instead, scribes usually recorded their legal status as ‘relict’ or ‘widow’ only. The lack of personal identifiers, but the amplification of the woman’s legal status and her marriage to a minister, further underlines the clerical widow’s liminal place in negotiating with ecclesiastical authorities. While clergy widows held a different status to other women in the parish, their interactions with authorities and their imprint in the documentary record remained mediated by male voices.⁷⁷

For clergy widows, such anonymity in the records was rarely a reflection of their prominence in their parish following the death of their clerical husbands. That the widow usually continued to reside in the parish in which her husband had served as minister was her greatest form of strength in disputing financial settlements with local ecclesiastical

⁷² NRS, CH2/295/4, fol. 171v.

⁷³ Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Manchester, 2011), 7-9.

⁷⁴ NRS, CH2/424/2, fol. 3. Later in the century, Sinclair’s successor, Patrick Sibbald, repaid Agnes Buchanan, Sinclair’s widow, in full without any formal arbitration. See NRS, CH2/424/3, fol. 471.

⁷⁵ NRS, CH2/424/2, fols 67-8. In 1631, Kirkcaldy Presbytery asked Agnes Christison, widow of James Wilson, former minister of Kinglassie, to nominate two ministers to settle a dispute with her husband’s successor Thomas Melvill. NRS, CH2/224/1, fol. 47.

⁷⁶ NRS, CH2/295/4, fol. 171v.

⁷⁷ Glaze, ‘Women and kirk discipline’, 141; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, 39-41.

authorities. A surprising number of clerical widows continued to reside in the parish manse following the death of their husbands and forced a renegotiation with authorities over money owing to them. For example, Katherine Clephame continued to reside in the manse of Eddleston, Peebles Presbytery, for around twenty-five years after the death of her husband, James Logan.⁷⁸ While the length of Clephame's possession of the manse at Eddleston was extraordinary (and indicates some support from local landowners, if not the Presbytery), many other widows of ministers continued to reside in parish property suggesting that locals acknowledged the woman's rights on legal or compassionate grounds. Alexander Guthrie, the newly-installed minister of Stracathro, complained to Brechin Presbytery in April 1656 that the (again, unnamed) widow of George Fogo, the former parish preacher, 'maks him more unhable to attend his charge' because of her continued residence in the manse. Fogo had died in April 1655 and Guthrie believed that he had reached a settlement regarding money he was due to pay. However, Fogo's widow refused to leave the manse 'till compleitt satisfaction be made to her' by prominent landowners in the parish. Fogo's widow and Guthrie reached an agreement in late November, but only with considerable efforts from ministers elsewhere in the region to broker a deal. To close the deal, Guthrie asked that his financial settlement with Fogo's widow be recorded in the Presbytery book and noted that 'the said sowm' be repaid to him if he was transported to another parish or otherwise that 'his relict or aires may get restitution thereof' in the event of his own death.⁷⁹ Such clauses were written into every cleric's financial settlement, giving clerical widows a formal legal claim to repayment when the minister died. While the terms of these agreements were made by men, they were usually acted upon by women.

Unlike some other Protestant territories in Europe, the Scottish Kirk expected new incumbents to move into the parish manse immediately upon appointment and offered no grace period to the widow or family of the previous minister.⁸⁰ As such, their continued presence could be disruptive. Margaret Annand, widow of David Lindsay, former minister of Belhelvie, Aberdeen Presbytery, insisted on her right to 'keepe the manss and hail biggings thereof' until Whitsunday 1668 following the death of her husband in November the previous year. Annand's decision forced her husband's successor, George Innes, to concede at his first meeting of the kirk session in March 1668 that 'he cannot be accommodated' in the parish and would have to travel to the parish to preach or, in case of adverse weather, have the former schoolmaster read scripture in his stead until Annand relinquished her claim to the manse later in the year.⁸¹ The major landowners of the parish do not seem to have attempted to offer shelter in the parish to Innes, perhaps implying a degree of support for Annand's legal case.

Authorities well understood the importance of a smooth handover between the former minister's widow and the newly-appointed preacher. In 1646, the General Assembly considered 'the great burdens intrants undergoes when they enter the ministry, which holds many of them long at under' and ordered an investigation into how 'ministers manses and stipends may be all made free' so the new minister did not suffer the financial hardship of having to repay the previous incumbent's widow and family.⁸² Such efforts were largely

⁷⁸ NRS, CH2/295/4, fol. 5.

⁷⁹ NRS, CH2/40/1, fol. 369.

⁸⁰ Gordon Donaldson, "'The example of Denmark'" in the Scottish Reformation', *Scottish Historical Review* 103 (1948), 57-64, at 61; Inger Dübeck, 'Legal status of widows in Denmark 1500-1900', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 29 (2004), pp. 209-23, at 220; Susan C. Karant-Nunn, 'The emergence of the pastoral family in the German Reformation: The parsonage as a site of socio-religious change', in *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe*, ed. C. Scott Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schütte (Basingstoke, 2003), 79-99, at 90-1.

⁸¹ NRS, CH2/32/3, fol. 5.

⁸² *Records of the Kirk of Scotland, Containing the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies*, ed. Alexander Peterkin (Edinburgh, 1843), 449.

unsuccessful. In addition to attempting to get more lay financial support, presbyteries could police widows' efforts to obtain more stipend than they were owed. In one very rare case in June 1645, Biggar Presbytery received a complaint from Robert Brown, the newly-appointed minister of Broughton, complaining that Katherine Wenton, the widow of his predecessor, had incorrectly claimed parts of the parish stipend for the second half of 1644 and the start of 1645, despite her husband dying in April of 1644. The Presbytery agreed that the stipend was in 'nowayes belonging' to Wenton and her 'assigneyes'. Ultimately, ecclesiastical authorities were eager to get financial support from lay landowners to mitigate the impact of such disputes on Reformed services. In July 1650, the ministers of Lanark Presbytery asked the marquis of Douglas to support Jean Baillie, the widow the former minister of Crawford, who was presumably in possession of the parish manse after the death of her husband in December 1649.⁸³ Despite ecclesiastical authorities attempting to police the limits of clerical widows' impact, such efforts ultimately failed and disputes between new entrant ministers and the widows (and children) of the previous incumbent continued well after the Restoration.

The clerical widow's importance extended to the items or money that would often remain in her custody after the death of her husband. Mary Innes, widow of Alexander Douglas, Bishop of Moray, had in her possession over five hundred merks of disciplinary penalties from the parish of Elgin eighteen months after the death of her husband in 1623.⁸⁴ While clerical widows of less exalted status held rather less financial clout than Innes, they continued to possess small commodities of money and objects that were considered important to parish life following the death of their husbands. In April 1633, Christian Carr, widow of David Philp, former minister of Elgin, delivered two communion cups and several cloths that had been in her possession since Philp's death the previous year.⁸⁵ Similarly, the widow of William Milne in Glass delivered 'a bassen for baptisme' and 'ane box and tuo dolouris money therin' that were in her possession in 1644.⁸⁶

A number of clerical widows also maintained possession of important documentation pertaining to ecclesiastical affairs after the deaths of their husbands. This had become such a prominent concern following the death of a minister that the Synod of Moray instructed newly-appointed ministers in 1626 to refuse to pay any outstanding debts to their predecessor's widow (or other executors) 'until he be first putt in possession of such wretttes and bookes as belong to the kirk quhair he is minister'.⁸⁷ The death of each minister must have occasioned a handover of records and books, but evidently these transfers were not always smooth. The unnamed widow of Patrick Turner, the former minister of Dalkeith, appeared before the Presbytery of Dalkeith in October 1634 to deliver 'four paper books contaneing the actis and actiounis of the said presbytrie' alongside four 'tomes' containing the works of Robert Ballarmin and a copy of Andrew Willett's *Synopsis Papismi*, a guide to theological controversies.⁸⁸ While the personal libraries of ministers may have had symbolic value for clerical widows, the possession of the kirk session register offered them something of great importance to the application of parochial discipline.⁸⁹ In April 1644, the unnamed widow of William Milne, the former minister of Glass, Strathbogie Presbytery, met with ministers from the Presbytery 'concerning the sessioun book and uther munimentis belonging

⁸³ NRS, CH2/234/1, fol. 451.

⁸⁴ NRS, CH2/145/4, fol. 59

⁸⁵ NRS, CH2/145/5, fol. 100v.

⁸⁶ NRS, CH2/342/2, fols. 51-2.

⁸⁷ NRS, CH2/271/1, fol. 24.

⁸⁸ NRS, CH2/424/2 fol. 63.

⁸⁹ Michelle Wolfe, "'There very children were soe full of hatred': Royalist clerical families and the politics of everyday conflict in Civil War and Interregnum England", *Studies in Church History* 40 (2004), 194-204, at 202.

to the kirk' in her possession. The ministers discovered that Milne's widow had in her possession the register of the parish kirk session, but that the other documents pertaining to the parish were missing.⁹⁰ In 1649, the session of Edinkillie, Forres Presbytery, searched frantically for the whereabouts of the kirk session register after the death of the parish minister John Dunbar in 1646. The session discovered that a chest of Dunbar's books was in the possession of one of Dunbar's relatives, but that the key was held by Allan Grant who had married Dunbar's unnamed widow. In the absence of the parish papers, the session was forced to start a new register.⁹¹ Clerical widows provided an important link between historic events in a parish and the demands of ecclesiastical authorities beyond the period covered by this article and into the eighteenth century.⁹²

The death of a minister created a space for a dialogue between a certain subset of women and ecclesiastical authorities in early modern Scotland. Clerical widows were active participants in negotiations with presbyteries over their rights to the parish stipend and funds disbursed on the parish manse. They held a unique status that affected what Michael Graham called 'the social mathematics' of their interactions with ecclesiastical courts.⁹³ Their identities were entangled with those of the clergy through marriage and reputation, while they maintained connections with ecclesiastical authority through sons or other family members who entered the ministry or through personal friendships with neighbouring clerics. Such connections gave clergy widows a unique perspective on local ecclesiastical bureaucracy. Despite their unusual status, their presence in presbytery books and their negotiating power usually faded when their claims to parish finances had been settled or they remarried.

The period between a cleric's death and the settlement of his financial interests presents a window through which we can better understand Reformed attitudes towards gender. The Kirk's eagerness to protect the dignity of its ministry extended to seeing widows and children of deceased ministers as both objects worthy of charity and as parts of the ecclesiastical structure. The centrality of clerical marriage to Reformed Protestantism added a distinct arena for female involvement in official Kirk business. The widows of ministers who served in Scottish parishes had a legal right to claim parts of the stipend and other money owed to their dead husbands, which forced Kirk authorities into a dialogue with these women and their associates.

Interactions between clerical widows and ecclesiastical authorities reveal there was a space in Reformed religious culture where women actively petitioned Church courts, frequently asserted their rights and had an impact on ecclesiastical business. These women understood the workings of the Reformed religious culture (and finance) in an intimate way. While their voices were typically mediated by male clerks, their significance in the day-to-day business of presbyteries across early modern Scotland is undeniable. The Kirk's interactions with these women was largely positive and reflects how the Reformed Kirk in Scotland had spaces in which negotiations with lay women was the norm. The status of the petitioner as the widow of a local cleric and the context in which she found herself could fundamentally change how the authorities of the Kirk responded to her as a woman. Clergy

⁹⁰ NRS, CH2/342/2, fol. 51v.

⁹¹ NRS, CH2/432/1, fols 1D-2. Such circumstances were probably restricted to cases where the minister died suddenly or where the parish finances would not support an assistant. In wealthier parishes, ministers would slowly divest themselves of parochial responsibilities and hand over any records in their possession to their assistant. See CH2/592/1/1, fols 19-20.

⁹² Alastair Mutch, 'Return to Humber: Minister and heritors in the eighteenth century', *Scottish Church History* 48 (2019), 126-47, at 11. For more on the power of local memory contained in parish registers, see Andrew Gordon, 'The paper parish: The parish register and the reformation of parish memory in early modern London', *Memory Studies* 11 (2018), 51-68, at 51-3.

⁹³ Graham, 'Women and Church courts', 189.

widows held some institutional leverage that is often overlooked by historians, but that highlight moments of female engagement with Reformed culture. This conclusion should encourage historians to focus their attentions on other ways that women could interact with Reformed religious institutions beyond disciplinary matters.

The moment of engagement between clerical widows and the religious hierarchy of early modern Scotland also reveals the limits of female involvement. While clerical widows understood the workings of the Church courts and could use friendship or familial connections to frame and present petitions (usually with considerable success), the arbitration of such cases was always handled by the men who staffed the Church. Indeed, the identities of clerical widows was often clouded by a scribal culture that identified them by their legal rights but ignored their individual names or personal details. Clergy widows' participation in ecclesiastical law operated within the structures of the Kirk's patriarchal authority. While the experience of clerical widows evidences a different type of interaction between women and the Reformed Kirk, these interactions also reflect the limitations of female involvement in organised religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.