

The Carrick Covenant of 1638

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Whether one agrees with Johnston, of Wariston, that Wednesday, the 28th of February, 1638, was "that glorious marriage day of the Kingdome with God" or holds with Charles I. that the Covenant was "a most wicked band," it cannot be denied that Scotland was swept by a movement which for fervour and unanimity stands unparalleled in her history. Copies of the Covenant were penned and dispatched to most parts of the land shortly after the first signing at Greyfriars in Edinburgh. As such copies were frequently laid up in family charter chests, many have come down to posterity. However, the Covenant in the Ailsa Muniments, now preserved in H.M. General Register House, Edinburgh, is worthy of attention in its own right. It is a very fine specimen and has suffered less than most at the hands of time. The eighty-seven signatures are in the main those of Carrick lairds, many the representatives of ancient families now long extinct. The rows of names provide eloquent testimony of the impact of the Covenant on one locality and serve as a reminder that Ayrshire proved a stronghold of the Covenanting cause through fifty years of fluctuating fortunes, especially during the dark years under Charles II., when the Covenants were proscribed and their adherents suppressed.

The untrimmed skin, with the neck piece retained at the foot, measures 31 ins. x 25½ ins., and has been mellowed by age to a dull cream. A few stains, some ink blurs in the area of the signatures and one small hole in the text, constitute minor blemishes. The name of the notary has not been inserted, but the text is written in a smallish, round but clear hand with a very sparing use of capitals. All the signatures are readable and many of them still challenge boldly over the years. In accordance with normal practice they are headed by the Covenanting nobles and other leaders. Then follow the bulk of the signatures running roughly in lines across the document, although considerations of space forced John McAlexander, younger of Dalreoch [no. 43], to make what is to modern eyes a surprisingly wide detour to complete his signature. Some of the lairds sign under their territorial designations only, a mode of execution valid at law until 1672. Styles range from the polished flourish of the Maybole notary, John Shaw [no. 33], to the laboured scrawl of John Fergusson [no. 45]. There is a distinct tendency towards family and territorial groupings and some rather striking differences of ink. As in some other extant Covenants the famous Glasgow Determination has been added under the body of the signatures at a later date. This is in a smaller and less careful hand than the text and has suffered a greater degree of fading. The seven signatures which follow the Glasgow

Determination are either by those who had not had a previous opportunity of signing or who were affirming their adherence in the light of the fateful proceedings of the Glasgow Assembly. The laird of Knockdaw signed in both places [nos. 38 and 85] and may certainly be taken as re-affirming his allegiance.

The Carrick Covenant is in appearance an austere and un-spectacular document. It may be contrasted with larger Covenants which are known to have been signed centrally either in Edinburgh or Glasgow. The latter are usually large in size, heavily subscribed often by members of General Assembly, Parliament or Privy Council, and frequently elaborate in execution with designed borders, illuminated capitals and ornate penmanship. The Carrick Covenant conforms in respect of size and comparative simplicity of design and style with other copies drawn up with a view to subscription in the localities. These were first signed by a few of the nobles and other leaders and then sent to influential people to procure local signatures. Naturally the number and class of signatories vary with the district. The number on this copy compares with the numbers on copies sent to similar areas, such as Earlston and Dunblane, but falls far short of that on a Covenant signed in Maybole. The Carrick Covenant is signed largely by landward people. Other copies have varying proportions of lairds, burgesses and others. It need hardly be added that, although the Covenant movement was a truly national one embracing all classes, it was not democratic in the modern sense. Indeed, at a later stage the Covenanters deplored the emergence of democratic sects in England. The original Covenant was signed first by the noblemen and barons, then by the ministers and burgh delegates, and only later was it offered for general subscription. Class groupings in the arrangement of signatures are apparent in most extant copies. Although the Carrick Covenant is signed by men only, the movement was not confined to men and the Maybole Covenant includes the signatures of a number of women, among them Lady Jean Hamilton, Countess of Cassillis, the subject of the legendary elopement.

There can be no doubt that the crisis which produced the Covenant was a religious issue, just as the driving force of the movement was religious. No other interpretation can explain the enthusiasm with which the Covenant was welcomed by people of all classes in almost every part of Scotland. The Carrick subscribers belong to the class most likely to have imbibed effective religious teaching and most capable of having reasoned on the implications of the religious innovations introduced by Charles I. However, it would be unrealistic to deny the presence of other motives ranging from patriotism, tinged with an early brand of nationalism, to self interest and fear of deprivation. The nobility in particular had many reasons for distrusting Charles, but contemporaries

considered that the great Act of Revocation (1625), which re-annexed all the church and crown lands alienated since 1542, was the ground stone of all the mischief that followed. It has been said that few Scottish families of consequence were unaffected by this measure, and that its immediate effect was to shatter the alliance between crown and nobility and to throw the majority of the nobles on the side of the presbyterian clergy. John, Earl of Cassillis [no. 8], was one of the leading Covenanters and also one of the most consistent. As hereditary bailie of Carrick and leading landowner, he would exert a natural influence over neighbouring heritors and tenants. Carrick rentals show that a large proportion of the signatories held feus or tacks of lands from Cassillis. Significantly, in view of the recent Act of Revocation and possible fears of future raids on property, some of these lands pertained to the regality of Crossraguel and the collegiate church of Maybole. Gilbert Kennedy [no. 23], William Cathcart [no. 27], Mr. Ralph Weir [no. 64], James Corrie [no. 81] and others were or had been in the Earl's service and many of the lairds acted as his *ad hoc* legal agents from time to time. The notary, John Shaw [no. 33], was in constant demand for drafting documents. Such examples could be multiplied and they all show that self-interest if nothing else would urge the lesser men to "coort wi' Kennedy." In fairness it should be added that there is no evidence in the Ailsa Muniments of direct coercion at this stage and the absence of other lairds, equally exposed to influence, argues for a fair degree of independent decision. Indeed, the picture is softened considerably when we find discharges by Thomas Kennedy in Balmainoch [no. 61] to Gilbert Kennedy, the Earl's factor, for a pension bestowed out of his lordship's goodwill and favour for maintaining his son at college. Some of the ties binding Cassillis and the others may well have been the more powerful because based on mutual loyalty and affection.

Religious issues fanned smouldering resentment into active resistance to royal absolutism. James VI. had succeeded in shackling presbyterianism by establishing bishops and enforcing the Five Articles of Perth (1618), of which the most obnoxious to Scottish opinion was that prescribing kneeling to receive communion. Mr. James Inglis, minister at Dailly [no. 49], would have good reason to recall the detested Articles as he penned his signature. In 1620 he had been haled before the Court of High Commission for disobedience to the innovation in ritual and he is reported to have replied defiantly when threatened with banishment or silencing. Charles I., acting in concert with Archbishop Laud and a few Scottish bishops of his own creation, proceeded to make more fundamental alterations in discipline and ritual. In the beginning of 1636 Charles sent down the Book of Canons, which was to replace the Second Book of Discipline, and it was followed in May, 1637, by the Service Book, popularly known as Laud's

Liturgy, which was to be substituted for Knox's Book of Common Order. The instrument of compulsion was to be a new Court of High Commission with wider powers.

Both in regard to method of authorisation and contents the Canons and Service Book were regarded in Scotland as unconstitutional and unacceptable. All the world knows of the reception given to the Service Book in St. Giles on the 23rd of July, 1637. The reaction in Ayrshire was equally emphatic and petitions against the innovations poured into the Privy Council from burghs and parishes throughout the county. On the 8th of October the elders and congregation of Kirkoswald appointed Sir Alexander Kennedy, of Culzean [no. 10], their commissioner to present their supplication "anent canones laithlie come out and a booke of common prayer set out and appointit to be the onlie forme of discipline and divine worschip in this kingdome commanded to be obeyed red and practised in the kirk and congregatiounis thair of Quhairas we vnderstand the saidis canones and buke conteineth dangerous pointis against the discipline practised and religioun professed be ws and our predicessouris in this kingdome according to the canone of holie scripture and quhilk was ratified be actis of parliament and generall assemblies." They prayed the Council to stop the course of the said Canons and Service Book and to free the petitioners from the same and other innovations "so adverse to the puritie and sinceritie of religioun professed amongis ws hithertillis and authorised and approvin be his word and blissing." Their supplication itself alleged that the Service Book drew near to popery in sundry points thus underlining the common opinion in Scotland that the Liturgy was Canterbury amended by Rome. Charles's refusal to conciliate the practically unanimous opposition aroused by his innovations led to the signing of the National Covenant.

Minor variations of spelling excepted, the text of the Carrick Covenant corresponds closely with other extant copies. The document is a lengthy one but may be briefly summarised. The basis of the document is the Negative Confession of Faith of 1581, consisting of a condemnation of the chief tenets of the Church of Rome. The less enthusiastic could hardly refuse to sign without incurring the charge of papistical sympathies. The second part consists of a long catalogue of Acts of Parliament passed against popery and in favour of the "true religion." Most of these confirmed the church's position and were intended to demonstrate that the late innovations were contrary to the constitution and worship of the church as legally acknowledged. The third part, which was the work of Alexander Henderson, minister at Leuchars and later Moderator of the Glasgow Assembly, is the supplementary Covenant and may fairly be called the Covenant proper.

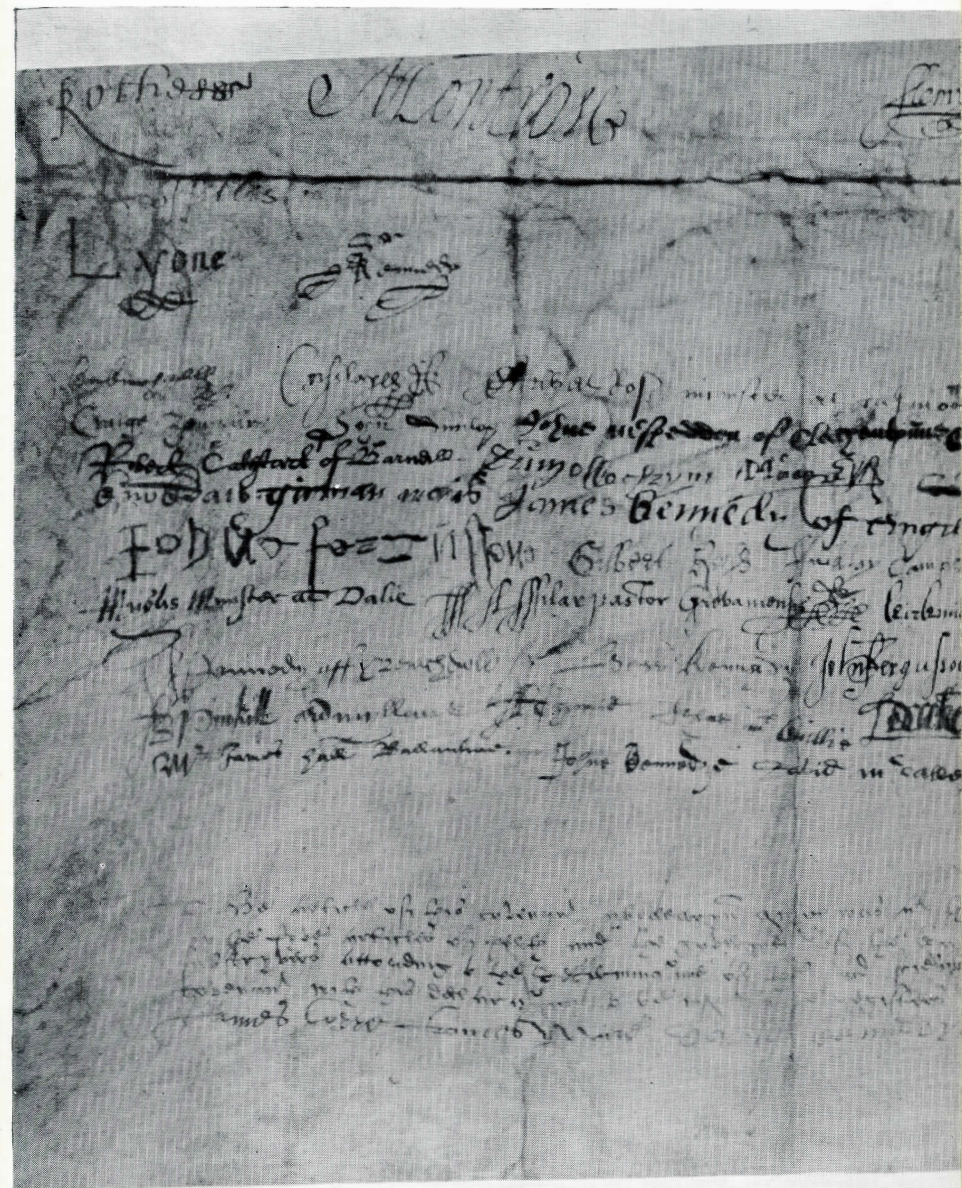
The subscribers to the Carrick and other Covenants swore before God to defend the "true religion" and to recover the purity and liberty of the Gospel as established before the late innovations which were declared to have no warrant by the word of God, to be contrary to the Reformation and Acts of Parliament and tending to the re-establishment of popery and tyranny. They expressly disclaimed any intention of attempting anything that might turn to the dishonour of God or the diminution of the King's greatness. On the contrary they promised to stand to the defence of their sovereign, his person and authority, "*in the defence and preservation of the foresaid true Religion, Liberties and Lawes of the Kingdome.*" Time was to show how stoutly they sought to redeem this pledge but it was also to show that loyalty to church and loyalty to king often proved incompatible and the guarded phraseology of the above oath indicates which loyalty was the more likely to prevail. Again the subscribers swore to stand to the mutual defence and assistance of one another "*against all sorts of persons whatsoever.*" This phrase has a most determined ring and meant a deliberate preparation for all eventualities.

In deference to moderate opinion the Covenant does not actually call for the abolition of the episcopal form of government, but contains a parenthetical clause forbearing the practices of all innovations already introduced in matters of the worship of God or approbation of the corruptions of the government of the church or civil places and power of churchmen until they might be tried in free Assemblies. But opinion hardened against the bishops and correspondence of the period shows that the mass of the people had come to believe that bishops and popery were one and the same thing. Even so inherent a royalist as Montrose declared with almost his last breath that he had cared nothing for bishops and had never intended to advance their interests. "No bishop, no king," might seem a fundamental axiom to Charles and his advisers in London, but the general conviction in Scotland was that the General Assembly was the ordinary remedy prescribed by divine authority for the redress of grievances. Obviously this was the opinion of the members of the presbytery of Ayr when, on the 26th of September, 1638, they constituted Mr. James Bonar, minister at Maybole, Mr. John Fergushill, minister at Ochiltree, and Mr. Robert Blair, minister at Ayr, with the Earl of Cassillis, one of the ruling elders, their commissioners to the Glasgow Assembly. The commission narrates that the presbytery had "*diligently considered the manifold corruptions innovations and disorders disturbing our peace and tending to the overthrow of religion and liberties of the reformed kirk within this realme quhilk hes come to passe speciallie throwe the want of the necessar remedie of generall assemblies alsweall ordinar as pro re nata.*"

The Glasgow Assembly sat from November to December 20, 1638, and some of the results of its labours may be seen in the Glasgow Determination added to the Carrick Covenant below the main body of signatures. The later signatories subscribed according to the determination that the Five Articles of Perth and the government of the kirk by bishops had been abjured and removed and the civil places and power of kirkmen declared to be unlawful. The Glasgow Assembly also abolished the Book of Canons, the Service Book and the Court of High Commission. In short it demolished the entire ecclesiastical edifice reared with such pains by Charles and his father. War was inevitable and the two Bishops' Wars resulted in the concession by the king of all the demands hitherto made by the Covenanters. Divisions and disillusionments were soon to come, but the Covenanters had held together long enough to achieve far more than their leaders could have dreamed at the outset.

The Carrick Covenant is signed mainly by lairds drawn from the nine parishes of Carrick. Colmonell is particularly well represented with about one quarter of the total signatures. There are some tenants and people in the service of the Earl of Cassillis and a small number whose interests did not centre directly in property. Prominent among the non-landed element are the ministers of Colmonell [no. 13], Dailly [no. 49], Girvan [no. 50] and Ballantrae [no. 76]. A few like Andrew McAlexander [no. 31], Alexander Barclay [no. 55] and David Kennedy [no. 70] are representatives of the merchant and professional classes, but most of these had some interests in land or some connexions with landed families in the district. William Gordon, of Craichlaw [no. 28], James Kennedy, of Cruggleton [no. 40] and Alexander McCulloch, of Myrtoun [no. 41] were Wigtownshire lairds, but all three had Carrick connexions. Despite a few notable absentees it is fair to say that this Covenant provides a cross-section of the landed interest in Carrick. Many were related by descent or marriage, and they were in frequent contact on business matters. Their names appear again and again on legal and financial papers in the Ailsa Muniments, and it is obvious that they were no ignorant peasantry but an able and literate class well versed in affairs. Acutely interested in any threat to property but unlikely to embark on foolhardy enterprises, they and others like them formed the backbone of the Covenant movement in the localities of Scotland. Although their estates were in many cases heavily burdened and the inventories of their goods and gear preserved in their recorded testaments may seem unimpressive by modern standards, they were men of substance for their day.

The Covenant was soon to demand sacrifices from them, Sir Alexander Kennedy, of Culzean, and the lairds of Auchindrane.



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Photographed from the original in the Ailsa Muniments, preserved in H.M. General Register House, Edinburgh.

Girvanmains, Ardmillan, Corseclays, Penkill and others were called upon at the time of the Bishops' Wars in 1639 and 1640 to join with the Earl of Cassillis in bonds to Edinburgh merchants "for furnischeing of powther ball match and vther necessar furnischeing for the comoun vse of ws the saidis gentilmen heretouris and vtheris vndersubscryveand for defending and menteaneing of our religioun libertie and lawes of our natioun presentlie now in hand." Cassillis was colonel of the Carrick troop and discharges to him for pay for service in the Bishops' Wars include one by Major William Crawford, of Skeldon [no. 86], who distinguished himself a few years later at Marston Moor. Sir Alexander Kennedy commanded a company and his son Thomas, later Major Thomas Kennedy, of Baltersan, served with the Scottish Army in 1640. One last example may be taken. The James Corrie on this Covenant [no. 81] is probably the Captain James Corrie in Maybole who was killed at the battle of Alford in June, 1645. His testament, dated the 16th of April, 1645, at Maybole, states simply that he had been called out for the public service of kirk and kingdom.

No indication is given of the date or place of signing, but it is inherently unlikely that all signed at the one time or place. Differences of ink, the family and territorial groupings and a double signing by Thomas Kennedy, younger of Kirkmichael [nos. 51 and 75], all suggest that the Covenant circulated to some extent. Some may have signed at Cassillis or other places, but it was more usual for swearing and subscription to take place in the parish churches. In view of the incidence and grouping of signatures and the presence of the four ministers, it may well be that this Covenant was partially signed at the church of Colmonell, then perhaps at Dailly or Girvan, and Ballantrae. The other Carrick ministers would surely have signed had the document been offered for subscription in their parishes. The testament of John McAlexander, of Drummochrin [no. 30], shows that he died in September, 1638, so the main signing must have taken place in the period between March and September, 1638. In all probability the Carrick Covenant was signed about the middle of March, 1638. There is extant a Covenant, probably signed in Ayr, which bears a notarial attestation "*decimo tertio mertii 1638*," and we can be sure that Carrick would not lag far behind.

SIGNATURES ON CARRICK NATIONAL COVENANT.*

- 1st line. 1. *Roths.* John Leslie, 6th Earl of Roths.
2. *Montrose.* James Graham, 5th Earl and afterwards 1st Marquess of Montrose.
3. *Flemyng.* John, 8th Lord Fleming, later 3rd Earl of Wigtown.
4. *Loudoun.* John Campbell, 1st Earl of Loudoun.
5. *Balmerinoch.* John Elphinstone, 2nd Lord Balmerino.
6. *J. Cranstoun.* John, 2nd Lord Cranstoun.
7. *Johnstoun.* James, Lord Johnstone of Lochwood, later Earl of Hartfell.
- 2nd line. 8. *Cassillis.* John Kennedy, 6th Earl of Cassillis.
- 3rd line. 9. *Lyone.* James Lyon of Auldbar.
10. *Sir A. Kennedy.* Sir Alexander Kennedy of Culzean.
- 4th line. 11. *Kirkmichaell.* David Kennedy of Kirkmichael.
12. *Corsclayes.* Robert McAlexander of Corseclayes.
13. *Gilbert Ross, minister at Calmonell.*
14. *Johne Eccles of Kildonand.*
15. *Johne Eccles zungar.* John Eccles, younger of Kildonan.
16. *David Kennedy of Ballimor.*
17. *Dalreoche.* Andrew McAlexander of Dalreoch.
18. *Thomas Kennedy of Pinquhirrie.*
19. *M[r] H. Cathcart.* Mr. Hugh Cathcart, tutor of Carleton.

* I am indebted to Sir James Fergusson, of Kilkerran, Keeper of the Records of Scotland, and Miss A. B. Calderwood, Assistant Keeper, H.M. General Register House, Edinburgh, for advice and assistance in the compilation of this list.

- 5th line. 20. *Craige zoungar.* Gilbert Grahame, younger of Craig.
21. *John Dunlop.* Perhaps a John Dunlop, who was a servitor of the Earl of Cassillis.
22. *Johne McSpedden of Clachantoun.*
23. *Gilbert Kennedy.* Gilbert Kennedy of Danger.
24. *David Cathcart of Glenduisk.*
25. *Johne Grahame off Laglartrie.*
26. *John McBlaine.* Perhaps John McBlane in Drumbain, in the parish of Kirkoswald. The Session Clerk of Kirkoswald in 1638 was a Thomas McBlane.
27. *Williame Cathcart.* William Cathcart in Kirkland of Maybole, prebendary of the collegiate church of Maybole, sometimes described as a servitor of the Earl of Cassillis.
28. *W. Gordoune.* William Gordon of Craichlaw.
- 6th line. 29. *Robert Cathcart of Barneill.*
30. *Dummollochryne.* John McAlexander of Drummochrin.
31. *A. McAllex[ande]r.* Andrew McAlexander, merchant, burgess of Edinburgh, probably brother of John McAlexander of Drummochrin.
32. *Quentein Schaw of Grimet.*
33. *J. Schaw.* John Shaw, notary in Maybole.
34. *J. Shaw.* Perhaps James Shaw, son of above John Shaw and also a writer in Maybole and later in Ayr.
35. *Johne Quhytfuird of Balloch.*
36. *Johne Chalmer of Sawchrie.*
37. *Adame Quhuirde.* Adam Whitefoord in Trochrig.

- 7th line. 38. *Knokdaw.* John Kennedy of Knockdaw.
39. *Giriuan Manis.* Hew Kennedy of Girvanmains.
40. *James Kennedy of Crugiltorne.*
41. *Alexander McCulloche of Myrtoune.*
42. *Craig.* Gilbert Grahame, elder of Craig.
43. *Johne McAllex[ande]r of Dalroche zonger.*
44. *Thomas Ecclis.* Perhaps Thomas Eccles in Barrhill, of Altercannoch.
- 8th line. 45. *Johne Fergusson.*
46. *Gilbert Roiss.*
47. *Findlay Campbill.*
48. *David Kennedy zonger of Balmaclanquhene [Balmac-lanachan].*
- 9th line. 49. *M[r] J. Inglis, minister at Dalie.* Mr. James Inglis, minister at Dailly.
50. *M[r] A. Milar, pastor Grevaniensis.* Mr. Andrew Millar, minister at Girvan.
51. *Kirkmichaell zonger.* Thomas Kennedy, younger of Kirkmichael.
52. *John McIlmone.* Probably John McIlmun, tenant of Croftnook and other lands in Dunure.
53. *Drimmelland.* Hew Kennedy of Drummelane.
54. *Hew Alexander.* Perhaps Hew McAlexander, son of Robert McAlexander of Corse-clays.
55. *Alexander Barclay.* Alexander Barclay, merchant burgess of Edinburgh, indweller in Maybole.

- 10th line. 56. *W. Kennedy off Creachdow.* William Kennedy of Creachdow.
57. *Hew Kennedy.*
58. *John Fergusson.* John Fergusson of Millenderdale.
59. *Thriff.* George Fergusson of Threave.
60. *T. Fergusson.* Thomas Fergusson, younger of Threave.
61. *Thomas Kennedie.* Thomas Kennedy in Balmannoch.
62. *Q. Kennedy.* Quentin Kennedy in Maybole, brother of Hew Kennedy of Drummelane.
63. *Willame Fergusson.* William Fergusson of Auchinsoul.
64. *M[r] Ralph Weir.* Mr. Ralph Weir of Bennane.
65. *Willame McMurrie.* William McMurrie in Drummoren.
- 11th line. 66. *T. B. Pinkill.* Thomas Boyd of Penkill.
67. *Ardmyllane.* Hew Kennedy of Ardmillan.
68. *Al. Thomas.* Alexander Thomas, reader at Ballantrae.
69. *Johne McKuillie.* Probably John McCullie, tenant in Whiterow.
70. *Da. Kennedy.* David Kennedy, admitted surgeon burgess of Edinburgh on the 28th of April, 1641.
71. *Waltir Kennedy.* Walter Kennedy of Knockdon.
72. *Hew Kennedie younger of Bennen.*
73. *Johne Kennedy.*
74. *James Kennedy.* Signature resembles very closely that of James Kennedy, who was a servitor and later factor of the Earl of Cassillis.

75. *Kirkmichaell zonger.* Thomas Kennedy, younger of Kirkmichael.
- 12th line. 76. *Mr. James Hall, Ballantrae.* Mr. James Hall, minister at Ballantrae.
77. *Johne Kennedye.*
78. *David McCawel.*
79. *James Greg.*
80. *James McMeikeine.*

Signatures Below Glasgow Determination.

81. *James Corre.* James Corrie in Maybole, who was at one time a servitor of the Earl of Cassillis, and was probably the Captain James Corrie in Maybole who was killed at the battle of Alford in 1645. He was the younger brother of George Corrie of Kelwood (died c. 1633-4) and so was the uncle of the John Corrie of Kelwood of 1638.
82. *Frances Mure.* Francis Mure of Pennyglen, a younger brother of John Mure of Auchindrane and so a nephew of Sir Alexander Kennedy of Culzean.
83. *David Kennedye of Garrihorne.*
84. *J. Mure Aucheindraine.* John (later Sir John) Mure of Auchindrane.
85. *Knokdaw.* John Kennedy of Knockdaw.
86. *W. Craufurd of Skeldone.* William Craufurd of Skeldon.
87. *R. Kennedy.*