

MAGGIE WALL: A CONSPIRACY THEORY

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A clandestine cooncil gaitherin somewhere in Perthshire 14 April 1657.

Present:

Robert Corrie O'Eglington. Landowner
John McLeish, Judge fae Perth High coort.
James McPherson, Meinister.
Willie Dornack, Colonel fae the local garrison
Lord Donald Strathwillian

The five men sat at the big, weel polished table, their countenances grave and serious.

"Whit are we goin tae dae?" Robert Corrie O'Eglington asked.

"Ah huv nae idea Rab." John McLeish, answered.

"We need tae dae something. We cannae let this go on." Lord Donald stated.

"Ah ken. A freen o' mine whae's a dochter wis tellin me ower 300 guid folk wir condemned as witches in the last few years an burnt or hung. An some because some wee lassie accused them. The juices o' youth rinnin through her body, an she wis listened tae! A hysterical wee lassie, an folk deid." James McPherson, said sadly.

"Whit's the world cumin tae. Whit's Scotland cumin tae that we wid allow sic a thing tae pass?" cooncillor Willie Dornach muttered. "Men, wimen, an even bairns burnt. Ma sojers huv nae stomach fur their ill-daeins.

"Aye..an they want mair, the king an the kirk, they aye want mair." James said.

"We're a learned folk, wie grand auld institutions like oor universities. An whit about the guid folk whae are scunnart, as weel as afeared fur their ain souls. This is a terrible curse, that hus nae ryme nor guid reason tae be allowed tae cairy on." Lord Donald remarked.

"Its a sair affliction, an it's oor ain folk that are sufferin." James burst oot.

"Richt, that's whit we're here tae stop, an by God with his help we will." Lord Donald's voice rose. "Think gentlemen, think an come up wie something tae pit an end tae this affront. We huv twa week afore we gaither again, an ah'll be looking fur a when o' ideas tae that end."

The men noddit, rose quietly, an left the chamber.

Extra ordinary council gaitherin twa weeks eifter

"Weel freens hiv we ony ideas? Time is o'er takin us." Lord Donald stated.

"We cuid petition the council, there maun be ithers that think the same as oor sels." Ever the politition, Willie lookit fur a' the ways tae keep hisel the richt side o' the law.

"Aye the thing wie official objection is, we cuid end up bein accused oorsels." Judge John retorted.

"Whit aboot dain something frae the pulpit James?" Is there ony way could we influence the kirk." Robert asked.

"Ooooh, ah widnae care tae try it, maist are against it, but a when are still fur it, an preach it a' hell fire on the Sabbeth."

"Whit aboot daen something at the source then, cuild we no tak the accusers in haun?"

Broo's furrowed doon as they tackled their ideas. Another 15 meenits went by an they were deep in discussion when Robert held up his haun.

"Gentlemen, Ah maun crave yer indulgence, an ask a favour frae ye a'."

"Ye huv it Rab, whit's in yer thouchts?"

"Weel, there's wan thing Ah want ye tae tak intae yer consideration, an dae it without prejudice. Noo, if ye'll gie me leave." Robert rang the sma hand bell at his side and a maid appeared at the door.

"Wid ye summon ma wife here."

The maid noddit."A meenit Sir." Efter a curtsey she wis awa.

"Yer wife Rab? Whits that gentle wiman tae dae wie ony o' their evils", James asked.

"She's a staid, learned, an guid wiman. Ah telt her o' oor dilemma efter oor last meetin, an yestreen she cam tae me wie sic a bonnie design, it neer tain the breath fae me. Noo ma freens will ye listen tae her?"

They all lookit at each ether, then noddit.

There was a cannie knock at the door and Elsbeth Corrie entered, the men stood an Willie ushered her to a chair. Her demean was respectful and her een wis down cast as she gaithered herself intae the chair.

"Noo gentlemen ye a' ken ma wife, an ye've pledged tae listen, so Elsbeth ma dear the flair belongs tae ye."

"Ah'll be as brief as Ah can, an ye'll no interrupt me till am fienished, an then ye can say whit ye want." She said in a sma voice."Are ye a' agreed?"

Again they a' noddit their assent.

She laid oot her plan and they listened intently. At last she was fienished, and leanit back in her chair, lookin anxiously at the powerful men gaithered about her.

Lord Donald was the first to speak.

"Aye, weel noo, it cuid be done. It wid tak when o' planning, but...it cuid be done."

"Ithers wuid huv tae len a haun, but aye it cuid be done." James was on the borders of lookin relieved.

"There is folk we can trust and they'll be recruited wie care." Willie was already makin plans in his mind.

Twenty meenits later they were awe agreed. It cuid and wid be done.

Third gaitherin 21st May. Elsbeth Corrie attendin.

"Ah'll speak first if naebidy hus ony objection." Willie volunteered. "Ah huv approached fower good men that ken hoo tae keep silent, an are willin tae go along wie us. Twa fur the Jail hoose an twa fur the coort." He sat doon.

James stood up.

"Ah'll mak arrangements tae procure a body, an a similar lookin wiman for the coort appearance. The maisterless folk under the toon brig are thankit fur the help Ah gie, an are willin tae help by bein the accusers. Ah'd trust these folk wie ma life. Och! an ah'll be gein the wuman comfort in her cell afore the burnin. "

It wis Judge John's turn.

"Ah'll mak shair ah try the case, an question the accusers in a mainer that's eloquent and pertaintant....Withoot bein ower obstreperous."

Robert spoke "Elsbeth an ma'sel will talk tae the jailor and executioner and discern whit way their minds lie and see whit we can dae tae secure their allegiance. There nicht be some sma remuneration involved though."

Lord Donald sat writin a' the information doon.

"Attention tae detail gentlemen, is the key. Ah'll arrange fur a fictional lady tae be brocht intae existence, an dae the coordinating every step o' the way. Are we a' ready tae pit this plan intae action?"

"Haud on a meenit," said Elsbeth, "Whit are we goin tae cry this Lady?"

Efter a breith Elsbeth herself whispered softly, "We'll cry her Maggie Wall."

Aw the men stood an liftit their glesses.

"Tae Elsbeth Corrie, an oor success." Lord Donald said and they drank.

Elsbeth smiled and raised her ain gless. "Ahm afeard fur ye aw gentlemen, but ah will pray fur ye. By the will o' God an yer guid sels we will o'ercome a' that's in front o' us, so fare thee weel in a'ye dae. She drained her gless.

A month later everything wis set.

The accusation had been made, and the woman arrested and flung in jail. The trial was set and the witnesses well prepared, Judge John McLeish presiding.

Maggie Wall was brought into court. A portly old woman, gray, dirty hair keekin oot fae her bunnet and fallin doon ower her face, her clase filthy and worn. A pair lookin soul.

The accusers werna muckle better, but they played their part and held their ain, wie the questions of Judge McLeish. As was proved, the expectations of the folk in the court room, carried the day, and the judgment wis handed doon... Maggie Wall wis tae be burnt the day efter.

That nicht the reverend James wis in the Jail tae comfort pair Maggie Wall fae Dunning. He had brought wie him a widden kist tae use as an alter table and he stayed wie her well into the wee sma hours. When a' the streets wir empty his carriage wis ca'ed fur, and baith he and the alter wir pit safely aboard.

Early morning twa sodgers were stackin the wid and peat roon a central widden pole. By nine o'clock a sma crowd had gathered... and Maggie Wall was oxtert oot the jail and dragged aff fur her burnin. Her heid wis doon, her matted hair covered her face and her body was limp wie despair. She was tied tae the stake, and mercy wis gein, she wis strangled by the executioner. Mair tar, and wid furby was piled on, and Maggie Wall was set a blieze.

They had pullt it aff.

The body that was burnt wis an old woman whae had deid unner the city brig, twa days afore, there was aye a body to be foon among the pair o' the city. The woman who had played her part in court as Maggie Wall, wis back hame in Johnston, carried awa by James whilst hidden in the alter kist. The same box which had taken the deid body intae the jail the nicht afore.

It was a' at an end, except for the building o' a large monument in minding o' Maggie Wall set up by an unkent body or bodies in Dunning Perthshire.

They gathered wan mair time and with quiet sermon they thankit the Lord for his mercy and guidance.

Judge John had made shair a papers fae the trial vanished. In actual fact, Maggie Wall didna exist as a witch in the offeecial records.

Maggie Wall was the last witch burnt at the stake in Scotland, and aye there a real mystery about her deith. There is nae record o' her trial, and nae offeecial mention of her name, at a time when this was seen to be of the utmaist importance.

No lang after her deith, veesitors tae Dunning were asking about Maggie, they were confoondit as nane o'the villagers kent wha she wis and the meinister o' the parish maintained it was a hoax. He was nearer to the truth than he ever could have imagined.

But somebody lued "Maggie Wall" because in actual fact, there's a wreath, and muckle mair, laid each year at her monument by persons unkent, with the inscription cerd saying "In mind o' Maggie Wall who was burnt by the kirk in the name of Christianity."

Mibby it is in mind o' aw the pair wretches wha suffert at the hauns o' the ungodly.