

My name is Christian Fletcher.

'If Cromwell himself should rap upon our door, I, Christian Fletcher, will keep Scotland's Honours safe hid at Kinneff.' This was my pledge.

If I just kept moving I knew I could do it. If soldiers stood before me I had to brazen it out. It's six miles or so from Dunnottar to Kinneff. Castle to Kirk in less than two hours if I didn't panic and if I could bear the weight.

Elizabeth Ogilvie, my friend and wife of the castle governor, had that morning sent notice to me to come and collect flaxen linen and thread. I held down the fear in my heart. This was our signal that the garrison would soon fall and that Anne Lindsay had safely conveyed away the King's papers, stitched into her belt, as we had planned.

Now - I was to play my part. I was to smuggle the Honours of Scotland from under Cromwell's nose, carry them home and hide them away. My husband, the Reverend James Granger, had agreed to keep the crown, the sceptre and the sword of state hidden at the wee Kirk in Kinneff. I confess I was excited and terrified by my errand.

It was February: bright, with a steep wind over the sea and the ground crisp with a hard frost. I'd taken my husband's mare for she was strongest and even she was slipping on the icy coastal track. I noted the hundreds of Cromwell's soldiers stationed in siege of the castle. I was careful to be friendly and wish them peace and God's grace as I passed amongst them. I put my faith in my position as the minister's wife, on a parish errand, to deflect any suspicion of my journey.

Elizabeth met me with a heartening smile and we made our way to her private chamber. There was no time for chatter as we set about preparing the precious cargo.

The gold crown weighed heavy at four pounds and I couldn't believe I was to carry it. The sceptre was strong but delicate, almost three feet long and capped by a crystal glass orb. It was like a magical wand. In fact, the whole event seemed to have a wondrous spell cast upon it.

The crown went under my apron where my thick cloak covered its bulk. The sceptre, swaddled in flaxen thread, passed remarkably well for a distaff. With a load of cloth across my

mare's back, it looked for all the world as if the minister's wife had been to collect the flax for parish distribution.

The rocky path along the cliffs was in the last of the sun now and the frost melted away. I kept up a steady pace on the sure-footed mare, praying to God that none would suspect or stop me. I was ready to toss all my treasures into the sea if there was any threat of being pursued.

By dusk I was home, elated at my safe passage but knowing we still had much to do. James was already inside the Kirk and had the pavement stones lifted in front of the pulpit for the hiding place. We put the precious pair to bed, all snuggled down and lovingly swathed like new babes.

But we looked down at the re-laid stones with dismay. The mould had been so disturbed around them that it was obvious, even in the lamplight, that there had been a burying of some sort! Carefully, we cleared away all the mould 'til it looked all of a piece as it was before, James said prayers and we went to our bed, weary and watchful.

A month later, I returned to the castle with my serving woman, to carry away the sword of state. Governor Ogilvie had ordered the blade to be halved and packed in two pieces as it was near ten feet long, cruelly heavy and impossible to disguise. My trusted serving woman, waiting on the shore below the steep castle walls, received the weighty parcels into her creel of dense seaweed. Reaching Kinneff, again unsuspected, James and I interred the sword beneath two flat stones at the back of the Kirk, clearing the disturbed mould away as before. There was nothing to do now but wait and pray.

God knows we'd all be dead if Cromwell had found what we had done.

It was in May that year of 1652 that Dunnottar finally surrendered. When the Honours were nowhere to be found, I knew that Elizabeth would give nothing away. She was imprisoned by Cromwell and I never saw her again. My only hope was that the wondrous spell the treasures cast would keep them secret.

I wonder whether, if I had told my husband that every three months for the next nine years we'd need to lift the heavy pavement stones, take out the precious parcels from their earthen cots and clean them to keep the mould from them, he'd have refused to hide them! But

somehow this strange and self-imposed observance became our joint duty to Scotland; a way of serving our beloved nation and feeding the faith in its future. One day we believed these gifts of service would be acknowledged for the acts of love that they were.

**Christian Fletcher c.1619 – 1691**

**Alexandra Mathie**