

# Historic Scotland podcast: Episode 8 transcript

## Chapter 1

### **Sarah:**

Hello, and welcome to the Historic Scotland podcast. My name is Sarah MacGillivray. I'm an actor and writer with a passion for people, place and story.

Each episode, we've travelled across Scotland to a different site, unearthing their surprising tales, from Edinburgh to Stirling to Huntly, we've covered an awful lot of castles over the past few months and today we've ended up here at Kildrummy.

It used to be a mighty stronghold in the north-east. Kildrummy Castle was a key seat of power and the site of dramatic sieges during Scotland's Wars of Independence.

We'll hear from historians Morvern French and Chris Tabraham, who'll help us piece together the events of that turbulent time, shed light on the extraordinary leadership of one Christina Bruce and uncover what life might have been like behind the battlements.

## Chapter 2

01:00

### **Morvern:**

The shield-shaped plan helped the defenders to be able to control what was happening outside the walls because they could see all of the points where the attackers could come from.

### **Chris:**

It was really a royal castle, built with royal approval, and to be used by the royal house whenever they needed to come north.

## Chapter 3

01:30

### **Sarah's intro:**

Today, Kildrummy Castle is a ruin, but its vast curtain walls and imposing gatehouse speak to its former grandeur, built to command the surrounding landscape and protect those within.

This is Chris.

### **Chris:**

Kildrummy, it was actually called Kindrummy, which means it was at the head of a ridge. And that ridge was the starting point, if you were going north, to go into lands which had really struggled, were really struggling to come to terms with the fact that we're now part of Scotland proper, rather than Moray, which had this sort of independent sort of history to it.

So Kildrummy was, unlike today, when, you know, Kildrummy feels as though it's in the middle of Aberdeenshire and the middle of north-east Scotland. You know, a thousand years ago, it was at the edge. And that's why we have such an impressive castle. It doesn't look as impressive as it did in the old days because it suffered quite badly.

So Kildrummy is really a frontier in the 12th century and 13th century, rather than being in the middle of something, as it appears to friends of Historic Scotland as they go up Strathdon to visit it.

### **Sarah:**

Yeah, you do see it now as being in the middle of something. That's really interesting that it was actually on the edge. And so was it built there because it was then on the edge? It was the final sort of...

### **Chris:**

It was built there. Well, we don't know who built it, but it was somebody important. Probably the Earl of Mar in the middle of the 13th century.

It could have been the Bishop of, I think it was Moray, Gilbert, who was the big cheese up there in the early 13th century.

It's possible that the chapel might have been built by him. It's such an impressive part of the castle that, you know, the chapel does stand out as being the handiwork of somebody who's tremendously spiritual, but also somebody who had the wherewithal, the wealth to build it.

It also doesn't sit with the rest of the castle quite easily. It's a bit of an angle. But certainly whoever built it built it around about 1250 is our best guess. We have no evidence one way or the other. And then it would be at the edge of Scotland proper.

### **Sarah:**

That strategic location made Kildrummy not just a stronghold, but a statement. And what a statement it was, not just in purpose, but in sheer scale and splendour.

### **Chris:**

We're talking of somebody with a lot of money, throwing it at building Kildrummy Castle. There aren't many castles around to compare it with. Those that are don't come into the quality of Kildrummy.

The masonry of the curtain wall. The curtain wall is the great, solidly thick wall that surrounds what would have been the castle courtyards with all their buildings and residences and paraphernalia.

There's stretches of the curtain wall survive very well at Kildrummy. And they're built of lovely, top-quality ashlar stone, big squared chunks. And you don't get that very often.

The quality of the towers that are built to project from it. Yes, the castle was built for defence, but it was built primarily to impress and overawe those who gazed upon it from outside, whether that was the native inhabitants of the area of Strathdon, to cow them into some sort of submission, that the lord in this castle was very, very important and very, very powerful.

But it was also to do with imposing its authority, or the castle's owner's authority, on those who came to seek to grasp it, to attack it and take it.

And that happened several times in Kildrummy's history, with a chequered history of success. But by and large, it did the business. The first record of a siege at Kildrummy was shortly after Robert the Bruce had become King of Scots in 1306.

He saw Kildrummy as being one of the main assets of his crown in the north, probably *the* main asset in the north. And he even risks sending his queen, his second wife, to Kildrummy

for her safety, along with other members of his entourage, including Christian Bruce, I think, who you are going to feature in the podcast as well.

So he wouldn't have sent them to Kildrummy if he thought that they were going to be in the least bit at risk of being captured by Edward of England, Edward I of England – Hammer of Scots, as he later became known.

So who sent his own son, Edward II, the future Edward II, to the castle in 1306 to 'ding it doon', to cast it down and grab Lady Bruce and her children.

Will you be mentioning John Barbour and his great poem, *The Bruce*? Because there's a lovely quote there. I've got it somewhere, but a quote.

*When the King of England was told how they meant to hold the castle, he was extremely angry and ordered that all the garrison should be altogether destroyed without ransom.*

*The English went to the castle forthwith, besieging it vigorously and attacking it often and strongly, but still they failed to take it.*

*For those within were worthy and defended themselves doughtily, counterattacking their enemies often, so that some were struck and wounded and some slain.*

*Many a time they would come out and have a fight at the outworks, often killing and wounding their foes.*

*In brief, they conducted themselves so bravely that those outside despaired and meant to go back to England, for they saw that the castle was so strong, knew that it was so well provisioned, and the men inside defending themselves so well that they had no hope of taking it.*

And that's from the horse's mouth. That's from somebody who wasn't alive at the time of the siege, but was Archdeacon of Aberdeen. And he would have got all that information about Kildrummy from people who were probably there at the time defending the place.

## Chapter 4

09:58

### Sarah's intro:

The poetic account brings those scenes to life. Defenders hurling stones from the battlements, standing firm against overwhelming odds. And it's not hard to see why they succeeded when you look at the castle's defences.

## **Chris:**

Yes, it was a high wall as well. But in addition to that, John Barbour, the poet, does mention, a little later on, the wall was embattled, that it was fortified specifically, probably for the siege.

They would have brought out huge timbers and constructed a battlement on the top of the wall, the wall walk, which they could then have sheltered behind while they were attacking the enemy beyond.

And he mentions specifically it was the battlement was both within as well as on the outside. So even if the enemy got in through the curtain wall, through the entrance, or through forcing a gap in the wall somewhere in the defences, the defenders would still be up there, you know, 20, 30 feet above the ground, chucking things down on them, like boiling oil and stones and what have you, from this embattlement.

So that's a sort of near contemporary eyewitness account of how strong the curtain wall was. It was also defended by towers that projected from the curtain wall, huge towers.

The castle, as I said earlier, was intended primarily as a great impressive residence of nobility, of power and might in the landscape. But it needed to have accommodation for people who were at the top of the tree, of the pecking order in Scotland, such as the Earl of Mar, whose castle it nominally was, although it was really a royal castle, built with royal approval, and to be used by the royal house whenever they needed to come north.

So the towers were there for accommodation, but they also provided an element of defence by providing sighting views from the battlements along the main strand of curtain wall to keep engineers away.

In the 1306 siege, the most important English artillery man was there on the outside, building what we call mangonels and trebuchets.

But Thomas Houghton, the English artillery man, was at Kildrummy and he would have been making these machines to chuck at this wall and chuck at the towers. But they singularly failed to do so.

Another reason why Kildrummy is so powerful in its passive strength is the great ditch that fronted the curtain wall.

So I think there's quite a good stretch still on the eastern side of Kildrummy, where you can walk down into the ditch. You can just imagine the kind of hurdle that that rocky cut ditch

would have presented. It might have had water in it. I think it certainly had water in part of it. The back den probably had water, but the rest of it would be just a huge dry ditch. So that if you had to get to the curtain wall with your 'sow', which was a sort of a battering ram, you would have had to fill up the ditch with rubble and stuff before you managed to bring the sow right up to the wall to start hammering away or to let the miners, the sappers on the attacking side, hack their way through the stonework.

And all this, of course, ate up valuable time. If you've got an armed force in the field in Aberdeenshire, what, 550 miles from the Tower of London, it's taking you an awful lot of time and money to keep them there. And the longer you can make them attack your wall without getting anywhere, the more successful your siege will be.

### **Sarah:**

Yeah. So would there have been people whose job it was to actually dig that huge ditch, to dig that huge moat?

### **Chris:**

Oh, when building the castle, yes. Yes, they would have had a huge workforce there, working flat out because the longer they were there, the more expensive it would be.

So the Earl of Mar would have been shelling out an awful lot of money to build the castle. It would have taken maybe about five or six seasons of work, summer seasons of work, to get all the materials together from all over Aberdeenshire and Firth of Aberdeenshire. Some of the stonework may have come from Moray, the Moray Plain, that all the timbers had to be felled to create it. So it's a lot of work and a lot of expense.

## **Chapter 5**

16:03

### **Sarah's intro:**

As Chris reflects on the immense effort it took to build Killdrummy, it's clear it wasn't just a local marvel. It stood shoulder to shoulder with the greatest castles in Europe.

## Chris:

Can I maybe just add one thing, which I think the friends might appreciate?

Kildrummy is one of the most impressive, well, was one of the most impressive castles built in the age of castle building.

You know, the classical age of castle building was the 13th century. And it started off in France and it spread across Western Europe. And wherever the Crusaders were fighting, that's where they built some of the best castles.

The fact that we've got some wonderful castles in Scotland is largely because the Scots were very much pro-French and not very pro-English.

They used to be okay with the English, but gradually the English began to have designs on Scotland as an adjunct to the Kingdom of England, and most notably Edward I, who came to the throne in the 1270s, and was at first friendly with people like Robert Bruce, but then soon fell out with them.

So the Scots then went back to their old friends, the French, and the to-ing and fro-ing between Scots lords and France was quite considerable.

The other castle which is so like Kildrummy is Dirleton in East Lothian. That was built by a chap called John de Vaux. His very name is French. It came from a place called Vallibos or Vaux in Normandy.

And he was very friendly with the French king. And through that, through his contact, the French king, he became the guardian of the French lady who became Queen of Scots, Marie de Coucy, who was the daughter of the great Duke Enguerrand de Coucy, who built one of the most spectacular castles anywhere in Europe.

Unfortunately, the Germans in the First World War got to it and largely destroyed it. But fortunately, two Scottish architects, David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross, got to it before the Germans and fully recorded it. So we've got a wonderful record of this castle, which is near Amiens in northern France.

I went there when I was 15, quite by mistake, but I wish I'd spent more time looking at the remains. There wasn't much left of it then. But Coucy-le-Château was one of the most spectacular castles, and it was built by Duke Enguerrand.

John de Vaux of Dirleton must have seen it quite frequently because he would have accompanied Queen Marie across the Channel to see her dad and the family back home on regular visits. And he thought, hmm, this is rather a nice castle. I'll build something like it myself.

And he did at Dirleton, a smaller version of Coucy-le-Château, or what's left of his original castle. You can see where he got his ideas from.

Now, Jean de Coucy must have known the Earl of Mar, who built Kildrummy. And he can see, or through the king, Alexander II, must have fed his contacts with France through to these other lords.

So perhaps Kildrummy owes its presence in Scotland to Jean de Coucy and through him to the King of France and Duke Enguerrand in Amiens.

So we're talking of two great castles in Scotland, which rank among the best in Europe.

## Chapter 6

20:56

### **Sarah's intro:**

So, from the heart of France to the highlands of Aberdeenshire, ideas, architecture and ambition travelled, shaping Kildrummy into one of Scotland's finest medieval fortresses. But as well as its incredible architecture, it also played home to some important people.

### **Morvern:**

Hi, I'm Morvern French. I'm the Properties Historian at Historic Scotland.

### **Sarah:**

To understand the siege of Kildrummy, we need to get to know the remarkable woman at its heart. Christina Bruce, or Christian Bruce as some sources call her, wasn't just a sister to Robert the Bruce – she was a formidable political and military figure in her own right.

### **Morvern:**

Christina Bruce, also known as Christian Bruce. She was the daughter of Marjorie, Countess of Carrick and Robert VI Bruce.

So she was the sister of the famous Robert Bruce, who later became Robert I. He was Robert VII Bruce. There was a lot of Robert Bruces.

So her father was Lord of Annandale, so they were a family based in south-west Scotland.

We don't know when exactly she was born, but she was certainly born by 1293 because her mother was dead by then.

And also, Christina was married by 1305 and she had to be 12 when she was married. So she was at least 12 in 1305.

Her first husband was Sir Christopher Seton, who was a Bruce adherent in the First War of Independence.

## **Sarah:**

Okay, how's your history? Let's rewind a little. In 1286, Scotland was thrown into chaos. King Alexander III had died suddenly and his only heir was his young granddaughter, known as the Maid of Norway.

She was meant to take the throne, but she died on her journey to Scotland. That left the kingdom without a clear ruler.

To help decide who should be king, the Scottish nobles invited Edward I of England to step in and arbitrate.

Edward chose John Balliol, but he didn't get the obedient puppet he expected. Balliol resisted Edward's interference, and in 1296, Edward had him removed.

This marked the start of the First War of Independence. Though it wasn't just Scotland versus England, it was a messy conflict, with Scottish families fighting each other, switching sides and seeking power.

The Bruces, the Balliols and the Comyns were all major players. During this time, Christina's married to Christopher Seton. He's involved in the military and political struggles of the time, fighting alongside Bruce supporters against English forces.

Fast forward to 1306. Robert the Bruce, Christina's brother, declares himself King of Scots. Christopher is captured and executed by the English. Things are not going to plan.

Robert the Bruce was quickly defeated and forced into hiding. His supporters were scattered.

With Robert on the run, the Bruce women, including Christina, Robert's wife Elizabeth, his daughter Marjorie, their sister Mary and Isabella MacDuff, the woman who had crowned Robert, all fled together. Their first stop, Kildrummy Castle.

Kildrummy was a vital stronghold for the Bruce cause, but it wasn't safe for long. They heard that Prince Edward, the future Edward II, was coming to besiege it.

The women escaped just in time, heading north, possibly aiming to reach Norway, where their sister Isabella was queen, but they were captured and taken to England. Christina Bruce was imprisoned in a manor in Lincolnshire, alone and held there for eight years.

Back in Scotland, Kildrummy Castle fell to Edward's forces, but the war wasn't over.

In 1314, Robert the Bruce won a huge victory at the Battle of Bannockburn. With new power, he negotiated a massive hostage swap, trading English prisoners to get his family back. Christina finally returned home.

Are we keeping up?

Not long after, Robert granted Christina a lordship, the Garioch, a territory just east of Kildrummy. It's likely he chose this land deliberately. The Bruce family had an ancestral claim to the area, and Kildrummy had once sheltered Christina in Scotland's darkest hour.

In 1326, Christina married again to a leading Bruce supporter, who would go on to become guardian of Scotland, one of the highest positions in the land.

The First War of Independence officially ended in 1328, when Robert's young son, David, was married to the sister of England's new king, Edward III.

But peace was short-lived. Robert died in 1329, and with five-year-old David on the throne, Scotland was vulnerable again.

In 1332, the castle's enemies returned. The disinherited, nobles who'd lost their lands during Bruce's reign, launched an invasion.

Their leader was Edward Balliol, son of the old King John Balliol, and they had support from England.

Once again, Scotland and places like Kildrummy Castle found themselves caught in the storm.

Phew!

So, by the 1330s, Christina's role in the Wars of Independence deepened. Now married to Andrew Murray, one of Scotland's guardians, she found herself once again close to the heart of power.

And when Kildrummy Castle came into her possession, that influence took a dramatic and very public turn.

## **Morvern:**

So we've got, still in Scotland, you've got Andrew Murray acting as guardian of the kingdom. He's married to Christina Bruce, and she's the aunt of David II. And it's unclear when exactly she gained possession of Kildrummy Castle, but it was certainly in her possession by September 1335, possibly before.

And the reason that she was given this castle is because the Bruces had a historical connection to the earldom of Mar, which was the earldom that Kildrummy was the seat of.

So Robert I, his first marriage before he married Elizabeth de Burgh, had been to Isabella of Mar, daughter of the earl. And then another one of Robert and Christina's sisters was the mother of the 8th Earl of Mar.

So this means that they had a sort of family connection and Christina was the great aunt by marriage of the 9th Earl of Mar by the time that all of this happened in 1335. But he was away in England at this point, and he was a child, so he wasn't really involved in any of these events.

Okay, so we know that in 1335 Christina Bruce held Kildrummy and that she was besieged there by David Strathbogie. And the main chronicle source for this was written by Andrew Wyntoun, who was a cleric at Loch Leven and he was writing this in the 1420s, so quite a few decades after the fact, but we can get to that later.

So Andrew Wyntoun wrote what's called the *Original Chronicle* and it has quite a lot of detail about this siege. He's talking about the few castles that remain in the Bruce hands and he said:

*The third castell wes Kindromy*

*Dame Cristiane þe Bruys stoutly*

*Held wiþe knyghtis and sqwyeris*

## **Sarah:**

I love that. So that's like *knyghtis and sqwyeris*.

## **Morvern:**

Yeah. So this is medieval Scots and he says:

*Greiffit þare fais on seire maneris*

which means they hurt their foes in many ways, the knights and the squires, and then he says... in the other manuscript version, he describes them:

*Reddit about þaim weil þe meris*

which means they were good at protecting the boundaries from the attackers.

The bigger chunk of text, I'll just read it straight through without ... and then we can talk about it after, but the bit that I just read, that tells us first that Christina was in command of these knights and squires, and that they were actively defending the castle by attacking the besiegers. They weren't just sitting inside hoping they would go away. Christina was saying 'right get out there and start attacking' and it's possibly by firing arrows or other missiles at them, and we know from the archaeological remains that Kildrummy had several very high towers and that the shield-shaped plan helped the defenders to be able to control what was happening outside the walls because they could see all of the points where the attackers could come from. And then at the back of the castle, there was a steep ditch, so nobody could come from the back.

## **Sarah:**

What we learn from Andrew Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle* is that Christina wasn't passively waiting behind the castle walls. She was leading, directing, fighting, and her resistance would prove crucial, not only for her own safety, but for the entire Bruce cause.

Let's introduce another character to this soap opera, though. David Strathbogie. He belongs to the noble Strathbogie family, an influential Scottish noble house, holding land in Aberdeenshire and the north-east of Scotland. David Strathbogie himself was known as the Earl of Atholl, a title that held considerable regional power and responsibility. The earls of Atholl were key figures in the governance and defence of their territories.

## **Morvern:**

And then later on in the *Chronicle*, Wyntoun says:

*Now ga we to þe Erll Davy,  
That semblit till him gret cumpany,  
And raid rudely oure all þe land  
Sum quhile, men said, with thre thousand;  
And sa till assege Kindrummy  
He schupe him with his men stoutly.  
Thare Cristiane þe Brufs wiþin,  
That thocht to lat him in to wyn,  
Maid stout and manly resistens,  
And wichtly set for hir defens,  
And oftare chasit þaim without  
Than þai did þaim within, but dout.*

So what's happening here is, it starts by saying Strathbogie's assembled all these men, and he's raiding the surrounding lands. He's violent, he's a fearsome attacker and then he makes way towards Kildrummy, like sort of with intent to take it.

Then we've got Dame Christian the Bruce within and it's saying that she is determined not to allow him entry and she '*maid stout and manly resistens*', which is Wyntoun's way of saying she was just as good as a man, which sounds kind of offensive, but I think he meant it as a compliment.

*And wichtly set for hir defens* – strongly set for her defence.

And then we've got her men chasing the attackers without. And then in the other manuscript version of the same chronicle, it says *scaphet*, so injured. They actually fought outside the castle walls.

So yes, it's a very active defence. She's sending her men out to skirmish with the besiegers. And she's got the supposedly masculine qualities of strategy. She's thinking in advance how she's going to stop Strathbogie getting in. And then she's telling her men what to do. And they are successful in doing that.

So she would have made use of the defensive properties of the castle. So, as I already said, she would have made use of the tall towers, the shield-shaped plan, the well-predicted gatehouse of the twin towers at the front.

So she would have had a good view of what was happening all around the surrounding countryside.

She might have even known about Strathbogie's approach in advance because she would have had scouts out there that would come and tell her what was happening.

So she was prepared for this to happen and one of the dangers of being besieged is that you might run out of food and be forced to surrender. So it's possible that she also prepared for Strathbogie's advance by getting in loads of supplies to be able to last as long as possible.

And then what happened was that while Strathbogie was attacking, Christina's husband, Andrew Murray, he was in West Lothian at that point, negotiating with the other side. He heard about the siege and he said, 'right, I'm off'. And then he started making his way up north to help Christina out.

So he took a load of men with him and then drew Strathbogie away from Kildrummy and they met at Culblean, which is about 30 kilometres south of where Kildrummy is. And so they had the Battle of Culblean there on the 30th of November 1335. And Christina sent some of her men to this as well. So she sent 300 men to assist Andrew Murray in this battle.

And Strathbogie was killed. So, yeah, it was, for the Bruce side, this was a huge success because Strathbogie was a really powerful disinherited leader. He had a lot of support. And he was also a claimant to the throne even. So to get rid of him was a big boost. And because of Christina's defence and then Andrew Murray building on that defence by defeating Strathbogie in battle, this gave the Bruce side the initiative to sort of regain the upper hand in the Second War of Independence.

So they started taking back more castles. This included Andrew Murray's castle at Bothwell in 1337. But before that one of the first things he did after he relieved Christina at Kildrummy was he went over to Lochindorb and started besieging Strathbogie's widow, Katherine Beaumont.

So she was at Lochindorb, which is an island castle. It's a very atmospheric location. She was cut off on this island and she possibly had her and Strathbogie's infant son with her there as well – also called David. So Andrew Murray set up a siege camp to harass Katherine Beaumont inside this castle and then he sort of went off and left them to do that and she was under siege for many months, and she wasn't relieved until midway through 1336. Edward III and Katherine's father came and rescued her and Andrew Murray kind of ran away because he wasn't about to tangle with Edward III at that point.

Anyway, so the war didn't end completely at that point. This was the 1330s. It didn't finish until 1357, with the Treaty of Berwick, but Christina certainly played a role in turning the Bruce fortunes around in those early stages when it was really... they were in real danger of

being utterly defeated before this. And so she kind of held Strathbogie at bay long enough for Andrew Murray to come up and dispose of him and put the Bruces in a much stronger position.

### **Sarah:**

And Christina wasn't alone in this kind of leadership. History records a number of medieval women who took up arms, or commanded those who did, to defend their homes and their causes.

### **Morvern:**

Agnes Randolph was quite famous in her defence of Dunbar because she was defending it against the Earl of Salisbury. And he besieged her for several months.

And she would sort of do things to mock him. Like she was supposed to be the one that was running out of food from Salisbury's perspective, but she would send out food to him and say, 'are you hungry? Come on in'.

And it was obviously a trap. Like as soon as he came to get the food, her defenders would attack him. So he didn't go.

And she also did things like, so when he was firing stones at the walls, she would get her ladies to come out and dust the debris off with their napkins, just as if to say, 'oh, this is such a small dent on the walls'.

She's quite funny.

So Salisbury said if you don't surrender, this castle, we've got your brother, the Earl of Moray, hostage, we're going to kill him and she said, 'oh brilliant then I'd be Countess of Moray, that's fine'.

But that actually, in another scenario that did happen. Another besieged woman is Lady Seton at Berwick. She wasn't alone, her husband was there too leading the defence but their two sons were held by the English and they said 'look we've got your sons, you'd better surrender', and she is said to have said 'look we can always have more sons' and then the sons were executed. It's sort of seen as in the chronicles this is her putting the cause above any personal interest so she's sort of heroic in that way. It's not seen as a bad thing that she basically sacrificed her children.

I was just going to say, we have these other examples of women as military leaders making decisions in siege scenarios so what this means is that Christina Bruce is not alone and also in the chronicle accounts of the siege of Kildrummy, none of the chronicles say 'oh it's so terrible that Strathbogie was besieging a woman'. None of them say that because it was just accepted that the woman would step into this role. It was sort of part of an aristocratic woman's responsibilities. In peacetime, she would look after the home in terms of managing the staff and making sure it was supplied and looking after guests. In wartime, those skills were transferable so different staff – it's more military and she has to strategise and give orders. It's very similar to the peacetime role, except a bit more pressure.

And, as we know, Andrew Murray went on to besiege another woman himself, so he obviously didn't think it was that terrible a thing to do.

So what we've got here is Christina sort of marrying these domestic skills with military skills and putting them together in a very unique situation. Unique in terms of it's not something she would be doing every day, but she has the skills and the experience to do this. And by this point she's in her 40s at least, so she's an experienced woman, an experienced household manager, and she's got that loyalty and perseverance as part of a member of the Bruce family.

### **Sarah:**

That's interesting because I was thinking that she's such an important figure of the Bruce family, seems to be, but I've never heard of her.

And yeah, I'm just wondering why or how she has been recorded. If you could speak to that, that'd be great.

### **Morvern:**

Well, in the English chronicle tradition, she's completely unnamed. She's not even given a name, which you might think, oh, well, maybe the English chroniclers didn't know about her.

But then when you come to the Scottish chronicles, if we go back to the earlier ones, there's John of Fordun who wrote *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation* in the late 14th century.

So he was quite close in time to this event. And he was also based in Aberdeen. So you might expect that he would know about the history of Aberdeenshire. He doesn't name Christina either. He only says that Andrew Murray learnt that his castle with his wife was

being besieged. So he made ready to go and relieve it. And that's basically it. It's a bit rubbish.

And then the other big chronicle that gets written in the 1440s is *Scotichronicon* by Walter Bower. He was abbot of Inchcolm in the Firth of Forth, and he sort of continued Fordun's chronicle, but then added in bits from other sources.

So he talks quite a lot about David Strathbogie. I could read what he says.

*It is impossible to grasp from a brief account how many tyrannical and cruel acts this earl perpetrated against the people. For some he disinherited, some he imprisoned in dungeons, some he even banished and murdered; and in the end he ordered the destruction of all freeholders of the land without fail. But, as it is said in the proverb:*

*A prize disgracefully won does not bring good results,*

*because when God was wanting to put an end to his evil deeds, Atholl finally began to besiege the castle of Kildrummy.*

So you think, oh, this is great, we've got this panto villain sort of destroying all the land around. He's coming towards Kildrummy. You think it's going to be really dramatic, the description of the siege. It's not at all by Bower. He doesn't say anything about Christina or the siege. He just says... he talks about how 300 men travelled from Kildrummy to Culblean. It doesn't say who sent them. It's very sort of an anticlimax with Walter Bower.

So we've got remaining still Andrew Wyntoun's *Original Chronicle* from the 1420s, which remains the best source. And you might wonder why that is.

He was at Loch Leven. He was also a cleric. But, in contrast to Bower, he was writing for a secular audience. So Bower was writing for a religious audience, whereas Wyntoun, his patron was Sir John Wemyss, who was a Scottish landowner. And secular patrons tended to be more interested in military events. So that's perhaps why Wyntoun included it.

But also, later on in Kildrummy's history in the 1360s, one of the keepers was called Ingram of Wyntoun. So it's possible that it was passed down as oral history through the Wyntoun family. And that was how it ended up with him.

Or it could be Sir John Wemyss. He was related to the later earls of Mar. So maybe they somehow collected the story.

And quite often women's histories were preserved through oral history, especially by their families. So their descendants would tell these stories and that's how they would become established histories.

But Christina doesn't have any known descendants. She was married twice. I don't think she had any children, or certainly none that survived to adulthood, because when she was granted the Garioch, it was said, one of the stipulations was that after Christina's death, it would be inherited by her and Andrew Murray's heirs, but it wasn't inherited by them. It went to the earls of Mar. So there were no heirs to inherit Garioch after Christina died. But she held Kildrummy until at least 1342 because in the financial records we know that David II, who was back from France at this point, and Queen Joan visited. And she possibly held it until as late as 1350 to 51.

That's when the Earl of Mar, Thomas, reached his majority and possibly he came back and sort of reclaimed his ancestral seat. It's unclear.

But she died in 1357. Andrew Murray had already died in 1338. But Christina, when she died, Walter Bower does say something good about her. He says she was a most noble matron who died at a good age. So, I mean, it doesn't say much, but it's something from Bower.

And Christina and Andrew were both buried at Dunfermline Abbey, which is where Robert I is buried, and it was kind of a place that Robert seems to have intended as a sort of royal mausoleum, so lots of his family were buried there. It linked him back to earlier kings like David I, who was buried there and St Margaret.

So it was the sort of place where the Bruces were solidifying their place in the line of monarchs of Scotland. But the place where all these people are buried was in the choir of the church so the east end, the most holy end, which is now underneath the floor of the parish church, which was built in the 19th century. So you can't see these tombs, but they're under there somewhere, if anyone wants to make a Christina Bruce pilgrimage to Dunfermline.

## **Chapter 7**

51:19

### **Sarah:**

Christina Bruce's defence of Kildrummy wasn't just a single act of courage. It was the culmination of a life shaped by loyalty, resilience and strength.

She wasn't remembered in stone monuments or royal proclamations. She didn't leave behind a line of heirs to carry her name.

And yet, her legacy lives on. In the stones of Kildrummy, in the chronicles that hint at her heroism, and in the enduring story of Scotland's fight for independence.

Christina's story, and the story of Kildrummy, this amazing castle that now stands in ruin, reminds of the power of quiet.

Strength can organise, prepare and defend. Sometimes it waits behind walls, and sometimes it charges out beyond them.

This has been the Historic Scotland podcast.

It was produced and edited by Adam Stoner. I'm Sarah MacGillivray.

And that's all we've got for you this season.

I have so enjoyed exploring this beautiful country that I call home and finding out about the people, places and history that make it such a wonderful place to be.

Thank you so much for joining me.

Special thanks to the wonderful people at Historic Scotland and at Think Publishing that made this series possible.

Whether you hop off to Huntly, tread around Trinity House, stop by Stanley Mills or visit any other Historic Scotland site, there is so much to discover and be inspired by.

Every stone has a story and every site is a chance to step back in time and connect with the people who shaped Scotland's past.

See you around.