

Was Bishop Carswell's Widow a Witch?

Margaret, sister of Dougall of Inverawe and wife of Campbell of Cabrachan

Chapter 4

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On the 26th of July 1570, Bishop John Carswell, builder of Carnassary Castle, wrote to the lady Glenorchy, "I was past Inchald yesterday and because ane littill young lass of myne was seik I was constrained to return therunto..."¹ Only one daughter of his appears on record, Christian who married first Dougall MacConachy Campbell of Inverawe,² and secondly Neil Campbell, parson of Kilmartin and builder of the little castle or manor house there.³

Who Christians's mother was is not clear, but she herself must have been daughter of the Bishop's first wife, since Dougall of Inverawe's sister Margaret was Carswell's second wife who outlived him. Margaret appears as Carswell's widow in September 1573.⁴ No record of the Bishop's first wife has survived, but we know that when young he was an adventurous character, since after gaining his Masters at St. Andrews he did not immediately take Orders, but joined the rebellion of Donald 'dubh' with Darnley's father the Earl of Lennox in support of Henry VIII's 'rough wooing.' On the 28th of July 1545 he drew up and witnessed a commission by 'Donald Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross,' signing himself as 'Mr. Johnn Carsuell, notary public.'⁵ After making a name for himself for his translation and adaptation of the *Book of Common Order* and as Bishop of the Isles, he died between the 21st of June and the 4th of September 1572.⁶ That he did not take Orders directly following his time at St. Andrews is clear, yet by the Reformation of 1560 he was a senior churchman and his 'littill young lass' suggests that Christian was likely under 14 in 1570.

However here our more focused interest is on his widow, Margaret. On the 18th of September 1573 she was granted the lands of Teirfoure and Teirlaggan in Lismore.⁷ as Bishop Carswell's widow. These lands are significant.

In the early fifteen nineties, rivalry over the control of the young Earl of Argyll combined with wider national conflict to cause a deep rift in the Campbell kindred. In February 1591-2, John Campbell of Cadell [Cawdor] was murdered by the shot of a hagbut through the window of the house of Campbell of Stronchormaig at Knipoch while sitting by the fireside.⁸ Cawdor's host at the time was Dougall of Stronchormaig, one of the MacConachy kin of Inverawe, who appears as cautioner for Dunollie in 1599.⁹ As the *Book of Cawdor* states, "The actual assassin was MacEllar and the immediate director of the murder, a certain John oig Campbell of Cabrachan." That Dougall was unaware of the plot seems clear, since in 1602 Duncan, son of Stronchormaig [likely Dougall's grandson] married Beatrix, daughter of the then Cawdor.

John 'oig' of Cabrachan was younger brother of the Archibald Campbell, 2nd of Lochnell who was killed at Glenlivet in 1594. Their mother was a sister of Campbell of Ardkinglas, and their cousin young Ardkinglas was implicated in the murder plot. John 'oig' had married a Margaret Campbell, called 'Nein VicConoquhy' who in *Highland Papers* is therefore given as being a daughter of Inverawe.¹⁰ She had only Gaelic, and her highly detailed and lengthy account of the part played in the murder conspiracy by her cousin young Ardkinglas can be read there. The dates suggest that she was a daughter of the second marriage (to an Ardkinglas daughter) of Archibald of Inverawe. This Archibald of Inverawe first appears, presumably as an infant, in a charter of 1493¹¹ and is last heard of writing to Glenorchy in 1569 when he signed himself "Yours own very assured to power."¹² In his old age he was held responsible for "the drowning of clan Arthur" on Lochawe in 1567.¹³ The earliest surviving record of his son and successor Dougall as 'of Inverawe', appears on the 10th of November 1575.¹⁴ This was the Dougall who married Christian Carswell and was Margaret's brother.

The investigation into the murder of Cawdor dragged on for some years. In October 1595 Margaret was called to testify at Ardmaddy in Nether Lorn: 'Follows the confessione and depositions of Margaret Campbell relict of umquhill John Oig Campbell of Cabrachan brither german to the Laird of Lochnell maid be her in the place of Ardmadie the fyft day of the moneth of October in the Zeir of God 1595 Zeirs anent the crewall murthur of the Laird of Cadell ...' Margaret testified how she had been called to Ardkinglas after the murder, where the Laird asked her to obtain from the notorious witches of Lorne a means to 'convert My Lord Argyll his favor to us.' To this she answered that such an effort would only be effective were Ardkinglas to tell her his full part in the murder. She stated that the witches with whom she consorted used 'the name of God' meaning that they were, in modern terms, 'white witches.' She differentiates between 'witches' and those with only the second sight. Among the witches Margaret employed were some on Lismore.¹⁵

So was the Bishop's widow also the witch consulted by Ardkinglas? Or were there two Margaret Campbells, daughters of Archibald of Inverawe perhaps by different wives, both their mothers being called Margaret? The intriguing final item suggests that both may well have been the same person:

As widow of Bishop John Carswell Margaret had been granted the lands of Teirfour and Teirlaggan in Lismore.¹⁶ That was on the 18th of September 1573. On the 4th of July 1595, Donald, son of John 'oig' Campbell of Cabrachan, was granted a charter of the lands of Teirfour and Teirlaggan in Lismore.¹⁷

¹ SRO/NAS GD.112/39/8/15

² R.C.H.MSS 4th Rep.Pt.1, p.481, & O.P.S. vol.2 (i) p. 94

³ Argyll Transcripts by Duke Neill

⁴ O.P.S. vol.2, (i) p.166, & Barcaldine/Paton *Clan Campbell* vol.5, p.260

⁵ Matheson, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 'Bishop Carswell' 24 Feb. 1956, pp.182-191

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ O.P.S., vol.2, (i) p.166

⁸ *The Thaness of Cawdor* pp. 208-209

⁹ Index of Dunstaffnage Papers (82)

¹⁰ MacPhail Ed., *Highland Papers*, Scot. Hist. Soc. vol. 1, pp.159-175

¹¹ Argyll Transcripts by Duke Neill

¹² Jane Dawson, Ed., *Campbell Letters 1559-1583*, Scot. Hist. Soc. 1997, p.145

¹³ MacPhail Ed., *Highland Papers*, Scot. Hist. Soc. vol. 4, p. 54

¹⁴ Barcaldine/Paton, *The Clan Campbell* VI 30; full text in Coll.de Reb. Alb. pp.8 & 9.

¹⁵ MacPhail Ed., *Highland Papers* Scot. Hist. Soc., vol.1, pp. 159-175

¹⁶ O.P.S., vol.2, (i) p.166

¹⁷ *Great Seal*, 4th July 1595.
