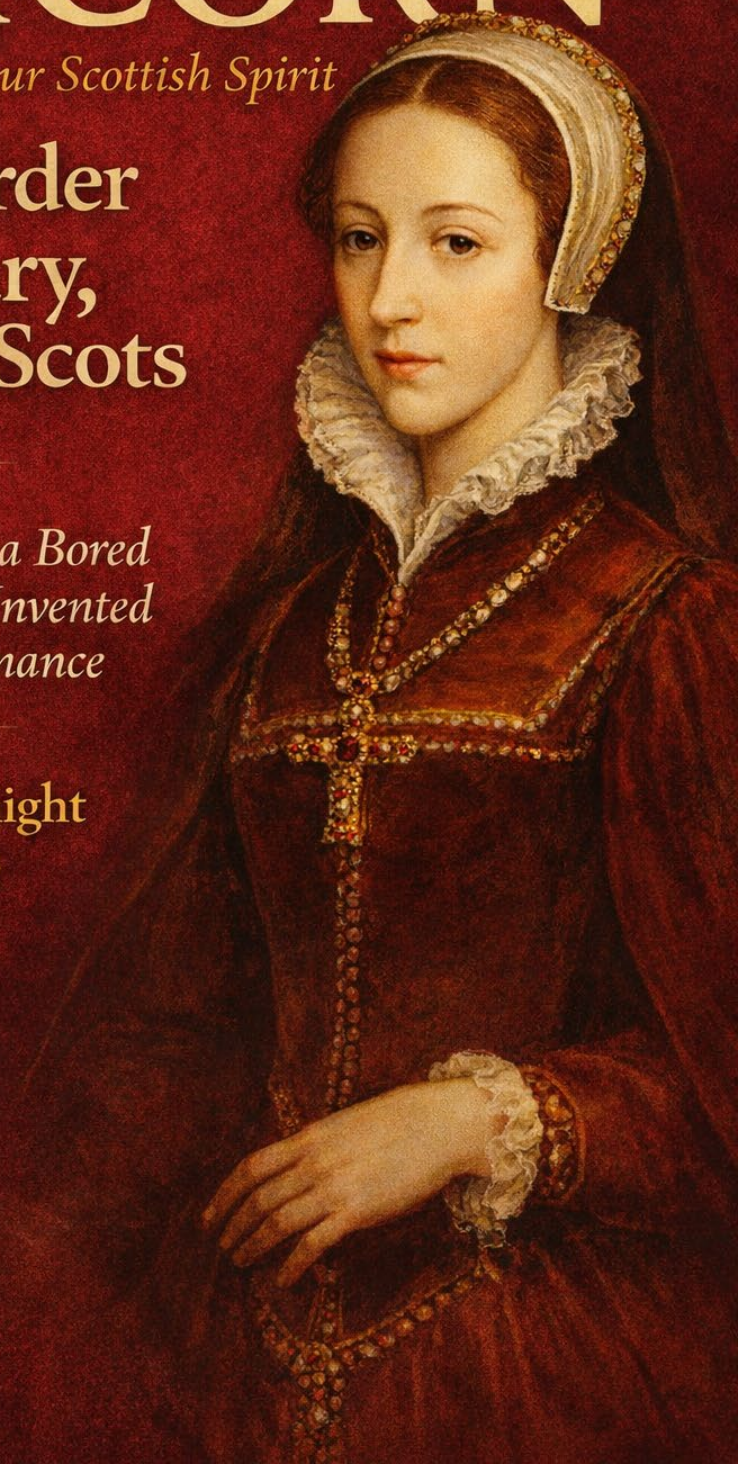
THE SCOTTISH UNICORN

February 2026

Ignite Your Scottish Spirit

Sex, Murder and Mary, Queen of Scots



Ivanhoe: How a Bored Scottish Lawyer Invented Medieval Romance

The Black Knight of Rhodes

SCOTTISH UNICORN NETWORK

A Wee Note From the Editor

With its fairy-tale castles, moody landscapes, and wondrous legends, Scotland has always struck me as the ultimate setting for romance. In this February issue of *The Scottish Unicorn*, we explore that theme — not as comfort, but as pressure: love tested by politics, by distance, by violence, and by loyalty. These are stories where affection is rarely private, choice is never free, and desire carries consequences that echo far beyond the heart.

We begin with *Ivanhoe*, a novel written by a Scottish lawyer recuperating from injury — never suspecting that he was inventing the medieval romance along the way. In its pages, Sir Walter Scott reminds us that love is often felt most keenly when it is deep, brief, and ultimately relinquished: the ache of what might have been.

At the center of this issue stands Mary, Queen of Scots — the most famous queen ever to rule this remarkable land. In a world where marriage was a weapon and intimacy could quickly become a liability, Mary's romantic choices entangled her in murder, scandal, and the struggle for survival itself. Her loves were never merely personal, and the consequences of them continue to fascinate centuries later.

The legend of the Black Knight of Rhodes offers something rarer still: endurance rewarded. One of Clan Campbell's most beautiful stories, it is a tale not of passion seized, but of faith held — quietly, stubbornly, and against the odds. Its power lies not in spectacle, but in patience.

We then step into the present, where Scottish memory lives on in unexpected places — from a fictional Texas town shaped by Highland inheritance, to a unicorn carved high in a castle wall, delivering its defiance in stone rather than words.

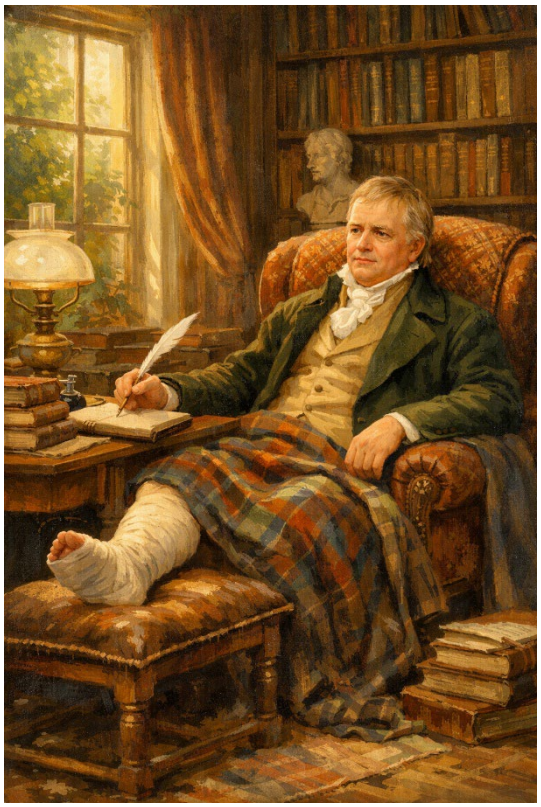
Taken together, these stories suggest that Scotland's great romances are not fantasies of escape. They reflect a culture that understands love as something to be negotiated, defended, sometimes sacrificed — and, on rare occasions, triumphantly reclaimed.

We hope this issue invites you not just to read, but to linger. And if you enjoy *The Scottish Unicorn*, we hope you might share this issue with your friends — and perhaps even with your lovers. Do stop by our website at **www.scottishunicornnetwork.org** and follow us on Facebook at **www.facebook.com/scottishunicornnetwork** **.**

Blyth Douglas

IVANHOE

How a Bored Scottish Lawyer Invented the Medieval Romance



At the time he wrote *Ivanhoe*, **Sir Walter Scott** was not yet the literary giant we know today. He was a lawyer by training, temporarily sidelined by injury and forced into convalescence — with time on his hands and stories in his head. Writing was not his profession; it was his escape.

While Scotland offered no shortage of romantic tales, Scott turned his imagination south, to England in the age of **Richard the Lionheart** — a land unsettled and uncertain, its loyalties divided. Within it, he imagined a medieval world of disguises and secrets, of honor tested under pressure, and of love complicated by danger and distance.

Without quite intending to, Scott stitched together the elements that would define **the medieval romance** for generations to come: disguise and honor, forbidden love, spectacle and loss. The result was the tale of an unforgettable, disinherited knight, **Wilfred of Ivanhoe** — and of two women who captured his heart in very different ways.

Wilfred of Ivanhoe

Wilfred of Ivanhoe is a young knight disinherited by his father, Cedric, for choosing loyalty to **Richard the Lionheart** over obedience at home. He leaves England to fight in the Holy Lands with Richard's army while still young — and still deeply in love with **Rowena**, a beautiful Saxon noblewoman he leaves behind.

During Ivanhoe's long absence, Rowena becomes a frequent object of attention and speculation. Suitors gather. Expectations emerge. Yet she remains quietly hopeful that the man she loves will one day return.

The crusade takes Ivanhoe far from home. And when he does return to England, it is not in triumph. He is wounded, weakened, and traveling in disguise — cast out by his father and stripped of position, moving through the world as an observer rather than a participant.

It is in this state that Ivanhoe re-enters Rowena's world — unseen, unrecognized, and aching with distance. His return comes at a tournament.

The Tournament of the Disinherited Knight

The Tournament at Ashby is a pinnacle of medieval splendor. Knights arrive in full armor, banners snapping in the wind, crowds surging forward to witness violence elevated into ceremony. Pageantry and danger mingle freely. Reputation and survival hang on the same blow.

Rowena presides over the event, elevated above the field, admired by all — yet curiously detached. She watches closely, waiting, uncertain of what she hopes to see.

Then a stranger enters the lists.

Calling himself the **Disinherited Knight**, he fights with a ferocity that commands attention. One by one, he defeats opponents more powerful and more celebrated than himself. His skill is undeniable. His restraint is striking. He fights as though something — or someone — matters more than victory.

From her seat, Rowena cannot look away. There is something familiar in the way the knight moves, in the way he carries himself even under the weight of armor. Recognition stirs, unwelcome and unsettling. She does not yet know who he is — but she knows he matters.

When the Disinherited Knight is finally unhorsed and injured, the truth can no longer be concealed. Ivanhoe stands before them once more — wounded, revealed, and unmistakably himself.

Rowena's relief is immediate. The man she loves has returned. But revealed, injured, and still disinherited, Ivanhoe is suddenly vulnerable — no longer hidden by armor or anonymity.

Enter Rebecca

Ivanhoe's injuries require secrecy. And it is **Isaac of York** who offers a solution.

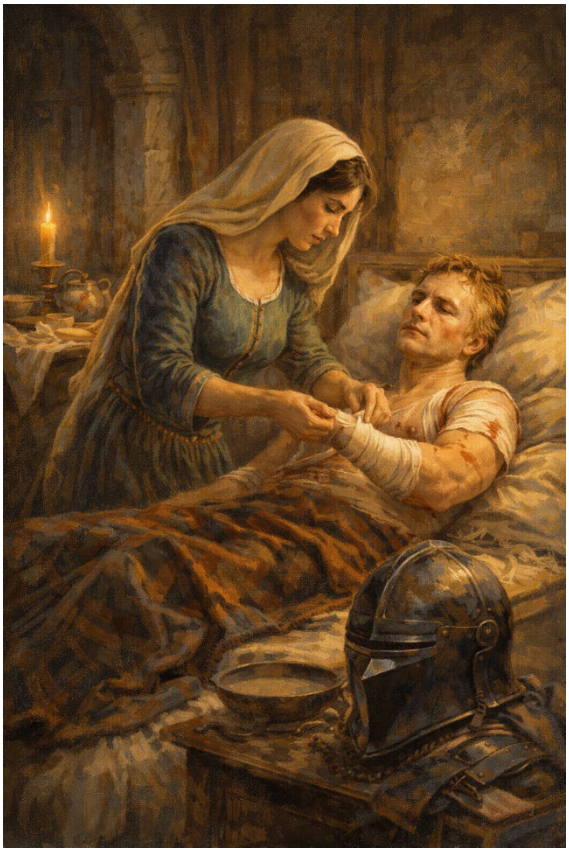
Isaac, a Jewish moneylender, has long been the object of harassment and exploitation by Norman knights. Earlier, when Isaac was threatened and vulnerable, Ivanhoe — then traveling in disguise — intervened on his behalf, offering protection when no one else would. Isaac does not forget the debt. So, when he recognizes the wounded Disinherited Knight at the tournament, he acts swiftly and quietly.

He summons his daughter, **Rebecca**, to tend the knight's wounds.

Rebecca's knowledge of healing is practical and hard-won. She treats Ivanhoe's injuries quietly, efficiently, and without ceremony, guarding both his condition and his identity. In the days that follow, the injured knight lies hidden — dependent on the care of a woman whose own safety is never assured.

It is in this enforced closeness that something dangerous begins.

Ivanhoe, stripped of armor and certainty, is no longer the distant figure Rowena glimpsed from the stands. Rebecca sees him in pain, in weakness, in moments when courage is measured not by spectacle but by endurance. Gratitude deepens into intimacy; intimacy into feeling neither of them can afford to name.



Rebecca understands the risk immediately. Ivanhoe, slower to reckon with it, senses only that in the quiet hours of recovery, something rare — and irrevocable — is taking shape.

Obsession and Accusation

Rebecca's intelligence and beauty do not go unnoticed — and in the world she inhabits, such attention is never neutral.

Among those who watch her most closely is **Brian de Bois-Guilbert**. A powerful Norman knight accustomed to taking what he desires, he is drawn to Rebecca with a force that is both immediate and unsettling.

He observes her as she tends Ivanhoe, noting her composure, her authority, the quiet confidence with which she moves through danger. He resents the devotion she gives to the wounded knight in her care.

At last, Bois-Guilbert makes his intentions known.

But Rebecca refuses him — clearly and without hesitation. It is a refusal he is unaccustomed to receiving. What begins as desire curdles into resentment; admiration hardens into menace. Rebecca understands at once that she has crossed an invisible line.

Not long after, she is seized. The accusation comes swiftly and publicly: witchcraft. It is a familiar charge, designed not merely to condemn but to annihilate — to strip the accused of credibility, protection, and voice. Rebecca is imprisoned, her fate wrenched from her own hands.

Her trial will be a spectacle. Judgment will not rest on truth, but on combat. A champion must fight on her behalf — or she will be burned alive. Rebecca faces the ordeal with composure, knowing precisely what is at stake. Her life now depends on whether someone is willing — and able — to risk everything for her.

Ivanhoe is still injured. He has not yet recovered his strength. But when he learns what has been done to Rebecca, hesitation becomes impossible. He will fight to defend her — even if it costs him his life.

Trial by Combat

When Ivanhoe rides to defend Rebecca, he does so not in triumph, but in defiance of his own limits. He enters the field weakened by injury, scarcely recovered, his strength uncertain. Across from him is **Brian de Bois-Guilbert** — powerful, experienced, and burning with a passion that has already begun to consume him.

The duel is brutal and uneven. And Rebecca watches it all with pounding heart, while the stake that may take her own life is constructed in the distance.

Ivanhoe fights to remain upright. Each exchange weakens him. Rebecca's life hangs not on his advantage, but on his endurance. The crowd watches in tense silence, aware that this is no contest of equals.

What many fail to realize is that Bois-Guilbert is fighting two adversaries: Ivanhoe on the field—and his own tormented mind. In a moment of wounded pride, he had orchestrated Rebecca's arrest. Now there is no way to undo what he has set in motion. If he wins this combat, the woman he loves will be burned alive.

There is only one way left to save her.

And as Bois-Guilbert reaches this fateful understanding, the balance shifts. His blows lose their precision. His strength falters. Once—then again. In the midst of combat, he staggers and collapses, overcome not by Ivanhoe's blade, but by the only outcome his conscience can endure. His body fails where his will has already surrendered.

With his death, Rebecca is spared. The sentence is lifted. The fire extinguished before it can be lit. Ivanhoe remains standing—alive, but barely.

The Lasting Power of *Ivanhoe*

With the trial concluded, order reasserts itself quickly.

Ivanhoe recovers. His place in the world, once uncertain, is restored. He returns to Rowena, the woman he loved before exile and danger complicated everything. Their union is celebrated and approved — a marriage that brings stability, and resolution.

It is the ending everyone expects.

Rebecca understands this before anyone else does. Though spared, she knows that survival is not the same as belonging. What passed between her and Ivanhoe was born in secrecy and danger — sustained by proximity, vulnerability, and a shared reckoning with mortality. It cannot survive the return to daylight and order.

She leaves England quietly, choosing distance over compromise. There is no confrontation, no plea, no bitterness. Rebecca departs with clarity and dignity, carrying with her what cannot be spoken — and what cannot be kept.

Sir Walter Scott does not linger on her departure. He allows it to pass almost unnoticed.

And yet it is the ache of this parting — not the tournament, not the duel, not the victory — that lingers longest.

Ivanhoe endures because it understands that romance is not always fulfilled by triumph. It does not always end with lovers sharing a lifetime together. Sometimes it resides most powerfully in what was briefly possible, intensely felt, and ultimately relinquished.

That quiet imbalance is the story's lasting power — and why it continues to resonate long after the final page.

Sex, Murder and Mary, Queen of Scots

She became Queen of Scotland at only six days of age. At forty-four, she died beneath an executioner's axe after nineteen years of imprisonment. But in the years between those two moments, the romantic life of Mary, Queen of Scots unfolded with the drama, danger, and excess of a Renaissance court.

The Infant Queen and the Boy King

Mary was born the only child of **King James V of Scotland** and his French wife, **Mary of Guise.** Her father died unexpectedly just six days after her birth. Before she was even a week old, the infant princess was proclaimed Queen of Scotland — and before she was out of the cradle, plans were already being laid for her marriage. Scotland had gained a queen. Europe had gained a matrimonial prize.

Mary's mother moved quickly to secure what was arguably the most powerful and desirable alliance available to a vulnerable Scottish queen: a marriage that promised to make her daughter **Queen of France**, while reaffirming Scotland's centuries-old bond with its Catholic ally — *the Auld Alliance*. At just **five years old**, Mary was sent across the Channel to France, already betrothed to the French heir.

It was a decisive act of maternal and political calculation. Scotland was unstable, England was hostile, and France offered protection, prestige, and power. By becoming the Queen of France through marriage, Mary would not merely rule Scotland — she would stand at the heart of Europe, itself.

But Mary's betrothed was no dashing prince. **Francis**, the Dauphin of France, was a frail and sickly boy, younger than Mary herself, and plagued by ill health from an early age. At the glittering French court, however, his physical weakness mattered less than his title. When they married in 1558, Mary was just **fifteen**, Francis **fourteen** — and with the marriage, she became **Dauphine of France**.

For a brief, intoxicating moment, destiny appeared to favor her. Raised amid the elegance, learning, and ceremony of the French court, Mary flourished. She was cultivated, multilingual, musically gifted, and utterly at home in a world of pageantry and power. When Francis unexpectedly ascended the throne in 1559, Mary found herself not merely Queen of Scotland in name, but **Queen of France in reality**.

But it did not last. Barely a year later, Francis was dead – carried off by a sudden and agonizing illness that no court physician could cure. His passing shattered Mary's position overnight. The crown passed to his younger brother, power shifted to a new regency, and Mary — now a teenage widow — was no longer useful to France. With startling speed, she was packed off to the kingdom she barely remembered, a country she had not seen since early childhood.

An English Scandal

When Mary returned to Scotland as a young widow, she did not step into a quiet kingdom — or a neutral one. She returned to a court watched closely by England, where a drama was unfolding that had little to do with Scotland — and everything to do with Mary.

Mary's cousin, Elizabeth I, had long refused marriage. She dismissed foreign princes, rebuffed dynastic bargains, and publicly declared herself wed to her kingdom alone. But there was one man she had never truly set aside: Robert Dudley, her childhood friend, favorite courtier, and — many believed — her lover.

Dudley was ambitious enough to hope. He knew Elizabeth loved him. The question was whether love would ever be enough. There was another impediment, as well: Dudley was already married. His wife, Amy, was young, inconvenient - and very much alive.

Until one day, when she was found dead at the bottom of a staircase, her neck broken. The circumstances were murky. The timing was appalling. And the rumors were immediate and relentless. Whispers followed Dudley everywhere. So too did suspicion — not only of him, but of Elizabeth herself.

The Queen withdrew from Dudley publicly, distancing herself from the scandal that threatened to stain her carefully cultivated image. Yet she did not abandon him entirely. Instead, she devised a solution that would remove the problem — and serve England's interests at the same time: **Robert Dudley would marry Mary, Queen of Scots.**

It was a proposal that solved everything on paper. Dudley would gain a crown. Mary would gain an English-approved husband. Elizabeth would rid herself of a dangerous intimacy without losing a trusted ally. And England would gain influence over Scotland without an open war.

What the plan ignored was the cost to Mary. To marry Dudley would be to inherit his scandal — and to bind her fate to a man whose ambition had already left one woman dead and another compromised. Yet to refuse him risked offending Elizabeth herself.

A Toxic Choice

For Mary, Queen of Scots, the question of remarriage was never a private one. It was a matter of state — and England was determined to shape the answer. But to accept Elizabeth's favored solution, Robert Dudley, would mean accepting his reputation, his scandal, and England's hand firmly on Scotland's future. Dudley brought with him the stigma associated with his young wife's death and that of being Elizabeth's cast-off lover. Both marked him, unmistakably, as a man Elizabeth herself would not wed – and Mary could not unsee that.

But rather than reject him outright, Mary chose a different path. She would take an English husband - but not Robert Dudley.

She made instead what seemed to be a safer choice: A handsome young English nobleman of royal blood named Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley. Like Mary herself, Darnley was descended from Margaret Tudor, making him not only Elizabeth's subject, but Mary's cousin and a fellow claimant to the English throne. He was charming. He was Catholic. He was plausibly loyal. And unlike Dudley, he arrived without a corpse in his wake. Mary chose the man who seemed to belong to *her* world — and not Elizabeth's.

Mary did not marry Darnley for love. She married him to escape a trap. But in doing so, she walked straight into another.

Holyrood Palace – Edinburgh, Scotland

The Husband Who Would be King

On **July 29, 1565**, **Mary, Queen of Scots** married **Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley** at **Holyrood Palace** in Edinburgh. Mary was **twenty-two years old**. Darnley was **nineteen**.

At first, the marriage appeared promising and within months, Mary was pregnant with her first child — a son who would become **James VI and I**, uniting the crowns of Scotland and England in the next generation. For a brief moment, it seemed that Mary's choice might yet justify itself.

But the harmony did not last. Darnley soon proved ill content with the role of consort to a reigning queen. He wanted more than proximity to power; he wanted power itself. He pressed relentlessly for the *crown matrimonial*, which would have made him Mary's equal in name and authority — and, in practice, her rival. When Mary resisted, he sulked, raged, and conspired.

What Mary had envisioned as a partnership, Darnley understood as entitlement.

His behavior grew increasingly erratic. He drank heavily. He aligned himself with disaffected nobles. He resented Mary's intelligence, authority, and the ease with which she commanded loyalty. Where she governed, he undermined. Where she negotiated, he provoked. And where she sought stability, he introduced chaos.

Mary had married Darnley to secure her throne. Instead, she found herself bound to a husband who mistook marriage for sovereignty — and who could not tolerate standing beside a queen he could not control. The breakdown of the marriage was swift, public, and dangerous. And it would soon drag Mary into a spiral of violence and betrayal.

Murder in the Queen's Chamber

The marriage reached its breaking point in March, 1566 –less than a year after the couple had wed. By then, **David Rizzio**, Mary's private secretary and trusted adviser, had become the focus of Darnley's resentment. Rizzio was foreign-born, Catholic, and close to the queen — all qualities that made him suspect in the eyes of Scotland's Protestant nobility, and intolerable to a husband already seething with jealousy and thwarted ambition.

Rumors began to circulate. Some whispered that Rizzio exercised undue influence over the queen. Others hinted, maliciously, at impropriety. None of it was proven — and none of it was necessary. In a court already charged with paranoia and factionalism, perception was enough.

On the night of **March 9, 1566**, the tension turned to violence. Mary was six months pregnant, dining privately in her chambers at Holyrood Palace, when armed men burst into the room. At their head was her own husband, **Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley,** who stood by as Rizzio was dragged from Mary's side, stabbed repeatedly, and left dying just outside her chamber door.

The attack was not a moment of uncontrolled rage. It was planned. The conspirators had a purpose: to eliminate Rizzio, to terrorize the queen, and try to force Mary into granting Darnley the authority he believed was his due.

It also forced Mary to confront a far darker implication. If Darnley was willing to orchestrate a murder in the queen's own chamber, what limits remained — particularly after she had given birth? The precedent was terrifying. Mary herself had ascended the throne as an infant, and she knew all too well what power could be exercised in a child's name.

The Most Dangerous Man in Scotland

In the aftermath of David Rizzio's murder, **Mary, Queen of Scots** no longer faced merely a failed marriage. She faced a physical threat. Her husband had revealed himself as volatile, vindictive, and capable of orchestrating violence within her own chambers. Darnley was no longer simply an embarrassment or a liability — he was dangerous. And Mary, pregnant and surrounded by shifting loyalties, needed protection.

It was in this climate that **James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell** emerged as the most powerful figure in her orbit.

Bothwell was everything Darnley was not. Hardened by war, feared by his enemies, and utterly pragmatic, he was a man who understood force — and how to wield it. He had little patience for courtly intrigue or moral niceties. What he offered Mary was not charm or lineage, but something far more immediate: security.

Appointed Lord High Admiral and later entrusted with military command, Bothwell became Mary's enforcer in a court where authority had begun to fray. He was fiercely loyal to Mary, ruthless toward her enemies, and unapologetic in his methods. In an atmosphere thick with betrayal, those qualities mattered.

Contemporaries would later accuse Mary of recklessness in placing her trust in such a man. But from Mary's vantage point, the calculation was stark. Her husband had already sanctioned bloodshed. Her nobles were divided. Her throne was precarious. And the safety of her unborn child could not be left to sentiment.

Bothwell did not enter Mary's life as a lover. He entered it as a shield. What followed — whether alliance, dependence, or something darker — would soon eclipse even the scandals that had come before. But by the spring of 1566, one thing was clear: Mary's survival now depended on a man whose power lay not in legitimacy, but in fear.

And fear, once unleashed, is difficult to control.

The Explosion

After the murder of David Rizzio, there was no return to normality.

Darnley's position at court collapsed rapidly. The nobles who had once courted him now avoided him. Mary herself withdrew, no longer able to trust a husband who had sanctioned violence in her own chambers. Even the birth of their son, in June 1566, did little to repair the damage; it may even have heightened Mary's concern.

By the end of the year, Darnley was isolated — mistrusted by the queen, reviled by the court, and increasingly irrelevant. He drifted between resentment and self-pity, between demands for power and complaints of neglect. The man who had once insisted on a crown now struggled to command any attention at all.

When Darnley fell ill early in 1567 — possibly with smallpox, possibly with syphilis — he was moved to a house at **Kirk o' Field**, just outside Edinburgh's city walls. Officially, the relocation was for his recovery. Unofficially, it placed him out of sight and out of mind.

On the night of **February 10, 1567**, an explosion tore through the house. Darnley's body was later found in a nearby garden — not burned, not crushed by rubble, but apparently strangled. The building had been destroyed. The man inside it had been silenced.

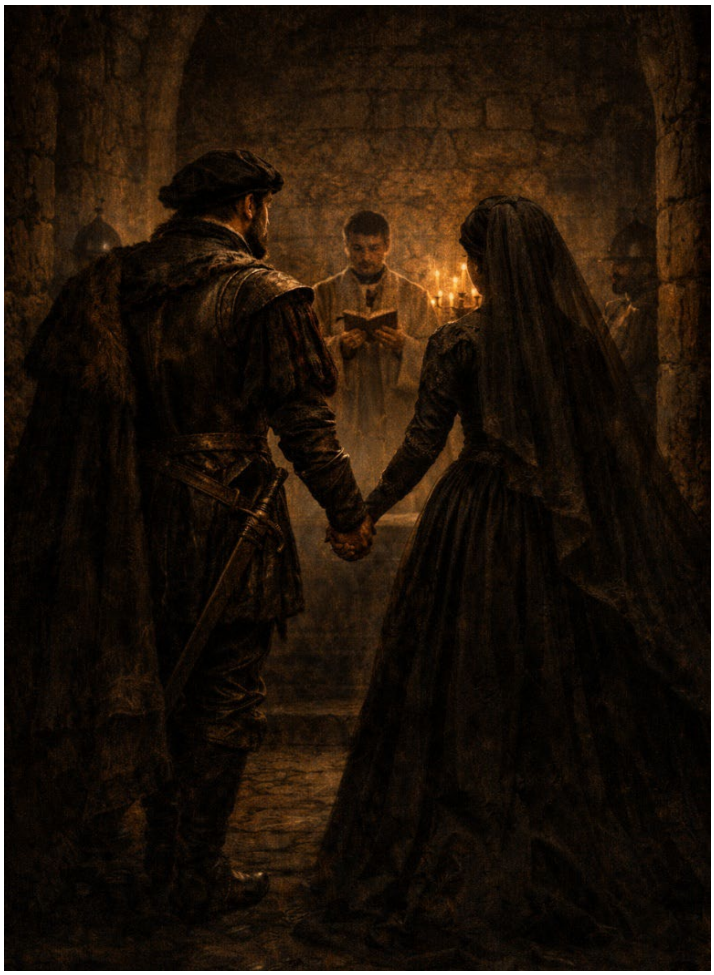
Suspicion fell immediately on **James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell**. He had motive. He had means. And he had already demonstrated a willingness to use force in defense of the queen. Yet when brought to trial, he was acquitted with startling speed — a verdict that convinced few and actually increased the speculation of his guilt.

More damaging still was the cloud that now descended over Mary herself. She had motive. She had opportunity. And she had been seen publicly in Bothwell's company in the weeks leading up to the murder. Rumor hardened quickly into accusation.

Whether Mary had sanctioned Darnley's death, tolerated it, or merely failed to prevent it has been debated ever since. What mattered in 1567 was perception. And perception was turning against her. The volatile husband who had sought to rule over her was gone. But in his absence, Mary would face a far more dangerous reckoning.

From Protector to Husband

What followed Darnley's death unfolded with startling speed. In April 1567, only a few weeks after the explosion at Kirk o' Field, Mary was intercepted while traveling near Edinburgh and taken to Bothwell's stronghold at Dunbar Castle. Whether this was a violent abduction or a coercive "rescue" has been debated ever since.



One thing was clear: Bothwell had become indispensable to Mary — not merely as a protector, but as the only man who appeared unafraid to act decisively in a world that had turned hostile. In the wake of betrayal, bloodshed, and public suspicion, his presence offered something dangerously compelling: certainty.

Where others hesitated, he advanced. Where others whispered, he commanded. Whether through persuasion, pressure, or a volatile intimacy forged under strain, Mary found herself drawn into an alliance that blurred the line between reliance and surrender.

By May, she was his wife.

The timing was catastrophic. The man widely suspected of orchestrating her husband's murder had now become Mary's new consort. Even those inclined to sympathy recoiled.

The narrative hardened quickly: protector had become husband — and the transformation looked damning. Mary may have believed she was securing stability at last. Instead, she had bound herself to the very figure whose reputation made that impossible.

The court did not wait to judge her. It moved almost immediately to remove her.

Swift and Merciless

Within weeks of Mary's marriage to Bothwell, a coalition of Scottish nobles rose in open revolt. They did not frame their rebellion as treason, but as necessity — a rescue of the realm from scandal, instability, and a queen who, in their view, had crossed an unforgivable line. They were swift and merciless in putting an end to the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Mary and Bothwell were confronted at Carberry Hill in June of 1567. There was no great battle. No last stand. Bothwell fled into exile, never to see Mary again. She surrendered.

The crown that Mary had worn since infancy was stripped from her with astonishing speed. She was imprisoned at Loch Leven Castle, forced to abdicate in favor of her infant son, and isolated from all but her keepers. There, under relentless pressure, she miscarried twins — of which, many speculated, Bothwell was the father. It was a last personal loss in a cascade of political ruin.

She was not yet twenty-five years old.

Mary escaped Loch Leven in 1568, rallied supporters, and attempted to reclaim her throne.

She failed.

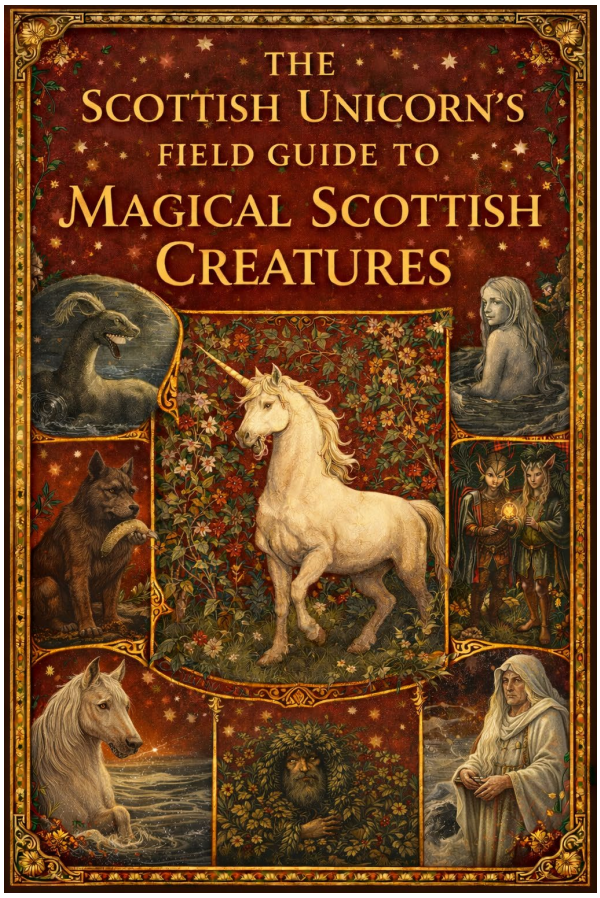
Mary then made a final, fateful decision to cross the border into England, seeking protection from her cousin Elizabeth. It was a catastrophic miscalculation.

Instead of sanctuary, Mary found captivity. Instead of alliance, suspicion. For the rest of her life, she lived as a prisoner — moved from castle to castle, watched constantly, implicated repeatedly in plots she may or may not have sanctioned. In the end, the distinction ceased to matter. She was executed in 1587, at the age of forty-four.

Though Mary's life before imprisonment spanned barely twenty-five years, those years were saturated with danger, drama and scandal. They secured her place as the most famous queen in the history of Scotland.

A *Scottish Unicorn* Special Issue

If you've ever confused your **Kelpies with your Selkies**, you are in the right place. If you've ever pored through a tale of Scottish folklore and wondered "***What on earth is this creature that the story keeps mentioning***?" ***The Scottish Unicorn's*** **Field Guide to Magical Scottish Creatures** was made for you.



Scotland's magical creatures have lived for centuries in stories whispered by firesides, carried across oceans by emigrants, and passed down through families who knew that myth and history are never entirely separate.

These beings are not relics of a forgotten past. They are part of Scotland's living imagination —guardians, tricksters, shape-shifters and companions - reflecting the land itself: wild, beautiful, and a little untamed.

But to many descendants of the Scottish diaspora – and even to many Scots today – they are not entirely familiar.

Our **Field Guide** is not meant to be exhaustive, scholarly, or intimidating. It's meant to be **welcoming**. Think of it as a friendly companion for the curious—whether you're deeply rooted in Scottish heritage, newly discovering it, or simply drawn to the magic of its stories.

Here you'll meet well-known figures, such as the **Loch Ness Monster**, and others you may never have encountered before. You'll learn enough to nod sagely if someone mentions a **Ghillie Dhu** or references a Scottish mountain named after the **Cailleach**. You'll be able to pronounce **Daoin Sith** with confidence, distinguish your **Selkies** from their seal-skin kin, and your forest spirits from the shadows they inhabit. Most of all, you'll come to discover why these creatures are still so beloved and continue to capture imaginations far beyond Scotland's shores.

Download your copy (free of charge) from our website – or read it on-line, if you prefer: www.scottishunicornnetwork.org. Just click WELCOME on our Home Page and you'll see the cover – then click through. Pour a cup of something warm on a wintry day, open up our Field Guide – and ***Ignite your Scottish Spirit!***

The Black Knight of Rhodes

Colin Campbell of Glenorchy - And the Token that Brought him Home

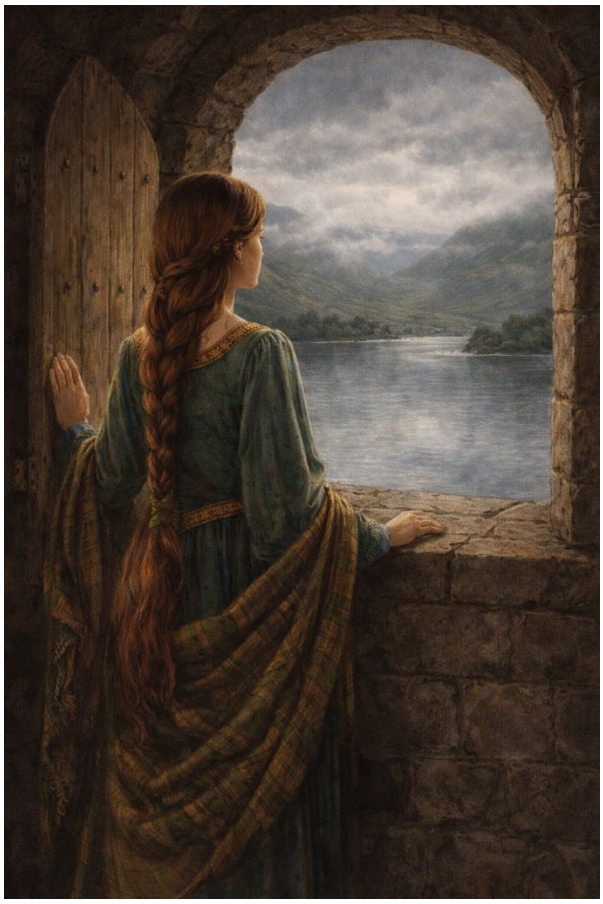
On the northern reach of Loch Awe, where the water lies dark and still beneath Ben Cruachan, the ruins of **Kilchurn Castle** hold a particular kind of Highland silence: the sort that makes you feel—just for a moment—that time has paused. In the mid-1400s, Kilchurn was not a ruin at all; it was just being built under the guidance of a young wife, Lady Margaret of Glenorchy—Campbell by marriage.

Ruins of Kilchurn Castle on the shores of Loch Awe in Argyll and Bute, Scotland

Masons worked the walls and the loch lapped at the shore, while the world beyond Argyll grew increasingly turbulent. Margaret's husband, **Sir Colin Campbell of Glenorchy**, was known among his people as **Cailean dubh na Roimhe**—*Black Colin of Rome*—a name linked to journeys that carried him far beyond Loch Awe. An old family record, the **Black Book of Taymouth**, would later tell of a charmstone he wore when he fought at Rhodes, a silver talisman meant to protect its bearer and bring him safely home.

But talismans do not prevent departures. Colin had made up his mind to go east. Whether he sailed as a formal Knight of Rhodes or as a Scottish noble fighting alongside them has long been debated; even sympathetic historians admit the archival record is thin. Yet the legend that survived in Glenorchy was never interested in paperwork. It was interested in what his leaving did to the woman he left behind.

Sir Colin's Departure – and Lady Margaret's Years of Waiting



Before Colin sailed, Margaret begged him to stay. He would not. But he did one thing—a gesture so intimate it feels almost modern. He commissioned a ring, engraved with both their names. On the eve of his departure, he broke it in two. He pressed one half into her palm and kept the other. "If you come to receive my half," he told her, "you will know me to be dead."

Then he went—first to Rome, the story says, and from there to Rhodes, where the Knights of St John defended their island fortress against Turkish attack. And in Glenorchy, **silence** took up residence alongside Lady Margaret.

Seven years passed. At first, the messages came—faint threads of ink across a continent. Then even those stopped. Neighbours began to murmur what people always murmur when a young woman waits too long: *He's gone. You must think of your future.*

Suitors arrived with sympathy carefully arranged like tartan pleats—concern, admiration, and then, inevitably, proposals. Margaret refused them all. "I have never received the token," she said simply. "So I will not speak of widowhood."

The Persistent Suitor

One suitor, however, was not deterred. In the old tale, he appears as **Baron Neil MacCorquodale**—persistent, calculating, and far too interested in what Glenorchy would add to his own lands. He listened to Margaret's one unshakeable condition and decided to destroy it.

He arrived at Kilchurn with a ragged messenger who claimed to have come from the continent. The man placed a letter in Margaret's hands. She read the words and felt the room tilt. Her husband was dead, the letter said—fallen far away, beyond any road that could bring him home.

Margaret's grief was immediate and fierce. Yet even then, through tears, she asked the question that mattered most: "Is there no token?" The messenger shook his head. No token, he insisted. Only the story - only a witness, only loss.

And because the ring-half never appeared—because the very proof she expected did not exist—Margaret's sorrow became something else as well: Confusion, then exhaustion, and then the slow crumbling fatigue of a heart that has held itself upright for too long.

MacCorquodale stayed close. Patient. Helpful. Always present. Eventually, when the pressure of years outweighed the pressure of hope, Margaret agreed—on one condition: She would marry MacCorquodale when the tower of Kilchurn was finally finished. So the work went on. The masons measured. The stones rose. But Margaret—still not fully convinced by the story of Colin's death—quietly told the men to take their time.

Someone Else Also Had Doubts…

Colin Campbell's old foster-mother—a woman who had once steadied him as a child and knew the shape of his fate better than any letter—did not trust MacCorquodale's neat certainty. She sent her eldest son south and east, to Rome, to learn what he could about Sir Colin's fate.

The son went. And in the streets of the holy city, against all expectations, he found Sir Colin Campbell alive. When the foster-brother told him what was unfolding at Kilchurn—the unfinished tower, the unwanted suitor, the wedding looming like a trap—Colin did not argue. He did not hesitate. He sailed for Scotland at once.

But when he landed, he chose not to thunder home in glory. He chose something cleverer. He sent his foster-brother ahead with a story of failure, and followed behind in disguise—cloak torn, hair unkempt, posture bent, the look of a man the world has already dismissed.

By nightfall, he reached his foster-mother's cottage and asked for shelter. She welcomed him without question. When the door was barred against the cold, he lifted his head into the firelight. And she knew him. "The wedding," she whispered, "is tomorrow".

Sir Colin's Return

The next day, Kilchurn filled with music and voices and the forced brightness of celebration. The great hall was laid with food and drink. The guests gathered to witness Lady Margaret's decision become irreversible. And then a beggar entered the hall.

He moved quietly to the lowest table and sat as though he belonged there—which, in a sense, he did. When a cup of wine was brought, he pushed it away. And in a voice that carried farther than a beggar's had any right to carry, he said, "I will drink only from the hand of the Lady of Glenorchy."

The room stiffened. Some guests laughed, thinking it insolence. Others looked to Margaret, waiting to see how she would handle the interruption.

Lady Margaret stood. Perhaps she meant to show generosity. Perhaps she meant to end the moment quickly. Perhaps—deep down—some part of her was listening for something she could not name. She crossed the hall and offered the cup to the beggar herself.

He took it, drained it in a single swallow, and handed it back. Margaret looked down into the cup—and there, resting against the bottom like a whisper made solid, was **half a ring**.

For one breathless instant the hall vanished. There was only her hand, the wine-dark cup, and the small curve of metal she had guarded for seven long years.

She looked up. The beggar raised his eyes.

And Lady Margaret saw her husband—the man who had left as a young laird and returned as something harder and deeper: a man who had crossed seas, survived battles, and still came home by the only road that mattered.

The wedding ended where it stood. The feast became a celebration—of return, of endurance, of a promise kept against the odds.

Black Knight of Rhodes

As for MacCorquodale, the old story insists he was allowed to leave Kilchurn unharmed. Hospitality was still a law in the Highlands, even when the guest deserved none of it. What happened after, the tale tells more darkly: that Sir Colin's men later hunted him down and killed him for his duplicity.

But that is not the part Kilchurn remembers best. Kilchurn remembers the moment a woman looked into a cup and found a token that turned grief into joy—proof, at last, that her long wait had not been foolhardy. It had been faithful.

And in the hush that still hangs over Loch Awe, it is easy to understand why this legend endured: because every stone in that tower seems to say the same thing. Some promises do come home.

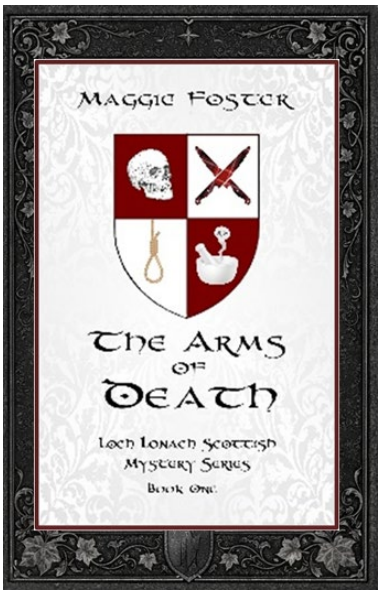
Editor's Note: **With thanks to David Stedman, Editor of the Clan Campbell Society (North America) Newsletter for sharing the original Campbell clan material that inspired this retelling of *The Black Knight of Rhodes*.**

Learn More

Readers interested in the history and traditions of Clan Campbell may wish to explore the work of Clan Campbell Society (North America), including its newsletter and membership programs. More information can be found at www.ccsna.org or if you have any questions or would like a copy of the latest Clan Campbell (North America) newsletter, contact David via email at editor@ccsna.org.

Love, Mystery, and the Memory of Scotland:
The Loch Lonach Novels of Maggie Foster

At first glance, Texas and Scotland might seem worlds apart — separated by oceans, landscapes, and centuries of history. But in the mystery novels of Maggie Foster, the distance quietly disappears. In her **Loch Lonach** series, Scottish heritage lives on not as nostalgia or costume, but as something deeply woven into daily life: names, music, customs, community — and, ultimately, love.



Foster, a seventh-generation Texan and fourth-generation genealogist, didn't set out to write "heritage fiction." Like many writers, she was advised to write what she knew. What she knew, it turned out, was a culture that had been hiding in plain sight all along. "Everywhere I turned, Scotland was there," she says. "Still used, still remembered — but never made an issue of."

That quiet persistence of Scottish culture forms the backbone of Loch Lonach, a fictional Texas community founded by descendants of Scots and Ulster Scots. Bagpipes appear at funerals and parades. Highland Games are an annual ritual. Children grow up with Scottish songs, tartan blankets, and naming traditions — absorbing a work ethic and sense of belonging without ever being told they are doing so.

It is this *unselfconscious inheritance* that gives Foster's novels their warmth and credibility. Her characters are not performing heritage; they are living it.

Romance That Grows — and Waits

While mystery drives the plot of the Loch Lonach series, romance is never an afterthought. Instead, it unfolds gradually, shaped by community expectations, long memory, and deeply rooted ideas about loyalty and marriage.

Two novels in particular showcase Foster's distinctive blend of suspense and love — one introducing readers to Loch Lonach and its central couple, the other offering a tender second-chance romance that has quickly become a reader favorite.

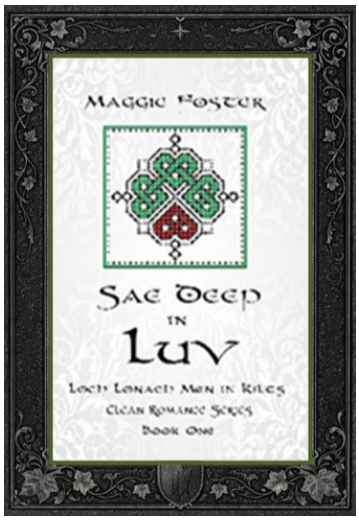
Book One: Introducing Loch Lonach

The opening novel of the Loch Lonach series, ***The Arms of Death***, introduces readers to a tightly knit Texas community founded by descendants of Scots and Ulster Scots — a place where kilts are worn without irony and heritage quietly shapes everyday life.

Ginny, the series' central heroine, appears settled at first glance. She has a steady boyfriend, strong ties to the community, and the respect of the local laird. But when a suspicious death shatters the town's sense of security, long-suppressed tensions rise to the surface.

A charismatic outsider arrives — equally capable of becoming Ginny's romantic rival or the story's killer. As rumors spread and loyalties are tested, Ginny must navigate deadly charm, arrogant condescension, and the weight of communal expectations. The romantic arc unfolds slowly and deliberately, stretching across four books — allowing trust, misunderstanding, and ultimately devotion to develop in a way that feels earned rather than rushed.

A Second Chance at Love



In contrast, a later novel in the series, ***Sae Deep in Luv***, places romance firmly at the center of the story — offering readers a deeply satisfying *second-chance love*. Ginny's mother, a widow, has no intention of marrying again. Independence suits her, and grief has built careful defenses. But when a man who has loved her since high school is invited to return to Loch Lonach and take on a position of responsibility within the clan, old feelings resurface.

The mystery in this novel serves as a catalyst rather than the focus, pushing both characters to confront unfinished business, family dynamics, and the memory of a long-dead rival. Extended family, clan politics, and the gentle chaos of community life all play their part. Here, love is patient, mature, and grounded in shared history — a reminder that romance does not fade with time, but deepens.

History, Memory, and Belonging

Foster's fiction is grounded in meticulous research. She maintains an ongoing **History and Genealogy of the Loch Lonach Homestead**, tracing her characters' fictional ancestors back through real migration patterns: from Scotland to the American South, through wars, forced migration, and reinvention.

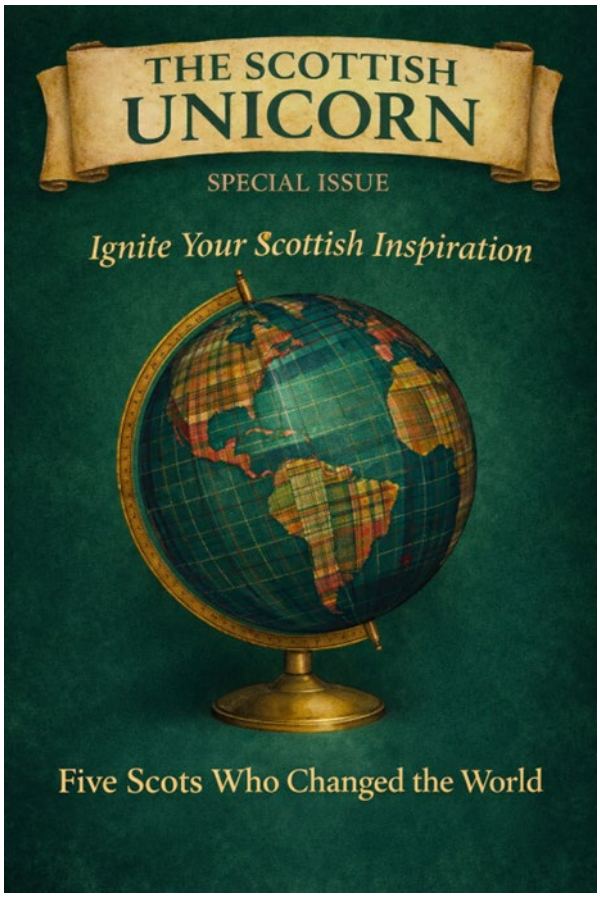
Some founding figures descend from Jacobite prisoners sold into the New World. Others are ambitious adventurers. One modern-day laird escaped wartime Scotland after losing his family in a WWII bombing raid. Future books will explore clan feuds, a local distillery, and long-buried secrets — all anchored in historical fact wherever possible.

What surprises readers most, Foster says, is not the mystery — but the endurance: "There's a phrase: *the blood is strong,"* she notes, *"*Vast distances and hundreds of years haven't erased the Scots." Again and again, readers tell her the same thing: they see themselves in these characters. They want to belong. They want to visit Loch Lonach. That longing — for place, for continuity, for community — may be the most romantic thread of all.

Where to Start:
Each Loch Lonach novel can be read as a stand-alone, but readers who begin mid-series almost always circle back. Foster is currently preparing two bundled editions for binge readers, to be released later in 2026. To learn more and purchase copies: https://www.amazon.com/Arms-Death-Loch-Lonach-Mystery-ebook/dp/B07JL16GL3

A *Scottish Unicorn* Special Issue

Have you ever wondered how a small country on the edge of Europe helped to shape the modern world? Have you ever paused to consider where ideas like modern communication, industrial power, life-saving medicine, or scientific measurement truly began? Have you ever heard that Scottish ingenuity fueled many of the innovations that shape the way we live today? If so, this Special Issue was made for you.



Ignite Your Scottish Inspiration: Five Scots Who Changed the World explores the lives and ideas of five remarkable Scots whose influence reached far beyond Scotland's shores. These were not mythic heroes or flawless giants. They were curious minds, restless thinkers, and determined individuals whose ideas travelled with emigrants, crossed oceans, and took root in new lands. Their legacies are woven into everyday life — often unnoticed, yet everywhere.

For many in the Scottish diaspora — and even for many Scots themselves — the global impact of Scottish innovation is only partially known. Names may sound familiar, but the human stories behind them are often lost to time.

This Special Issue is not a textbook, and it's not a list of achievements. It's an invitation - to connect with the spirit of inquiry, imagination, and perseverance that Scotland has quietly shared with the world.

Inside, you'll meet five individuals whose ideas changed how we communicate, calculate, heal, build, and understand the world around us. You'll come away not just informed, but inspired — with a renewed sense of how Scottish ingenuity continues to echo across generations and continents.

Download your copy (free of charge) from our website — or read it online, if you prefer. Simply visit **www.scottishunicornnetwork.org**, click **WELCOME** on our Home Page, and you'll see the cover — then click through.

Settle in with a cup of something warm or even a wee dram, open this Special Issue — and **Inspire Your Scottish Spirit**.

A Unicorn Sighting with Attitude:

Castle Fraser's Secret Act of Jacobite Defiance

This Unicorn Sighting is courtesy of photographer Gordon Ferrier of Aberdeenshire — who happened to be looking in exactly the right window.

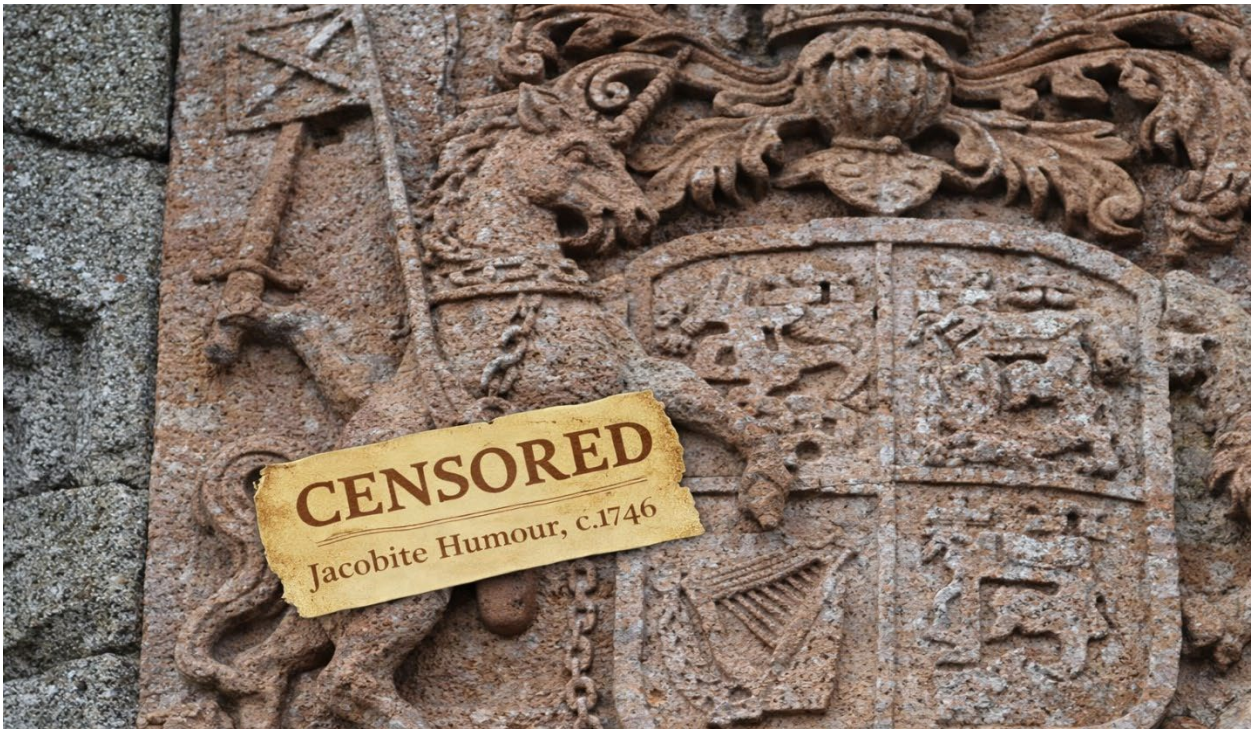
Castle Fraser, Aberdeenshire - Photo Credit: Gordon Ferrier

High on the walls of **Castle Fraser in Aberdeenshire**, far beyond the gaze of visitors strolling the lawns below, a Scottish unicorn has been quietly enjoying itself for nearly three centuries.

This particular unicorn is part of the castle's carved coat of arms — and from ground level, it appears perfectly respectable. Regal, muscular, triumphant. Nothing to see here.

But viewed from a small, rarely accessed room high within the castle — and only through an old turret window — a very different detail reveals itself. One so discreetly placed that most visitors, and indeed most generations, have never noticed it at all.

The unicorn, symbol of Scotland, has been given a very human enhancement — a deliberate anatomical flourish — positioned so that it asserts unmistakable dominance over the English lion across from it.



Coat of Arms, Castle Fraser - Photo Credit: Gordon Ferrier

This was no accident. And it was no childish prank.

The carving dates from the deeply bitter years following the **Battle of Culloden in 1746**, when Charles Fraser (1725–1746) was killed fighting for the Jacobite cause. In the brutal aftermath, resentment toward **King George II** and, above all, his son **William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland — "Butcher Cumberland"** — ran deep.

But open defiance was dangerous. Words could be punished.

Symbols, however, could be hidden in plain sight. So the Frasers chose stone over speech.

By granting Scotland's unicorn a discreet but unmistakable physical advantage over England's lion — visible only to those "in the know" — the family carved their resistance into the fabric of the castle itself. A private joke. A quiet insult. A laugh shared across generations.

Hidden high above Castle Fraser's courtyard, this unicorn still stands - and those, like Gordon, who know where to look, can still see it. Proud, defiant, and quietly irreverent — a reminder that even in defeat, the Scots never entirely lost their sense of humor.

National Unicorn Day — April 9

Celebrate the National Animal of Scotland

The unicorn did not originate in Scotland. It appears in ancient mythology across many cultures, admired for its strength, purity, and untamable nature. But in the **12th century**, Scotland made the unicorn its own.

During the reign of **William I of Scotland**, the unicorn began to appear as a royal symbol — eventually becoming firmly established as **Scotland's national animal**. Chosen not for gentleness but for power, the unicorn came to represent independence, courage, and sovereignty. In Scottish heraldry, it is often shown chained — not as a sign of weakness, but as a reminder that only a king strong enough could hope to restrain such a creature.

Over the centuries, the unicorn was carved into castles and woven into heraldry. When England and Scotland were united in 1603, it was set proudly beside the lion in the Royal Coat of Arms as a declaration of Scotland's identity and resolve.

National Unicorn Day was established in **2015** as a modern way of honoring this centuries-old symbol — not as fantasy, but as heritage. It is an invitation to notice where the unicorn still appears, and what it has come to signify: resilience, imagination, and the refusal to be subdued.

As Scots emigrated, their stories, symbols, and traditions traveled with them. The unicorn did not spread *from* Scotland — but Scotland's connection to the unicorn traveled *with* its people. Today, unicorns appear far beyond Scotland's borders: in museums and libraries, on civic buildings, in heraldry, gravestones, gates, and unexpected corners of the world.

This year, we invite Scots and descendants of Scots everywhere in the world to help **expand the celebration of National Unicorn Day** — not by reinventing the symbol, but by recognizing the unicorn's unique affiliation with Scottish heritage.

To mark **National Unicorn Day**, *The Scottish Unicorn* will release a **Special Issue** devoted entirely to Scotland's national animal.

Ways to Celebrate National Unicorn Day

There is no right way to celebrate **National Unicorn Day**. You might choose to:

- **Wear a unicorn pin, t-shirt or other insignia on April 9** – and take a photo!
- Send **Unicorn-themed cards to friends,** especially fellow Scots. It's easy to find blank greeting cards and write in "*Happy Unicorn Day – April 9th" "Celebrate the National Animal of Scotland* " and/or "*Wishing you a Day that Ignites Your Scottish Spirit"*. Or send emails or texts on April 9 with a unicorn emoji wishing your friends a **Happy Unicorn Day**.
- Share some **unicorn-themed cookies, cupcakes or offer coffee/tea in unicorn-themed mugs** to friends or co-workers on April 9th - along with tartan napkins
- Look for unicorns in **art, architecture, and heraldry** either where you live or in on-line videos, art or history books
- Visit a **museum, art gallery or historic site** where a unicorn appears
- **Share the story** of how the unicorn became Scotland's national animal

Share Your Unicorn Sightings

If you spot a unicorn we'd love to see it. Photographs of **Unicorn Sightings** may be featured in future issues and on our website and Facebook page. Just email your photo to our editor: blyth@scottishunicornnetwork.org.

Wherever you are in the world, take time out on **April 9th** to **Celebrate the National Animal of Scotland**