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Bruce and Carlin's Cairn by Tony Bonning

On the Rinns of Kells, just above Polmaddy, is a cairn which is called the Carlin's Cairn. Now it is often thought that Carlin in this sense means a witch and it was certainly used that way in Scotland in the past. But Carlin, in actual fact, is a Norse word. The male form is Carl, and means a man. Carlin is a woman. And the woman in particular was the wife of the miller at Polmaddy.

Now it so happened that when the miller and his wife were working away in the mill, Bruce arrived up. The woman recognised who he was but did not ask, afraid to give him away. Her husband unfortunately was a sympathiser of John Comyn.

A little while later along came some English soldiers and they asked if anybody had seen Robert the Bruce who had now taken off back to the hills.

The wife said 'Who was this?'

They said 'Robert the Bruce.'

'Nobody with that name has been here', she said, cutting across her husband who was just about to say there was somebody here. She very quickly silenced him.

The soldiers went away. However, later on they came back. Unfortunately, Robert the Bruce was in the building at the time. The miller by this time had been talked round by his wife - a wife can be very persuasive. However, he

did not wish to give Bruce away to the four soldiers. Not because he wasn't a sympathiser with John Comyn but because they were English and there was no way he was going to give Bruce, a Scotsman, away to the English.

So the miller took Bruce down into the mill itself and beneath the hopper that feeds the grain into the mill, he shoved Bruce down and shoved bags on top of him. The English came along and started working their way through the building to try and find Bruce, disregarding the people saying,

'Look, he's not here. There's no one like that here'.

'We'll check ourselves' they said. And they went down.

Finally, seeing the bags, one soldier pulled his sword out and thrust it through the bags spilling the contents all over place. At this, the wife hit the roof and said,

'Look at mess you're making of the place. Get out of here. Away you go, away back to England. Just don't mess our place.'

And so shocked by her onslaught were they that they hastily retreated from the mill. Bruce himself came out coughing and spluttering and covered in dust but very, very thankful to be alive, of course the sword probably just coming within an inch of killing him.

After the Battle of Bannockburn, Bruce returned to his family's castle at Loch Doon and invited the miller and his wife over to the castle. Because Bruce had now gotten rid of the the lords of Galloway who were the landlords of the miller and his wife, he then gave the miller and his wife the freehold of the mill at Polmaddy.

This is the transcript of the audio file available at
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