

# **The Clan and Company**

## **Meet the Women of the Secret of the Scottish Stones**

### **In order of Appearance**

#### **Mattie Black of Brims (Orkney, 1803-1888)**

Mattie Black was a legendary woman from Orkney's past, rumored to be a weather witch who could summon storms or sunshine with just a flick of her spoon. Though not much is written about her in history books, stories passed down on the islands say she knew when ships would wreck and where to find hidden treasure buried under sand or stone. Some folks feared her; others left her gifts on their windowsills, just in case.

#### **Effie Gray (Orkney, c. 1860)**

Effie Gray lived on the Orkney Islands in the 19th century and was known for her connection to the wind and sea. Like others before her, she claimed she could control the weather—especially when it came to selling sailors a “fair wind” for their journeys. Effie was also known for peddling love charms and small spells, offering people a little luck in matters of the heart. Some called her a witch, others a wise woman—but either way, they came to her for help. Her story may not appear in history books, but it lived on in whispers and warnings passed down through generations. Effie's quiet power reminds us that influence doesn't have to be loud to last.

#### **Florence Nightingale (England, 1820–1910)**

Florence Nightingale changed the world of medicine forever. During the Crimean War, she cleaned up filthy hospitals, made sure wounded soldiers were cared for, and saved thousands of lives—all with no magic, just determination and data. She walked through dark wards by lamplight, earning the nickname “The Lady with the Lamp.” Florence used statistics (and pie charts!) to show how hygiene could prevent disease. She helped invent modern nursing and proved that compassion and science could work hand-in-hand.

## **Janet Forsyth (Orkney, c. 1670-1705)**

Janet Forsyth was a woman from Sanday, one of the Orkney Islands, who was accused of witchcraft during the height of Scotland's witch trials. Like many women at the time, she was likely targeted because of her knowledge of healing, her independence, or simply because others feared what they didn't understand. Legend says Janet was imprisoned in Marwick's Hole, a dark underground cell beneath St. Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall where accused witches were chained and left in isolation. But unlike most, Janet is remembered for something extraordinary—she is believed to be the only woman to have escaped. No one knows how she got out, but her story has lived on for centuries. Janet represents the strength of women who stood up, even silently, against injustice—and the mysteries that history still holds.

## **Katherine Caray (Orkney, c. 1616)**

Katherine Caray lived in Orkney during a time when using natural remedies and healing charms could land a woman in serious trouble. She was known for using threads tied with blessings, stones for diagnosing spiritual illness, and a prayer that went, “bone to bone, sinew to sinew, flesh to flesh, and blood to blood.” To treat ulcers, she once gathered earth and stone from the spot where a man had been killed—an old ritual believed to hold healing power. Her knowledge of the land and body was passed down through generations, but it also made people suspicious. She was accused of witchcraft, like so many women who knew too much. Katherine's story shows how wisdom and danger often walked hand-in-hand for women in history.

## **Eithne (Irish Princess & Mother of Earls) (Ireland/Orkney, c. 930)**

Eithne was an Irish princess who became part of Orkney's Norse saga when she married into a powerful Viking family. She was the mother of Sigurd, one of the earliest Earls of Orkney, and her influence helped shape a line of rulers who would control the islands for generations. According to legend, she wove the Raven Banner—a magical flag that could bring victory in battle but doomed the one who carried it. That banner became a feared symbol during Viking raids and is still remembered in Orkney folklore today. Eithne's life connected Irish royalty with Norse power, and her legacy lived on through her descendants who ruled the islands. Though often overlooked in written histories, she stood at the heart of a political and

magical crossroads. And remarkably, she is the author's twenty-eighth great-grandmother.

### **John Gow (Orkney/England, 1698-1725)**

John Gow was a real-life pirate from Orkney who became infamous in the early 1700s for turning against his own crew and seizing control of the merchant ship *Caroline*. After sailing under the black flag and raiding vessels from the North Sea to the coast of Spain, he tried to return home under a false name—but islanders recognized him. Before he became a pirate, Gow had been engaged to a woman named Helen. The two had clasped hands over the Odinstone in Orkney, an ancient ritual that bound them together in the eyes of the community. When she discovered his crimes, Helen traveled all the way to London to officially undo the bond—a rare and powerful act at the time. Gow was eventually captured and hanged in London. His life was wild, ruthless, and unforgettable—and it left behind one of Orkney's most legendary love stories.

### **Mary Queen of Scots (Scotland/France/England, 1542–1587)**

Mary became Queen of Scotland when she was just six days old. Her life was full of political intrigue, royal drama, and daring escapes. She was taken to Lochleven Castle as a prisoner but managed to escape with the help of loyal supporters—one of history's most dramatic jailbreaks. Mary loved poetry, falconry, and yes, even golf—she's believed to be one of the first women to play the sport. Despite her intelligence and charm, her political enemies won out, and she was eventually executed in England. But Mary's story has lived on for centuries, inspiring books, plays, and legends. She remains one of the most fascinating—and misunderstood—figures in Scottish history.

### **Ragna of North Ronaldsay (Orkney, c. 860)**

Ragna was a Norse woman believed to have lived on the island of North Ronaldsay, the northernmost of the Orkney Islands, during the Viking Age. Her name appears in local legends and archaeological references, but her exact story has been lost to time. What makes Ragna especially memorable is her grave: she was buried with an elaborate headdress made of braided horsehair—something rare and highly symbolic in Norse tradition. The horsehair may have signified power, spiritual knowledge, or a

connection to seiðr, a form of Viking magic often practiced by women. Some believe she may have been a priestess, healer, or seer. Though we may never know the full truth, Ragna's burial shows that she was honored and remembered as someone important. Her story reminds us that even in silence, some women's legacies speak volumes.

### **Flora MacDonald ( Scotland/North Carolina, USA, 1722–1790)**

Flora MacDonald is one of Scotland's most beloved heroines, famous for helping Prince Charles Edward Stuart—"Bonnie Prince Charlie"—escape after his failed rebellion in 1746. Disguising him as her maid "Betty Burke," Flora smuggled him past British soldiers, risking her life for someone she barely knew. She was arrested and held in the Tower of London but later released. Flora eventually moved to North Carolina during the American Revolution, where her loyalty to the British crown put her in danger again. She returned to Scotland later in life, where she died peacefully. Flora's bravery, quick thinking, and quiet defiance made her a legend—and proved that courage doesn't always wear armor.

### **Isobel Gunn (Orkney/Canada c. 1781–1861)**

Isobel Gunn was born in Orkney but made history thousands of miles away. In 1806, she disguised herself as a man—calling herself "John Fubbister"—to join the Hudson's Bay Company and work in the harsh wilderness of Canada. She carried heavy cargo, braved brutal winters, and worked just as hard as the men around her—until she gave birth during a routine inspection, revealing her true identity. Afterward, she was sent back to Orkney and lived quietly, but her story was anything but ordinary. Isobel was one of the first known European women to cross into Canada's remote trading territories. Her boldness and resilience still echo through history.

### **Mina Paton Fleming (Scotland/Boston, USA, 1857–1911)**

Mina Fleming began her career as a maid—but ended up charting the stars. Born in Dundee, Scotland, she immigrated to the United States and found work as a housekeeper for Edward Pickering, the director of the Harvard College Observatory. When Pickering grew frustrated with his male assistants, he famously declared that his maid could do a better job—and then hired her to prove it. Mina went on to become

one of the first “computers,” women who analyzed astronomical photographs to classify stars. She created the *Pickering–Fleming system* and personally catalogued over 10,000 stars, helping build the foundation of modern stellar astronomy. She discovered white dwarfs, stars in their final stage of life, and helped identify more than 300 variable stars and 10 novae. Mina became the first woman to hold an official title at Harvard Observatory, and the first American woman inducted into the Royal Astronomical Society. She did it all without formal university education—just brilliance, precision, and relentless curiosity.

### **Mary Somerville (Scotland/England, 1780–1872)**

Mary Somerville was a self-taught scientist and mathematician who grew up in Scotland at a time when girls were rarely encouraged to study. But Mary was curious—so curious that she taught herself algebra by candlelight, using dusty books and a little help from her brother’s tutor. She went on to become one of the first women to publish scientific research in England and was so respected that the word “scientist” was first used in reference to her. She translated and explained the most complicated theories of her time, including celestial mechanics—the way planets move in space. Her clear writing helped ordinary people understand extraordinary ideas. Today, she’s remembered as one of the greatest science communicators of the 19th century—and an unstoppable learner.

### **Margaret Oliphant (Scotland/England, 1828–1897)**

Margaret Oliphant was a Scottish author who wrote over 100 books, including novels, biographies, essays, and ghost stories. She started writing as a teenager and kept going for the rest of her life—often supporting her entire family with her words. Her stories were filled with strong women, complex families, and spooky happenings, and she wasn’t afraid to write about topics others avoided. Margaret’s style blended realism with the supernatural, giving her work a quiet power that still holds up today. Though her name isn’t as well-known now, she was a bestselling author in her time. She showed that imagination, persistence, and purpose could carry a woman far.

### **Cleopatra VII (Egypt, 69–30 BCE)**

Cleopatra was the last active ruler of ancient Egypt—and she ruled with intelligence, strategy, and style. She spoke at least nine languages, including Egyptian (which most

of her Greek ancestors didn't bother to learn), and knew how to command both a throne and a room. Cleopatra formed powerful alliances with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony to try to protect Egypt's independence from Rome. She was known not just for her beauty, but for her sharp wit and political mind. Her reign brought a time of prosperity and cultural richness, even as the Roman Empire closed in. Though she lived more than 2,000 years ago, Cleopatra is still one of the most iconic women in world history.

### **Elizabeth Blackwell (Scotland/England c. 1707–1758)**

Elizabeth Blackwell was a Scottish botanical illustrator who combined science and art in a way few people had before. When her husband was imprisoned for debt, Elizabeth set out to support her family by drawing and publishing detailed images of medicinal plants. She created *A Curious Herbal*, a beautiful book with over 500 hand-colored illustrations, which became an important guide for doctors and apothecaries. She even taught herself Latin and botanical terminology to get the details right. Her work was praised across Europe for its accuracy and elegance. At a time when few women were allowed to study science, Elizabeth carved out a space with ink and talent. She turned hardship into something lasting—and rooted herself in the history of both medicine and art.

### **Scota (Egypt/Ireland/Scotland c. 300 B.C.E.)**

Scota is a legendary figure said to be the daughter of an Egyptian pharaoh and the namesake of Scotland. According to ancient tales, she traveled with her people across seas and settled in the British Isles, where her descendants became kings. Some say she brought the Stone of Destiny with her—the same one used in coronations for centuries. Whether she was real or mythical, Scota's name appears in Irish and Scottish chronicles, carved into the roots of two nations. Her story weaves together royalty, migration, magic, and the power of women to shape history.