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Published in:
Northern Studies

Publication date:
2019

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Citation for published version (APA):

Zickermann, K., & Murdoch, S. (2019). 'Bereft of all Human Help?': Scottish Widows of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). *Northern Studies*, 50, 114-134. <https://www.ssns.org.uk/journal/northern-studies-50-2019/>

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‘Bereft of all Human Help?’¹: Scottish Widows during the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648)

Steve Murdoch and Kathrin Zickermann

Introduction

SCOTTISH SOLDIERS and officers contributed heavily to the Dutch and Scandinavian armies during the Thirty Years’ War: estimates state that over 50,000 Scots aided the anti-Habsburg forces alone throughout the conflict.² In light of the war’s high attrition rate, it is surprising that we know little about the fate of the soldiers’ dependants. In her 2003 monograph, Alexia Grosjean noted that the field of military widows and children of fallen soldiers remained a rather under-researched topic.³ With reference to the Swedish case, Grosjean’s work was followed by several other contributions on women and warfare which focussed on Scandinavian case studies; Mary Beth Ailes looked at ‘War, Widows and State Formation’ in Sweden while Siobhan Talbot explored ‘Scottish Women and the Scandinavian Wars’ in general.⁴ More recently, there have been some significant contributions to the field, regarding both ‘widows’ and ‘women in warfare’ in other early-seventeenth-century theatres.⁵ However, a detailed analysis of the particular group comprising Scottish widows and based on their surviving correspondence is missing.

The present article seeks to close this gap by analysing a number of case studies which flag up the differences in the financial settlements available to Scottish widows based in the Dutch Republic and Swedish Empire. The

1 The Swedish National Archives (Riksarkivet), Oxenstiernska samlingen (OS), E724. Margaret Forrat to Axel Oxenstierna, 22 July 1633.

2 Murdoch (ed) 2001, 19-20.

3 Grosjean 2003a, 145. Some work has been done in this area in more general studies of widowhood. See Wiesner 2000.

4 Ailes 2006, 17-34; Talbot 2007, 102-127.

5 For example Lynn 2008; Sjöberg 2011, 204-216; Hacker and Vining (eds) 2012. See also Worthen 2017.

comparison reveals the extent to which these women were cared for through private provision (for example through stipulations made in wills) against any available institutional support. Most importantly, it also investigates what happened when such mechanisms failed and women had to rely on their own agency and/or their deceased husbands' social networks.

Wills

It is not surprising that Scottish soldiers sought to provide for their wives and children after their death, particularly given the nature of their profession. Personal testimony and legal documentation from enlisted men clearly reveals their concern for the women in their lives, be it their mothers, sisters, wives or daughters.⁶ Leendert Grim (Graham), a common soldier in Colonel William Brog's company, made a joint will with his wife Christina Bruce in December 1635, after five years of marriage. Both were named as sole beneficiaries in the event of the other's death.⁷ It made no difference to some men if their wives were Scottish or Dutch as evidenced when another Scot in Brog's regiment, Conrad Been and his Dutch wife Aelken Wilbortsdochter, also named each other as sole universal heirs.⁸ However, the cases of children inheriting instead of their mothers can also be seen in the testaments of common soldiers. Colonel Brog's trumpeter, John Thomas Maxwell, specified that his wife, Jannet Maxwell, would become his universal beneficiary, but only if he died childless.⁹ Others had a different view, such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC) musketeer David 'Vloeker' in 1622. He stipulated that his children could inherit, but only after his wife had died.¹⁰

In a recent survey of over 150 Scottish testaments located in Rotterdam, it was found that the majority, some 64%, were made by common sailors and soldiers serving either in the European or Asian theatres (albeit not all during the Thirty Years' War).¹¹ There was little difference found in the patterns of 'heir naming' between the soldiers and sailors of the VOC and those of the Scots Brigade, with the exception that the Brigade wives appeared to be based in the

6 For transcriptions of one such corpus from a common soldier who served in both the Dutch Republic and Sweden see Grosjean, Murdoch and Talbott 2015, 76-101.

7 Gemeentearchief Rotterdam (GAR) – Notarial Archive (ONA). Testament 14/12/1635 Inventarisnummer 195. Aktennummer 231/44s; Grim (Graham) married Bruce in Delft, 15 September 1630. See Maclean 1976, 250.

8 GAR ONA, Testament 13/05/1631. Inventarisnummer 108. Aktennummer 157/275; Coenraat Been married widow Aeltgen Willeborts in Rotterdam 25 June 1628. Maclean 1976, 249.

9 GAR ONA, Testament 08/01/1633. Inventarisnummer 129. Aktennummer 3/19.

10 Murdoch 2012, 40.

11 Murdoch 2012, 38-57 & 46 (for the statistical data).

Dutch Republic, while those of the VOC recruits were often based in Scotland.¹² The Rotterdam archives also reveal that legal declarations including notarial records of obligation (*schuldbekentenis*) and powers of attorney (*machtiging*) were employed to ensure that debts were cleared before the residue of wealth and belongings were returned to heirs either in Rotterdam or Scotland.¹³

High-ranking officers in Swedish service also left wills to ensure their wives and children would be cared for. General Sir James Spens of Wormiston drafted his in 1631. In it he was careful to protect his son and heir from his first marriage, William Spens, and all his rights to the main Spens barony of Orreholm, in Västergötland, including the manor and the moveable goods therein. But he was equally emphatic about the lands that should pass to his second wife, Margaret Forrat, including 15 farms and the country manor house at Ala, in Uppland, and that these were to remain in the possession of his wife so long as she remained unmarried. Ten of the farms had to be given up upon any remarriage, after which they would pass to her son Axel, though she was to maintain the estate at Ala until her death. His daughters from his first marriage to Agnes Durie, Isobel, Elizabeth and Cecilia, having already had 'sufficient dowries' were nevertheless granted specific gifts of money and movables, but Spens was categorical that, through his will, the rights of Margaret Forrat were protected from any claim by his children against her estates. To guarantee this he made Axel and Gabriel Oxenstierna, the guardians and protectors of all his children from both marriages.¹⁴

While James Spens made provision for his children should Margaret Forrat remarry, his daughter Isobel's husband was more emphatic. Major General James Ramsay used his will to positively urge his wife, Isobel Spens, to remarry another husband from an established family for the sake of their child.¹⁵ For whatever reason, she chose not to take another husband. Whilst the practice of remarriage was common in Scotland and in Europe as a whole, it was extremely common among the widows of the soldiering class with some 50% of the marriages in the Scots-Dutch brigade involving already widowed women.¹⁶

As Winifred Coutts has amply demonstrated, in addition to wills, there were also pre-nuptial marriage contracts for those of certain social strata in Scotland, which gave some form of social security, especially as they

12 Murdoch 2012, 37-38 & 40.

13 Murdoch 2012, 39.

14 National Records of Scotland (NRS), GD334/109 The Will of Sir James Spens of Wormiston (copy), 31 May 1631.

15 Spens 1983, 36-37. For more information on James Ramsay, see Grosjean 2004.

16 Glozier 2001, 136.

were legally enforced and upheld by the law.¹⁷ Even in the cases of women abandoned by their husbands, we find legal recourse to ensure claims upon their estate both before and after they died. The case of Mary Haynes, the estranged wife of the alleged bigamist Colonel Robert Monro of Foulis, is instructive in this regard as she not only got a settlement through the Scottish courts in 1627 while Monro was still alive, but also continued to receive her entitlement from his heirs after he died abroad in Swedish service.¹⁸

Institutional Support and Royal Interventions

It is not possible to say how many soldiers made wills in the first place or how many widows were covered by pre-nuptial marriage contracts. Nor do we know if the majority of wills included sufficient property or money to provide widows with lifelong pensions. It is, however, evident, and not surprising, that not all widows could fall back on private income left to them by their husbands and therefore had to look for other means of support, including sponsors to bring their case to the attention of the appropriate authorities.

In a military context, some widows could rely on support from local civic authorities and even interventions by their own monarch, particularly if the men died in the king's service. The British and Irish expeditionary forces that participated in the Stuart campaigns against Spain and France in the 1620s experienced a number of maritime disasters. This saw the wrecking of three ships in one incident alone in 1625, leaving some 227 widows and orphans who were still being supported by the City of Dover some four years later.¹⁹ Among those lost was Leith skipper David Gardiner whose ship *Gift of God* had been pressed into royal service for the wars. With the support of Charles I, his widow, Euphemia, petitioned the Lords of Admiralty on behalf of herself and her 'six fatherless children', interestingly, not for a pension, but for Gardiner's quarter share of the ship's value.²⁰ Other widows had to rely on the aid of relatives. The ill-fated 1627 *Ile de Ré* campaign left still more Scottish women in mourning. Sir William Cunningham died at the head of a troop of horse and when his father petitioned for compensation, the widows of others

17 Coutts 1999, 176-186.

18 Highland Council Archive Service, GD93/201. Contract between Colonel Robert Monro of Obstell and Hector Monro of Foulis, 20 September 1639. The document mentions the obligation both to Mary Haynes and her daughter, Elizabeth, from 1634.

19 The National Archives (TNA), State Papers (SP) 16/530, f.44. Petition of the Mayor, Jurats, and Commonalty of Dover, 26 March 1629.

20 TNA, SP16/304, f.104. Petition of Euphemia, widow of David Gardiner, 17 December 1635.

killed among Cunningham's troops were specifically included.²¹ Coupled with Winifred Coutt's case study on the expectations of domestic widows, it is clear from these examples that widows were being supported in a number of additional ways domestically, from civic charity to royal intervention depending on the merits of the case under scrutiny.

The situation of widows who lived in the Dutch Republic differed to those who did not leave their home country. From the start of the Eighty Years' War in 1568, Scots were found in the Dutch Republic in a number of capacities, both civilian and military. In the former sphere, the support structures for widows has long been understood, particularly in relation to the widows of the legally defined 'Scottish nation', located at the Scottish staple port of Veere in Zeeland.²² In the military, too, there was support. For example, some provision was available from the Dutch Council of War for widows and children of men who had achieved the rank of captain or above. However, there was no consistency in what was granted, and sometimes lower ranks also benefited. In 1621 four widows of Scottish officers received a life pension from the Council of War. The amounts received varied. The widow of Captain John Balfour obtained an annual payment of 50 guilders (£5), whilst the widow of Lieutenant Colonel Caluart, Barbara Bruce, and the widow of Captain Strachan, Agnes Kirkpatrick, received 200 guilders each highlighting that rank was not the defining factor for the amount awarded.²³ As regards Kirkpatrick, later records reveal that she was still receiving the same pension in 1650.²⁴ The children of nine families also received a pension, with the amount per child ranging from 62 to 200 guilders.²⁵ Some of this was for their education. In 1620 Kirkpatrick was awarded a 50 guilder maintenance fund to keep her son at school, a fund that she, like numerous other mothers, had received in previous years.²⁶ In Sweden, Scottish widows benefited in similar ways. Queen Christina agreed to pay 600 Rixdaler (£150) per year for the education of the children of Margaret Forrat, widow of Sir

21 *Calendar of State Papers Domestic in the reign of Charles I*, 1629-1631, 431. Petition, undated, 1630.

22 See for example in *Extracts from the Records of the Convention of Royal Burghs*, 1615-1676, 97, 119, 229, 251 & 308.

23 *Papers Illustrating the History of the Scots Brigade in the Service of the United Netherlands 1572-1782*, I, 320-321. NB There is confusion in Ferguson's records between Anna Kilpatrick and Anna Kirkpatrick. There were two women who were both widows. One was the wife of Captain Strachan, the other the wife of Colonel Henderson. On page 594 Ferguson indexes both women together. Captain John Strachan married 'Agnes Kirckpatrick' on 30 October 1596 lending credence to Kirkpatrick, not Kilpatrick, being her name and why we refer to her as Agnes here. See Maclean 1976, 34.

24 *Scots Brigade* I, 231, 233 & 492.

25 *Scots Brigade* I, 320.

26 *Scots Brigade* I, 233.

James Spens, despite his will stipulating that the profit from her farms should have covered their educational expenses.²⁷ In this case, the state-sponsored educational bursary continued for the Spens boys for at least twelve years after their father's death in 1632, though as we shall see below, this woman was perhaps exceptional.²⁸

Almost all pensions applied for by captains' and colonels' widows in Dutch service had been granted during this period, but the authorities became increasingly weary of the constant drain of money.²⁹ In 1621, the States General declined the application for a pension from Delia Butler, widow of Captain David Ramsay, but instead awarded her 80 guilders to facilitate her return to Scotland.³⁰ It is noticeable that this reluctance to pay pensions coincided with the end of the Twelve Years' Truce between the Dutch and the Spanish (1609–1621). The financial situation became more acute immediately after the siege of Bergen-Op-Zoom in 1622. There were now many new widows for the Dutch to deal with and additional associated costs of re-entering a state of war were becoming quite apparent, both in human and financial terms. Therefore, when the widow of Colonel Robert Henderson, Anna Kirkpatrick, asked for a pension, the Council hesitated to grant the request as it might set another precedent.³¹ However, as the colonel had apparently behaved particularly fearlessly, they were inclined to review the petition favourably, not least in order to encourage similar acts of bravery by his fellow officers. Initially, Anna was granted only three months of her husband's pay. In July and September 1624 both King James VI and members of the Scottish Privy Council became involved in supporting her case which again came before the States General.³²

27 NRS, GD334/109. Will of Sir James Spens of Wormiston, 31 May 1631.

28 Fischer 1907, 99. For the continued involvement of the Swedish Chancellor in the tutoring choices for Forrat's sons, see RA/OS, E619. Margaret Forrat to Axel Oxenstierna, 30 June 1643 and 13 November 1644.

29 *Scots Brigade* I, 342-343.

30 *Resolutiën der Staten-General: Nieuw Reeks, 1617–1670. Del 5, 1621–1622*, 105. Resolution, 2 April 1621. There were complications here: Delia Butler, daughter of the late Captain Thomas Butler, had previously brought a case against Colonel Buccleuch who, though she was only 15, had seduced her and fathered a daughter by her. For this she was already receiving financial compensation from the Dutch authorities, and she gained custody of her child. See *Resolutiën der Staten-General: Nieuw Reeks, 1617–1670. Del 2, 1613–1616*, 380 & 561-562. *Ibid.*, *Del 3, 1617–1618*, 93, 111 & 374. Somewhat insensitively here, Butler is indexed as Buccleuch's widow; *Scots Brigade* I, 260, 262-266 & 393. Her late husband, David Lindsay, had served in Buccleuch's company since 1612 and had died sometime before 1 February 1620. See *Scots Brigade* I, 228.

31 *Scots Brigade* I, 342-343. As Henderson did not die until 1622 at Bergen-op-Zoom, we can be sure that Anna Kirkpatrick is meant here rather than Kilpatrick as Henderson sometimes calls her. In the volumes of the *Resolutiën der Staten-General*, Widow Henderson is only referred to as Anna Kirkpatrick. See *Resolutiën der Staten-General: Nieuw Reeks. Del 6, 1623-1624*, 36, 40 and 55.

32 *Scots Brigade* I, 345; *Resolutiën der Staten-General: Nieuw Reeks. Del 7, 1624–1625*, 15 & 78.

These interventions were successful. In January 1626 Kirkpatrick was awarded a sum of 300 guilders annually, but only four months later the amount was raised to 500 guilders. However, a subsequent petition from her for the transfer of her pension onto her children after her death was not upheld by the council.³³

As the Kirkpatrick case demonstrated, the valour of her husband proved a factor in her pension. However, one did not have to be a senior officer to deserve such consideration. George Bruce became an ensign in Captain Kirkpatrick's company only three weeks before his death at the fort of Schenken. Regardless of his relatively short service as an officer, it was the longevity and steadfastness of his service as a rank and file soldier that was noted by Frederick of Orange who intervened on his widow's behalf in 1636. That said, not all interventions were immediately successful regardless of the credentials of those who supported the petition. In May 1632 King Charles I requested the payment of a sum of 1490 guilders owed to Captain Ramsey's widow. The matter was deferred to the Council of State, though no conclusion was reached at that point.³⁴ If such cases tell us anything, it is surely that intervention, even by an anointed prince, could directly help in some cases but not necessarily in others.

Scottish widows continued to fight for their rights to an annual pension during the ensuing decades. One particularly complex case was that of Christina Boswell, the widow of Lieutenant Colonel Allan Coutts, who petitioned the council in May 1631 for a pension in recompense for her husband's long and faithful service.³⁵ The petition was first deferred and repeatedly refused. Christina Boswell did not give up and submitted additional requests over the coming years. On 5 March 1632 her fifth petition was forwarded to the Council of State and she received a one-off payment of 150 guilders.³⁶ Although this was a minor success, three months later Christina's request for an annual pension was again refused upon the advice of the Council of State which stated that 'it would be too great a burden for the country to support the widows of all captains and officers'.³⁷ Besides, they argued, Colonel Coutts had not died facing the enemy but in his bed, and his son's appointment as an ensign should have been adequate recompense. The peaceful passing of Coutts stood in contrast to Henderson's valorous demise as the Dutch authorities now effectively indicated a reluctance to pay out for those who did not die fighting. It was deemed imperative that any further claims made by Christina were to be disregarded as otherwise an important precedent would be set. She remained undeterred, however, and continued to petition the Council of War for a life pension which

33 *Scots Brigade I*, 349-350.

34 *Scots Brigade I*, 444.

35 *Scots Brigade I*, 60 and 442. Allan Coutts had died before 12 May 1631.

36 *Scots Brigade I*, 444.

37 *Scots Brigade I*, 445.

led to several awards of smaller regular and larger irregular payments over the next six years. The authorities were careful not to view these as a fixed pension.³⁸ It is clear that Christina's persistent efforts wore the authorities down but, despite her relative successes, her situation remained precarious.

A similar, although less successful, case is that of Maria van Loon, the Dutch widow of Colonel John Halket, who had died in battle at Bois-le-Duc in 1629.³⁹ The Council of State found that she should receive the same pension as other widows of colonels or captains, which was an amount of 1500 guilders over three years. However, this renewed petition from Maria arrived with the Council in January 1640, eleven years after her husband's death. Thus, they argued that as van Loon had already received some payments, her grant was not to exceed 1000 guilders over four years. Unfortunately for her, the decision was once again deferred, and the outcome remained unclear.⁴⁰ But van Loon was not without significant patrons; a letter of Frederick V, sometime King of Bohemia, to his wife Elizabeth in 1629 already mentioned the desperation of the widow and her numerous children.⁴¹ From her records, it is clear Maria was receiving some assistance, but the slow pace is evidenced by the subsequent intervention of her patrons. Fully 10 years after Frederick's letter to Elizabeth, the Queen of Bohemia petitioned the States General to get Maria's son John a position as an officer; one which they had declined to grant him nine years previously.⁴² The granting of an officers' commission still seemed to be a suitable compensation to the Dutch authorities, at least in some cases and particularly where the widows had the friends in high places

The efforts of the Dutch Republic to save money when granting pensions and other payments also becomes evident in the case of the unnamed widow of Rev Andrew Hunter, the chaplain of the Scots Brigade. Apparently, the States General had asked the three colonels of the Scots Brigade if money usually paid to the Scottish minister could be reallocated to support Hunter's widow. The colonels answered on 14 November 1630 that they had no objection to this and that they would provide for the maintenance of their chaplains without the assistance of the Dutch authorities during the widow's remaining lifetime, but in essence the Dutch had abrogated their responsibility to her.⁴³

38 *Scots Brigade I*, 446-447.

39 Maria van Loon and Captain John Halket married on 19 December 1608 in The Hague. See Maclean 1976, 140.

40 *Scots Brigade I*, 458-459.

41 *The Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia: Volume I, 1603-1631*, 777-778. Frederick V to Elizabeth, 19 August 1629. We thank Dr Akkerman for bringing this intervention to our attention.

42 *Elizabeth Stuart*, 778, notes 9 and 10.

43 *Scots Brigade I*, 438-439.

These cases of interaction between Scottish widows and the Dutch authorities are instructive for many reasons, not least that ever since the outbreak of the Eighty Years' War, widows of officers, in particular, expected financial remuneration, whilst deserving lower ranks' widows also obtained limited financial assistance. However, the prevailing attitude to the transfer of property requires interrogation, given that land was a commodity the Dutch did not have much of, and what they did possess was already allocated. In Europe, it was generally accepted that upon being widowed, a woman could retain a proportion of her husband's land or property to sustain herself so long as she did not remarry. The land or property would then devolve to the late husband's heirs on his widow's death although the heirs apparent could take a widow to court during her lifetime if they felt she was decreasing the value of their inheritance.⁴⁴ This situation became particularly acute in the Swedish Empire: any possessions that the Swedish Crown acquired and hoped to profit from had to be both held and carefully managed. They did so via the allocation of land and governorships to those who served them best, often in lieu of pay. During the Thirty Years' War, Scots were viewed as something of the favoured nation in this regard. They were awarded governorships and land in abundance in both Sweden proper and in the conquered territories.⁴⁵ Because this reward for service via land donation was contingent on the soldiers remaining alive, particularly in contested territories, the significance for the wives and family following the death of the land-holder naturally had consequences.

Institutions such as the Swedish *Riksråd* (Council of the Realm) recognised the plight of the bereaved families, of officers at least, and sought to implement measures to alleviate their fate. The *Riksråd* altered an existing policy to allow the widow of the recipient of a land donation to maintain the property so long as she did not remarry.⁴⁶ However, there were drawbacks to this decision. For example, if the widow had not been mentioned in the original land donation, the land reverted to the crown immediately. Despite this drawback for women who had married already landed husbands, daughters could benefit from this new policy. They were to be granted three years' worth of interest as a 'bridal tax' on property, regardless of whether the mother was mentioned in the original donation or not.⁴⁷ In the Scottish case, their rights could also be supported by their pre-existing wills and marriage contracts. This proved crucial particularly in the Swedish context, albeit we

44 Wiesner 2000, 37.

45 Grosjean 2003b, 53-78.

46 Ailes 2006, 17. An example of a Scottish widow who received her husband's possessions was Cecilia Spens (widow to Major General David Drummond). She also held six farms in her own right. RA/OS, E589, Cecilia Spens to Axel Oxenstierna, 15 October 1639.

47 SRP III, 121. Minute, 7 June 1633.

are forced to look to the higher status widows due to a dearth of evidence regarding the wives of common soldiers.

The Agency of Widows

With institutional support sporadic at best, and the Swedish military suffering something of a financial crisis after 1630, many widows turned to other sources of help.⁴⁸ Many cashed in their social capital with individuals at the highest level of the military leadership or with requests made directly to the Swedish government. Ailes divides these appeals into two main categories with one encompassing any financial requests (including outstanding debts owed to their late husbands), and the other any form of maintenance to secure their future, including donations of land.⁴⁹ As the Gardiner case, above, demonstrated, this could include the recovery of assets, or value in lieu, as per her claim on her husband's ship. Ailes' categorisation reminds us that not all widows pursued a pension. It is clear that provisions were made for some widows to gain possession of land in their own right. Miss Rutherford was the widow of Andrew Forrat, the navy captain who blew himself up along with his ship *Solen* rather than let it fall into the hands of the Poles in 1627. For his actions, Widow Rutherford was apparently granted several estates from King Gustav II Adolf, with all the privileges of nobility attached.⁵⁰ Catherine Murray, a correspondent of the Swedish Chancellor and Regent, Axel Oxenstierna, long before the death of her husband, Colonel Thomas Thomson, also received confirmation of her land in Vrana and Munkevraak after his death, doubtless due to the chancellor's mediation.⁵¹ Isobel Spens also petitioned Oxenstierna for reimbursement for James Ramsay's long and loyal service.⁵² In order to enforce her claim, Isobel relocated from her residence in St Andrews in Scotland to Sweden in the mid-1640s. This proved to be a successful move as in 1647, her wish was granted when her son David was given various farms in Sweden under the condition that Isobel should hold the estates in her possession until her death.⁵³ Numerous other cases show women easily taking possession of portions of land, some for the duration of their lives, whilst others gained the land outright.

48 For the financial implications and differences in money available to the Dutch and Swedish armies, see Murdoch 2016, esp 57-62

49 Ailes 2006, 19

50 Fischer 1907, 179

51 *Den introducerade Svenska Adelns Ättartavlor* vol. 8, 264-265. See also Murdoch and Grosjean 2014, 249. For her previous correspondence with Oxenstierna, see RA/OS, E740. 'Catharina Moritz' to Axel Oxenstierna, December 1636 and another 'undated'.

52 RA/OS, E692, Isobel Spens to AO, Stockholm, 13 April and 9 December 1646; Spens 1983, 38-39.

53 Spens 1983, 38-39.

Of those who sought to recoup debt, not all targeted the government of the armies in which their late spouse had served. Margaret Lindsay, the widow of surgeon William Welch, petitioned Charles I to receive Welch's outstanding back pay of £272 and expenses after several years' service in both the Danish and Swedish armies.⁵⁴ Of interest here is that she viewed the recruiting colonel, Donald Mackay Lord Reay, as the party responsible for the debts owing to her husband, and not either of the Scandinavian kings. Lindsay was not alone in the pursuit of outstanding debts or reasonable living costs based on their husband's service. In 1649, Colonel William Forbes interceded on behalf of Isobel Forbes, a rare example of a low-status widow, who had lost her husband several years previously. Widow Forbes' own financial burdens were increased by the responsibility she had for the children of one Captain Pringle whose wife had been killed by a cannon ball. Some remuneration had been forthcoming from General Lennart Torstensson, but this had been interrupted for some time.⁵⁵ As her case demonstrates, not only could she call on her kinsman, Colonel William Forbes, for help but he in turn took her case further up the extended kinship hierarchy to General Arvid Forbes in order that her remuneration would be reinstated. The widow of George Leslie petitioned Axel Oxenstierna in 1639, also for outstanding payments due to her late husband.⁵⁶ She did so with the support of Field Marshal Alexander Leslie, the half-brother of her deceased husband and close friend of Oxenstierna.⁵⁷ These latter cases seem to contradict Merry Weisner's assertion that extended families did not care for widows of bereaved relatives in this period as the Forbes's and Leslie's clearly did.⁵⁸

Leslie's widow was one of several Scottish women who were in correspondence with the Swedish chancellor, but in terms of agency, we should not think in simplistic terms about women only engaged in correspondence once their husbands had died. The previously mentioned Margaret Forrat maintained a correspondence with and was well-acquainted with the Swedish Chancellor for several years before her bereavement. There is no doubt that her marriage placed her in a slightly different position to several of the other widows discussed here. Her husband was both a general in the Swedish army and held the position of permanent ambassador to and between the houses of

54 TNA, SP16/257 f.110. Petition of Margaret Lindsay to Charles I, c.1633; Riis 1988, II, 132.

55 Lund University Library. De La Gardie Släktarkiven, Forbes 8.1. William Forbes to Arvid Forbes, 3 June 1649; Fischer 1907, 240.

56 RA/OS, E648. Widow Leslie to Axel Oxenstierna, 30 January 1639

57 RA/OS, E648. Widow Leslie to Axel Oxenstierna 30 January 1639

58 Wiesner 2000, 90. For more of the differences between Scottish kith and kin networks in comparison to other European structures, see Murdoch 2006, 13-48.

Stuart and Vasa.⁵⁹ What becomes clear in the moment of her bereavement is the influence this lady held in her own right.

Aggrieved that her late husband was not getting the respect in death, he had been accorded in life, Margaret penned a number of letters to Chancellor Oxenstierna. One of the earliest of these to survive is a carefully crafted missive in Latin, the tone of which is strikingly firm and reprimanding in nature: her husband's body remained unburied and her family was being mocked for it, whilst creditors were hounding her for bills, she claimed she simply could not meet. Margaret said that even if she sold everything she owned, she could not keep up interest payments on debts accrued while her husband had been deployed on Sweden's state business.⁶⁰ Bearing James Spens' will in mind, and Axel's signature upon it, Margaret reminded Oxenstierna of his obligations to her and her family. She cleverly concluded the letter to this devoutly religious statesman noting 'that providing for widows and orphans is pleasing [to] Almighty God.'⁶¹ The message was heard. Having already been named as co-guardian of her children, within months of Forrat's letter Oxenstierna facilitated her sons' and their half-brother Colonel William Spens' elevation to the House of Nobility (*Riddarhuset*) through a special dispensation from the crown which even allowed for their continued adherence to Calvinism.⁶²

In the following years, Margaret played on the relationship between Oxenstierna and her sons, asking for help to protect their estates even after she married her second husband, Colonel Hugo Hamilton in 1637.⁶³ In order to protect their inheritance, Oxenstierna asked Queen Christina to reissue and confirm land donations given to General James Spens by Gustav II Adolf in 1631. The original document stated that 'We forbid all of those that owe us obedience to put any obstacle or hindrance in the way of the aforesaid Jacob Spentz (*sic*) or his heirs in any shape or form now or in the future'.⁶⁴ This supported the will of James Spens, and Axel Oxenstierna proved true to the obligations he undertook to his old friend.

59 Grosjean 2003a, 67-87; Murdoch 2000, 93-138.

60 RA/OS, E724. Margaret Forrat to Axel Oxenstierna, 22 July 1633. We thank Dr Peter Maxwell-Stuart for his meticulous translation and detailed notes on this particular letter. The trope of the 'unburied husband' resounds throughout the letters of the widows. What they are actually getting at, is 'not buried with sufficient pomp, ceremony and status'. See also the similar protests of Isobel Spens noted in her correspondence with Oxenstierna. RA/OS, E692.

61 RA/OS, E724. Margaret Forrat to Axel Oxenstierna, 22 July 1633

62 SRP III, 193. Riksråd minute, 9 October 1633; SRP V, 214 & 257. Minutes, 21 and 31 October 1635. A cautionary note here is that the editors of the *Riksråd* series were not sure which son was meant and often conflate William and Axel.

63 RA/OS, E724, Margaret Forrat to Axel Oxenstierna, 26 August and 27 September 1636.

64 Queen Christina's 1641 republished letter of donation by Gustav II Adolf, originally written 11 August 1631 and quoted in Fischer 1907, 236-237.

Once Oxenstierna's intervention had resolved her sons' situations, it was not long before Margaret Forrat's case for her pension was brought before the *Riksråd*. Despite the generous provisions laid out in James Spens' will, his creditors were moving in on Forrat's assets. In September 1634, she was paid what she was due for Spens' expenses during his Swedish service in Germany. However, the year of grace she had requested in regard to Spens' finances was not allowed as the cost of 10,000 Riksdaler was prohibitive for the state. Instead, Margaret was granted a sum of 1000 Riksdaler to be paid in two instalments over the next two years.⁶⁵ In addition to this, she received the right to the church tithe in Härkirberga for three years to supplement her income.⁶⁶ Although this seemed helpful, a *Riksråd* minute from the following year made it clear that not all of her issues were resolved. It reveals that Margaret had requested that no other person would be invested in her estates, obviously with an eye to those debtors.⁶⁷ To resolve the wider Spens family debt, it is clear that William Spens worked closely with his father's widow. The Marquis of Hamilton interceded on their behalf asking that William should be allowed to sell the Orreholm estate. The *Riksråd* responded that they were sympathetic to both William and Margaret, but Queen Christina, to whom the petition was directed, forbade the sale stating that William would have sufficient opportunity to raise money on the estate.⁶⁸ Such a sale would, anyway, have been in breach of the original grant.

Thereafter, Margaret's financial problems may have eased as she did not raise them again in her other surviving correspondence. She maintained her written exchanges with Axel Oxenstierna. For example, in January 1638 she wrote regarding diplomatic meetings at the Stuart court passed on by her husband, Hugo.⁶⁹ Her agency here is clear in that it was she, and not Colonel Hamilton, who had the ear of Axel Oxenstierna to pass on such intelligence. In 1643 she wrote a letter of intercession on Hamilton's behalf, including seeking permission for him to remain in Stockholm beyond his allotted period of leave.⁷⁰ The continued correspondence reveals a woman comfortable with her status. Margaret shows us that she commanded respect from senior officials in the Swedish government, could successfully activate kith, kin and friendship

65 SRP IV, 225. Riksråd minute, 25 September 1634.

66 Fischer 1907, 99.

67 SRP V, 326. Minute. 18 November 1635.

68 Historical Manuscripts Commission, *The Manuscripts of the Duke of Hamilton, K.T.*, 83. 'in answer to a petition by the Marquis (Hamilton) for Sir William Spens, the Council express great regard for the widow (Margaret Forrat) and children, and state that though Spens's barony of Oreholm cannot be alienated, it may be mortgaged on behalf of the creditors'. Stockholm, 17 July 1635. Extract.

69 RA/OS, E619. Margaret Forrat to Axel Oxenstierna, 2 January 1638.

70 RA/OS, E619. Margaret Forrat to Axel Oxenstierna, 7 August 1643.

networks to gain advantage for her children, and intercede on behalf of her second husband who, though a full colonel in the Swedish army, was clearly not so well connected as she. This daughter of a 'middling sort' family from Fife died in 1653 and was given a full state funeral at Riddarholm church – final resting place of many Swedish kings – in Stockholm.⁷¹

Isobel Spens and Margaret Forrat's cases reveal that these women's long-term relationship with members of the Swedish government is far from exceptional. Another interesting case is that of Martha 'Hansdotter' Stuart. She was born in Scotland, the daughter of John Stuart and Brita Soop. After moving to Sweden, she married a French Lieutenant-Colonel, Anton Ydron, but was widowed in 1632 after her husband died at the battle of Nürnberg. Her first surviving letter to Oxenstierna contains a 'typical' petition highlighting her husband's long and loyal service of 26 years followed by a request for help.⁷² However, while some scholars dismiss widows' use of the relation of the deceased husband's military curriculum vitae in their personal testimonies as somehow seeking sympathy, the women are using exactly the same techniques and register as men in identifying and locating themselves for the benefit of the governmental hierarchy to whom they wrote. This device allowed the authorities to easily understand who it was they were dealing with – for example, there were two Martha Stuarts corresponding with Swedish government officials in the mid-seventeenth century.⁷³ Men such as Axel Oxenstierna were in receipt of thousands of letters every year, so it was important to specify who the petitioners were, especially given the Scottish tendency to recycle first names across generations. Anyone who has transcribed such letters, whether by colonels or generals looking to recover their entitlement for service, will understand that Martha Stuart simply used the appropriate code to explain who she was and why she was worthy of consideration.⁷⁴ There was nothing gendered about it.

So what makes Martha Stuart's case interesting? Having been widowed in 1632, there is little indication of any immediate request for help from either

71 *Riddarholmskyrkan: Sveriges Kyrkor, Stockholms Kyrkor*, vol.2, 724.

72 RA/OS, E757, Martha Stuart to Axel Oxenstierna, without date or place.

73 These were Martha Hansdotter Stuart and Martha Beata Stuart. For the latter see RA, Skoklostersmalingen II. Personarkiv, E8151. Martha Beata Stuart to Count and Riksråd Per Brahe, 1672.

74 RA/OS, E703. Numerous letters from Colonel Francis Ruthven to Axel Oxenstierna, 1639-1643 in pursuit of his pension. Here Ruthven repeatedly details his years of service and why he is deserving of what is due to him. Even when chastising superior officers for a minor slight, the reminder of who the author was, and how long they had served was an essential part of the soldiers' correspondence. See Colonel John Gunn protesting against Colonel Wrangel in Krigsarkivet, Karl Viggo Key Arkiv, Gunn to Major General Karl Gustav Wrangel, 14 December 1644. In this case Gunn staked his 18 years of service over the word of the general's relative.

Axel Oxenstierna personally or the state in general, but it is clear she gained entitlement to property. Nevertheless, from the late 1640s, the chancellor acted as a patron to Martha and her family on several occasions. For example, in 1647 she thanked Oxenstierna for his help in regard to a royal donation based on a large share of crops harvested from an ecclesiastical tithes.⁷⁵ The following year, Oxenstierna recommended Martha to the *Landshövding* Johan Berndes, stating that she should receive payment for some of her husband's possessions which had apparently been illegally taken by a Captain Ferret (Forrat?).⁷⁶ During this time, Martha also sought Oxenstierna's help in regard to one of her sons who was joining Swedish service. He was, apparently, unable to pay for a horse and therefore Martha implored Oxenstierna to confer with General Robert Douglas to equip her son gratis until he was able to repay him. She further requested that Douglas stand as guarantor for any ransom for her son should he become a captive.⁷⁷ Martha later sought the Chancellor's aid in getting her sons ennobled and introduced into *Riddarhuset*.⁷⁸ This was granted in 1649 when both her sons were elevated into the peerage. Martha Stuart thus evidently had the ear and direct support of the most powerful man in Sweden and – through him – senior members of the Scottish military community, including General Robert Douglas. However, if not familiar with Swedish geography, one might miss a crucial detail in the Stuart-Oxenstierna dynamic. While it is true that the Widow Stuart corresponded with 'Chancellor Oxenstierna', one should also note that her requests were also directed to her immediate neighbour. Martha Stuart lived and farmed on the island of Almö, situated in Lake Mälaren while Oxenstierna resided 'next door', slightly to the south west at Tidö Slott.

Martha Stuart's later letters to Oxenstierna certainly read like requests to a local magnate rather than to the Chancellor of Sweden. For example, on 20 November 1651, she asked Oxenstierna to sell her two farm horses since she had suffered great damage to her livestock. She offered to pay for these at the first opportunity, but with hay rather than specie.⁷⁹ On another occasion, she complained about the high prices of hay and referred to the big floods which had affected her lands. In this instance, she asked Oxenstierna to sell her two oxen which would allow her to continue her husbandry.⁸⁰ Albeit that these and her other requests for intervention were being made to a man who happened to be the Chancellor of Sweden, Widow Stuart was also simply

75 RA/OS, E757, Martha Stuart to Axel Oxenstierna, 21 November 1648.

76 RAOSB, Series I, Vol. 16:2, 681-682, Axel Oxenstierna to Johan Berndes, 9 October 1648.

77 RA/OS, E757, Martha Stuart to Axel Oxenstierna, 30 July 1647.

78 RA/OS, E757, Martha Stuart to Axel Oxenstierna, undated.

79 RA/OS, E757, Martha Stuart to Axel Oxenstierna, 20 November 1651.

80 RA/OS, E757, Martha Stuart to Axel Oxenstierna, 9 September 1649.

asking a close neighbour to help out a fellow farmer in times of need. It was, in this spirit, that Oxenstierna responded.

Conclusion

This brief examination of Scottish widows does much to contest some of the prevailing assumptions surrounding the bereaved wives of fallen soldiers. While undoubtedly true for some that 'widowhood generally brought a decline in a woman's economic status', the cases considered here suggest that many simply continued as before.⁸¹ Scrutiny of the wills and testaments of the common soldiery in the Dutch Republic shows that men and women anticipated their own demise and made contingencies for just that event. Certainly, the options available to the wives of all common soldiers included returning home, joining the sutlers following the armies or remarrying.⁸² While Dutch sources are abundant on the lower status women, Swedish sources on the subject remain scant. Indeed, Isobel Forbes remains one of the few low-status Scottish widows in a Swedish context for whom we have any information at all. That said there are other factors to consider: whether in Scotland or overseas, women managed farms or businesses while their husbands were away fighting in the wars. Often, despite personal bereavement, they simply continued in their previous roles, albeit while in mourning. Existing scholarship has already proven that mechanisms were in place to ensure the welfare and legal rights of bereaved wives in Scotland and abroad regardless of social status. Delia Butler's case shows that the Dutch were prepared to finance her passage home to Scotland where local institutions could look after her. Isobel Spens, on the other hand, made the journey to Sweden from Scotland to gain access to her entitlements. As she and Martha Stuart show, many women continued to develop their economic fortunes long after the death of their husbands, taking either state-sponsored pensions or land in lieu of payment. Whilst many widows remarried to secure their livelihoods, these widows preferred to live their lives on their own terms and without recourse to remarriage.

Considering the totality of the correspondence base, we find ourselves unconvinced by assertions that the state only wanted to support the most deserving of the widows. Rather they did what they could with the resources available. As recent research has demonstrated, the Swedish state was in a particularly perilous financial state after 1630 and could barely afford to pay its living soldiers, let alone their widows. The Dutch Republic, on the other

81 Wiesner 2000, 37-38.

82 Sjöberg 2011, 205 & 207.

hand, buoyed by its expanding empire in South East Asia, could reward both servicemen and their wives, even hiking up the wages offered to the military around 1630 after some nine years adjusting to the renewed conflict with Spain.⁸³ But with the higher wages came an expectation to make some provision for widowhood while the husbands were still alive. Scrutiny of widows' letters and petitions reveals that many widows appear to have been granted pensions without ever having to petition for one. Other widows can only be shown to have only ever have written one letter to the authorities and it is not yet certain if that reflects success at first time of asking, or a negative outcome. Moreover, in this regard, the widows who did petition the authorities behaved no differently to men in similar situations in the period. Numerous cases demonstrate that the contention that women 'could not expect to receive much financial help from the crown based upon their own merit' is also found wanting.⁸⁴ One need only think of Christina Boswell in the Dutch Republic or Margaret Forrat in Sweden to refute the contention. The majority of cases we have analysed show foreign women in alien environments sometimes exerting considerable influence in their country of residence, even if they moved there specifically to make their case, as Isobel Spens demonstrated.⁸⁵ As Alexia Grosjean had previously noted, it would be foolish to think that foreign women could not achieve this either directly or through the influence of their wider kith and kin networks.⁸⁶ Indeed, Wiesner has observed that widowhood gave a woman the power to influence the careers and cultivate opportunities for her children, and, with only a few exceptions, this is certainly confirmed in our case studies above.⁸⁷

83 Boxer 1965, 337-342.

84 Ailes 2006, 25.

85 This contrasts with the findings presented in Ailes 2006, 27. In another example of exerting influence abroad, the wife of the cavalry trooper James Ramsay who died in Royalist service in England in 1640 either personally petitioned, or had someone in authority petition, both Charles I and the Scottish Parliament in 1641. That she was most likely a Dutch widow in Scotland is shown in the subsequent letter of recommendation in her favour sent to 'the Estates of Holland' in 1641. See Charles I and the Parliament of Scotland to the Estates of Holland, 17 August 1641, found in *RPS*, 1641/8/44, and also *RPS*, 1641/8/59, Ordinance in favour of Alexander Ramsay of Balnabreich, 17 August 1641. That James Ramsay had been knighted as suggested in the first document is debatable and may reflect confusion with the colonel of the same name. Similarly, the French widow of medical doctor William Oliviat successfully petitioned the Scottish Parliament in her own right and was awarded some 2,000 merks by the treasurer of the army in 1646 for her husband's covert work as 'agent and intelligencer' in France for four years. See *RPS*, 1645/11/131. Act in favour of Widow Oliviat, 26 November 1645. All *RPS* records accessed via www.rps.ac.uk on 10 September 2018.

86 Grosjean 2003a, 158-159.

87 Wiesner 2000, 38.

In the present project, we have located, transcribed and translated hundreds of letters pertinent to Scottish widows in the period of Thirty Years' War and its aftermath. The cases here are but the tip of an exciting corpus which, we believe, provide some important conclusions.

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