



# Kirk o' Field

## What happened in 1567?

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## Introduction

Early in the morning of 10 February 1567, Kirk o' Field house in Edinburgh was destroyed by an explosion. The partially clothed bodies of Lord Darnley, the second husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, and his servant were found in a nearby orchard, apparently strangled but unharmed by the explosion. Suspicion immediately fell upon Mary and James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, one of her closest and most trusted noblemen. Although Bothwell was considered to be the lead conspirator, he was found not guilty at his trial in April, 1567. Mary married Bothwell the following month, just three months after Darnley's murder.

Darnley's death remains an unsolved historical mystery. Work through the available evidence and see if you can work out what happened.

## Tasks

Look at close up 1

1. This is the bodies of Lord Darnley and his servant in the garden
  - a) Why are the men half naked?
  - b) How did the bodies get there?
  - c) What might the chair have been used for?
  - d) Are there any obvious marks on the bodies?
  - e) Who do you think the dagger belonged to?
  - f) How do you think they died?

Look at close up 2

2. This section shows Lord Darnley being carried away and the funeral of his servant
  - a) Where are the men taking Lord Darnley's body?
  - b) Why do you think the soldiers were there?
  - c) Where is Lord Darnley's servant being buried?

Look at close up 3

3. This section shows the site of the murder
  - a) Judging from the ruin, how big was the explosion?
  - b) The ruins of Kirk o' Field House have been labelled the site of the murder.
  - c) Do you think this is really where the murder occurred?

Look at close up 4

4. This is the Infant James - Lord Darnley's son and heir to the throne
  - a) The infant James is saying 'Judge and revenge my caus, O Lord.' What do you think this means?
  - b) James would have only been a one year old baby at this time. What is the artist trying to suggest about the death of Lord Darnley?"
  - c) From what you have found out so far, how do you think Darnley died?

Look at Source 2

5. This is a letter allegedly from Mary Queen of Scots to Bothwell.
  - a) If the letter is really from Mary to Bothwell, who is the 'he' Mary keeps referring to?
  - b) What does Mary want Bothwell to do with the letter?
  - c) What warnings does Mary give Bothwell?
  - d) Who is his 'humble and faithful lover'?
  - e) What could Mary mean when she says 'who shortly hopes to be another thing unto you'?
  - f) Does the letter show Mary plotting with Bothwell to kill Darnley? Give reasons to back up your answer.
  - g) Why do you think Bothwell did not burn the letter as Mary asks?
  - h) Do you think we can trust this letter as evidence?

Look at Source 3

6. This is a letter from Elizabeth I to Mary.
  - a) Do you think Elizabeth was happy with Mary's marriage to Bothwell?
  - b) What do you think was the Queen's mood when she wrote this?
  - c) Why do you think the letter has been crossed out and changed so much?
  - d) Who do you think might have made the changes?
  - e) Do you think Elizabeth herself would have written this letter, or would someone have done it for her?
7. Based on the evidence you have looked at, write a statement summing up how Lord Darnley died and who you think was responsible
8. What do you think about the evidence you have? Do you think a conclusion based on this evidence can be trusted-if not, why?

## Background

The story of Mary Queen of Scots and her marriage to Lord Darnley shows both the romantic and the brutal side of politics in the 16th century.

In 1565 Mary married Lord Darnley, a Catholic, and great-grandson of Henry VII. Although handsome and elegant, Darnley was weak, vain and spoilt. He soon made himself very unpopular among the Scottish nobles and Mary soon grew to hate his bullying ways. She began to spend most of her time with David Rizzio, her secretary, and this stirred the jealousy of Darnley.

On 9 March 1566 Mary was having supper with David Rizzio when her husband burst in. Rizzio was dragged from the room and killed. Over 50 dagger wounds were counted on his body. Meanwhile Mary was held captive by her husband and forced to make him king in his own right. Mary had few people to turn to during this time except James Hepburn, the Earl of Bothwell.

On 16 June Mary gave birth to a son: James. Mary and Darnley seemed to have made up. Their son's birth was very important because not only was he heir to the Scottish throne, but he was also the heir to the English throne.

Early the following year, Mary managed to persuade Darnley that she had forgiven him for the murder of Rizzio. Darnley was sick and decided to stay at Kirk o' Field House in Edinburgh. On the night of 10 February, Mary left to attend a wedding party while Darnley stayed at home. At about 2am, a massive explosion reduced Kirk o' Field House to rubble. Darnley was killed, but not by the explosion. He was found half-naked - not in the rubble of the house, but in the garden outside the town walls. Something had frightened him so badly that he had escaped from the house before it exploded, but someone saw him fleeing, caught up with him, and strangled him.

The list of suspects was long, because Darnley had many enemies. However, many people suspected that Mary and her friend Earl Bothwell had arranged the murder. When Mary married Bothwell 3 months later it looked as though the suspicions were right. The Scots rose in rebellion. Mary was driven out to England and her infant son James was made king. Elizabeth I took her prisoner - and a prisoner she stayed for the next 19 years.

Meanwhile, in 1568, a group of Scottish Earls 'found' a number of letters in a silver casket, supposedly written by Mary to Earl Bothwell. The letters seem to show that Mary was in love with Bothwell and was planning to murder her husband.

## Teachers Notes

This lesson involves the pupils in detective work, using three crucial sources about the murder of Lord Darnley the husband of Mary Queen of Scots. Groups of pupils can study individual sources and report back to the whole class and then together arrive at an answer to the mystery. Alternatively, pupils can work through the exercise as a self-contained study.

### Sources

Source 1 is MPF 1/366, a plan of the murder scene at Kirk o' Field church. The plan was drawn for William Cecil shortly after the murder. The murder aroused obvious interest in England. Darnley had once been Elizabeth I's suitor and was her cousin.

Source 2 is SP 53/2, an extract from the longest of the "casket letters" written sometime between 1566 and 1567. Produced by the Earl of Moray as evidence of Mary's complicity in the murder of Darnley, the originals of the letters have always been doubtful. The document shown here is a copy made in 1568 to present before a commission set up at Westminster to investigate the case. It is poor copy, roughly translated from French and giving only excerpts from the original. Currently, historians believe the Casket Letters were fakes - a botch job of various letters, some perhaps written by Mary others fabricated.

Source 3 is SP 52/13/71, an extract from a letter written to Mary by Elizabeth I. The extract from a letter from Elizabeth I was written to Mary on 23 June 1567, shortly after her marriage to Lord Bothwell. The letter itself was heavily edited by William Cecil, however the tone of contempt and disgust is undoubtedly the Queen's. She felt that Lord Bothwell was guilty of the death of Lord Darnley, and despite Mary having held an inquest and exonerated him, she should have devoted more time to catching the killer(s) of her husband. Elizabeth was also unhappy about Mary's marriage to a

divorcee, and was concerned for the upbringing of Mary's son, James, the heir to both the Scottish and English thrones.

### Notable People

**David Rizzio** : Mary's private secretary. He was murdered by Lord Darnley at the Palace of Holyrood on 9 March 1566 because it was felt he was getting too close to the Queen. It is worth noting that his name is also often spelled David Riccio.

**William Cecil** : An English statesman, the chief advisor of Queen Elizabeth I for most of her reign.

**Lord Bothwell** : James Hepburn was the 4th Earl of Bothwell and the 3rd husband of Mary, Queen of Scots following the death of her husband, Lord Darnley, and Bothwell's divorce from his wife, Lady Jean Gordon.

**Earl of Moray**: Moray was the illegitimate son of King James V of Scotland and Lady Margaret Erskine, daughter of John Erskine, 5th Lord Erskine. He was Regent of Scotland from 1567 until his assassination in 1570. He was also Mary's half brother.

## Schemes of Work

**Elizabeth I : How successfully did she tackle the problems of her reign**  
Key Stage 3 Unit 5

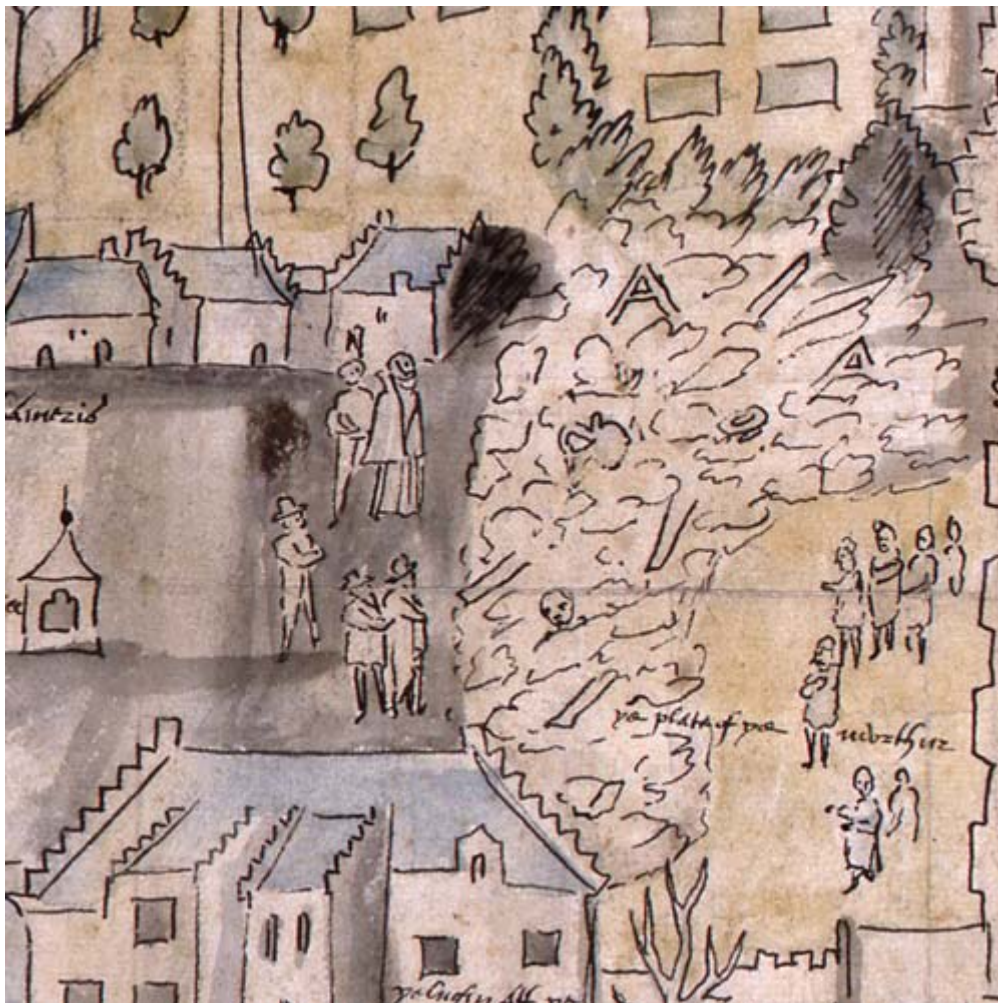
## Source 1 : Kirk o' Field Map 1567 (MPF 1/366) Close up 1 : Lord Darnley and Servant



## Close up 2 : Lord Darnley's body being removed



## Close up 3 : The scene of the explosion



## Close up 4 : James as a child





## Source 2 : Extracts from a letter allegedly from Mary to Earl Bothwell (SP 53/2)

I go to my beloved father. You make me  
 resemble so much of him I my strength to you  
 and you make me almost do please to get up a way to  
 me but if it were not for your sake I would  
 I had rather be dead. My first desire for yet to be  
 forth I will not say but no coming but I shall  
 to be in your arms and I shall be at sea and I shall  
 shall forsake you no more, and I will do what  
 I will, and will say, but I have prayed me to hurry  
 after to my own.

I understand my body. But I submit my self wholly to you  
 and I will do what you will, and I will be happy to  
 I will obey you.

To be short, his honor shall be done unto  
 you by me, and if I shall become any thing, I will make  
 myself a memorial to you. It shall be done by the  
 honor of God. For it is so dangerous, my father is  
 well knowing it, for I think I have not yet  
 said I am sorry.

Forgive me, and give you my only friend for good luck  
 I shall be glad to hear of you, and I shall be glad  
 my offer to you for the reward of my prayer.

## Source 2 : Transcript of extracts from a letter allegedly from Mary to Earl Bothwell (SP 53/2)

... I go to my tedious talk. You make me dissemble so much that I am afraid thereof with horror, and you make me almost play the parte of a traytor. Remember that if it weare not for obeyeing you I had rather be dead. My hart bleedith for yt. To be shorte, he will not come but with condition that I shall promise to be with him ane heretofore at bed and bord and that I shall forsake him no more; and upon my word, he will do whatsoever I will, and will com, but he hath prayed me to tarry till after to morrow. ...

... Alas, I never deceavid any body; but I remitt myself wholly to your will And send me word what I shall doe, and whatsoever happen to me, I will obey you. ...

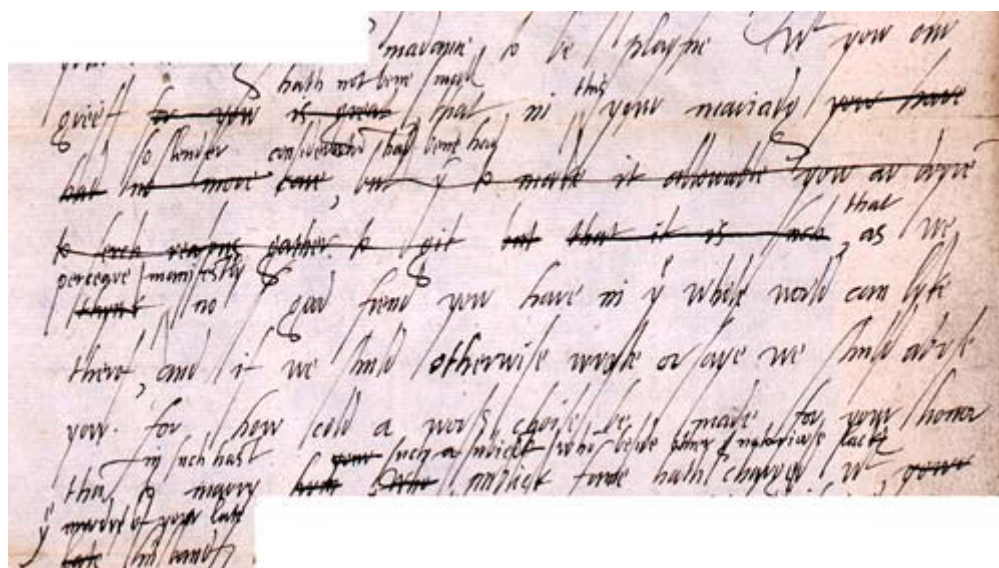
... To be short, this bearer shall declare unto you the rest; and if I shall learne any thing, I will make every night a memorial thereof. He shall tell you the cause of my stay, Burne this letter for it is to dangerous, neyther is thar any thing well said in it, for I think upon nothing but upon greefe if you be at Edinburghe. ...

... God forgive me and give you my only frend the good luck and prosperitie that your humble and fathyfull Lover doth wisse unto you, who hopith shortly to be an other thing unto you for the reward of my paynes. ...

### Glossary

dissemble : put off, afraid : afraid, horror : horror, traytor : traitor, yt : that, ane : even, heretofore : as before, bord : board, forsake : abandon, remitt : give, greefe : danger

## Source 3 : Extract from a letter from Elizabeth I to Mary (SP 52/13/71)



## **Source 3 : Transcript of extract from a letter from Elizabeth I to Mary (SP 52/13/71)**

Madame, to be plain with you, our grief has not been small that in this your marriage so slender consideration has been had that, as we perceive manifestly, no good friend you have in the whole world can like thereof, and if we should otherwise write or say we should abuse you. For how could a worse choice be made for your honour that in such haste to marry such a subject, who besides other and notorious lacks, public fame has charged with the murder of your late husband.