

Loyal wife

Winifred Maxwell (born Herbert)

1672-1749

Winifred Maxwell believed that a wife should support her husband – no matter what.

In 1699 she married William Maxwell, 5th Earl of Nithsdale.

When the earl was sentenced to death after the failed Jacobite uprising of 1715, the countess headed to London to beg mercy from King George I.

When snow stopped her stagecoach she completed the journey on horseback – despite fears that her husband’s Catholicism would stop him being pardoned.

When the king refused her petition she clutched at his robes – he dragged her to the end of the room.

Undeterred, the countess, a maid and two friends, sprang the earl from the Tower of London by dressing him in women’s clothing.

She stayed behind and pretended to be chatting while the earl got away, then bought time for herself by telling the guards he was praying and should not be disturbed.

Even then the countess had not finished. While her husband fled to Europe she made a hazardous journey to Scotland to collect important family papers. King George is reputed to have said that Lady Nithsdale did him more mischief than any woman in Christendom.

- Read the Oxford DNB biography here: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/18417.html>.