The Legend of the Dundee Dragon

There was once a farmer who lived at Pittempton by the banks of the Dighty Burn. He was a lucky man, because he had nine daughters, who were all handy and helpful around the farm, and – mostly – very well-behaved.

One Sunday morning, the farmer realised they had no water to wash or cook with, so he called to his eldest daughter, whose name was Mazota, and asked her to fetch a bucket of water. Mazota got herself out of bed and walked out across the field towards the well. She was still half in a dream, thinking about Martin, the apprentice blacksmith from the village who she'd been dancing with all last night at the ceilidh. But as she got closer, she realised something was wrong. Curled around the well was a long, scaly dragon. It was asleep, but as she approached, the scent of her reached its nostrils and the dragon woke up. And it woke up hungry. The creature opened its jaws, baring its terrible teeth, and in a flash it pounced forwards and leapt on Mazota, and gulped her down in a couple of mouthfuls.

Back at home, the farmer was wondering where his daughter had got to. Eventually he got so tired of waiting on the water that he called his second-eldest, Findoca, to go and see what her sister was up to. Findoca ran off across the field after her sister, hoping for a bit of gossip about Martin. But the dragon was wide awake now, and its appetite had been whetted. As soon as it sensed Findoca was nearby, it leaped after her and ate her too.



The farmer, who was getting more impatient by the minute, sent his third daughter, Fincana, to tell her sisters to stop blethering and hurry up with the water. Fincana made her way to the well. She barely had time to register the dragon, never mind turn and run for her life, before it devoured her too.

So the farmer sent his fourth daughter, who hasn't even been given a name by the tradition, poor lassie, and she met the same fate. And he kept doing this until each of his nine daughters had been sent to the well to meet a terrible fate in the jaws of the dragon.

It was only after all nine of his daughters had failed to return that the farmer thought he should go and check on them himself. As he walked towards the well, he was horrified to see the dragon lying curled up around the well, snorting away. The dragon was quite full now, and maybe the farmer didn't smell as appetising as his daughters, so he had time to turn on his heels and run screaming towards the village.

'There's a dragon at the well!' he cried. 'And it's eaten all my daughters!'

On hearing this, most of the villagers ran for cover, hiding in their byres or cupboards or under tables. But when word reached young Martin, the apprentice blacksmith who had been in love with the eldest daughter, he was more furious than scared. He wasn't sure if he was angrier at the farmer or the dragon, but the dragon felt like a more immediate problem.



So Martin grabbed the biggest hammer in the smiddy he could hold above his head, and strode out across the fields, swinging it this way and that and yelling. When the dragon saw him coming, it was unbothered at first – he was wee, nothing a bit of fire breath couldn't deal with. But Martin was also fast, and angry, and got a few hits in with his hammer while dodging the dragon's teeth and claws. The dragon realised it had a fight on its hands, and soon the two of them were chasing one another up and down the banks of the Dighty burn, across the fields and around the foothills of the Sidlaws.

Some of the braver villagers crept from their hiding places to watch in awe as Martin ran around the dragon, doing his best to land blows on its scaly hide. But the dragon was swiping at Martin with its tail and claws too. Soon both of them were looking battered and tired, but Martin had the worst of it. He could barely keep on his feet, or keep his hammer lifted. The dragon raised its head up above Martin, opening its jaws wide, preparing to bring them down around his head.

As they saw this, the watching villagers cried out - **'Strike, Martin!'**

And Martin, with the last of his strength, picked up his hammer and swung it into the soft skin on the underside of the dragon's neck as hard as he could.

This was the final blow. The dragon was defeated. It lay its head down on a stone in the field, and spoke -

I was temptit at Pittempton

Draigelt at Baldragon

Stricken at Strikemartin

And killed at Martin's Stane



And with these words, it died. The whole village hailed Martin as a hero, and carved the stone where the dragon died with illustrations of the dragon and the battle, raising it upright in the field where it still stands today. The names the dragon gave to the places where Martin had chased it are still the ones we use today too, but Strikemartin has been changed to Strathmartine. The story of Martin and the dragon is marked in Dundee in many ways. As well as the place names, and the stone you can still visit, we've honoured the dragon with a statue in the Murraygate.

But what about the Nine Maidens themselves? Do they just get eaten by the dragon and then fall out of the story? They don't give up that easily. For years, people – I think especially girls and women – would go to that well to remember them and perhaps leave them an offering of nine white stones. If you look at old Ordnance Survey maps of Dundee, the well is marked, but it's nowhere to be seen on more recent ones. In the nineteenth century, the farmer apparently got tired of people traipsing over his fields, and the well was covered over. The well at Pittempton was once one of several in Angus associated with Nine Maidens, and the story of Martin and the Dragon is not the only place they appear in local folklore... but that's a story for another day.

