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## WILDE WAS JAILED TO PROTECT 'GAY' PM; Plot to cover affair at N.10.



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Byline: ANDREW BUSHE

OSCAR Wilde may have been set up when he was charged with homosexual offences as part of a plot to cover up the fact that the British Prime Minister at the time was gay, a new book claims.

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Following his conviction for "gross indecency" after a sensational 1895 trial that scandalised Victorian society, Wilde was ruined.

Sentenced to two years hard labour, he went into exile after he emerged from prison and spent the rest of his life in Paris, using the pseudonym Sebastian Melmoth.

Neil McKenna, Gay rights campaigner and author of a new book, The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde, thinks he knows why.

He suggests he was sacrificed to protect then Liberal Prime Minister, Archibald Primrose, the Earl of Rosebery.

He claims the Prime Minister was having an affair with Viscount Drumlanrig, the eldest son of the Marquis of Queensberry and elder brother of Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas, who was the lover of Wilde.

McKenna says Queensberry was so enraged that both of his sons were having gay affairs that he threatened to uncover the homosexuality of Rosebery.

When Drumlanrig died in a shooting accident that appears to have been a suicide, his father wanted his day in court with Wilde.

Queensberry provoked a showdown by leaving a note for the playwright at his club that read "For Oscar Wilde - posing as a somdomite (sic)."

Urged on by Bosie, Wilde decided to sue Queensberry for libel. Disastrously, he lost the case. The jury decided the note was "published" for the public benefit.



McKenna, whose family originally came from Co Monaghan, has brought together a range of new sources and circumstantial evidence to support and analyse it.

On the day the libel case ended, all of the documents and defence evidence were forwarded to Director of Public Prosecutions, Hamilton Cuffe.

"The trial collapsed in the morning and immediately Queensberry's solicitor Charles Russell sent all the transcripts and witness statements to Cuffe with a covering letter saying he wanted to ensure there wasn't a miscarriage of justice.

"Cuffe summoned Russell to his office. I think it was at this meeting that Russell relayed Queensberry's threat, 'Prosecute Wilde or I'll destroy Rosebery and other leading Liberals'. It was an early outing exercise."

Immediately after that meeting, McKenna says Cuffe met Attorney General Sir Robert Reid, Solicitor-General Sir Frank Lockwood and Home Secretary Herbert Asquith in the House of Commons.

"It was after this meeting that Cuffe decided to proceed with the warrant for Oscar's arrest. It all happened literally within hours.

"It is impossible to imagine why Britain's three most senior law officers met with the Home Secretary to discuss whether or not to prosecute Oscar Wilde unless there was something else going on.

"It was out of all proportion. Cuffe should have been able to decide on his own.

"When the first prosecution collapsed they took the unusual decision to try him again and this time the prosecution was led by Sir Frank Lockwood.

"Wilde was charged with gross indecency and not sodomy and you do not get the Solicitor General of the government to lead a prosecution like that unless the government regards it with a degree of severity."

McKenna said it was incontrovertible that both Bosie - Wilde's boyfriend - and More Adey - Wilde's business manager while he was in prison - believed the playwright was the victim of a conspiracy.

McKenna says Rosebery fainted when he heard the that Wilde had been sent to prison.

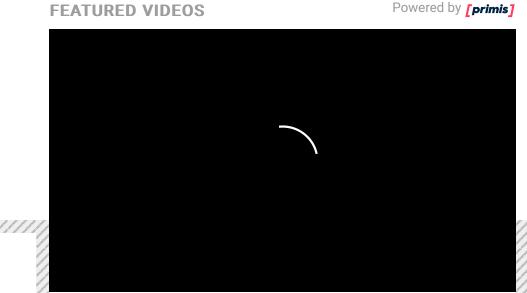
CAPTION(S):

PREMIER: Roseberry Below: Queensbury; LOVERS: Oscar Wilde with Bosie

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