



EDWARD BRUCE 700

AFTER BANNOCKBURN
OPERATION: IRELAND
1315-1318



THEIR ANCESTORS HAD LANDS IN ULSTER,
THEIR GRANDFATHER HAD SIGNED AN ALLIANCE WITH ULSTER LORDS,
THE OLDER BROTHER'S WIFE WAS FROM ULSTER,
THE YOUNGER BROTHER SPENT HIS YOUTH IN ULSTER,
THE OLDER BROTHER BECAME KING OF SCOTLAND,
THE YOUNGER BROTHER BECAME KING OF IRELAND.

THIS IS THE STORY OF
THE BRUCES AND IRELAND

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BACKGROUND THE BRUCE CAMPAIGN IN IRELAND

On 23/24 June 1314 the forces of Robert Bruce won a stunning victory at Bannockburn over a much larger English army. It was the culmination of a campaign that began in 1307, shortly after Bruce returned from Rathlin Island, off the north coast of County Antrim, where he had sought refuge for a number of months. Despite the crushing Scots victory at Bannockburn, Robert Bruce's claim to the title 'King of Scotland' was not recognised by Edward II of England, without which there could be no lasting peace.

Around the same time, the leading Gaelic Irish figure in Ulster, Domhnall O'Neill, king of Tyrone, a distant cousin of the Bruces, was finding himself threatened by Richard de Burgh, the Earl of Ulster – Robert Bruce's father-in-law. O'Neill looked to Scotland and to Robert Bruce for assistance, encouraging the victor at Bannockburn to send a Scots army to Ireland to fight the Anglo-Normans.

Sending an army to Ireland suited Robert Bruce's strategic political and military aims for it allowed him to open a second front by instigating his pan-Gael scheme of surrounding Edward II with rebellious subjects in his western dominions.

His young brother Edward seems to have needed little encouragement to lead the campaign in Ireland. Indeed, many see him as being the prime instigator of it and that he was motivated by dynastic ambitions of his own. As John Barbour, author of *The Brus* (1375) states, Edward, 'with great joy in his heart, and with the consent of the king, gathered to him men of great valour.'



Above: St John's Tower, Bruce Crescent, Ayr.
 A black marble plaque within the park reads 'To commemorate the Parliament of King Robert the Bruce at this Church of St John the Baptist on 26th April 1315'.

It was this Parliament which approved Edward Bruce's mission to Ireland. He set sail from Ayr to Antrim one month later.



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25TH MAY 1315 THE LANDING AT LARNE LOUGH

The army assembled for the invasion of Ireland in May 1315 was probably not much smaller than the Scottish army at Bannockburn and no doubt included many of the veterans of that battle. Barbour states that 'It was a great enterprise they undertook when, as few as they were, being no more 6,000 men, they set out to attack all Ireland'.

The place of departure was Ayr, then the most strategically important port on the south-west coast of Scotland, and the location of Robert Bruce's recent assembly that endorsed the campaign. It can be safely assumed that the core of the fleet was the West Highland galleys and birlinns supplied by two key allies of the Bruces – Ailean Macruari, 'King of the Isles', and Alexander Macdonald, 'King of Argyll'.

According to Barbour's account, the Scottish fleet 'arrived safely . . . without skirmish or attack, and sent their ships every one home.' Barbour specifies the location for the landing as 'Wolringis Fyrth', i.e. Viking's Forth, which has traditionally been understood as being Larne Lough. Another source refers to 'Clandonne' which has been interpreted as either Clondunmales (now Drumalis, Larne) or possibly Glendun further up the coast. It is likely that a large fleet would have needed multiple landing locations.

The story of the arrival of the Scottish army in the Larne area was passed down through the generations and was well known in the nineteenth century. In 1899, the brochure produced for the Larne Grand Fete featured on its front cover an illustration recreating the arrival of Bruce and his fleet. In 1976, a re-enactment event was held in Larne entitled 'The Bruce Cavalcade' when hundreds of people lined the streets.



Larne Lough. Bruce's fleet is likely to have landed at multiple locations along the east Antrim coastline - a stretch of land which had been granted to his ancestors by King John in the early 1200s. An artists impression of the landing featured on the programme for Larne Grand Fete in 1899.

An estimated 2million people every year sail by ferry between Scotland and Northern Ireland.



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JUNE 1315 THE 'CORONATION' OF EDWARD AT CARRICKFERGUS

Having landed on the east coast of County Antrim, the Scottish forces regrouped and prepared for their onward journey. They were immediately confronted by an Anglo-Norman force of 20,000 led by the Mandevilles, Bissets, Logans and Savages, who Barbour describes as 'the flower of Ulster'. This battle took place in the vicinity of Mounthill where a cairn once marked the battlefield.

Afterwards the Scots moved on to Carrickfergus, the most important Anglo-Norman stronghold in Ulster with its imposing castle standing sentinel over Belfast Lough. Alongside the castle a town had developed which was a centre of trade and commerce. The Bruce forces seized the town of Carrickfergus – but not the castle which held out for over a year longer – and established what would effectively be their base camp for the duration of the campaign.

According to Barbour, shortly after taking Carrickfergus '... the folk of Ulster had come entirely to his (Edward Bruce's) peace... there came to him and made fealty some of the kings of that country, a good ten or twelve ...'. Historians have interpreted this moment as what could be described as Edward Bruce's 'coronation' as King of Ireland. In the Irish annals for 1315, it is recorded that 'the Ulstermen consented to his being proclaimed King of Ireland and all the Gaels of Ireland agreed to grant him lordship and they called him King of Ireland.'

Two years later, in a 'Remonstrance' sent by Domhnall O'Neill and other Irish leaders to Pope John XXII, they set out how they had sought help from Edward and had 'unanimously established and set him up as our king and lord in our kingdom'.



Carrickfergus Castle was begun in the late 12th century by the Anglo-Normans, on the rock where Fergus, the first King of Scotland, drowned around 501. In 1315 Edward Bruce took the town and laid siege to the castle, and was reputedly crowned King of Ireland here. The castle eventually fell to the Scots in 1316. King Robert Bruce then joined Edward with a further 7,000 troops and began a campaign to try to take control of all of Ireland.



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10 SEPTEMBER 1315 THE BATTLE OF CONNOR

After capturing the town of Carrickfergus, the Scottish army headed south to the important town of Dundalk, one of the seats of Anglo-Norman power in Ireland, along the way wreaking havoc on the Anglo-Norman Earldom of Ulster. It is likely that the settlements at Dundonald, Downpatrick and Dundrum were razed at this time, while the impressive castle at Greencastle overlooking Carlingford Lough was captured.

Having razed Dundalk and much of the surrounding countryside, the Scottish army turned north and headed towards Coleraine where a Scottish pirate, Thomas Dun, ferried them across the River Bann.

At Connor, an important ecclesiastical centre near Ballymena, the Earl of Ulster, Richard de Burgh had gathered huge food stores for his men. Driven by hunger, Bruce's army learned about these supplies, and marched towards Connor. A detachment of Bruce's men, wearing the captured clothes of the men of one of de Burgh's patrols, launched a successful attack on the Anglo-Norman encampment.

Early the following morning (10 September 1315) the Anglo-Normans attacked on the Bruce camp. However, the Scots had been expecting this, and as a decoy they had left their banners flying over their camp to create the impression that they were still there. De Burgh's men were lured into the trap, and were once again attacked by the waiting Scots.

Such was the confusion that Bruce's army entered the town of Connor, took control of the food stores and seized the corn, flour and wine and carried it to their headquarters at Carrickfergus. One of the most important battles in medieval Ulster, Bruce's victory at Connor left him as the effective master of the northern province of Ireland.



The Church of Ireland church in Connor stands on the site of its medieval predecessor, the cathedral of the diocese of Connor, which stood here in Edward Bruce's time.

The 19th-century historian George Benn observed: 'Connor from its antiquity and ecclesiastical character – but still more from its association with the name of Edward Bruce – is, perhaps, one of the most interesting spots in the County of Antrim.'



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14 OCTOBER 1318 EDWARD'S DEATH AT FAUGHART: THE AFTERMATH

Ultimately, the Bruce intervention in Ireland ended in failure. Despite Robert Bruce himself coming to Ireland in 1317 to support his brother, the Scots failed to conquer the entire island. After three-and-a-half years the campaign ended disastrously in defeat at the Battle of Faughart on 14 October 1318 with Edward Bruce himself killed in the fighting. Many of the leading men in the Scottish army were also killed.

The remnants of Edward's army headed back towards Carrickfergus. On reaching the coast they boarded ships and returned to Scotland. It was the end of the campaign. There was to be no further Bruce-instigated invasion of Ireland.

Edward Bruce's body was quartered with his head sent to Edward II. A strong tradition persisted, however, that he was buried in the old graveyard at Faughart. At different times in the nineteenth century there were suggestions in Scotland and Ireland that a permanent marker should erected at Faughart to commemorate him.

In the 1960s a flat stone was placed over what was believed to be Bruce's grave. In recent years a new marble plaque was placed at the head of the grave which records, in English and Irish, 'Edward Bruce, King of Ireland. Killed in Battle of Faughart, 14th October 1318.'

In terms of the importance of the story to Scottish history, the modern consensus amongst historians is that the invasion of Ireland ultimately served its purpose as Edward II of England was deflected by events in Ireland from his intended new landward invasion of Scotland. This gave Robert Bruce the time needed to consolidate his position to be the rightful King of an independent Scotland. This was finally conceded by Edward III in the Treaty of Northampton a year before Robert's death.



The flat stone on the reputed grave of Edward Bruce at the Hill of Faughart, County Louth.



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