

**THE BURNING OF THE
BARNs OF AYR: BEING THE
SUBSTANCE OF A LECTURE
GIVEN AT AYR, FEB. 7, 1878**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649353330

The Burning of the Barns of Ayr: Being the Substance of a Lecture Given at Ayr, Feb. 7, 1878 by
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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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JOHN PATRICK CRICHTON-STUART BUTE & RAY WALLACE

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The Burning of the Barns of Ayr.



N the 7th February, 1878, the writer gave a lecture in Ayr, of which the present tract embodies the substance. It differs mainly from the lecture as delivered, in two points. In the first place, it contains some matter which he had not before him at the time, and a good deal which he had written, but which he omitted in order not to be even more burdensome to a patient audience than the extreme dryness and intricacy of the subject in any case necessitated his being. Secondly, it is entirely

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1878, 18 Aug. 1878, 2/-

pulled to pieces, and arranged under the following six heads :—

- I.—The Capitulation of Irvine, with a sketch of the events leading to it, being the epoch to which Lord Hailes believed that the Burning was to be assigned.
- II.—A sketch of the Invasion of 1298, which the writer believes to be the time when the Burning really took place.
- III.—A discussion of who the Burners were.
- IV.—A notice of Edward I.'s residence at Ayr, and retirement from Scotland after the Burning.
- V.—The account of the Burning in Blind Harry.
- VI.—The executions connected by Blind Harry with the Burning.

The authorities quoted throughout are, as far as possible, contemporary. Some of them have not yet been published, and of those that have been, the bulk have not been translated.

The writer has made the subject one of close investigation, on and off, for about two years. He is conscious that, as applied to the myth which finds its wildest development in the *Wallace*, his treatment may be styled a destructive criticism. He would rather himself claim for his work the title of constructive. His aim has been, even, if need be, upon the ruins of false beliefs, to place, or rather, perhaps, to suggest the way of placing, upon an irrefragible historical basis, an event in national and local history, the obscurity of which has hitherto made it the victim alternately of credulity and scepticism.

(I.) The Capitulation of Irvine.

In the winter of 1296-7, the English Government appeared to be firmly and, on the whole, peaceably established in Scotland. Early in May, 1297—indeed, most probably, as the writer thinks, upon May Day itself—a riot took place at Lanark. The same day

William Wallace's wife was hung there, by order of the English Sheriff, William Hazlerigg; and that night the insurrection broke out in the burning of the English quarters at Lanark.*

The next thing we hear is that "these two Lord Williams," (William Wallace and William Douglas,) "with the perverse multitude, came to Scone, in the belief that they should there find the Justiciary of our King, who had been holding a Court there. Thither they hastened to destroy him. But he got warning, and just succeeded in narrowly escaping, leaving great spoils in the hands of the enemy." Who the Justiciary was, and what he had been doing, we learn also:—"The Justiciary of the King, William Ormesby, in obedience to the King's commands, banished without distinction of person all who would not take fealty to the King

* Wynthoun, VIII. 13. Wallace Papers, 191.

"of England."* This is a point to which attention should be particularly directed, viz., that immediately after the burning of Lanark, William Wallace and his friends successfully attacked the English Judge sitting at Scone, where he had been acting with great severity. After the Scone affair, the insurrection spread, and the insurgents captured Perth.† While they were there, they received the adhesion of many of the highest personages in the kingdom, and the English Government seems to have been practically upset. The news was now reaching King Edward in London. "When our King," says Hemingford, "heard such things, he did not believe them, but sent the Bishop of Durham"—Antony Bek—"with orders to find out the truth. The Bishop flew to the spot, but found the Scotch assembled in such a mass that he dared not withstand

* Hemingford, W. P., 42-3. Rishanger, 170-1.

† Hemingford, 43.

"them, and so went back."* However, before there was time for any news to arrive of Bishop Bek, the accounts of the war received in London must have become so grave as to determine Edward to take strong measures at once. It was perhaps the news of the adherence of the aristocracy to the popular party which caused the English King, on June 4, to commission Henry Percy and Robert Clifford to lead an army into Scotland with extraordinary and extensive powers.† And ten days later, Warenne, Earl of Surrey, was despatched with the powers of Guardian of the Kingdom.‡ How-

* The expulsion of Bishop Bek from Scotland is made by Blind Harry the subject of a long episode. (B. vii. 515—608.) It is there stated that the Bishop had come to the Bishop's Palace at Glasgow, and that it was attacked by the insurgents, and he had to fly, and it appears to me that that account is the true explanation of what Hemingford says elsewhere about Wallace attacking the Palace at Glasgow. It is true that Hemingford says the attack was dictated by hostility to the regular occupant of the Palace, the Bishop of Glasgow. But that Wallace and Bishop Wishart were in cordial alliance all along, although sometimes secretly, is sufficiently evident from the draft of accusations drawn up at a later period for denouncing the Bishop to the Pope. (Palgrave, 343.)

† Historical Documents, II. 170—3. ‡ Historical Documents, II. 184.

ever, the proceedings of the Earl of Surrey were very slow. He collected troops in Yorkshire, and did not reach Berwick till July 27,* and the interest is in following Henry Percy and Robert Clifford. They took between a fortnight and three weeks to get to Carlisle. They were at Carlisle on June 24,† and must have moved forward almost immediately. "They were passing the night," says Hemingford,‡ "at Lochmaben without apprehension, when, behold, the inhabitants of the land, being wishful to scare them, raised a cry at midnight, not, indeed, 'The Philistines be upon you,' but, 'The Scots be upon you.' But they rose to arms, and presently every man set fire to the house wherein he had been quartered, and went on their way by the light [of the conflagration]."

* Historical Documents, II. 200.

† Historical Documents, II. 186.

‡ W. P., 44-5.