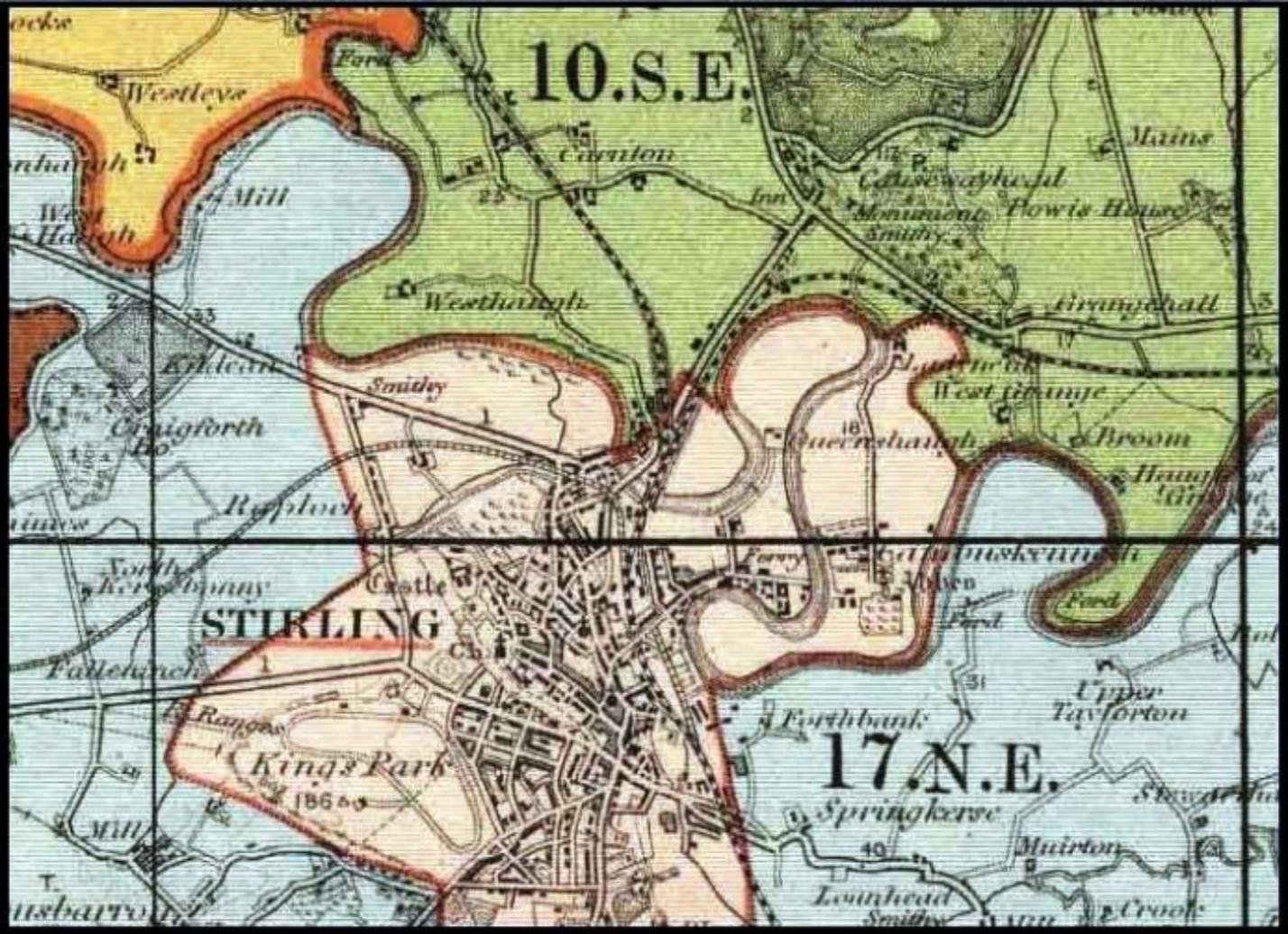




**Baillie James Ronald of Stirling
and
The 1297 Stirling Bridge Controversy**



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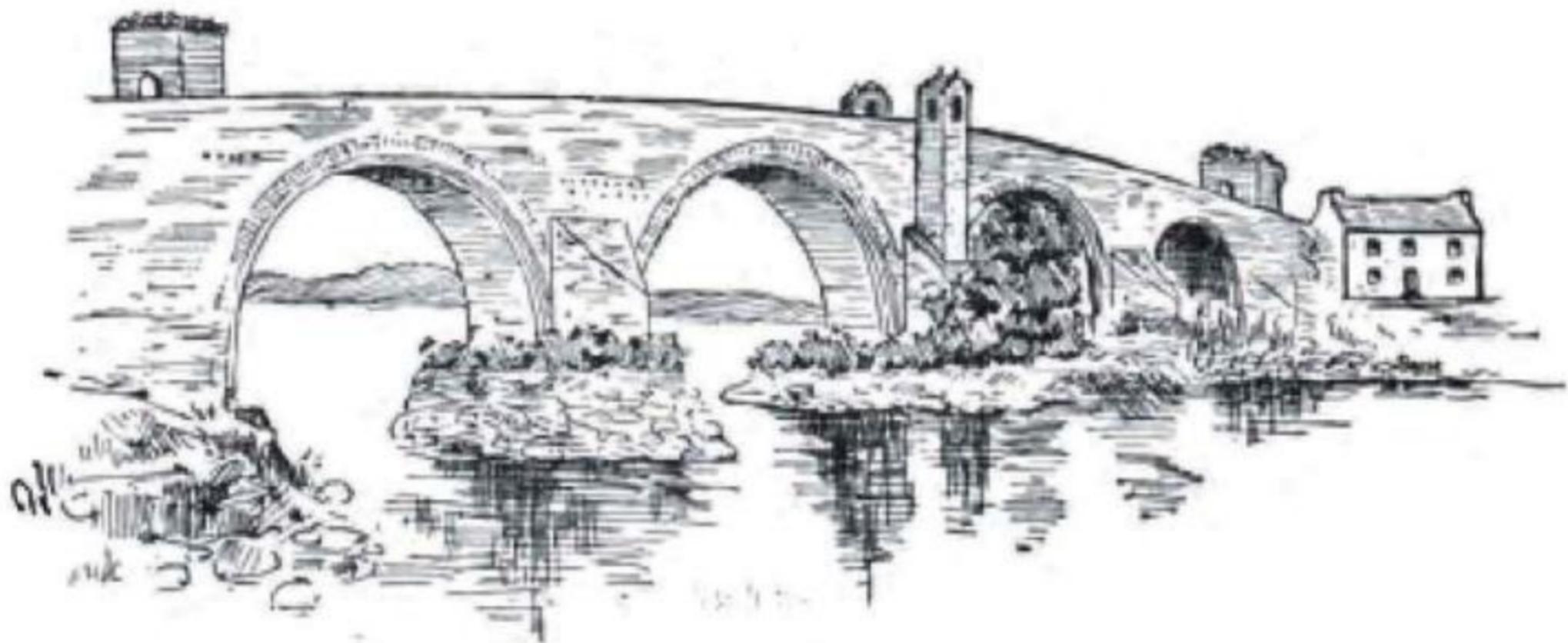
STIRLING

17.N.E.

Kings Park
1865

ocks
Westleye
Carrinton
Westthorpe
Craigforth
Rasploch
Forthbank
Springkerse
Louthhead
Smithy

Mains
Flowie House
Smithy
Strangball
Broom
Hawthorn
Upper
Tayforton
Muirton
Crook



Old Stirling Bridge as it was prior to 1745

Site of Stirling bridge in 1297 - Controversy

James Ronald writes.. besides those who believe in Kildean or the Abbey as being the site of the ancient bridge, there are others, and we confess to be of the number, who decline to believe that the bridge was situate at either of these two places, and who hold that there are good grounds for believing that it stood on the site of the present old bridge. We have already expressed the opinion that when the King's Park was enclosed and constructed in the reign of William the Lion, the Roman Road had at this part ceased to be used as a road. We attach great importance to old roads, and it may not be out of place if we give a short description of the roads in the vicinity of, and leading to and from Stirling in the thirteenth century. Take the north side of the Forth, within a small radius we have the Abbey of Cambuskenneth, the Mills of Craigie (Craigmill), where the corn of the great Abbey was ground ; the Church of Logie, the town and Mill of Airthrey, and the town and Mill of Cornton. Extend the radius and we find churches in Tullibody referred to as existing in 1220 ; in Alva, in 1180 ; in Tillicoultry, in 1220 ; in the Blare, in 1207 ; and in Lecropt, in 1260. It is a reasonable thing to suppose there would be roads to these places, so we find in 1220 the causeway leading from the north end of the bridge to the Hospital at the head of the causeway, and from thence to the town of Airthrey,

with a branch road leading to the Church of Logie, and likely to Alva and Tillicoultry. The road to Cambuskenneth Abbey was from the causeway by Chirmerlands along the river side, with a branch road leading to the Mills of Craigie, and thence to Tullibody, and there is no doubt that there would be a road from the causeway to the town of Cornton, and thence to Lecropt and Dunblane. All these roads remained to the end of the eighteenth century, and many of them still exist. At this point we would call the attention of those who have studied the Roman roads to this question. Why is this part of the road between the north end of the bridge and Causewayhead, at the early date of 1220, called the causeway (*la chaussée*), and is it possible this may have been a part of the Roman road or causeway ? It strikes us as being somewhat peculiar.

On the south side of the Forth and of the burgh, we have the town of St. Ninians, with its church referred to in the reign of David I., the town of Cambusbarron and its mill, and the burgh of Airth with its church. It is reasonable to suppose there would be convenient roads to these places, so we find on 7th July, 1242 (*a*) a "charter by David Benham, bishop of St. Andrews, granting to the church of St. Ninians of Kirketoun in name of endowment, that land which lay near the church (the Glebe land), on the north side between the great road from Stirling to Kirketoun (St. Ninians) and the footpath leading from the said road to the Bishop's houses, near the church." That is to say, all the land between the main road leading from Stirling

to St. Ninians, and the road, then a footpath, leading from the main road at Mr. M'Jannet's property to Braehead and the Calton is comprehended in this endowment and constituted the ancient glebe of the St. Ninians Parish Church. There would, no doubt, be a road to the town of Cambusbarron and its mill. Airth was a king's burgh in 1214, having a church in connection with the Abbey of Holyrood, and we have no doubt there would be a road leading to it from Stirling by the Craigs. These roads remain with us to this day, of course very much improved, both in width and in gradient, but the fact that they were in existence in these early days, disposes, at least to our mind, of the argument that this portion of the Roman road was in use in 1297. Again, we call your attention to a statute passed about 1230, in the reign of Alexander II., "That if a knight or a son of a knight, or any tenant in knight's fee, or any by charter, or by free service, or their sons, accused any man of reif, or of manslaughter, or of theft, or of revising, or any other misdeed by which battle may be raised," it is lawful for them at "the brig of Strivelyn," in the King's Court, or any other Court, to choose another person to "debel the defendour," that is to knock him down. We are of opinion that the importance of this statute lies in the fact that according to our theory the bridge was within the Royal burgh. Again, after the destruction of the bridge, either at or soon after the battle in 1297, we find the institution of a ferry at Winchelhaugh Park, near to the present old bridge, and convenient to the existing roads. It occurs to us that if the bridge had been at Kildean, with roads

leading to and from it, it is natural to suppose that the ferry would be erected there, but as already stated, the ferry is found at the Old Bridge. We have also the statement by Lord Kames in his "Art of thinking," that in his day there was a stone in the bridge bearing upon it the date of 1211, which evidently applied to a former bridge. And lastly, what is most remarkable is the complete and entire absence of all mention of Kildean in old papers and charters. In all our researches we have only once come upon anything like a reference to Kildean, and that we have already mentioned by the name of Cuilte-Donenald, but never once have we found any reference to the bridge being there, and we have seen no authority for the statement except the tradition referred to by Lord Hailes. We therefore claim that the evidence here adduced, taken collectively, is conclusively and distinctly in favour of our contention, that there are good grounds for believing that the bridge over which part of the English army crossed on the ever memorable day of the battle of Stirling Bridge, the bridge engraven on our old burgh seal, was really and truly the ancient Bridge of Stirling, and that it stood on the site of the present Old Bridge; within the bounds of the Ancient and Royal Burgh of Stirling.

Scotland's Historic Fields of Conflict Gazetteer

STIRLING BRIDGE

1 SUMMARY

1.1 CONTEXT

With the failure of the House of Canmore in Scotland, Edward I of England supported the installation of John Balliol as a vassal king of Scotland. In 1295 there was a rebellion, leading to an English campaign involving the sack of Berwick and the defeat of a Scottish army at Dunbar. Balliol then sued for peace and accepted an English occupation but, in 1297 under the leadership of Sir William Wallace and Sir William Morray, there was a major Scottish revolt. This was at a time when the English were engaged in war with France and, as so often, the Scottish forces chose this time to challenge their enemy, when they were more vulnerable because fighting on two fronts. By August 1297 Morray and Wallace controlled almost all of Scotland north of the Forth, except for Dundee. As Edward I was fighting on the continent, the English governor, the Earl of Surrey, marched north with an army from Berwick to relieve Dundee.

1.2 ACTION

It was at the crossing of the River Forth at Stirling that the Scottish army chose to meet the challenge. They deployed on the north east side of the Forth, here deep and impassable except by bridge, though a ford existed two miles upstream. The Scottish commanders are believed to have surveyed the battlefield from Abbey Craig, the high ground 1.5 km from the bridge where the Wallace monument now stands. The Craig is named after the adjacent monastery of Cambuskenneth which also provided an alternative name for the battle.

A Scottish knight in the English army offered to take a force across the ford, to attack the enemy from the rear, but this option was not exploited. Instead Surrey chose only to advance across the bridge. An English detachment was sent forward over the bridge, wide enough for only two horses, to cover the crossing of the main English force. Wallace waited until a substantial number of the troops had crossed (possibly just 2000 (5)) and then attacked. The Scottish schiltrons fended off a charge by the English heavy cavalry and in the counter attack engaged the English infantry. They gained control of the east side of the bridge, cutting off the opportunity for English reinforcements to cross. Caught on the low lying ground in the loop of the river with no chance of relief or of retreat, most of the outnumbered English on the east side seem to have been killed, at most a few hundred escaping by swimming across the river. Following this decisive Scottish victory, the English army retreated to Berwick, most English garrisons surrendered and Wallace was installed as Guardian of Scotland.(3) (4) (5).

1.3 TROOPS

There is good contemporary evidence for the composition of the English army but far less certainty for the Scottish.

English: in July 10,000 infantry claimed but by September possibly just 6000 foot, 300 horse (5)

Scottish: 5-6000 foot, 180 horse (5)

Losses:

Uncertain but substantial numbers of English killed; the medieval chronicles quote wholly unbelievable numbers of Scots killed (5).

1.4 COMMEMORATION & INTERPRETATION

The Wallace Monument is an impressive 19th century tower standing on Abbey Craig, in the general area from which Wallace is believed to have surveyed the battlefield prior to the action.

2 ASSESSMENT

2.1 LOCATION

In the 19th and early 20th century the location of the bridge was open to considerable dispute, with a suggestion that it stood at Kildean, more than a kilometre to the north west of the present bridge. Of modern authors only Kinross places the bridge on this site (1). In 1906 Cook suggested the currently favoured site, which is the only location at Stirling for which there is documentary or archaeological evidence for a medieval crossing of the Forth. Only a ford is known to have existed at Kildean, in the post medieval period, and this was therefore considered likely to be the ford referred to in the battle accounts. The foundations of the early bridge have been located immediately north of the surviving Old Bridge (2). **There is now broad agreement between most authors as to the location of the initial deployments and action, in the loop of the river immediately to the east of Stirling Bridge.**

2.2 PRIMARY SOURCES

There are several original accounts for the battle, including the English account by Guisborough.

2.3 SECONDARY WORKS

The most recent modern study is that by Armstrong, which in addition to providing an accessible summary of the action, is well illustrated and provides a useful overview of the armies and the background to the campaign (6). Reid provides a useful but brief account. Neither however are referenced, which is a major drawback.

2.4 BATTLE ARCHAEOLOGY

None has been identified.

2.5 BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC TERRAIN

Some physical remains of the 13th century bridge are known to survive (2). A causeway from the bridge running across the floodplain towards Abbey Craig is referred to in the secondary works.

2.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE

This was the first major Scottish victory in the Wars of Independence, which brought most of the country back under Scottish control and raised Wallace to a position of political control.

2.7 CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT

The vast majority of the battlefield is built over. Two rail lines and a modern major road divide up the only substantial remaining open area on the battlefield, separating the main open space from the site of the bridge. However the limited areas of open ground (rugby and related playing fields) lie in the presumed area of the later phases of the action, adjacent to the river. Also there is a small area immediately adjacent to the east end of the bridge. There is one other small area of open ground within the urban area (school playing field). Though Abbey Craig remains undeveloped almost the whole of the area of the probable Scottish initial deployment is developed. A tiny fragment of the land on the western bank adjacent to the end of the bridge, where the English forces approached the bridge, is also undeveloped.

2.8 CURRENT DESIGNATIONS

The Wallace Monument is listed and its immediate environs scheduled due to the presence of a much earlier fort. The slopes below the Wallace monument are an SSSI. The 15th century bridge is listed and both this and the remains of the 13th century bridge are also Scheduled, hence any immediately associated surviving battle archaeology may also be protected. The surviving open ground immediately downstream of the 15th century bridge is a Conservation Area, thus encompassing a small part of the area of potential survival of battle archaeology. Martin identifies an oddly restricted area for conservation that excludes the whole area of relatively open ground in the loop of the river (7).

2.9 POTENTIAL

The majority of the battlefield is so extensively developed that there have to be serious questions as to what significance the study of any surviving battle archaeology might have for the understanding of the action. This is however a very low lying area described in the geological mapping as post glacial 'raised beach deposits and associated marine and estuarine alluvium' with an additional small area of reclaimed inter-tidal flats in the loop of the river on the south of the battlefield. There may thus be potential for the survival of a buried battlefield surface in the area of the playing fields and immediately adjacent to the bridge, in the loop of the river. There is also the possibility of waterlogged deposits in such a low lying area. If such conditions exist then it could mean exceptional

survival of both artefacts and burials. If information is not yet available from past watching briefs (reported in the NMRS (2)) on the chronology of the stratigraphy here then it would be appropriate to seek a location where trenching might test the stratigraphic relationship between the alluvial deposits and the medieval causeway from the bridge, to establish at what depth any battlefield deposits might exist. The small undeveloped area in the school grounds, if it has not been heavily disturbed, might contain some surviving battle archaeology as it is the one area that has not been built over in the broad zone where it is suggested that the main action took place. However given the difficulty of recovering medieval battle archaeology the potential on the latter may be very low although again the evidence might prove to be buried by alluvial deposits.

It is to be expected that significant action took place in the surviving undeveloped area adjacent to the east end of the bridge while the final destructive action of the battle took place beside the river to the south. Archers were involved in the action and so significant numbers of projectiles should have been deposited in at least some parts of the field, while men at arms involved in hand to hand fighting and then the final stripping of their bodies, should have provided the potential for the loss of a range of non ferrous items similar to those recovered from the Towton battlefield. Given that this is one of relatively few major battles in such a topographical location, if burial beneath alluvium or waterlogging was demonstrated then it would be a rare survival. Demonstrating such survival might be difficult but it would be important to establish if such a potential exists as it may only be in such conditions of burial that the true nature of medieval battle archaeology can be finally established. It may then be possible to better understand the battle archaeology, or lack of it, on other medieval battlefields where deposits have been affected by more destructive chemical and mechanical damage. Physical evidence from this area may also assist in the understanding of the nature of the terrain at the time of the battle. This would include geological evidence for the width of the river and nature of the adjacent ground. Also, because the modern and the 15th century bridge took the crossing away from the 13th century location there is surviving archaeology of the 13th century bridge which, together with any immediately adjacent evidence of the nature of the causeway, may help in the understanding the terrain.

Despite its state of development, it is argued by Martin that the terrain can still be grasped very effectively, given that the bridge, river, valley floor and Abbey Craig are such distinctive features in the landscape. This is supported by Armstrong's description of the battlefield.

2.10 THREATS

A range of threats, particularly of a piecemeal nature, are likely on the open ground given its location within the heart of the urban area. River erosion is also reported as a potential problem (7), as might be any remedial works to deal with this erosion. Martin reports vandalism as a problem with past interpretive schemes(7).

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