

THE BATTLE OF BANNOCKBURN FAMILY HISTORY PROJECT: OUTCOMES AND DEVELOPMENTS

by Graham S Holton¹

ABSTRACT

The author previously provided, in *FMG News*, No.10, September 2014, an overview of the *Battle of Bannockburn Family History Project*. At the editor's suggestion, in this article he expands on some issues highlighted by the project, and describes how its two strands are being extended. He suggests some research opportunities for the future.

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The Battle of Bannockburn (23-24 June 1314) was a significant Scottish victory in the first war of Scottish independence. Stirling Castle, occupied by the English, was under siege by the Scottish army. Edward II of England assembled a formidable force to relieve it. This attempt failed, and his army was defeated in a pitched battle by a smaller army commanded by Robert I of Scotland.

The Battle of Bannockburn Family History Project was established at the University of Strathclyde to celebrate the 700th anniversary in 2014. The project has identified 158 combatants (139 English, 19 Scottish) named in primary sources, while a further 127 individuals who may have been present appear in secondary sources. The major primary sources used were several chronicles, particularly *The continuation of the annals of Nicholas Trivet*, the *Calendar of documents relating to Scotland* and a number of rolls of arms from the period.

I mentioned in *FMG News 10* that diploma students from the Genealogical Studies Postgraduate Programme at the university had last year completed an assignment researching participants in the battle. Two of these students decided to follow this work up in their final projects, resulting in submissions entitled *What is the pedigree of Sir Giles d'Argentein, 'the third best Knight in Christendom'?* by John Brown and *How did the deaths of the English knights killed at Bannockburn affect the succession to their lands and titles?* by John Burt.

The first of these attempted to discuss the relationship of Sir Giles d'Argentein to other recorded members of the family of d'Argentein, using, amongst other sources, close rolls, fine rolls, patent rolls and inquisitions post mortem and for heraldic evidence, various rolls of arms. His conclusion was that the famous knight killed at Bannockburn was the son of Sir Giles d'Argentein c.1210-1282. This may still be open to challenge following further research, but John Brown's work has gathered together a large number of transcriptions of original sources, thus providing a good foundation for subsequent study.

A contrasting project from John Burt looked at the impact of the deaths of twelve English knights who were tenants-in-chief with surviving inquisitions post mortem. As well as consulting the inquisitions, John Burt also made use of close rolls, fine rolls and patent rolls in his study. The resulting redistribution of lands was considerable, particularly due to the fact that Gilbert de Clare, 8th earl of Gloucester, one of the greatest landowners in England, was one of the twelve. His

¹ The author is Principal Tutor, Genealogical Studies Postgraduate Programme, University of Strathclyde. E-mail: g.s.holton@strath.ac.uk.

lands were distributed between his three full sisters (he also had two half-sisters). Of the other eleven knights, seven had heirs who were under the age of majority, leading to the control of their lands being ceded at least temporarily to guardians and at least three of the knights' widows remarried within two years, resulting in the control of their dower lands passing to their new husbands until the wives' deaths. The consequences were not only a redistribution of lands but also a redistribution of power.

Carrick aunts

A further piece of very interesting research which has come to light as a result of my earlier article, is that of the well-respected genealogist Andrew B W MacEwen, based in Maine, USA. Mr MacEwen had noticed my comment that King Robert the Bruce's mother, Marjorie, Countess of Carrick, had three younger sisters – a little known fact – but that it was unlikely that we should ever know what happened to them. Mr MacEwen responded to the editor explaining that his researches had in fact revealed a good deal of information about them. In the course of our project it had not been possible to engage in new research in primary sources. Our aim was to compile and consolidate the genealogical information from already available research for a considerable number of participants in the battle, which had never been done before. This emphasises the value of projects of this nature, which not only serve as a focus for research at the time, but also encourage responses and contributions from others which can make very important additions to knowledge.

Mr MacEwen has a paper in preparation that will include the Carrick aunts of Robert the Bruce and he has kindly given permission to summarise his results here.

The results of Mr MacEwen's unpublished research show the names of the three younger sisters as being Aithbhreac (Effrick), Rignach and Isabella. Aithbhreac married Sir Colin Campbell, Rignach married Malcolm MacLean, Chief of the MacLeans and Isabella married firstly Alan MacRory and secondly Sir Ingram de Umfraville. Through these aunts, Robert the Bruce was closely related to Angus 'Og' Macdonald of the Isles, Christina of Garmoran and Eva, the wife of Sir Philip Mowbray, the governor of Stirling Castle at the time of the Battle of Bannockburn. These most interesting relationships have implications for a deeper understanding of the period of the Scottish wars of independence.

Student work 2015

Once again this year, our new diploma students will be set a similar assignment to those from last year, with the names of three participants in the Battle to be researched. Added to the research materials from last year, this should result in a large resource of biographical, genealogical and heraldic information on virtually all of the 150 or so named individuals who were confirmed as present at the Battle.

Genetic genealogy

The very important genetic genealogy strand to the project is also continuing with research currently focussing on the Stewart family, but with the intention of following up studies already done on the Berkeley and Grey families. We also hope to extend the methodology to other specific medieval families, attempting to trace male line descents through documentary sources followed up by identifying possible DNA matches and carrying out further testing as appropriate.

Testing current members of the Stewart family with documented male line descents has the potential to reveal special defining DNA markers for major branches of the family such as descendants of King Robert II of Scots and perhaps of his sons Robert, Duke of Albany (c.1340-1420) and Sir John Stewart, Sheriff of Bute. This could make it possible for Stewart descendants lacking documentary evidence to discover their own male line descent from one of these historical figures by identification of relevant DNA markers.

Future research

It is clear that there are a number of areas of possible future research – further work on the identity of Sir Giles d’Argentein, the Carrick aunts of Robert the Bruce, not to mention the possibility of illegitimate Carrick uncles, which also surfaced as a result of the project, further interesting genealogical issues which may be highlighted by this year’s diploma students, and the whole field of genetic genealogy. In addition, the three major issues mentioned in my previous article, namely the high level of endogamy within knightly society, the frequency of multiple marriages and the apparent contrast between survival rates of male lines in Scotland and England (so far two established out of 19 Scots and three out of about 139 English at the Battle), all merit further study.

Exhibition and website

The exhibition associated with the project has now completed a tour of three venues, following its initial run at the Bannockburn Visitor Centre, having been viewed by in excess of 10,000 visitors. The information presented in the exhibition on 17 of the participants in the battle is now available on the Strathclyde Genealogy website at <http://www.strathgenealogy.org.uk/> which can act as a focus for further research. The website can be developed and expanded as further information comes to light, to become a valuable resource on the biography, genealogy and heraldry of men who fought in the battle.

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Battle of Bannockburn, 1314, from the Holkham Bible



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