



Siol nan Gaidheal

The day the Scots saved France

Accounts of the Hundred Years War that are easily available in the anglophone world describe stirring feats of arms in an age of chivalry during an epic struggle between two great military powers. One is regaled with a catalogue of great English victories whose names resound in the histories taught in the anglophone world; Poitiers, Crecy, Agincourt, Cravant, Verneuil, even the curiously named "Battle of the Herrings". Indeed, the oldest regiment in the world, reputedly, certainly the oldest in the British army, the 1st Royal Scots, lists an engagement during *la Guerre de Cent Ans* as the first of the many hundreds of battles and sieges where it has distinguished itself. Surely it is therefore only through blind prejudice that so many seem not to ask what must appear to the impartial an obvious question - how is it possible that the English lost the war, when they seem to have won all the battles? In answering this question we must return to that engagement listed as the first credited to the Royal Scots. The engagement in question was the Battle of Bauge, fought on the day before Easter Sunday, 1421, and was considered by many at the time to be the turning point in the war, being the first occasion a "French" army inflicted a defeat upon the English in the field during the course of the war. This "French" army was almost entirely Scottish in composition, and included units whom the Royal Scots claim as predecessors.

Great leaders historically are seen to select members of a foreign race renowned for their martial prowess to form their bodyguard, since they are held to be immune to domestic politics. Thus the Byzantine emperors employed the Varangian guard, composed of Vikings who had rowed and portaged their way across Russia in search of riches and enhanced repute. The Roman emperors selected warriors from unconquered German tribes to attend them. And the kings of France placed their personal safety in the hands of Scots at least since 882 C.E. when Charles III formed his bodyguard from "Scottish gentlemen." Tradition maintains that this practise was started by his grandfather, Charlemagne, and it was certainly well established by the time of Louis IX (St. Louis), ultimately forming the basis of the Archers of the Scottish Guard or "Garde Ecosaise." They became known as the oldest regiment in the French army, a reputation which inspired the comment from a member of their only French rival for ancient pedigree, the Regiment of Picardy, that they were "Pontius Pilate's Bodyguard." This was a reference to the tradition that Pontius Pilate, having been born to the wife of a Roman ambassador who was accompanying her husband while he was negotiating a treaty with a tribe in Caledonia (at Fortingall near Loch Tay), chose Caledonians to form the Temple guard in Jerusalem. Certainly by the time the Auld Alliance was ratified in 1295 the cordial relationship between France and Scotland was already many centuries old.

And in the year 1420 the parties to that alliance were in dire straits; James I of Scots had been captured and was being held by the English; Henry V of England, in the aftermath of Agincourt had conquered Normandy and his Burgundian allies had even taken Paris; the French king, Charles VI, had gone mad, and the majority of the powerful men who used to pay him allegiance had agreed to the trumped up treaty whereby Henry became heir to France; the civil war in France which the early phases of *la Guerre de Cent Ans* can be interpreted as, had delivered to Burgundy *a sure thing*.

In 1419 there landed at La Rochelle 150 men-at-arms and 300 archers, from Scotland. Over the course of the next six years 17,000 men would disembark from Glasgow to make the same journey. They formed the basis of the only armies the French could put in the field for the next ten years. Without them there would be no France.

The English are a nation beguiled by centralisation, and have been ever since the Norman Conquest (one might point out that conquered nations are always obsessed by centralisation.) Therefore having conquered Normandy it was natural for them to adopt the strategy

that has so often proved fruitful subsequently - to attack the centre of power. After the fall of Paris and the conquest of Normandy, penetrating south of the Loire towards the Dauphin's headquarters at Chinon became tantalisingly feasible to the English in those years after French incompetence delivered to them the field at Agincourt. And yet the perennial English conceit, their presumption, led Henry from the fray, and left matters in the hands of his brother, Thomas, the Duke of Clarence. English accounts of what happened next are little more than a collection of commonplaces from amongst their chronicles - a critic of these texts who was not English by birth or sympathy (as few of the critics who have ever read them are) would immediately recognise the tropes and motifs which are part of English *mythistoire* and should be given the same credence as outlaw tales. There is the warning about the ensuing disaster, which is not heeded. There is the inordinate respect shown to everything holy, which leads the English into error. There are the many mistakes, not borne out by the record, to excuse them. As ever, English defeat is due to the perfidy and guile of their enemies, and the honest mistakes of a few well-meaning hotheads.

The English are portrayed as gallantly chasing off some Franco-Scottish raiders from Normandy, and pressing their pursuit as far south as the Loire. We are asked to believe that they extended their supply lines and committed their heavy cavalry, the decisive element in battles of this period, on such a valiant whim! The expedition was a strategic probe towards the Loire which the Scots thwarted, a fact whose significance must be nullified. The failure of the English archers to make any impact is explained in the English account by their absence, when in reality the English were drawn into battle on ground that neutralised the contribution of archers. And yet this is the account which is the primary source of anglophone history of this period!

Needless to say, the engagement is dismissed in all anglophone accounts as "a minor skirmish, notable only for the death of the Duke of Clarence", or in the words of Mark Twain, as a "barren fight" with no issue (in his "autobiography" of one of the servants of *La Pucelle*, Jeanne d'Arc). That is, if it is mentioned at all! At Bauge, the Scots destroyed the English heavy cavalry, which at that time meant a lot more than the mere death of the king's brother. It meant the destruction of their ability to be anything other than a garrison, and the prevention of an English army penetrating south of the Loire and encircling the strategically vital cities of Orleans and Tours, thus giving the French vital time in which to recover and face the next onslaught.

While Henry was in England raising fresh levies in 1421, his brother Thomas the Duke of Clarence led 10,000 men south towards the Loire. They set about besieging the castle at Bauge when a Scottish army of

6,000 men commanded by the Earl of Buchan made contact with them the day before Good Friday. A truce was reached, lasting until Monday, so that the combatants could properly observe the religious occasion of Easter. The English lifted their siege and withdrew to nearby Beaufort, while the Scots camped at La Lude. However, early in the afternoon of Saturday Scottish scouts reported that the English had broken the truce and were advancing upon the Scots, hoping to take them by surprise. The Scots rallied hastily and battle was joined at a bridge which the Duke of Clarence, with banner unfurled for battle, sought to cross. A detachment of a few hundred men under Sir Robert Stewart of Ralston, reinforced by the retinue of Hugh Kennedy, held the bridge and prevented passage long enough for the Earl of Buchan to rally the rest of his army, whereupon they made a fighting retreat to the town where the English archers would be ineffective.

Both armies now joined in a bitter melee that lasted until nightfall. During the melee Sir John Carmichael of Douglasdale broke his lance unhorsing the Duke of Clarence; since that day the Carmichael coat of arms displays an armoured hand holding aloft a broken lance in commemoration of the victory. Once on the ground, the Duke was killed by Sir Alexander Buchanan. The English dead included the Lord Roos, Sir John Grey and Gilbert de Umfraville, whose death directly led to the extinction of the male line of that illustrious family, well known to the Scots since the Wars of Independence. The Earl of Somerset and his brother were captured by Laurence Vernon (later elevated to the rank of knight for his conduct), the Earl of Huntingdon was captured by Sir John Sibbald, and Lord Fitz Walter was taken by Henry Cunningham. On hearing of the Scottish victory, Pope Martin V passed comment by reiterating a common mediaeval saying, that "the Scots are well-known as an antidote to the English." In the summer of 1421 the Dauphin campaigned north of the Loire and retook much territory.

In gratitude to the Scots he made Archibald, 4th Earl of Douglas, Lieutenant-General of the French forces and conferred upon him the title of Duke of Touraine. Sir John Stuart of Darnley received the lands of Aubigny-sur-Nere and Concessault. The Earl of Buchan was made Constable of France. In 1422 the Dauphin created the "hundred men-at-arms of the King's bodyguard", known as the "Hundred Lances of France", to supplement the 24 archers of the *Garde Ecossaise*. The Hundred Lances eventually became the company known as the Gendarmerie of France who distinguished themselves at Fontenoy in 1745. John Carmichael was elected bishop of Orleans in 1426, and was one of the 6 bishops to attend the coronation of the Dauphin as Charles VII in 1429 at Rheims. Hugh Kennedy, known to the French as

Canede, was granted the right to quarter his coat of arms with the fleur de lys of France.

James I was released in 1424, and in 1428 signed the Treaty of Perth whereby a further 6,000 Scots were dispatched to defend France. This occurred at another critical time - the English once again were trying to penetrate south of the Loire and had besieged Orleans hoping to secure it as a crossing point. The French Royal treasury records, maintained by Raguier, list many Scots salaried by the Dauphin to hold Orleans. Sir Thomas Blair is listed as commanding 20 men-at-arms and 29 archers; Sir Cristin Chambers is listed as the captain of the *Garde Ecossaise*, and received the lands of Saintonge in reward for his efforts at Orleans; Sir John Crichton is listed as commanding a company of men-at-arms and archers of unknown number, and is subsequently made governor of Chatillon; Archibald, 5th Earl of Douglas, is listed with another company of unknown number; Sir Henry Galois is listed commanding 10 men-at-arms and 30 archers; Sir William Hamilton is listed with a company of unknown number, and as a consequence of his contribution the Hamilton's were conferred the title of Dukes of Chatellerault; Sir Thomas Houston commanded 22 men-at-arms and 71 archers and received the lands of Gournay as reward; Hugh Kennedy was there with his retinue who had fought at Bauge; Edward of Lennox is listed as being in command of 42 men-at-arms and 108 archers; Sir David Melville is listed as commanding 12 men-at-arms and 28 archers, rising to 50 and 32 by January 1429; Sir Alexander Norwill is listed as commanding 15 men-at-arms and 29 archers; Sir John Wishart is listed as leading 48 men-at-arms and 105 archers.

On February 8th, 1429, 1,000 Scottish reinforcements arrived at Orleans, commanded by John and William Stuart. These were immediately squandered the next day in an attack on an English convoy from Paris supplying the forces besieging Orleans. The French commander, Charles of Bourbon, Count of Clermont, ordered an attack but abandoned it with his own forces, leaving the Scots to their fate. The Scots lost 250 men including John and William Stuart.

The relief of Orleans was to fall to others. Jeanne d'Arc led a supply convoy from Blois to Orleans to feed the starving garrison. Her escort consisted of 60 Scottish men-at-arms and 70 Scottish archers led by Sir Patrick Ogilvy of Auchterhouse, hereditary sheriff of Angus. Her banner flew proudly in the wind; it had been made by Hamish Powers in Tours at a cost of 25 livres-Tournois, and in gratitude Jeanne had persuaded the dignitaries of Tours to provide Hamish's daughter's

dowry. Indeed, at the subsequent show trial she was subjected to, it was noted that the only people who had carried devotional images of her had been Scots.

After the siege had been raised and the English routed at the Battle of Patay, Jeanne prevailed upon the Dauphin to make the perilous journey north to Rheims to be crowned. This journey was fraught with danger, as Rheims was close to territory still held by the English, but in order to be made king, Charles needed to be anointed with the holy oil kept there. Again the escort that accompanied Jeanne d'Arc and the Dauphin, soon to be Charles VII, was composed almost entirely of Scots.

The French recovery made possible by the Scots meant that *apres la Pucelle* their assistance was called upon less and less. Nevertheless the warm bond between Scotland and France persists to this day. Scottish merchants were given first choice of wine in Bordeaux in gratitude, much to the chagrin of the English merchants, and so in conclusion it would be fitting to raise a glass of claret and make the toast "Vive la France, Alba gu brath."