

The Legacy of William Wallace & His Crawford Relations

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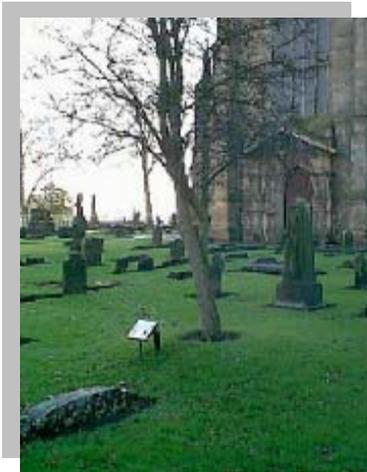
One of the most complete portrayals of William Wallace's life is the epic poem by Blind Harry known today simply as "The Wallace." Blind Harry lived and wrote in the late 1450s, about 150 years after Wallace's death. He wrote down many of the popular stories about Wallace's life and legend, performing at the court of James IV to great appreciation. He wrote the poem down in about 1477, and it was one of the first books published in Scotland around 1508, with the title: *The Acts and Deides of the Illustre and Vallyeant Champion Schir William Wallace*. Current historians tend to challenge the veracity of much of his story, but this work continues to provide the framework for William Wallace's life.

An adaptation by William Hamilton of Gilbertfield was published in 1722 as *The Life and Heroick Actions of the Renoun'd Sir William Wallace, General and Governor of Scotland*. Hamilton's version of the poem has been widely circulated over the last several hundred years, as popular in homes as the bible. This work is also the source of most of what is known of Wallace's Crawford connections. Wallace's mother Margaret Crawford and his uncle Reginald (or Ranald, as per Blind Harry) Crawford, Sheriff of Ayr and Lord of Loudoun appear prominently. It provides most of what we know about Wallace's Crawford family relations.

William Wallace's legacy is that of probably the most prominent of Scottish heroes. He initiated the Wars of Independence against England, which, though not able to finish them -- that being left to Robert the Bruce -- provided the impetus that led to Scotland throwing off the English yoke, a circumstance that would persist until the Scottish King James the VI, and 1st of England, assumed the English throne, thus uniting permanently the crowns of the two countries. The 700th anniversary of the Battle of Stirling Bridge was celebrated in 1997, with many commemorations of Wallace's name and legacy in Scotland, as well as abroad where Scots are living. Mel Gibson's film *Braveheart* (1995) placed the figure of Wallace in the international arena. Widely criticized by historians, the movie screenplay by Randall Wallace closely followed Blind Harry's epic poem, except in one thing. The movie does not give any recognition -- even mention -- to the extended family that prominently encompassed his Crawford kin.

Who actually was William Wallace? He is certainly Scotland's best loved hero, a natural leader and fighter, both a general and a guerrilla, a big man, bigger than life as pertains to physical size as well as his spirit and legend. The man, who with very limited resources routed the English -- that centuries long enemy of Scotland -- whom psychologically and symbolically for the Scots represented that rival younger brother who was able to ably defend himself against the bullish elder sibling (England/Edward I). Wallace was and is all of these things. But primarily, William Wallace was a son of Ayrshire, known and beloved by his extended family of Crawfords and other clans who formed a relatively close-knit community around the town of Ayr and the surrounding countryside and villages.

William Wallace's father appears to have been Alan Wallace. The person named in Blind Harry's epic poem as his father is Malcolm Wallace, but Malcolm was evidently his brother and maybe also the name of a paternal uncle. Recent research using documents found on the



Continent (from the Hanseatic League) suggest his father's name was Alan. William's mother was Margaret Crawford, a daughter of Sir Hugh Crawford, Chief of the House of Crawford, the heritable Third Sheriff of Ayr, who also was the Lord of Loudoun. Blind Harry (Book X, Chapter III) describes Margaret fleeing to Dunfermline as a pilgrim when remaining in Ayrshire became too perilous. She died and was buried there. A commemorative plaque is to be found on the grounds near the cathedral.

Sir Reginald Crawford was William Wallace's maternal uncle. He may have had another maternal uncle whose name is unknown, and who is considered (by George Crawford, the historian) as the progenitor of the Crawford's of Baidland and subsequently of the Ardmillan cadet. A paternal uncle Richard Wallace also figures in

Blind Harry, but is considered by some current scholars as a later figure from a different cadet. William Wallace had two brothers: Malcolm (elder) and John (younger), and a sister whose name has not come down and married into the Bailies of Limington.

William Wallace is reported by Blind Harry as having been born at Ellerslie (Ayrshire). Though disputed with an Eldersly in Renfrewshire (near Glasgow), the first location is more likely since it is close to the known residence of his maternal Crawford relatives (Loudoun) and of the Wallace family lands near Kilmarnock. It is thought that Wallace spent considerable time at his maternal uncle Sir Reginald's residence (probably at Loudoun) especially after the death of his father who was ostensibly killed by the English when he was about 12. At right is a picture of the ruins of Loudoun Castle, The rampart is reported to have been built by Sir Reginald, William's uncle.



Scenes in Blind Harry's epic poem [Book I, Chapter I, pages 1-2] describe Wallace's parentage:

Sir William Wallace much renown'd in war;
Whose bold progenitors have long time stood,
Of honorable and true Scottish blood;
And in first rank of ancient barons go,
Old knights of Craigy, baronets also;
which gallant race, to make my story brief,
Sir Thomas Wallace represents as chief.
So much for the brave Wallace's father's side,
Nor will I here his mother's kindred hide:
She was a lady most complete and bright,
The daughter of that honorable knight,

Sir Ranald Crawford, high sheriff of Ayr,
Who fondly doted on his charming fair.
Soon wedded was the lovely blooming she,
To Malcolm Wallace then of Ellerslie;
Which am'rous pair, transported with delight,
Begot young Malcolm that same joyful night. ...

Later passages center on his mother and her family [Book I, Chapter III, pages 10-11] describing the loss of her husband and elder son, her despair and sorrow, and the caring support and protection of Sir Reginald (or Ranald), her brother. Sir Reginald's response when finding out that Wallace had survived a confrontation with five English soldiers while fishing at the nearby Irving River is how a loving uncle would respond [Book I, Chapter VI, pages 12-13]:

The news did so surprise the ancient knight,
He almost fainted in his nephew's sight:
Then bids keep the secret: "For such fishing sport,
If it be known, you might pay dearly for't."
"Uncle," said Wallace to the good old man,
"I'll push my fortune now where best I can,
Since I no longer may with you abide.
I'll try these English geldings how they ride."
A purse of gold the knight unto him gave.
Wallace kneel'd down, and humbly took his leave.
"When that is done, pray nephew send for more."

It was the killings at the Barns of Ayr (Blind Harry, Book VII, Chapter I) that likely set in motion the Wars of Independence, though some recent historians question its happening. According to Blind Harry, Sir Reginald was the first Scottish noblemen from Ayr who answered the call of the English for a peace meeting with Ayrshire noblemen. He was killed as were seventeen other nobles as they each arrived at the Barns of Ayr. Wallace was en route with Sir Reginald when asked him to go to Crosbie to retrieve papers pertinent to the peace conference. On his return, William received warning and was able to avoid the trap. In rage, he retaliated burning the Barnes of Ayr with the English soldiers inside. The killing of his uncle and the other Ayrshire noblemen propelled Wallace into organizing the resistance to the English.

William Wallace's second in command was John Graham. His third in command was his maternal cousin William Crawford. It is uncertain if he was the son of Sir Reginald or of another uncle. Upon John Graham's death (at Falkirk in 1298), William Crawford became his second, accompanying him on the trip to the Continent where they met Baliol and fought for the French King Philip le Bel (the Fair). He also met with the Pope requesting and obtaining the Pope's acknowledgment for the Scottish cause of Independence.

There is an incident described upon their return to Scotland with a narrow escape from English soldiers at the Elchoke Park (or Elcho) home of William Crawford and his wife where they had taken refuge after their landing near Perth. Elcho farm is located somewhat east southeast of Perth. William Crawford's wife was left alone when they fled into the nearby woods and almost

burned alive. William Wallace appeared suddenly, managing to draw off the English soldiers into the forest where his party ambushed them.

William Wallace was betrayed to the English and captured at Robroyston near Glasgow. He was taken to London and executed on August 23, 1305. His manner of death, though for the time not unusual for treason, was horrible -- drawing and quartering.

The fight with the English took a severe toll on the Wallaces and Crawford. William's father and both brothers were killed by the English. Most his maternal uncles and cousins likewise lost their lives. The heritable position of Sheriff of Ayr and the title and lands of Loudoun passed on to the Campbells with the marriage of the heiress and last survivor of the line, Susanna Crawford, daughter of Sir Reginald, the Fifth Sheriff of Ayr, to Duncan Campbell. Hugh, an uncle of Susanna, does appear to have survived, or at least one of his offspring did, and it is into this line that the Crawford Chieftainship passed. Hugh Crawford also was the progenitor of the Crosbie line. For his valor at Bannockburn he was rewarded by Robert the Bruce with a heritable grant, being given the estate at Auchenames, which became the residence of the Crawford Chiefly line and gave its name to that cadet.

The principal legacy of William Wallace for us Crawfords is his kinship to our House. His mother was a Crawford and thus the Wallaces recognize us as kin, as we do them. We also, through the centuries, have shared with him his love of liberty learned from bitter life lessons and at his uncle's knee. Sir Reginald is said to have inspired his at the time very young nephew William with the statement:

**Dico tibi verum, libertas optima rerum:
Nunquam Sanville sub nexu vivito, fili.**

Freedom is best, I tell you true, of all things to be won:
Then never live within the bond of slavery, my son.

As a leader of his country and people, William Wallace is said to have oft repeated this phrase to inspire them in their resistance to the English. William Wallace is Scotland's greatest hero, a man of integrity, but also a man of his day -- violent and vengeful. His determination to free his country from a foreign yoke left a legacy manifest in many prominent historical documents related to the struggle for independence, among them the Scottish Declaration of Arbroath and the American Declaration of Independence.

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