## Those Darn Irish Excerpts from a Diary Concerning the Bruce Invasion

## by Andrew Nolan

"We have a simple statement for [British Prime Minister] Mrs. Thatcher: Disengage from Ireland and there will be peace. If not, there will be no haven for your military personnel, and you will regularly be at airports awaiting your dead."

-- A May 1, 1988 statement from the Provisional Irish Republican Army claiming responsibility for a car-bombing which left three British soldiers dead. The statement was printed in a front-page story in the *New York Times* on May 2, 1988.

Call me Maupas.

Sir John de Maupas.

Knighted by Edward II, who is King of all England by grace of God and right of succession, and sent to this accursed island of Ireland by the same king, to do battle with the Godless Scots and lay them low. I only hope the rain stops soon -- it rains frequently now, and not the gentle fall showers which bring the first hints of winter. It's a driving rain, one which ushers in the cold and damp winter which has been coming earlier and earlier these years. The ground is too wet to sow any crops and so the people again face the monster starvation, alone and helpless. <1> All because of the accursed Scottish king Robert and his foul brother Edward. Tomorrow, the so-called high king of Ireland will see what a true defender of the faith can do. I will kill Edward the Bruce with my own hands.

I suppose I should first outline what happened -- how this usurper stole the crown of Ireland and how we came to be here at Faughart, where the Irish have traditionally crowned their kings. I must confess, my hatred for the Scots and Irish is tempered in some degree by their ferocity, their unwavering courage in the face of adversity. I curse his name, but the Bruce has beaten us at every turn -- so far. He first arrived in Ireland on May 25, Anno Domini 1315. This was almost a full year after his brother Robert had smashed the troops of Edward at Bannockburn through deceit and trickery. But the real roots of the Irish problem stretch much deeper than this -- the real tale is not one of two kings, but one of a race of people.

The Gaels had settled into their island and had become comfortable with their own barbarian life-style. They had accepted the church, thanks to the blessed St. Patrick, but perverted it with their own inferior pagan ways. Even the incursion of the Normans after the Conqueror wasn't enough to civilize them -- the more the settler tried to educate them in the hold doctrines of feudalism, the more stubborn they grew about their independence. One lesson they did learn was the necessity for unity in the face of resistance, <2 > which is why they offered King Haakon IV of Norway the crown in 1263.

<3> It was an attempt to unify the native Gaelic lords against invaders from England, since they could not agree who among themselves should be king.

In a vain attempt to lead the Irish down the path of righteousness, His Holiness Pope Adrian IV assigned the land of Ireland to Henry II in his bull *Laudabiliter* and charged him with reforming its church and it people. This task Henry assayed with great skill, and he succeeded in bringing peace and law to the land for some time. But rebellion was still a common cry of the ignorant Irish, and their cries had to be stifled at some point to preserve the realm and bring them the benefits of English civilization.

Thus it was that Edward's father, God rest his beloved soul, sent John de Wogan as justiciar, to put the affairs of the island in order and to make it a profitable enterprise; another jewel in the king's crown. This Wogan did, but at the expense of what little good will the Irish chieftains had for the Crown. They rose up in rebellion against their new lords, the Anglo-Irish of the Pale - the mid-eastern part of Ireland, directly across from Wales, where the Norman settlers first established their colonies. Even the descendants of the original colonists expressed discontent with Wogan's policies, but he maintained his rule with an iron grip. Wogan was sent in 1295 to reconcile feuds between nobles and to make the colony both self-supporting and a treasury to draw upon for the French and Scots campaigns.  $<\underline{4}>$ 

One of the major handicaps of the king's power in Ireland was his inability to inquire into feudal connections among the lords of the island as he could in England under the Quo Warranto from the Statue of Gloucester. Wogan successfully investigated the feudal obligations of many lords and got the king additional land and revenue as a result. <5> Wogan also convened the first Irish Parliament for the purpose of obtaining Irish approval for their participation in the Scottish campaigns. <6> But Wogan held as little love for Irishmen as I do another Parliament was called under our beloved Edward II, in 13 10, which declared that "no mere Irishman shall be received into a religious order among the English in the lands of peace." <7> The Parliament of 1310 drew a sharp distinction between the English-administered shires as land of peace, the Lords' domains as march lands, and the Gaels' lands as lands of war. <8>

In an effort to beat back the Scots, my liege Edward drained his treasury in Ireland so it was no longer possible for the justiciar to maintain the king's peace. <9> And so Wogan fell out of favor and was removed. It all happened when Roger Mortimer, Lord of Trim and claimant to the Irish region Leix by right of descent, arrived to assume his duties over these lands. The tenants -the de Lacys and the Verduns -objected, wanting to hold the land directly from the king. The last official action of Wogan was to lead an army against the Verduns, who beat him. <<u>10</u>> Meanwhile, some whispered the traitorous de Lacys were behind the invitation to Edward Bruce to assume the lordship of Ireland. <<u>11</u>>

The Gaels were agitating under Anglo-Irish lords like Mortimer and Richard de Burgo, earl of Ulster, and John de Bermingham, lord to Tethmoy. And perhaps they had been given good reason to rebel; some of the settlers were harsher than circumstances may have dictated. Take, for example, Piers de Bermingham, baron of Tethmoy and lord of the castle Carrickfergus. Under the guise of healing a breach between him and his hostile neighbors, the O'Connors of Offaly, he threw a Christmas feast and invited the Gaels to attend. After dinner, he had the chief, his brothers and their retainers butchered. For this act, the government in Dublin gave him [pounds] 100 and praised him as a hunter of the Irish.  $<\underline{12}>$ 

The Irish wanted independence - especially the hotheaded Donnall O'Neill, lord of Ulster (known as Tir Eoghan by the Irish), the tenant of the "Red Earl," Richard de Burgo. O'Neils's kingdom was under pressure from de Burgo to the south and his rival O'Donnell in the west, and needed a protector badly to maintain his fragile grip on his land. <13> And the success of the Scots gave the Ulster O'Neill's hope they also could break free of English domination. <14> Enter the cunning Robert.

Now, as I have said earlier, the Scots defeated the good Edward by sly treachery, but it puzzles me why they then invaded Ireland. It has never been of consequence to anyone, and the advantages it offers are far outweighed by the savage, contrary, independent streak the Irish have always exhibited to their conquerors. They are subdued and controlled only with great difficulty and constant surveillance, be the conquerors Gaelic, Anglo-Saxon, or Norman. With these facts in mind, it is hard to understand why the Scots felt they would have any better luck than would the English.  $<\underline{15}>$  Nevertheless, to repel just such an invasion is what has brought me here today.

Robert had delivered Edward a major setback at Bannockburn on June 24, 1314.  $<\underline{16}>$  All that Robert needed to do to consolidate his position and secure his throne was to guard against a counterattack by Edward. Robert, instead, decided to press his luck and go on the offensive. The English had a tenuous grip on Ireland, but if they could be dislodged and Ireland used as a base to launch a flanking maneuver through Wales, England itself could fall before Robert.  $<\underline{17}>$  Certainly, any serious threat to his throne would be smashed.

In addition, Bruce could further his mad plan for a united Celtic kingdom of Scotland, Ireland and Wales by giving his brother Edward the Irish throne. <<u>18</u>> Edward had served his brother loyally and devotedly, <<u>19</u>> but he was a restless soul, hot-tempered and given to high ambitions. <<u>20</u>> Above all, he and his soldiers were drunk on the taste of victory after Bannockburn, as were his men at arms, and needed a diversion. The island was ripe for invasion -- the Irish chiefs were ready for a deliverer, the Irish Church had been wronged By English Lords, the feudal Anglo-Irish lords were disoriented, and the earl of Ulster appeared to be neutral or even friendly to the Bruce's cause. <<u>21</u>> These conditions presented to Edward the tempting prospect of a new kingdom, and assured to Robert the tranquility of a secure throne. <<u>22</u>> It would please Robert no end to have his brother holding the Irish throne. <<u>23</u>>

just before sending him to Ireland, Bruce called a Scottish Parliament on April 26, 1315, to establish a line of succession, from Robert to his male heirs, and failing that -- and the king had no sons at the time -- to Edward and his sons, and then to the king's sister Marjory. I think the nearness of the Irish expedition set these fears loose, and the

Parliament was to allay them. <24> And you can be sure Robert sat much easier with his ambitious, ruthless brother off in search of his own kingdom.

Before the invasion, Robert sent emissaries through northern Ireland to spread propaganda and to cause the people to agitate for freedom. There is even some evidence Edward crossed over to the island once before 1315 and was forced to retreat because preparations were not yet complete. <25> The brothers generally tried to secure the support of the Irish chieftains to ensure the expedition's success. <26>

And so it was that Edward arrived at Larne, at the northeastern tip of the country, on May 25 of 1315, with 6,000 men and some of the finest knights of the Scottish realm, including Robert's confidant Thomas Randolph. <27> The defender of that part of Ireland, the earl of Ulster, was in the west in Connacht at the time. <28> What little opposition de Burgo's vassals could muster fell like chaff before Bruce and his experienced men. <29> As soon as the people learned of Edward's arrival, they flocked to him -- all the petty Irish chieftains of the North like O'Neill and his henchmen. <30> But the Gaels were not in complete agreement over the possible benefits from his arrival of proposed leadership. As he moved southward through Mowry Pass, a group of Irishmen attacked his party. But the incompetents slowed him not at all. <31> Many of the Irish nobles in the southern part of the island resisted the Scots bitterly, preferring the benefits of their own English lords rather than to have to serve as slaves under the Scotsmen. <32> After all, the king which O'Neill offered the southern lords was as much a foreigner as any Mortimer or Plunkett from the Pale though the Good Lord knows the Irish need some kind of outside ruler, else the savages would all butcher themselves. <33>

Edward continued his devastating advance south, arriving at the town of Dundalk and putting it to the torch. The beast killed so many inhabitants and caused so much carnage that the streets ran with blood. <34> One church was set to the torch while still filled with men, women and children, and then let burn to the ground as the air rang out with their cries. <35> The year 1315 was not a kind one to the realm of Ireland -- it was ravaged by famine and many strange diseases, death trod through the countryside as undisputed master, and intolerable storms buffeted the crops. <36> Having a merciless band of Scots mercenaries plunder what meager offerings the country had to offer only made the situation that much more bleak.

De Burgo had learned of the invasion and had assembled a group of forces from his vassals in Connacht. So had the justiciar, Edmund le Botiller, from the magnates of meath, in the area just south of Dundalk. The two met at Ardee on July 22, <37> where Richard insisted on meeting the Bruce alone, as he was afraid of two things. He did not want le Botiller taking any of the credit for himself and establishing a royal claim over the earldom of Ulster, and he did not want his land to suffer the ravages of harboring a royal army. <38> Richard was still confident of success because of the presence of Felim O'Connor by his side. Felim was Irish king of Connacht, and held the land through de Burgo. <39> His presence would serve to dishearten the other Irish chieftains in the battle, and also bolster the members of de Burgo's army.

He and Felim managed to push the Scots back to Coleraine in the north, but fortune did not smile on de Burgo that day. Bruce managed to convince Felim's rival, Rory O'Connor, to take up arms in Connacht against him,  $<\underline{40}>$  and Felim left de Burgo to resist Rory, forcing the early to fall back from Coleraine to Connor.  $<\underline{41}>$  Bruce, emboldened by this change in events, met the earl there on September 10, 1315, and soundly defeated him capturing his cousin William in the process.  $<\underline{42}>$  The Ulster English fell back to Carrickfergus, the lone northern castle which still held out against the cruel invaders. Edward lay them under siege and the earl of Ulster was forced to fell to Connacht, which was being ravaged by the O'Connors civil war.  $<\underline{43}>$ 

It was a typical Irish welcome.

In November, Edward advanced into Meath. <44> where, on December 6 of 1315, he met and defeated Roger Mortimer, Lord of Trim, at Kells, opening the rest of meath before him. <45> He then marched west to Granard, south to Finnea and Loughsewdy -- unhindered and burning as he went -- and there he spend Christmas. <46> The destruction he was spreading was seriously weakening the Anglo-Irish feudal settlements. <47> he moved on into the province of Leinster guided by the treacherous de Lacys, the former tenants of Mortimers. The Scottish Band avoided the large, well-garrisoned castles as the moved through Castledermot, Athy, and Reban. <48> They kept in constant motion, raiding and burning as they went, hoping to seriously reduce the lands of the Anglo-Irish magnates and to rouse the native Irish to rebellion. <49> Everyone knows that the two races -- the Scots and the Irish -- are easily incited to rebellion, as they both hate the yoke of servitude and the English. <50> For example, Felim O'Connor and regaining control of Connacht, turned on his English allies and joined forces with Bruce. The O'Briens of Thomond in the southwest, many minor chiefs in Ulster, Munster and Meath, and many clergy also paid at least lip service to Bruce. <51>

With the unpredictable Irish giving him at least grudging support, Bruce advanced to Castledermot. John de Hotham, the chancellor of Ireland, summoned the Anglo-Irish magnates to meet Bruce there. <52> On January 26, near Ardscull, they caught up with the Scots. Bruce and his men were at a breaking point, both tired and hungry, while the larger, fresher colonist's army waited for them at Skerries, near Ardscull. <53> They outnumbered him and they should have beat him soundly, but ill luck was with them, and Bruce won the field. <54> Some grumbled that the magnates quarreled among themselves and allowed the Scots to walk away with the victory, but I refuse to believe it. Nevertheless, the impact of Bruce's unlikely victory was widespread and disturbing: Irish revolts began to spring up all over the country as far away as Kerry, in the northwest, and Limerick, near Ardscull in the southwestern region of the country. <55> Subsequently, Hotham required all the lords to swear their fealty to the king on February 4 as a sign of both loyalty and unity. <56>

The outlook was bleak -- the king's justices postponed all cases until after Easter, the treasury was empty and Hotham had to ask the king for £500 to maintain the government and keep the war going.  $<\frac{57}{}>$  The year 1316 was another year of famine and disease, made no better by the ravages of war ripping through the countryside.  $<\frac{58}{}>$  Meanwhile,

the Scots moved back through Fore into Ulster, reaching there before the end of February, and they then resumed the siege of Carrickfergus.  $<\underline{59}>$ 

Here, then, is one of those moments in the life of Edward that gives me pause. Bruce met with the governor of Carrickfergus castle, as Bruce controlled the town but had not yet taken the castle. They reached an agreement to observe a truce over Easter week. On Easter eve, fifteen English ships slipped into a seaward gate to reinforce the castle. On Faster morning, the sun rose in a slate-gray sky and found only Neil Fleming and about 60 Scots guarding the town gate. The English attacked the band of Scots at dawn's light, and only the ignobility of the Scots and Irish could excuse this breach of truce by the colonists. The English greatly outnumbered Fleming and his men, who quickly sent word to Bruce of the surprise attack. They managed to hold the English at bay, though they were sorely pressed until Bruce finally arrived and drove them back into the castle. Immediately, he inquired about Fleming and learned he had been mortally wounded. He stayed by Fleming's side until he died, and then, Edward the Bruce wept.  $<\underline{60}>$  When May 1, 1316, came -- stark, bitter and windy -- two weeks later, Edward Bruce crowned himself high king of Ireland. <61> The ceremony occurred at the hill of Faughart, near Dundalk, according to Gaelic custom. <62> In September of that year, Carrickfergus castle finally succumbed to the siege, And in the fall of that year, Thomas Randolph, a knight who had accompanied Edward on the expedition, returned to Scotland to ask for the presence of Robert the Bruce to help finish the conquest of the Emerald Isle.

Meanwhile, Edward II was finally overcoming his domestic difficulties and taking some effective action. On August 10 of 1316, William de Burgo, who had been released by the Scots, returned to Connacht with John de Bermingham of Tethmoy and soundly defeated the rebel Felim O'Connor at Athenry, who had treacherously turned on Bermingham after he had been aided by him. It was one of the greatest victories for the Anglo-Irish ever. <63> In November of 1316, his highness appointed Roger Mortimer Lord Lieutenant and Warden of Ireland. <64> He was not to arrive until 1317, but the justiciar, Edmund le Botiller, managed to mount a defense force with the help of the magnates in the meantime. <65>

Now, I think Robert risked the trip to Ireland for a number of reasons. He trusted the judgment of Thomas Randolph, who had already returned to Scotland for one set of reinforcements. The war was going well, as the Anglo-Irish had not yet beaten Edward, while Edward had aroused the Irish and been crowned high king. Robert saw a chance to consolidate the Scot's hold on the north of Ireland, and possibly the whole island. This would appease his greedy, ambitious brother Edward, and put Ireland firmly under Scottish control. And with the earl of Lancaster and Edward II at odds in England, the possibility of an attack from the English was slight. <66>

Thus, sometime around Christmas, Robert the Bruce arrived at Carrickfergus to assist his brother in the last stages of the subjugation of Ireland.  $<\underline{67}>$  The Bruces spent the winter making preparations for a march on the south in an attempt to seize the Anglo-Irish colonist's government at Dublin. There were any number of possible explanations for this mission into the south it may have been conceived as a march through the land to stamp

Edward's reign with the seal of legitimacy, or an attempt to Win the Irish over to their side or to incite them to rebel against the Anglo-Irish, <68> or a move to join forces with the rebel O'Briens from Thomond, an area in southwest Ireland, or simply a try at ample and more convenient supplies <69> -- but I think it was something else. Irish custom dictated that the high king tour the realm of Ireland through Ulster in the north, the central districts of Meath on the east and Leinster on the west, Munster in the south and Connacht in the northwest. And the Scots dearly loved custom, as do all Gaels like the accursed Irish. <70>

In any event, the Bruces set out to tour the provinces of the realm in February. They concentrated on quick foraging forays, avoiding the well-stocked and heavily defended castles and concentrating on numerous small raids to stir the Irish up in rebellion. They advanced on Dublin, where de Burgo took refuge and was subsequently imprisoned for acting in complicity with the rebels. There may be some truth to the charge, as Robert is married to his daughter Elizabeth. But John de Bermingham, my general, is married to Mathilda, Elizabeth's sister-and no one could accuse him of plotting against beloved England. Instead of attacking, they turned southward toward Munster, preferring not to risk defeat it a final assault on Dublin. <71> There were rumors that they hoped to meet up with a group of Irish chieftains from Thomond somewhere in Limerick. When they arrived, though, no one was there to meet them. The Irish were using the invasion to good advantage, yes, but they used it to further their own petty concerns. <72> They could not overcome their own quarrels long enough to help in the liberation of their own country. Or perhaps they felt it was futile to overthrow one foreign ford for another who had brought them nothing but famine and ruin. In any case, they may have offered little aid to the Scots, but they certainly gave no relief to the English.

The Scots stopped in Limerick, at Castleconnell, and the English under le Botiller were close behind them, though they dared not face them yet it open combat. The southern Anglo-Irish armies, known as the Geraldines, were too inexperienced and poorly armed to take on the might of the full Scottish army.  $\langle \underline{73} \rangle$  This is where Bruce learned that English reinforcements under Mortimer were coming and retreated back into Ulster, arriving there at the beginning of May. I was a member of that army which arrived under the command of Roger Mortimer.

It was a horrible bloody mess. The Scots had hoped to live off the country, but there was no food to be had.  $<\underline{74}>$  In addition, they caused so much devastation in the lands through which they traveled that he Irish could not have felt much admiration for them, though many favored Edward when he first arrived.  $<\underline{75}>$  To survive, the soldiers were reduced to eating horseflesh, and some whispered they dug up their dead comrades and ate them,  $<\underline{76}>$  while women succumbed to eating their own children.  $<\underline{77}>$ 

The Scots had precious little regard for their allies as they moved back into Ulster. The O'Briens of Thomond, in the southwest, were left to fend for themselves against Richard de Clare. In May 10 of 1318, the Lord granted those sub-creatures a miracle, as they managed to recapture their land from the English.  $<\underline{78}>$  Re-civilizing it will be a long, bloody task. Meanwhile, we tracked the Bruces back through Meath, where we came

across the traitorous de Lacys. We drove them into Connacht and seized their lands for Mortimer, who is the Lord of Trim. <79> Since then, Mortimer has been moving from town to town in the Pale and Meath and Munster trying to right the wrongs done by the Scots, but the Irish refuse to be tamed. <80> It was during this time, in mid1318, that Donnall O'Neill of Ulster appealed to His Holiness, Pope John XXII at Avignon. <81> He claimed the English had violated the bull *Laudabiliter*, had denied the Irish the rights of all English law, stolen land from the people and the Church, barred them from entering religious orders, and declared the English felt killing the Irish was no worse than killing a dog. The Gaels asked the Holy Father to recognize Edward the Bruce's right to the throne through O'Neill's surrender of it to him. <82>

The Pope saw through this cheap sham immediately and excommunicated all the followers of Bruce in Ireland, while asking for Edward to treat the Irish with the dignity they so richly deserves.  $<\!\!\frac{83}{2}\!\!>$ 

And that is what we intend to do tomorrow. I write now to let the world know of my hatred for Edward Bruce, and my admiration of him. He must die. For the good of the king and the good of the country, I will find this Edward and crush him for all he had done to reawaken the pagan spirit of the Irish people, for only heaven can know when the Irish will again submit to the yoke they are required to bear.

I hear we are advancing on him at Faughart, where he was crowned more than two years ago. Mortimer has been recalled for business in England,  $<\underline{84}>$  but we have a capable leader in John de Bermingham. We have numbers, and we have God on our side.

This time tomorrow, I will have rid the world of Edward Bruce.

\* \* \*

Sometime in the fall of 1318, Robert heard of the advancing English army and sent word to Edward to wait for Scottish reinforcements:

A vastly superior English army, under Sir John de Bermingham, moved against the Scots; and the King Edward the Bruce, wrathfully overruling the counsels of his staff [and his Irish allies] disdaining to wait for the approaching reinforcements from Scotland, and despising the hesitations of his Irish allies, dashed against the tremendous odds with his native impetuosity.  $<\underline{85}>$ 

The next day, Edward and Bermingham met on the field of battle near Faughart. After a long day of bloodshed and courageous fighting by both parties, the English won the battle and subsequently, the war.

The body of Sir John de Maupas was found lying across the corpse of Edward the Bruce.

The Irish suffered through famine and plague during the Scottish invasion, and little sorrow was expressed at the passing of Edward.  $<\underline{86}>$  The English continued to dominate

the island, though the O'Briens's victory over Richard de Clare in 1318 was an ominous portent, signaling a resurgence in Irish resistance to foreign rule. The Irish continued to suffer through plagues, famines and status as second-class citizens for another 600 years, never losing sight of their goal of achieving independence.

They still haven't.

## Notes

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- 42 Otway-Ruthven, p. 227.
- 43 Otway-Ruthven, p. 227.
- 44 Otway-Ruthven, p. 228.
- 45 Fryde, p. 40.
- 46 Otway-Ruthven, p. 228.
- 47 Lydon, p. 288.
- 48 Lydon, p. 288.
- 49 Lydon, p. 288.
- 50 Murison, p.111.
- 51 Taylor, p. 97.
- 52 Otway-Ruthven, p. 228.
- 53 Lydon, p. 288.
- 54 Otway-Ruthven, p. 229.
- 55 Lydon, p. 288.
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- 58 Edwards, p. 54.
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- 62 Otway-Ruthven, p. 230.
- 63 Taylor, p. 98.
- 64 Fryde, p. 40.
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- 66 Scott, p. 178.
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- 68 Scott, p. 178.
- 69 Murison, p. 116.
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- 74 Lydon, p. 285.
- 75 Taylor, p. 99.
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86 Otway-Ruthven, p. 237.

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