

The Battle of the North Inch (Battle of the Clans)

The history of this battle in 1396 is more than confusing. One history of this battle says that David Lindsay, first Earl of Crawford and Dunbar tried without success to end a dispute between two clans.

The first bit of confusion is that David Lindsay did not become the first Earl of Crawford until 1398 and he was not the Earl of Dunbar. George De Dunbar was the Earl of Dunbar at this time. Another history says the Earl of Crawford and the Earl of Dunbar at the kings command could not settle this dispute so they came up with a plan, to which the clan chiefs and the king agreed. Each side would choose 30 of their best men, which would meet on the field of battle in open combat. The king would award honors on the victor and pardon the defeated. The end of the dispute, gladiatorial combat in the 12th century.

The second bit of confusion is who were the combatants? Most accounts agree that Clan Chattan was one. The other in some accounts was Clan Kay or Quhele. Sir Walter Scott indicates Clan Chattan and Clan Quhele. Alexander MacKintosh Shaw in his privately printed "Clan Battle at Perth" noted the combatants as Clan Chattan and Clan Cameron. For this article we agree with Shaw as to the combatants being Clan Chattan and Clan Cameron.

On the day of the battle both clans marched through the streets of Perth. Each led by their respective pipers. The 30 combatants of each side armed with sword, dagger, axes, bows and targes.

Note: They were not in clan tartan as it did not exist at this time as a means of clan identity.

They marched to the western banks of the river Tay. At this point the field of combat had barriers built up on three sides. The river Tay being the fourth side. The king, "Robert III" and his court sat in a

guided arbor at the summer house of the Dominican Monastery, almost like a jousting event or more like Roman Emperor at the coliseum. Exchequer accounts of 1396 had an entry which states "For timber, iron, and making of a battlefield for 60 persons fighting on the inch at Perth, £14:25 or 14 pounds 2 shillings.

Before the combat started each clan was counted to make sure of only 30 combatants per side. It was found that Clan Chattan only had 29. Clan Chattan protested and would not fight one man short and Clan Cameron would not give up one man to even out the sides. Finally, a man from Perth stepped up and said he would fight for Clan Chattan and make up for their missing man. He would do all this for a fee. The fee was half a French crown of gold and if he survived, be maintained for life. The offer was accepted by Clan Chattan. So into history stepped Henry Smith or Hal O' The Wynd as he was called, known to be fierce in combat.

Both sides took to their ends of the field of combat now that the issue of a missing man was resolved. The custom of combat in this day was the Highland Charge, all for one, one for all. As the pipers blew their respective battle song both clans charged each other and met in the middle with shouts of courage and challenge. This turned to screams of pain as men lost arms to swords, mortal wounds to bodies. After about fifteen minutes of carnage, the pipers on both sides sounded retreat. Almost as if both sides had agreed to a break to rest. At this time about twenty men from each side lay on the field of combat dead or dying of mortal wounds. Shortly the pipers again sounded the charge, again they met head to head, targe to targe in the middle of the field of combat stepping over or around the dead and dying after more minutes of carnage Clan Chattan had eleven men standing. Clan Cameron had one man left standing, sorely wounded, the lone survivor from Clan Cameron fled the field and swam across the river Tay to see another day. Thus ended the battle of the North Inch. Of the sixty combatants, 48 had died.