

# William Wallace in Lanark



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*A Knight and Lady from the time of Wallace*

Lanark is well known for its links with the famous Scottish patriot William Wallace. It was the events in Lanark of May 3rd 1297 that were to show that the spirit of the Scottish people was not crushed after the savage attack made by Edward I on Berwick in 1296 and the ensuing defeat of John Balliol, the King of Scotland at that time.

In the aftermath of the defeat of John Balliol, many Scots pledged themselves to serve Edward I by signing the Ragman's Roll. They probably thought that Edward was going to appoint another king or become King himself. They were

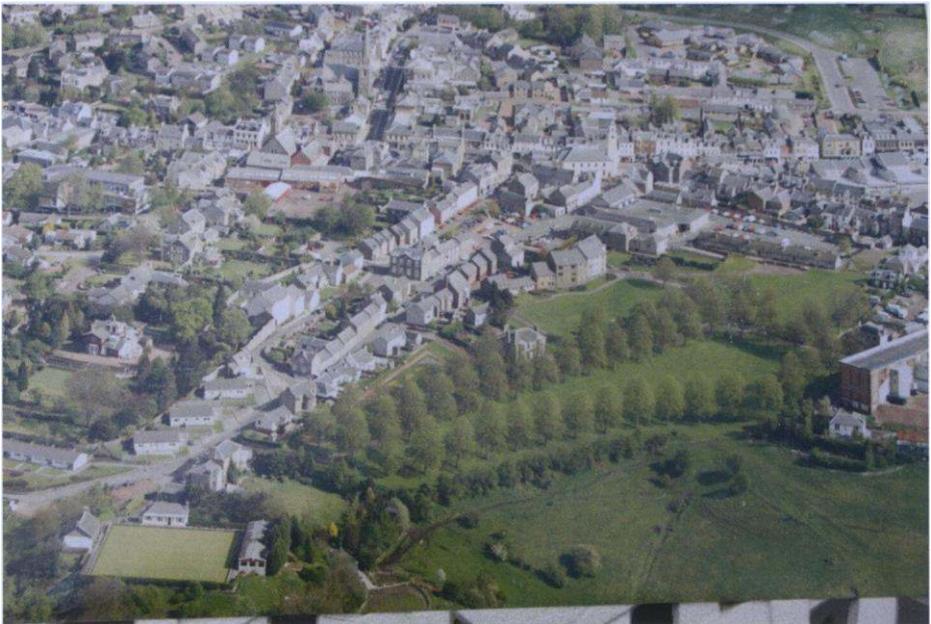
outraged to discover they were going to be treated just like the Welsh. One family to resist from the very beginning was William Wallace's. Others joined, not only angered by Edward's attitude towards the Scots but incensed by the high taxes imposed by Walter Cressingham, Edward I tax collector. In addition they were angry about a tax called The Prest, which was a wool tax imposed on all of England, Scotland and Wales to finance Edward I's wars in Flanders.



It is very difficult to get hard facts about William Wallace, as much of our knowledge comes from authors such as Andrew of Wyntoun and Blind Harry. Unfortunately the biography written by William Wallace's personal friend, a cleric called John Blair, does not survive though Blind Harry does refer to his work.

Andrew of Wyntoun's work was published about 1430 and Blind Harry's poems were printed about 1510. As they were written between a hundred and twenty five and two hundred and five years after Wallace's death, they obviously lack historical accuracy and this has made some of the stories difficult to accept at face value.

There is however no question about the truth of William Wallace's attack on the Sheriff of Lanark. The castle where Wallace is thought to have killed Haselrigg or Haselbrig (there is some doubt about the actual spelling of the name of the Sheriff), still survives. It is now a bowling green lying at the bottom of Castlegate.



*An aerial view of Lanark castle*

The following are missing the wooden fortifications that would have been there in Wallace's day, as well as some of the ditches defending it.

## Local Legends and stories about William Wallace

William Wallace has inspired writers throughout the ages to describe his daring deeds. Unfortunately there is little information that has come down to us from the period when he was alive. There is no doubt he struck fear into the hearts of the English. A contemporary chronicler writing in the monastery of Lanercost in Cumberland, has this to say 'Robert Wishart, Bishop of Glasgow, ever foremost in treason conspired with the Steward of the Kingdom, named James, for a new piece of insolence, yea, for a new chapter of ruin. Not daring openly to break their pledge to the king, they caused a certain bloody man, William Wallace, who had formerly been a chief of brigands in Scotland, to revolt against the king and assemble the people in his support.'

Another monastic chronicler from England, Walter of Hemingborough in Yorkshire, informs us that 'In the month of May (1297) the perfidious race of Scots began to rebel'.

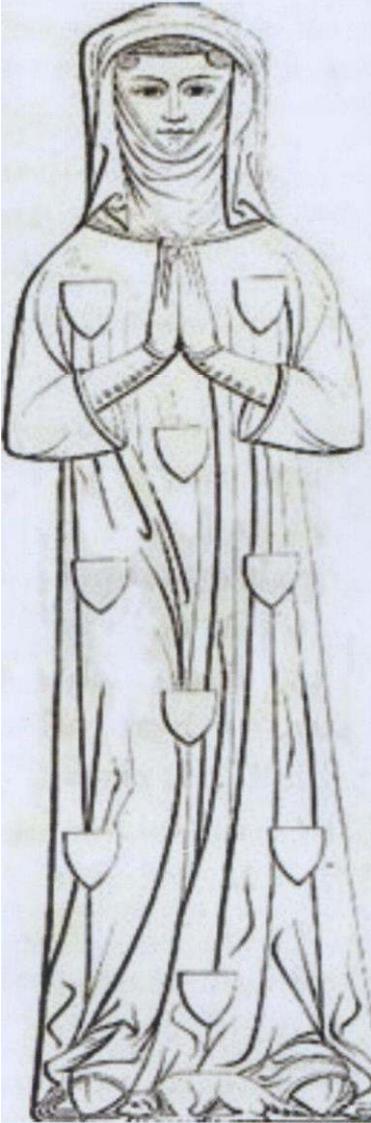


Much of the information thereafter about Wallace in Lanark comes from two sources: William of Wyntoun, Abbot of Lindores in Fife and the poet 'Blind' Harry. The earliest account was used by Blind Harry for his Wallace.

There are other Scots authors who mention Wallace but do not give us such a detailed account of what was happening in Lanark.

***The chronicler Walter of Hemingborough*** From what Blind Harry and others tell us, William Wallace came to the Clyde Forest after successfully ambushing the English at Loudon Hill. This event is supposed to have taken place in July 1296. After the skirmish, Wallace took refuge in a cave near Coalburn to rest his men. It is thought that Wallace may have met Marion Braidfute for the first time and learned about the arrogant and cruel Sheriff of Lanark called Haselrigg. Marion

was 18 years of age and the daughter of the laird of Lamington. She informed Wallace about the Sheriff, whom Blind Harry describes as 'cruel, outrageous and spiteful in his actions.' He had put to death Marion's brother who had come along with Marion to stay in his father's town house in Lanark, supposedly to avoid trouble; his father was to be disappointed in this respect.



Marion Braidfute is described in the following way by Blind Harry, 'She suffered all and bore herself right lowly, so amiable she was, so benign and wise, courteous and sweet, full of noblesse, of well ordered speech.'

Wallace fell in love with Marion, but according to some sources, he decided that it would not be wise to marry Marion until Scotland had been freed from the English. It may be the fact that Marion was pregnant that made him change his mind. Certainly it would not have been possible for him to marry Marion in December and for her to bear his daughter by May 1297 when she was murdered by Haselrigg's soldiers.

Bearing in mind the death of Marion's brother Wallace, according to Blind Harry, came to Lanark for 'sport'. The 'sport' in question was the murder of any English soldier on sight to avenge the wrongs heaped upon the Braidfute household.

Wallace did not want to rush into things and he wanted to build up his forces. But his hand was forced by the taunts from the English soldiers when he was leaving St Kentigerns one Sunday

morning. They thought they would chance their arm since they knew that Wallace was neither wearing his habergeon - a leather jacket with mail at the collar and under the arm pits - nor was his head protected by a steel cap underneath his cap. At first they tried a bit of name calling to bait him and when this failed, they mocked his sword calling it a knife. Even this did not

provoke him, however when they said that his daughter was a bastard and that the priest of the chapel of St Nicholas had been sleeping with Marion, his temper snapped.

A fracas ensued and Wallace's men joined in. The English took a severe beating, there were fifty Englishmen either dead or badly wounded, but there were still enough left to force Wallace to retreat to Marion's house. There Wallace's men continued their resistance, but a decision was made to retreat to Cartland Crags and hide there. Since it was easy to escape into the countryside, Wallace's men

managed to make their escape. Marion was not so lucky.

Beside himself with impotent fury, Haselrigg determined to wreak vengeance on Wallace. Marion was now his prisoner, so he decided to execute her not only to warn other Scots about the dangers of treachery and treason, but to deny Wallace the company of the only woman he truly loved.



*Monk from the 14th Century*

When the news reached Wallace, he was beside himself with grief. However he bided his time before planning his attack on Lanark Castle. The English meanwhile sank into complacency thinking that the rebels had been terrified into submission. Gathering his small force at Cartland, Wallace stole

into Lanark in the dead of night. Foolishly the English had neglected to guard the wall of the town. Silently through the dark, Wallace and his followers crept up to the castle and again luck was on their side. Overpowering the guards, Wallace's band got access to Haselrigg's apartments. Startled from

the depths of sleep, Haselrigg was unable to defend himself. Wallace split his skull to the collar bone with his massive two handed sword. Haselrigg's son hearing the commotion rushed up the stairs to his father's bedroom only to be cut down himself. Meanwhile the young Auchinleck, one of Wallace's followers, plunged his dagger into the almost lifeless body of Haselrigg 'to mak siccar' to check if the sheriff was really dead. Though there can be little question that in fact he was dead.



***Lanark Castle as it looked in the 1970s***

The slaughter of the English had only just begun. Wallace and his band killed two hundred and forty soldiers, merchants and commoners sparing only the women and priests.

Though the account given by Andrew of Wyntoun and Blind Harry is very much fictional, the impact that the events in Lanark had on the English should not be underestimated.

A contemporary chronicler Knighton wrote 'The whole followers of the nobility attached themselves to Wallace and although the persons of their lords were with the king in England, their hearts were with Wallace, who found his army reinforced by so immense a multitude of Scots that the community of the land obeyed him as their leader and prince.' The events of May 1297 gave heart to the

Scots struggling to get over the humiliating defeats in 1296 which had resulted in John Balliol's surrender.

A letter written by Edward I treasurer Hugh Cressingham also emphasizes the success of Wallace's campaign. He wrote to his king asking for £2000 because, he said 'Not one of the sheriffs, bailiffs or officials can raise a penny of the Scots revenues on account of a multitude of different perils which daily and continually threaten them'.

Edward I did not come and fight the Scots in person until 1298 at Falkirk. Not until the ignominious defeat of the Earl of Surrey's forces at Stirling Bridge on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1297 did Edward I believe the true seriousness of what was happening in Scotland. Edward I unfortunate treasurer Cressingham was killed and his portly body flayed by the Scots. Strips of his skin were kept as souvenirs. Wallace used some of it as a sheath for his dagger, an insult unlikely to be forgotten by Edward I. In August 1301, Edward I stayed briefly in Lanark and one wonders what he thought of the events of May 1297.

Referring back to the stories written by Andrew of Wyntoun and Blind Harry, there has been some speculation about what happened to William and Marion's daughter. She survived the Wars of Independence and became the wife of a squire called Shaw. After his death she reputedly became the wife of Sir William Baillie of Lamington. Though this part of the Wallace story on inspection appears to have been created by the Baillie family.

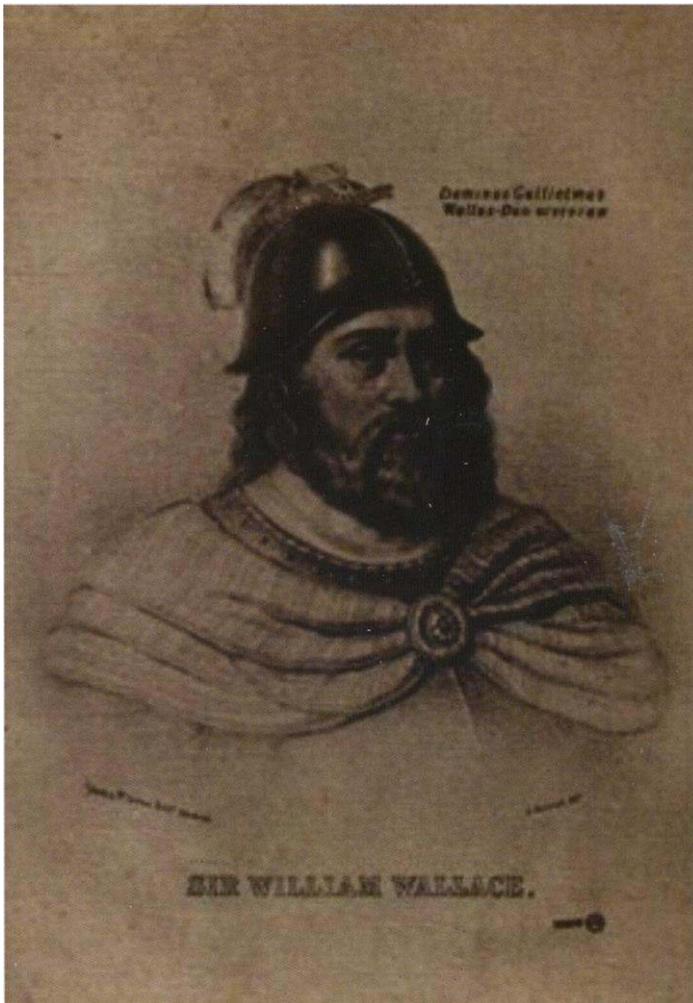
After the events of May 1297 the story of Wallace moves on to other places, reaching a climax with his victory on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1297 at Stirling and his subsequent appointment as Guardian of Scotland in 1298. Not so much is heard of Wallace after his defeat at Falkirk in 1298, but he did become Scotland's first roving ambassador in Europe. Unfortunately he did not manage to get any real help from either Papacy or the French.

Meanwhile Edward I strengthened his position in Scotland, while the Scots fell out amongst themselves. Edward I attitude to Wallace is best summed up in the following statement: 'No words of peace are to be held out to William Wallace in

any circumstance whatsoever unless he places himself utterly and absolutely in our will.'

Sir John Mentieth betrayed William Wallace to the English, who was then hung, drawn and quartered at Smithfield on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1305. Ironically Sir John Mentieth signed the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320.

*Picture that inspired the statue on St Nicholas Church*



# WALLACE'S LANARK

## SITES TO VISIT

### 1. THE CASTLE



*Artists impression of Lanark Castle courtesy of Education Resource*

This site became a Bowling Green in 1758. However up to the late 1970s most of the castle was clearly visible but housing developments round about have destroyed a view of the Castle from the Delves Park. Going up to the Bowling Green and walking to the far side, a view can be got of the valley beneath the Castle. Also on the Castlebank side an idea of the defences of the Castle can be gained from the road running parallel to the castle mound. Several ditches can be made out - these however are more visible in winter.

The castle that Wallace took from the English was wooden, having a palisade with a central tower. It probably had a bailey/courtyard area extending into Castlebank park which is partially visible in a map done by General Roy in the 1750s.

## 2. THE DELVES TRACK/ROAD.

At the bottom of the Delves Park are the remains of a medieval road though some of this was recently destroyed. This track runs along the edge of the fence beneath the line of trees and connected the Wellgate with the Castlegate. It would have been the route of choice for those wishing to attend St Kentigerns church.

## 3. THE TRADITIONAL SITE OF WALLACE'S HOUSE

*A 14th Century house*



This is near the Clydesdale Bank, Lanark. Tradition has this as a place where Wallace lived along with his fictional girlfriend/wife Marion Braidfute. It is a convenient place for commemorating Wallace's contribution to secure Scotland's Freedom. Every year a parade takes place on the Saturday nearest to August 23<sup>rd</sup> when Wallace was executed on the orders of Edward I of England. Archaeological investigations on the site have however revealed nothing of the time of Wallace.

## 4. ST NICHOLAS CHURCH.

The statue of Wallace is one of the most important icons of Lanark. It was placed in its niche in 1822 on the face of the church. Originally the sculptor Robert Forrest wanted it on a free standing pedestal in the High Street but this was rejected by the Council. The statue was based on an engraving of William Wallace that was in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries. Basically it shows Wallace clad in classical armour with a Celtic style helmet with a sword and a Highland style targ. It is a peculiar statue but it is a typical product of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its creation was instrumental in kick starting Robert Forrest's career as a sculptor.

Excavations in 1994 inside St Nicholas revealed some pottery of the time of William Wallace. Also six graves of the same period were found. One of these was a female. Unfortunately nothing is known regarding the names of the deceased. However due to the fact that they were buried in the church these people must have had a standing in the community.



*Statue of William Wallace on St Nicholas Church*

## 5. WALLACE IN LANARK.

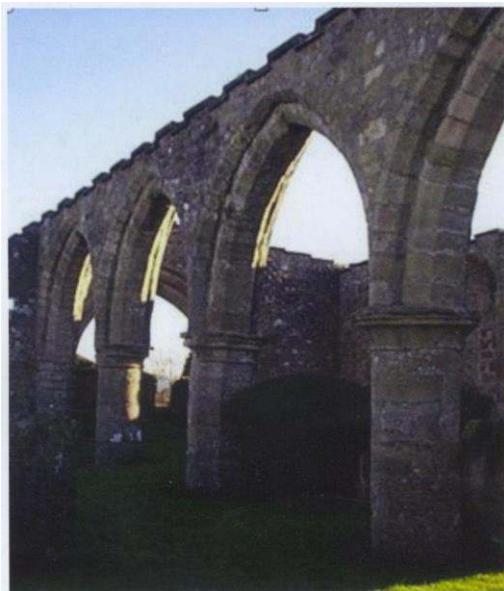
Behind Cook's Travel Agents in Lanark High Street one will find in the rear wall the remains of a two arched Gothic window. This is from a house of the mid to late thirteenth century. It could have come from a stone house on the site. It is known that the monks of Dryburgh Abbey had a town house in Lanark. They were the people wealthy

enough to construct a stone house built with the money that they got from sheep farming. Being the best house in town it is more than likely that Haselrigg would have stayed there rather than Lanark Castle. The Castle was old fashioned and really not a fitting residence for the Sheriff of Lanarkshire.

Blind Harry — the original version of 1488 tells us that Wallace killed Haselrigg in a stone house in Lanark. This could have been the place though of course much of what was written by Blind Harry should be taken with a degree of caution. Nevertheless bits of what he wrote reflect tradition and stories handed down over the centuries. Some of these are embellished, some invented and some with a grain of truth in them.

## **6. ST KENTIGERNS,**

Unfortunately much of the ruined Medieval Church is screened off by barriers. However it is worth looking at the ruins. William Wallace would have worshipped here and legend has it that he married Marion Braidfute at St Kentigerns. Legends apart, a good idea can be gained of the church as it existed in Wallace's day. What then is left of the St Kentigerns of 1297? The



*Old St Kentigerns, Lanark*

arches and the Cleghorn aisle are later additions; these are seen by the visitor as they enter the cemetery.

ons are later in date. The surviving parts are the south wall of the nave and the entry into the chancel. The best feature of the south wall, apart from the windows that are a mixture of Gothic and Norman styles, is the south doorway. This early gothic door has been regarded by many as one of the finest

doorways of its type in Scotland. It is interesting to think that William Wallace actually passed through this doorway.

## **7. LANARK MUSEUM**

Lanark Museum is to be found in the YMCA, Westport, Lanark.

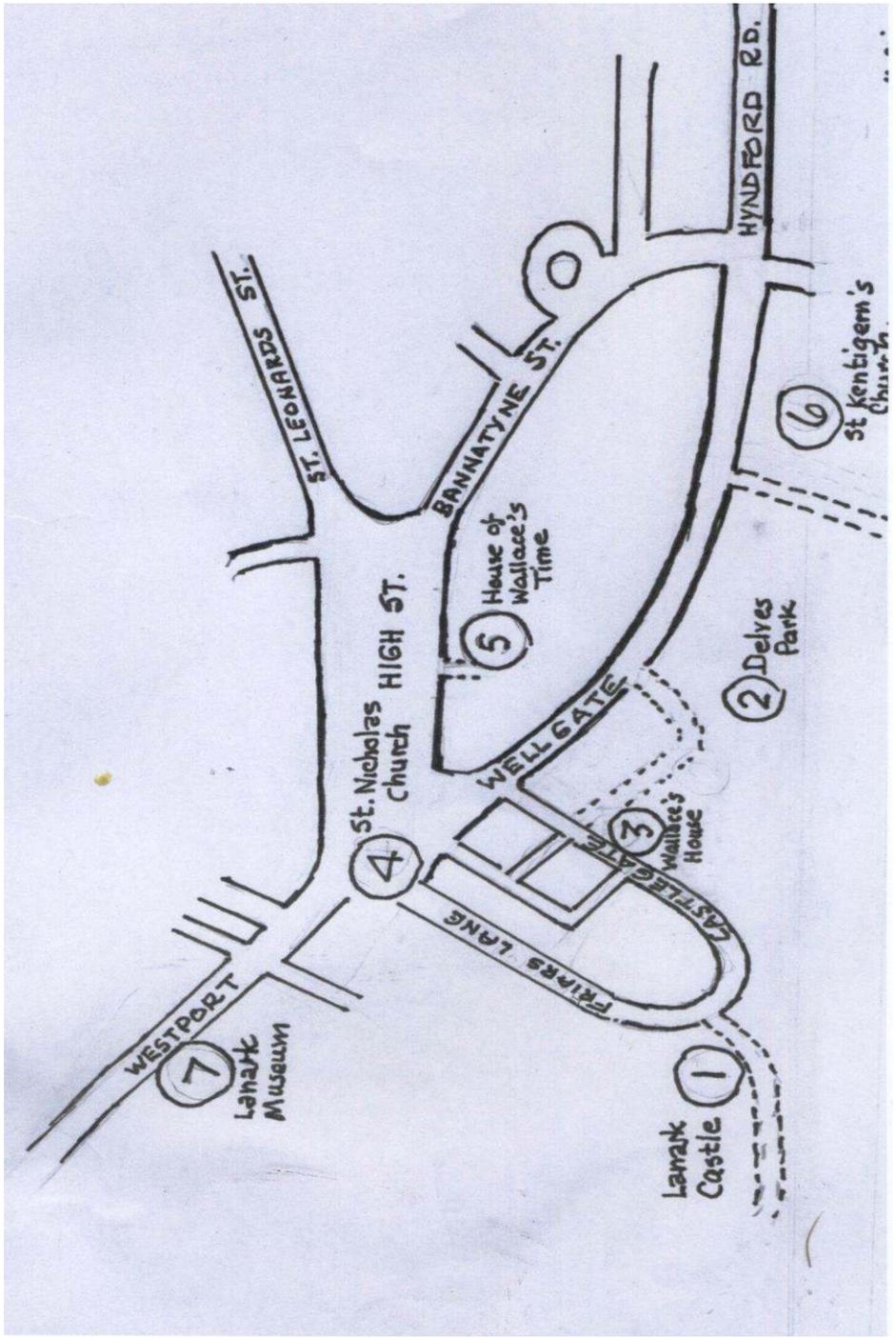
In this museum there are a number of artefacts that belong to the period of William Wallace. These have been mainly found in excavations undertaken by the Lanark & District Archaeological Society. These are pottery, some of which came from France and England, coins of Edward I, and other objects including part of the hilt of a dagger.

## **FINALLY**

Lanark is the only town in Scotland that one can actually see the buildings which relate directly to William Wallace. Further to that there are few museums that have artefacts in them of Wallace's time. That is why it is rewarding for anybody interested in Wallace to visit our town. We hope to improve the visitor experience to Lanark - after all "Our Past is our Future".



*Artists impression of how Lanark Castle would have looked in Wallace's time.*



Published by

LANARK AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

<http://www.ladas.org.uk/>

Information from Ed Archer

Artwork includes work by Crawford Fulton and Malcolm Gair

Designed by Stephanie Swan

2014

Funded by Heritage Lottery and Border Biscuits

