

The mysterious death of James III

James III, king of Scotland from 1460 to 1488, endured a turbulent reign. Having survived war with England and rebellions by Scotland's nobles (including his own brothers) he was eventually killed in the battle of Sauchieburn on 11 June 1488, during another rebellion: this one supported by his eldest son. The manner of his death gave rise to one of the earliest recorded conspiracy theories.

By the 16th century there were claims that James, while fleeing from the battle, had been murdered by an assassin disguised as a priest at Milltown, near Bannockburn, although another version of the story has James being thrown by a horse during the battle, either being killed by the fall or by enemy soldiers.

The parliamentary record merely states that the king 'happinit to be slane' and attributed the death to the king following bad counsel. Parliament exonerated the new king, stating that 'oure soverane lord that now is and the trew lordis and barouns that wes withe him in the samyne feild war innocent, quhyt and fre of the saidis slauchteris feilde and all persute of the occasioun and cause of the samyne'.

The following is an image of a page from the records of the Parliament of Scotland (PA2/5 folio 98v) and a transcript

Extract from the register of the Parliament of Scotland, 17 October 1488
 Enquiry into the Battle of Sauchieburn and the articles of Aberdeen
 (National Archives of Scotland, PA2/5 folio 98v – 98r)

Item in the present parliament Dene Douglas lord he and ynd to grace. He has the effect
 of the realm. Wee appoint the debate & cause of the feild of Cetermyn in the quill vngquihle
 James king of Scotland whom god assolve faultes to or sonar lord happint to be slane &
 ye cause & occasioun beind ynd of ymmitte & arguit amangst ye lord of the three
 epist. Whom lord glams present & thess dome article. Submitt Wee for said vngquihle
 king James hand the tenor of the quill felowis
 There is the article ympon ye quill & or sonar lord full of comission vnder his gart
 like to y lord vnder weid yat ye to say ye bishop of Aberdeen the charellar the erle of
 hmithe Erle mynhal & lord glams & alquid & Lindsay to comone conclud & end With
 ye lord follokind yat ye to say bishop of glasgow the of angus Erle lord hable lord
 like the quill lord full have full comission of my lord ynd & of all the lord being w him
 in the first to comone & conclud yat ye king his honer effat riak intozit be exaltat
 of ghat & beind yat he may exerce Justice vngquihly to all his hoys in all ye pte of his realm
 Item at his maist nobill pson be at all tymes in honer feruente & fredome dnd at ynd
 be vrelat Erle lordie & baronib & vthir pson of wysdome pndence & of gud dispo
 sition & vnspact to his honer & comy to all his hoys dourly about his nobill pson
 to the gud goyng of his realm & hoys
 Item yat all ye pson being about my lord ynd yf has d tyn by some dome supple
 to his honer make honabill & aggreuabill amende to his honer be ye wysdome and
 distreccion of the said lord ynd his hezitage & honour. Ext. pte
 Item yat ye Emper honer full of honabill suffitacion & lord to my lord ynd his son
 at ye consideration of ye said lord
 Item at Wyl lord & honabill pson of wysdome & distreccion dourly & of ynd distreccion
 salbe dourly about my lord ynd for ye ynd gouernance of his pson & his tenor
 Item to abys guone & conclud hore my lord ynd sal d all tymes to em be obidit to his
 funder ye king & hore yf fndly huff & tondit sal at all tymes be had be tynr name
 Item how ye lord & vthir pson being about my lord ynd sal haf o sonar lord frou
 & grace fauour & heilly for d vngp & ynd pson to be d pson at best cam be dmsit
 be ye said lord for any distreccion dom to ye king honer in any tym by some
 Item at my lord ynd sal haf d heithe fane & all lord fonal & hmpal & all vthir
 pson yat has be With the king honer & conseil or vthir fuit nobill in any tym of tabelle
 Item at al distreccion & distreccion non standunt or brand be tynr any lord or gret
 baronib of baird ye pte salbe dourly be ye wysdome of ye said lord to vnt concord sal
 his & fauour man pnd vngquihly our sonar lord hoys & pson to be had Justice to
 proceed & speall be tynr the Erle of baird & lord like etc

Image of PA2/5 folio 98 verso
 The text of the enquiry continues on folio 98 recto

**Extract from the register of the Parliament of Scotland, 17 October 1488
Enquiry into the Battle of Sauchieburn and the articles of Aberdeen
(National Archives of Scotland, PA2/5 folio 98v – 98r)**

Transcript

Item, in this present parliament, our sovereign lord beand present togidder with his three estates of the realm, was proponit the debate and cause of the feild of Steruillin in the quhilk umquhile James, king of Scotlande, quham God assolye, faider to our sovereign lord, happinit to be slane, and the cause and occasioun beand thar of commonit, oppynnit and arguit amongis the lordis of the three estates, Jhonne, lord Gla[m]mys present and schew certane articlis subscrivit with the forsaid umquhile King James hand, the tenour of the quhilk folowis etc.

Thir ar the articlis uppon the quhilkis our sovereign lord sall gif commissioun under its gret sele to thir lordis under writtin, that is to say the bischop of Aberden', chancellare, the erlis of Huntlie, Erole M[ar]schiale, Lord Gla[m]mys and Alexander Lindsay, to comone, conclude and end with thir lordis followand, that is to say the bischop of Glasgw, the erlis of Angus', Ergile, Lord Halis, Lord Lile the quhilkis lordis sall haffe full commissioun of my lord prince and of all the lordis being with him.

In the first, to comone and conclude that the kingis hie honour, estate, riale autorite be exaltit, conservit and borne up at he may exhers justice universally to all his liegis in all the partis of his realm.

Item, at his maist noble persone be at all tymes in honour, securite and fredome, and at thar be prelati, erlis, lordis and baronis and utheris persouns of wisdom, prudence and of gud disposicioun and unsuspect to his hienes and evinly to all his liegis dayly about his nobill persoun to the gud giding of his realm and liegis.

Item, that all the persouns being about my lord prince that has in tym by gane done displesserr to his hienes mak honerabile and agreable amendis to his hienes be the wisdom and discrecioun of the said lordis, thar liffis, heretage and honouris except.

Item, that the kingis hienes sall gif honerabill sustentacioun and levin to my lord prince his sone at the consideracioun of the said lordis.

Item, at wise lordis and honerabill persouns of wisdom and discrecioun, evinly and of gud disposicioun, salbe dayly about my lord prince for the gud governance of him and securite of his persoun in his tender age.

Item, to avise, commone and conclud how my lord prince sall in all tymes to cum be obedient to his faider the king and how that faiderly luff and tendernes sall at all tymes be had betuex thame etc.

Item, how the lordis and uthir persouns being about my lord prince sall haf our sovereign lordis favouris and grace favouris and hertly forgevinnys and thar persouns to be in securite as best can be devisit be the said lordis for ony displessere done to the kingis hienes in ony tym by gane.

Item, at my lord prince sall tak in hertlie favouris all lordis spretuale and temporale and all uthir persouns that has bene with the kingis hienes in consale or uthir service now in this tyme of truble etc.

Item, at al discenciouns and discordis now standand or beand betuex ony lordis or gret baronis of baithe the partis salbe drawin be the wisdom of the said lordis to unite concord, sa that luf and favour may stand ymangis oure soverane lordis liegis and peax to be had and justice to procede, and specially betuix the erle of Buchai[n] and Lorde Lile etc.

The quhilkis beand rede and schewin that the saidis articlis wes diverse tymes grantit to and brokyne be the peruerst counsale of diverse persouns beand with him for the tym, quhilkis counsalit and assistit to him in the inbringinge of Inglismen and to the perpetuale subjeccione of the realm, and under dissate and colour maid and refusit, and that oure soverane lord that now is ewer consentit to for the commoune gude of the realme, for the quhilkis the erle of Hu[n]tlye, the erle of Erole, the Erle M[ar]schell, the said Lord Gla[m]mys and utheris diverse baronis and utheris the kingis trew liegis left him and his dissaitful† and peruerst counsale and anherdit to oure soverane lord that now is and his trew opynyone for the commone gud of the realme. The quhilk mater beand schewin, commonit, examinid and understanding be the thre estatis and haile body of the parliament, thai riply avisit, declarit and concludit and in thar lawtez and allegeance, ilk man for him self, declaris and concludis that the slauchteris committ and done in the feild of St[er]juilin', quhar oure soverane lordis faider happinnit to be slane and utheris diverse his baronis and liegis, wes aluterly in thar defalt and colourit dyssate done be him and his peruerst counsale diverse times befor the said feild. And that oure soverane lord that now is and the trew lordis and barouns that wes withe him in the samyne feild war innocent, quhyt and fre of the saidis slauchteris feilde and all persute of the occasioun and cause of the samyne. And that aparte of the thre estatis forsaid, bischopis, prelattis, gret baronis and burgesis, gif thar selis herapoune to gidder withe oure soverane lordis gret sele to be schewin and producit to oure haly faider the paipe, the kingis of France, Spanye, De[n]m[ar]k and utheris realmez, as salbe sene expedient for the tyme etc