

Françoise Thurot captures Carrickfergus

From Henry Joy's *Historical Collections Relating To The Town Of Belfast* (1817)

Henry Joy quotes his sources as *Sleator's Public Gazatteer*, 1760, and *Hardy's Life of Lord Charlemont*, London 1812, Vol.1, page 112.

1760.—The French had long meditated an invasion of this country, but their plans were completely defeated by the skill and bravery of Lord Hawke. The little squadron of Thurot reached the Irish coast, and on Thursday the 21st of February 1760 entered the bay of Carrickfergus; it consisted of three frigates only, with about 600 men. Thurot, in a council of war, advised, that without attending to Carrickfergus they should sail up to Belfast, but M. de Flobert, who was at the head of the whole embarkation, differed from his colleague, and insisted, that to leave behind them such a fortified place as Carrickfergus (an old half-dismantled castle) would be against all military rules and precedents. To these arguments Thurot at length gave way, and thus was Belfast saved from complete plunder.

On the following day, after the surrender of Carrickfergus, the French sent up one of their officers with a flag of Truce and a letter to the Sovereign (of Belfast,) in these terms:—“Send us 30 hogsheads of Wine, 40 of brandy, 60 barrels of Beer, 6000 lb of Bread, and 60 Bullocks; if you don't do this immediately, we intend burning Carrickfergus, afterwards to proceed to Belfast, and behave there in a similar manner.”

With this request the inhabitants thought it prudent to comply, and part of the requisition was immediately sent off, but the weather being tempestuous, the lighter could not sail down the lough on that day.

Saturday.—This morning a flag of Truce was dispatched from this town to the commander of the French forces at Carrickfergus, acquainting him of the reason why the provisions stipulated were not sent down; and that the same, being shipped on board the two lighters, would sail with the evening tide if possible. In the afternoon one of the lighters with part of the provisions sailed, having been with no small difficulty manned, from a general reluctance the people conceived of supplying the enemy: but in her passage down, she was brought to, and stopped by a tender in the road.

This day men under arms continued to arrive, and at night the whole amounted at least to 3,000. An entrenchment commenced yesterday near the Mile-Water-Bridge, was finished this day, and planted with some small ship cannon.

About 9 o'clock at night a messenger arrived from Carrickfergus, with a letter to the Sovereign from Mr Fullerton, Dissenting Minister of that town, (by whom the flag of Truce was carried down from hence this morning,) giving notice, that the French, observing the provisions were stopped, had seized him, and swore that if the provisions were not sent on board by 8 o'clock the next morning, they would hang him, put to the sword the inhabitants of the town, reduce the town itself to ashes, and then march to Belfast. To avert, if possible, the execution of these threats, early on the following morning 8 or 10 carts were sent off

laden with provisions; but, only two were suffered to proceed, the rest being stopped at the extremity of the town, by a party of armed men: however, about, the same time, the master of the tender gave permission to the lighter to proceed to her destination.

On this day and the following Sunday, the troops collected, in Belfast, marched six miles down the shore, and remained there till night; but the enemy kept close within the walls and made preparations to embark, and on Thursday they embarked and took their departure.

M. Thurot, as a Gentleman of Belfast writes to his friend in Limerick, was highly provoked at missing his prey, the town of Belfast, which he declared he would have obliged to pay £50,000, besides provisions, and swore by the holy Trinity, he would have most of the land officers broke as soon as they got to France, for not agreeing with his opinion, to land within four miles of the town, and march up directly to it; by which means they lost so rich a prize, for the town of Carrickfergus was not worth sixpence.

During the stay of those irregular forces in Belfast, Lord Charlemont arrived, and found the town as well defended as the time and circumstances would permit. “The appearance of the peasantry, who had thronged to its defence, many of whom were my own tenants, was singular and formidable. They were drawn up in regular bodies, each with its own chosen officers, and formed in martial array; some few with old firelocks, but the greater number armed with what is called in Scotland the Lochaber axe, a scythe fixed longitudinally to the end of a long pole, – a desperate weapon, and which they would have made a desperate use of. Thousands were assembled in a small circuit; but these thousands were so thoroughly impressed with the necessity of regularity, that the crowd was perfectly undisturbed by tumult, by riot, or even by drunkenness.”