

African adventurer

**James Bruce of Kinnaird**

**1730-1794**

A huge red-headed man of six foot four, Bruce rode to battle astride a 17-hand black warhorse.

The incident had echoes of his ancestors in the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Wars of Independence against England.

But this was 18<sup>th</sup>-century Abyssinia.

Bruce, born at Kinnaird House in Stirlingshire, had been a sickly child and suffered tragedy when his first wife, Adriana, died of consumption aged just 20.

After losing his job as consul-general of Algiers he went to Abyssinia in search of the source of the Nile with a young Bolognese artist, Luigi Balugani.

Despite many shared adventures, Bruce made little reference to Balugani in the book of his travels, even changing the date of the artist's death to claim sole credit for discoveries.

Bruce, who posed as a Syrian doctor, was in Abyssinia at a time when the country was at the mercy of local warlords.

The effective ruler was Ras Michael Sehul, who Bruce fought for.

While exploring the Nile he was blocked by a local governor – but Bruce impressed him by taming a wild horse and was allowed to continue.

Bruce then trekked 1200 miles through Sudan and Egypt, running out of food and having to eat the last camel.

Suffering from malaria and with parasitic guinea worms infesting his leg, Bruce still made it to Cairo where he arranged a trade treaty for the East India Company.

After a life of danger and adventure Bruce's death seemed sadly unfitting – the result of a fall down stairs back at home in Kinnaird House.

- Read the Oxford DNB biography here: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/3734.html>.