

## Wondering Willie

In the early 17th century one of Scotland's most original and romantic travelers, William Lithgow (1585-1645), embarked on some extraordinary travels following his involvement in a scandal with a Lanarkshire lass. Thirty six thousand miles later he published his remarkable story in *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures and Painfull Peregrinations of Long Nineteene Years Travayles from Scotland, to the most Famous Kingdomes in Europe, Asia, and Affrica*

Many Scots regarded Lithgow's tales with skepticism, which he refuted, proclaiming his critics were 'mere vomiters of venom'. Not everyone dismissed his claims, the young James Graham, Marquis of Montrose was captivated by his yarns of exotic kingdoms.

Willie started his great journey in Europe, where he claimed to have walked the entire way from Paris to Rome, and on arrival in the city was forced to flee to Naples to escape the clutches of the Inquisition. He journeyed on through Italy to Venice via Loretto and Ancona with further adventures en-route. He claimed that he was shipwrecked, robbed by bandits, personally aided escaped prisoners and rescued several distressed damsels along the way.

Onto Greece, where two kindly Venetians gave him funds to travel to the Middle East and Jerusalem. On the road to Cairo his three Dutch travelling companions died suddenly from wine-drinking, which left him heir to all their possessions. He used his windfall to return home in 1613 via Sicily, Italy, Paris and London. Back in London he dazzled King James VI of Scotland & I of England with his tales of exotic lands. Unfortunately court life wasn't for him and in the year 1614 he set off on his travels again.

This time his first stop was Italy. From there he managed to fund another trip onto North Africa by an opportunist theft of the rings and purses from two duelists, who had just slain each other. He continued to travel until he ran into trouble in Spain, where he was arrested on suspicion of being King James's spy. After questioning and torture, Lithgow was handed over to the Inquisition for further physical punishment. He managed to survive the experience, but was left very scarred and decided it was best to return home. On his arrival back in England, he was sent to Bath for half a year to recover from his ordeal, courtesy of the King.

After recuperating, Lithgow returned to London whereupon he encountered the Spanish ambassador. He used the opportunity to try and secure compensation for the injuries inflicted by the Inquisition, but the appeal did not impress the ambassador who refused any compensation. The decision angered Lithgow who took his vengeance on the ambassador by physically beating him. Lithgow landed a 9 week jail sentence for his act.

In 1627, following the accession of King Charles I, William left London for Scotland, where he saw his days out as a humble poet, recalling his days of travel to anyone who would listen.