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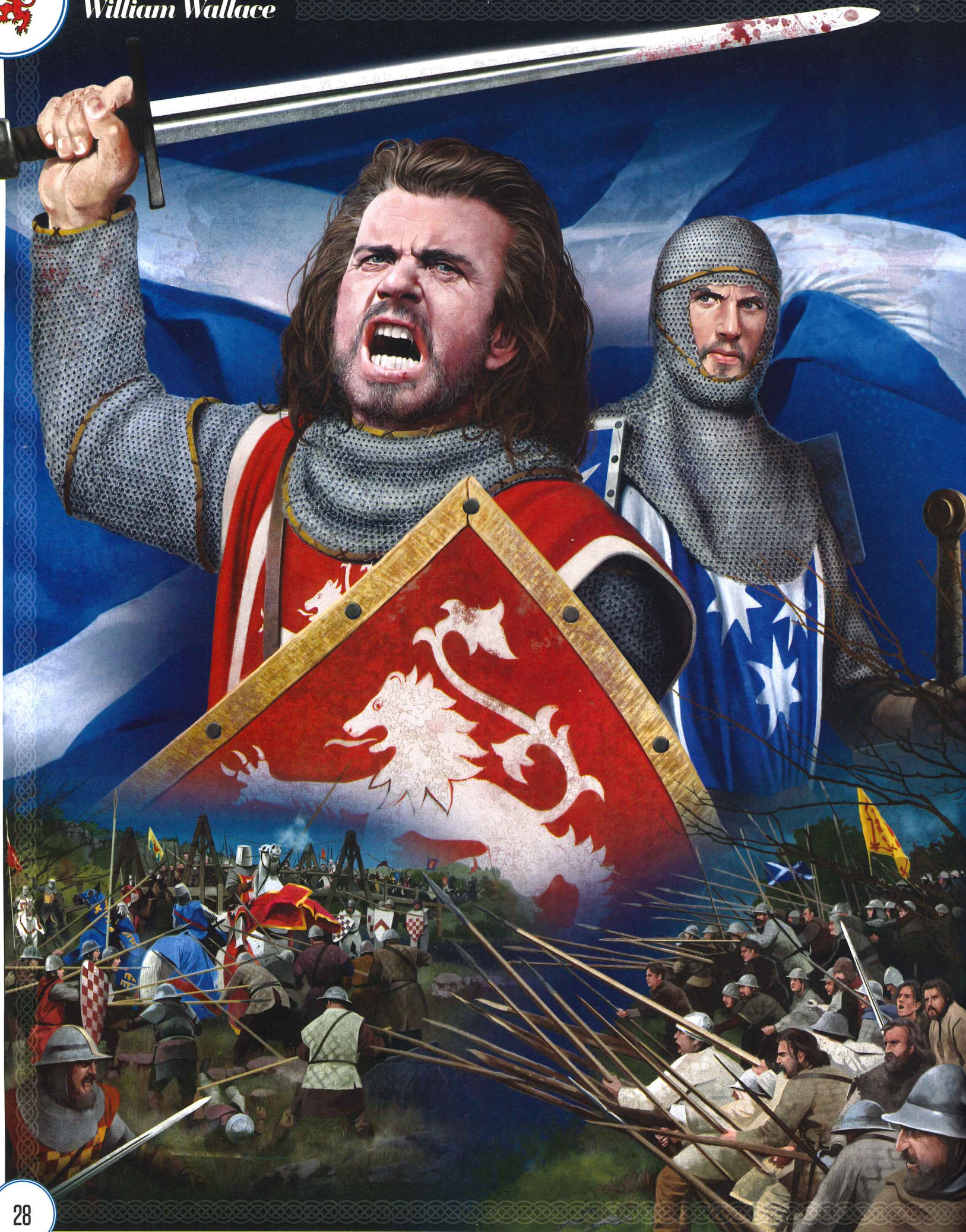
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Brown, M. (2017). William Wallace. *All About History*, (45), pp. 28-34.



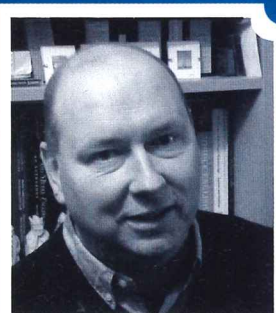


SCOTLAND'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

WILLIAM WALLACE

Discover the man behind the myth and his savage guerrilla war to end England's tyranny

Written by Michael Brown



MICHAEL BROWN

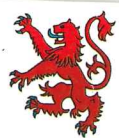
Author Bio

Michael Brown is professor of Medieval Scottish history at the University of St Andrews. He is the author of several books including *The Wars Of Scotland, 1214-1371* (2004).

On an autumn morning in 1297, a Scottish army of spearmen, knights, squires, townsmen and peasants looked down from the rocky crag where they were encamped. Below them, the wide River Forth looped through a marshy plain, the only crossing a narrow wooden bridge and causeway. Since dawn the Scots had watched the movements of a large English army assembled on the far side of the river beneath the rock of Stirling Castle. The Scots would have seen the arming of several hundred knights and men at arms, and may have wondered how a mob of poorly trained footmen could withstand the charge of heavy horses and riders. They had witnessed their leaders, the young nobleman Andrew Moray and the fearsome 'commoner' William Wallace, reject an English call for their surrender. "Go back," Wallace told the English envoys, "we did not come here for the good of peace but you should know that we are ready to fight for vengeance and for the freedom of

our kingdom." As the English vanguard filed slowly across the bridge, Wallace and Moray ordered their men to prepare for a battle that would determine the fate of Scotland. The men who stood with Wallace and Moray at Stirling Bridge had been driven to take up arms by the disasters that had overtaken their homeland. These disasters began with a series of deaths that ended a period of relative peace and prosperity between King Edward I of England and his brother-in-law, Alexander III, king of Scotland. To Medieval writers, the royal dynasty was the golden thread that held the kingdom together, but in March 1286, that thread began to fray when tragedy struck.

Alexander had been riding at night to visit his queen when he was thrown from his horse and killed. His only living descendant was his three-year-old grandchild, Margaret, daughter of the king of Norway. As she was so young, parliament chose six guardians to rule Scotland in the name of their absent queen. These guardians turned to King Edward I



William Wallace

of England - a neighbour and apparent friend - for help. It was agreed that Edward's son would marry Margaret - a match that would have united Scotland and England under a single dynasty - but the plan was foiled by Margaret's untimely death in 1290. The golden thread had snapped.

Scotland was left with no clear successor - a period known as the 'Great Cause' - with several ambitious families fighting over the throne, foremost among them the Balliols and Bruces. Facing civil war, the guardians once again turned to Edward, asking him to judge between the claimants. Before he agreed, the cunning king demanded that he be recognised as overlord of Scotland, and feeling they had no choice, they relented. Edward judged this Great Cause, choosing John Balliol as king in 1292. During the next three years, the English king asserted his rights over Scotland to the full. Though Balliol found it impossible to stand up to Edward, by 1296, many Scots were prepared to defy him. They allied with the French king, and in the face of this rebellion, Edward geared up for war.

The Scots were disastrously unprepared. From the outset, King John had no stomach for the fight, while his army, led by a group of nobles, manoeuvred ineffectively. At Easter 1296, the English king directed a huge force against the largest Scottish town, Berwick. Despite being defended only by a ditch and a timber palisade, the townsfolk defied the tall figure of the king, bombarding him with insults as he rode to their gate. Edward's response was to send his host to storm the town and put many of its inhabitants to the sword. A month later, the Scots suffered



William Wallace rejects English terms shortly before the battle of Stirling Bridge



"It would be his deeds and ability to inspire support, rather than his birth or rank, that turned him into a leader of his people"



The Scottish infantry destroyed the English vanguard at the Battle of Stirling Bridge

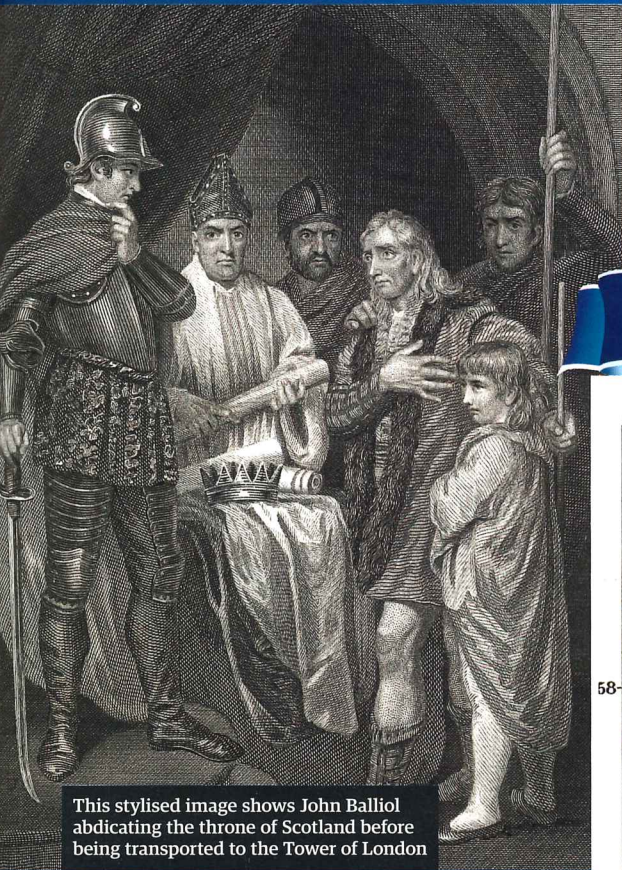
a second lesson in warfare. The leader of King Edward's army, John de Warenne, earl of Surrey, caught the main Scottish host outside Dunbar Castle. The Scots advanced without caution and were routed. While large numbers of footmen were cut down, most of the nobles were able to flee to the castle where more than 100 surrendered.

In the face of these disasters, the will of the Scottish king and nobles to resist collapsed. Lords hurried to make peace with the English king as he advanced through Scotland. John Balliol had failed to lead his people in this time of crisis and for this he earned a reputation as a weak, ineffectual monarch. His nickname - 'Toom Tabard', or 'empty coat' - was derived from Balliol's surrender at Brechin in early July 1296. Edward had the hapless Balliol stripped of his surcoat bearing the lion rampant arms of Scotland's kings. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London, and the Stone of Destiny - the seat on which Scottish monarchs were enthroned - was captured. To cement his rule, Edward held a parliament in the wreckage of Berwick, forcing Scottish nobles - knights, bishops, and claimants to the throne - to pledge obedience to him. Nearly 1,900 names were scrawled on the infamous document: the Ragman Rolls.



THE LAY OF THE HIGHLANDS

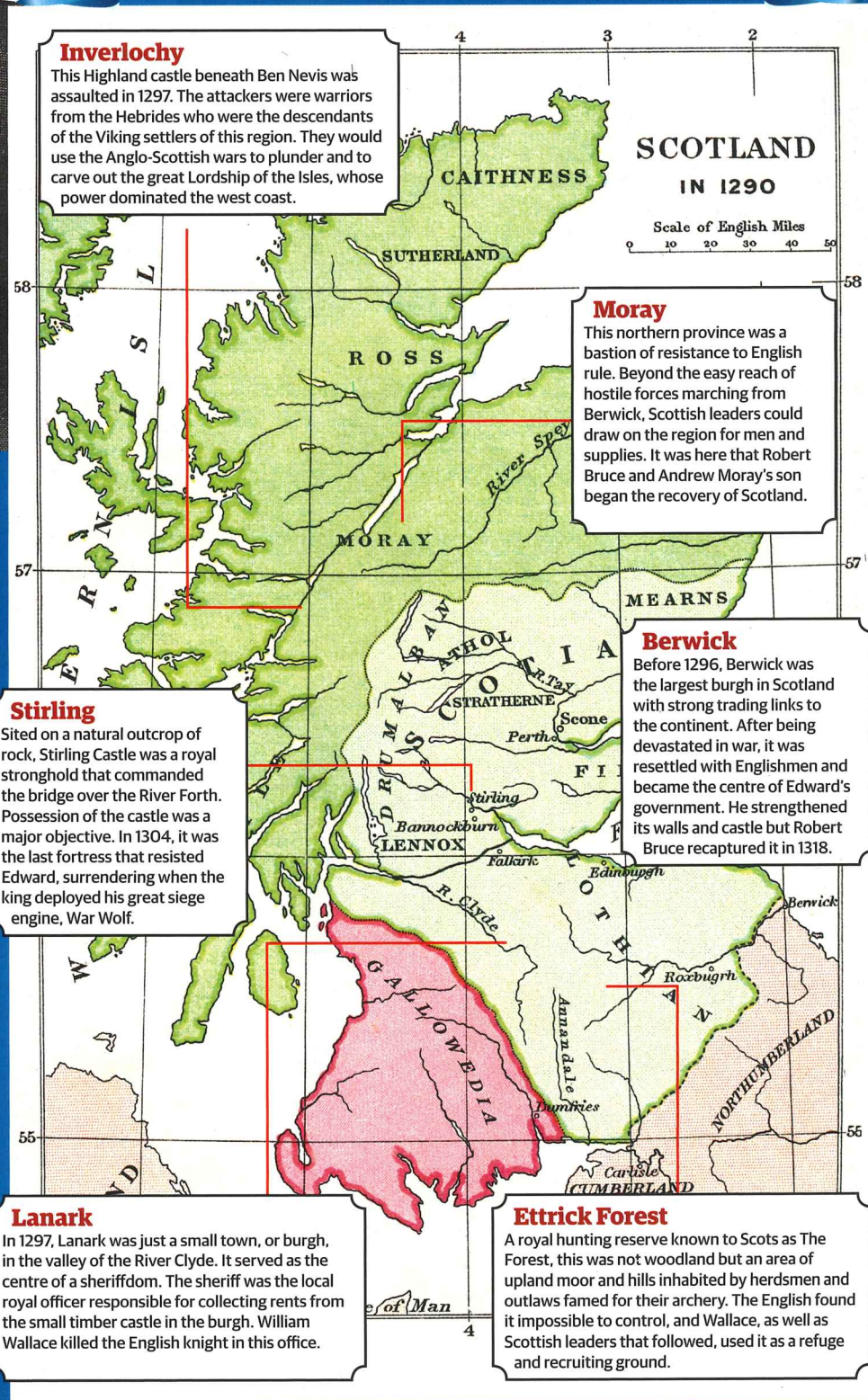
YOUR GUIDE TO SCOTLAND IN THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES



This stylised image shows John Balliol abdicating the throne of Scotland before being transported to the Tower of London

Most of the leading nobles were held in custody in England, while the government of the country was left in the hands of ambitious English bureaucrats, such as the hated treasurer Hugh Cressingham. To ordinary Scots, used to being governed by compatriots who understood their laws and customs, this was a shock and an insult. Across the kingdom, Scottish townsmen, freeholders and peasants experienced this new regime through the orders of English sheriffs backed by soldiers based in local castles. These 'middle-folk' may have regarded the war of 1296 as a matter of rival kings, but now they witnessed the humiliation of their country. They were also forced to endure the demands of the English administration. To aid Edward's war against the French, he seized the goods of Scottish farmers and merchants, and it was feared that ordinary Scots were to be forced to serve in his army.

Amid this tense atmosphere emerged William Wallace. His origins remain mysterious, but the English denounced him as a brigand and scoffed when he was knighted that the Scots had tried to turn a raven into a swan. In reality, Wallace was the brother of a knight and was trained to carry weapons, but he was young and landless. Hence it would be his deeds and ability to inspire support, rather than his birth or rank, that turned him into a leader of his people. In early 1297, Wallace and a band of men ambushed and killed the sheriff of Lanark, William Heselrig. Though romanticised in later stories as an act of vengeance for the murder of his wife, Wallace's action was planned as a blow by local men against foreign rule. It would be the start of open rebellion.





LAIRDS AND LADIES

DIVISIVE LOYALTIES LED TO INSTABILITY IN THE REALM

THE KING

The king was not just the head of government, he embodied the kingdom. He was expected to maintain peace between his nobles, to protect the church and the weak and to lead the army. The failure of the royal line caused Scotland's difficulties.



JOHN BALLIOL, KING OF SCOTS

John was not trained for kingship but for the church. Faced by Edward I and his ambitious nobles, John proved inadequate for his role.

EARLS AND GREAT LORDS

These nobles ruled wide provinces of Scotland where they exercised justice and led forces in the army. The earls were also the greatest subjects of the crown and were expected to advise the king. Their blood feuds could undermine the stability of the realm.

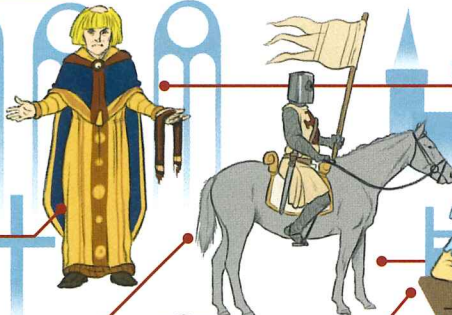


ROBERT BRUCE, EARL OF CARRICK

The Bruces believed they were rightful kings. Robert fought for Scotland in 1297 but his ambition was to take the crown for himself. In 1306, he would achieve this goal.

THE CLERGY

The church stood outside the normal hierarchy of the kingdom. They were obedient to both pope and to the king. The Scottish clergy were used to defending their rights against the English church and used their skills and authority to encourage support for independence.

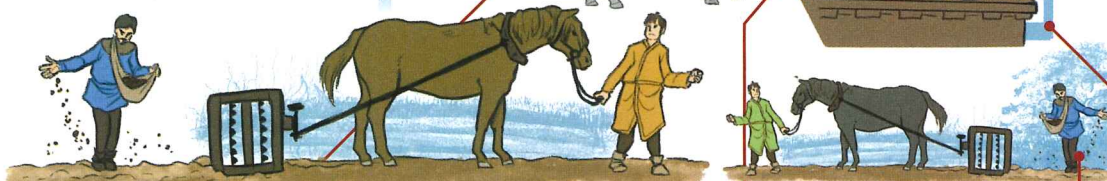


ROBERT WISHART, BISHOP OF GLASGOW

Wishart was a steadfast supporter of Scotland's independence. In 1297, he backed Wallace and was imprisoned by the English.

WILLIAM, LORD OF DOUGLAS

Douglas was a robber baron who was often in trouble with the law. Once war started, his skills became useful. He was an ally of Wallace and his son became Bruce's key supporter.



WILLIAM WALLACE

Wallace's future would have been as a wandering soldier or farmer. Exceptional circumstances made him ruler of Scotland.

MINOR BARONS AND KNIGHTS

Trained in arms, with numerous tenants and small castles, these were the lesser nobility of Scotland. This group were the key followers of great lords and of the king. They normally acted as the source of local justice and leadership.

'THE MIDDLE FOLK': FREEHOLDERS AND BURGESSES

In normal times, these rich peasants and townspeople would not have been regarded as politically important beyond their towns. However, armed with spears and wearing leather or padded armour, they were the mainstay of the army.

PEASANTS

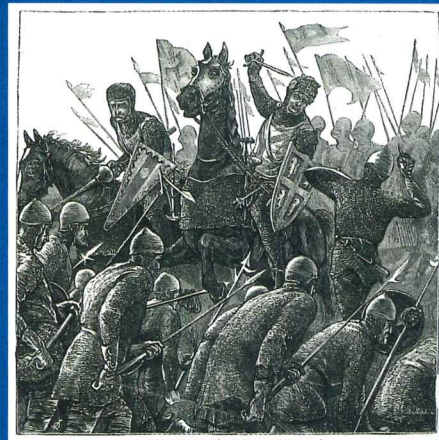
The vast majority of the population were rural labourers. War brought them threats and opportunities. Peasants became ribauds, armed plunderers and camp followers.

The histories written in Scotland gave active roles to many peasants in guiding Wallace and Bruce and helping to capture castles in a fight for 'freedom'.

In the weeks after his slaying of the sheriff, Wallace's supporters grew into an army of men from the 'middle folk' and peasants of south-west Scotland, but these events were part of a wider insurrection. Andrew Moray - a noble that had been imprisoned in England - managed to engineer his escape from Chester Castle and return to his home in northern Scotland.

Like Wallace, Moray was young and determined, however, his father owned extensive estates and many of his tenants rallied to join his son in arms. In late May 1297, his band of followers - in alliance with the townfolk of Inverness - expelled the English garrison and attacked Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness.

The English misunderstood their enemies. They quickly rounded up the nobles who had risen in support of Wallace, but then, in the words of Hugh Cressingham, "The English had gone to sleep." Wallace and his band had slipped away from the west into the hills of Ettrick Forest, where men continued to flock to his banner. Meanwhile, more than 300 kilometres to the north, Moray was also winning ground, picking off isolated English garrisons. King Edward in London and his officials in Berwick could only write letters asking Scottish lords to stop Moray. By August, English authority north of the Tay had collapsed and Wallace was able to lead his followers north to join forces with Andrew Moray's band



THE BISHOP OF DURHAM'S CHARGE AT FALKIRK, 1297.



This frieze in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, with William Wallace in the front row, shows many notable figures from the First War of Scottish Independence

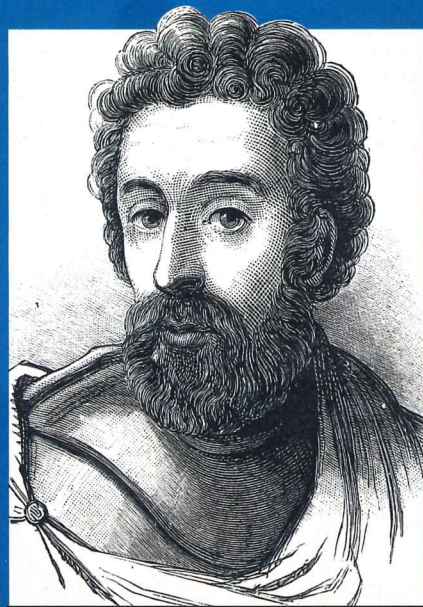


“The rebellion had recovered Scotland and it also created an army. William Wallace was now its commander”

outside Dundee. Faced with this crisis, the Earl of Surrey finally took charge. He assembled an army of perhaps 5,000 infantry and 500 heavy cavalry from northern England and led it towards the English-held castle at Stirling.

This location was the strategic key to Scotland. It was no accident that three of the major battles of the Scottish wars were fought within sight of the castle. Perched high on its rock, this stronghold commanded Stirling Bridge, which provided the only land route for an army seeking access to northern Scotland. If he was to win back the north for his king, Surrey had to cross. His enemies knew this, too. By the morning of 11 September, Moray and Wallace were encamped with their men on Abbey Craig, a rocky outcrop to the north of the bridge that gave them a commanding view of the plain below. They may have led a similar number of men to Surrey but had few or no horsemen.

The Earl of Surrey clearly despised the Scottish army and its leaders. Remembering the previous year, he expected them to submit or melt away.



No contemporary images exist of Wallace, so we must rely on artistic interpretation

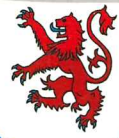
He rose late from bed and called back some of his vanguard who had already crossed Stirling Bridge. The earl then knighted some of his followers and sent the envoys to offer mercy to the Scots. Finally, he made ready to move. At a council of war, a Scottish knight in his army warned Surrey. “If we cross the bridge, we are dead men. For we cannot cross except two by two. Our enemies are in the open and their whole force will fall upon us.” He offered to lead a force across a ford upstream and outflank the Scots but the treasurer Cressingham, “a pompous man,” rejected this plan and demanded an immediate advance across the bridge to end the war and save money. The delays had given Moray and Wallace time to lead their men onto the low ground north of the bridge and form them up for battle. When, at 11am, the English vanguard began to file across the narrow bridge, the Scots were ready.

Stirling Bridge must have been choked with men and horses moving to the north side of the river. Wallace and Moray waited for the best moment. When about a third of the English army was across, they struck. The Scottish spearmen surged forward, making their strongest attack against the north end of the bridge. The English vanguard did not have time to form up and were pushed back at once. The bitterest fighting was probably for control of the bridge and causeway where many were thrown into the river and drowned. Once the Scots secured this, the English who had already crossed were cut off from the main body of the army.

With the end of the bridge held by the enemy, the Earl of Surrey could only watch in horror as his vanguard met its fate on the far bank of the Forth. Though one English knight, Marmaduke Tweng, managed to force his way back across the bridge, carrying his wounded nephew to safety, his comrades were penned into a loop of the river. Some unarmoured Welsh bowmen escaped by swimming, but the heavily equipped men at arms faced drowning or death in battle. Outnumbered, they were cut down by the triumphant Scots. Among the dead was Cressingham, whose body was skinned to make trophies.

Having seen the fate of his army, Surrey's nerve cracked. He fled the field and rode south to Berwick. Behind him, Stirling Castle and much of southern Scotland surrendered to the victors. However, the Scottish army had suffered losses in the fighting. Andrew Moray was wounded and, though he survived for several months, by the end of the year the daring northern leader was dead. The rebellion had recovered Scotland and it also created an army. William Wallace was now its commander, and after Moray's death was named sole guardian of the kingdom. Through the winter he continued to train the army and ready Scotland for the coming storm.

Upon hearing the news of Stirling Bridge, Edward I returned to England to prepare his revenge. By late June he was on the border at the head of a massive army of some 20,000 foot and more than



William Wallace

2,000 armoured cavalry. In the face of this huge host, Wallace initially avoided contact. He probably hoped that the problems of keeping so many men and horses fed would cause Edward major difficulties as he advanced. However, just as it seemed the English army would break up, Wallace decided to fight. As a leader whose power derived not from his rank but from his leadership, he may have felt the need to demonstrate his ability to defend Scotland, but his decision was disastrous.

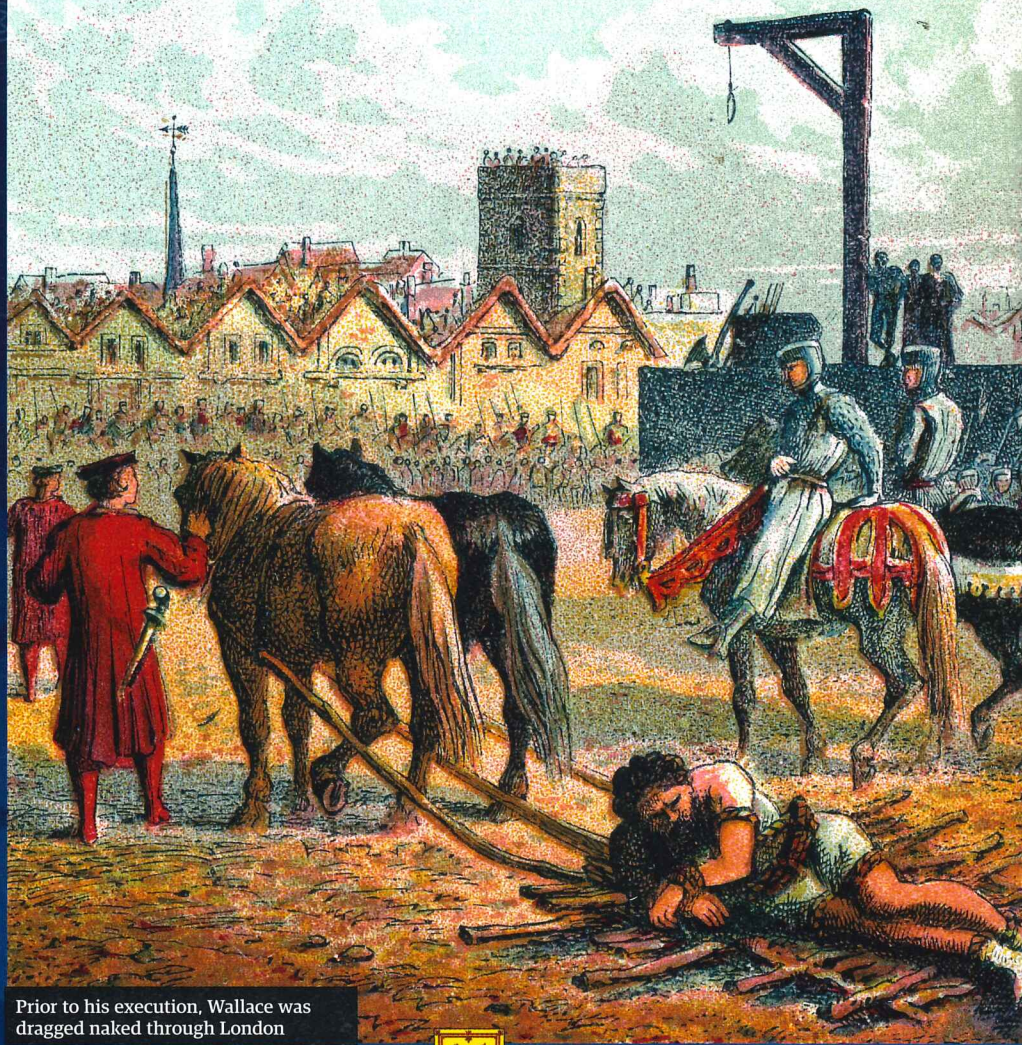
On 22 July, he formed his spearmen in tightly packed blocks called schiltroms. Though the few Scots cavalry fled, Wallace's schiltroms repulsed the initial charges of Edward's knights. The king was not panicked, however, and brought forward his archers to bombard the Scots spearmen. As their ranks thinned, Edward sent in his cavalry, and his forces ground the Scottish army down until it broke. Thousands of Scots were killed in the bloodiest battle of the wars. Wallace escaped but the army that he and Moray had built was destroyed.

Despite the disaster at Falkirk, there was no collapse of resistance to Edward. The rebels of 1297 had shown both belief in Scotland's independence and the way to fight a powerful foe, but Wallace's role as leader of the resistance ended at Falkirk. He resigned his guardianship and by 1299 had left Scotland. However, Wallace had not abandoned the struggle. He visited the court of the French king and possibly the pope, aiding in efforts to win their support for the Scottish cause. By 1303, he was back in his homeland and on the battlefield, but after six years of war, the Scots faced defeat once again. As the leader of a small band, Wallace continued to fight on after the surrender of the last Scottish stronghold, Stirling Castle, in 1304. Edward, not known for his merciful character, was implacable towards his enemy and insisted that Wallace be taken without any promises of forgiveness.

In August 1305, Wallace was hunted down and captured near Glasgow by the Scottish lord John de Menteith, who was rewarded for his efforts. The time had come for King Edward to exact revenge on his most hated enemy. Wallace was tried at Westminster Hall where he denied the accusations of treason, reasoning that he had never once sworn allegiance to the English king. But the verdict was cast before the trial had even begun. Wallace was condemned to a traitor's death at Smithfield, London, in September 1305 where he was hanged, drawn and quartered. The head of the Scottish hero was impaled on a spike above London Bridge, and his body parts were sent to several areas of the kingdom as a warning to others.

If Edward thought this marked the end of opposition, however, he was wrong. Six months later the Scots would revolt once again. By leading their men to victory at Stirling Bridge, William Wallace and Andrew Moray had reignited Scotland's cause and begun its fight for renewed independence; a fight they would eventually win.

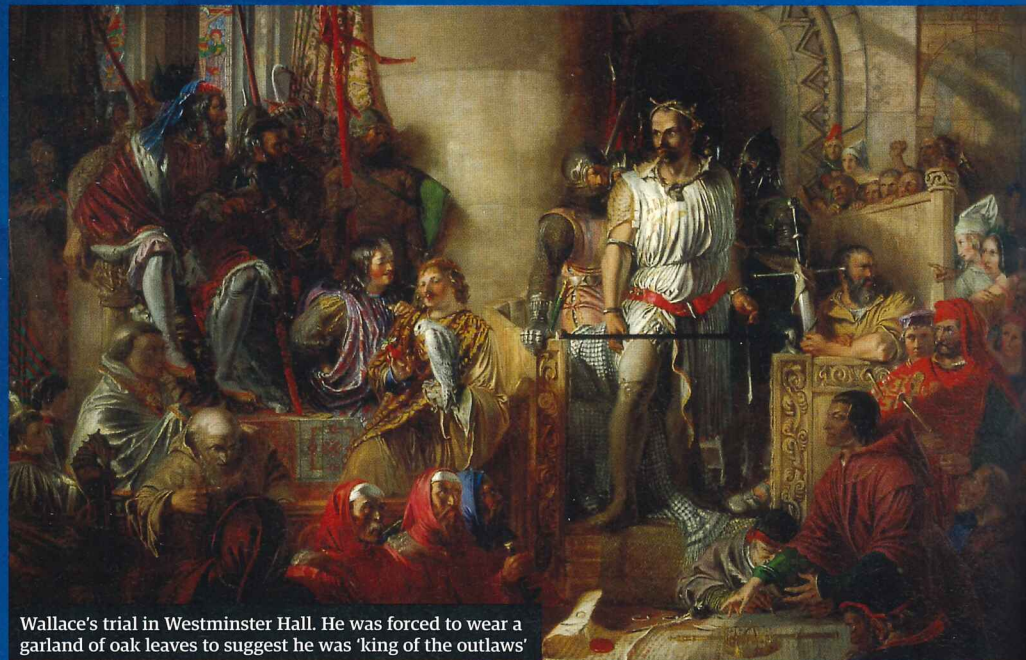
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Prior to his execution, Wallace was dragged naked through London



“As the leader of a small band, Wallace continued to fight on after the surrender of the last Scottish stronghold”



Wallace's trial in Westminster Hall. He was forced to wear a garland of oak leaves to suggest he was 'king of the outlaws'