

THE WILLIAM WALLACE YEARS

FROM
PARS SECUNDA COMMENTARII,
SUPPLEMENTUM AD RELATIONES *ARNALDI BLAIR*
SUPPLEMENTUM EX SCOTICHRONICO MAJORI
CONTINUATO, LIB XI Cap. XXVIII



Stained Glass window designed by Sir Noel Paton –Dunfermline Abbey

Transcribed from Latin by - Anne Hunter MA. DipEd
& George Hunter

EXTRACTS

FROM THE LIFE OF WALLACE

THE

ACTS and DEED of the most Famous and
Valiant Champion

Sir WILLIAM WALLACE,

Knight of ELLERSLIE.

Printed Edinburgh 1758

In the year 1297 William Wallace, son of a noble knight, was becoming famous. He was known as “hammer of the English.”

When he was young he killed the sheriff of Lanark, a powerful Englishman, well known as a skilful fighter, in the town of Lanark. Because of this all the Scots, who were bitter at being ruled by the English, flocked to his side and he was made their leader.

He was very brave and bold, very handsome and very generous. He came from a distinguished family and his older brother, Andrew, was a knight. Soon, all the lords of Scotland started to come to his side.

Wallace showed great bravery by attacking all the castles and other places in English control so that he could bring about freedom for Scotland. He encouraged all the Scottish lords to fight together, the strongest supporting the weak. As he himself was the strongest of all he became guardian of the kingdom and they all promised to obey him.



Great Seal appointed for the Government
Of the Realm
After the death of King Alexander III

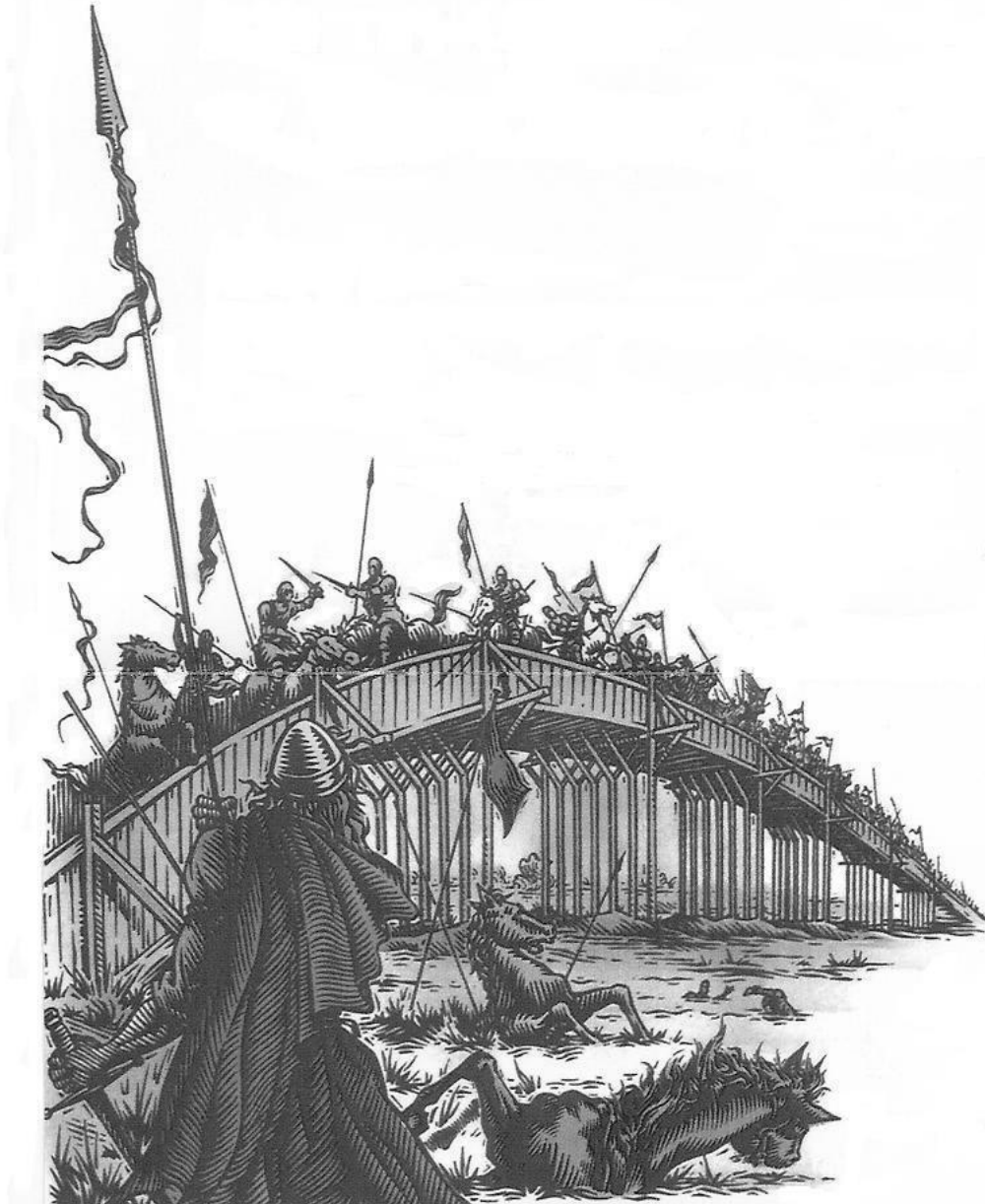


Other side of the Great Seal appointed for
the Government of the Realm
After the death of King Alexander III

Soon Wallace’s fame spread everywhere and eventually news of how Wallace had defeated his men reached the king of England. As he was busy with state affairs, he sent his treasurer, Hugh of Cressingham, with a large

army to punish Wallace for his audacity and to regain control of the kingdom of Scotland.

William Wallace was besieging the castle of Dundee, which was held by the English, when he heard news of the large army coming to Scotland. He immediately left the people who lived there to continue the siege under pain of death and set off to meet Hugh of Cressingham on Stirling Bridge.

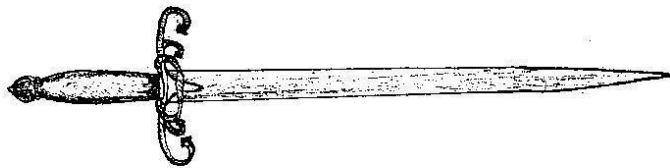


On the 11th September 1297 a great battle took place at the Bridge. Hugh of Cressingham was killed and his army put to flight. Some had their throats cut by swords, some were taken prisoner, others drowned but all were

defeated. Only one Scottish noble, Andrew of Moray, was killed and William's fame spread because of the great Scottish victory.

“For this reason the Scots adopted a stout heart at the
Instigation of William Wallace, who taught them to fight,
So that those whom the English nation held as living captives
Might be made renewed Scots in their own homeland,
So that they might besides help King John to reign
In his own kingdom, because if they wanted to serve
An alien king, they could lose their rights.
Hence in the year one thousand three hundred less
Three times one of the Scots are said to have vanquished
The savage English, whom they put into mourning for death
As the bridge bears witness, where the great battle is recorded,
Which lies beyond Stirling on the river Forth,
The third before the Ides of September was the day of grace
Offered as a celestial gift to the faithful Scots.”

William then hurried back to Dundee. The English, who had heard about the great battle, were terrified at the return of Wallace and surrendered.




Autumn was now approaching. As there was a shortage of food, once the crops had been brought into barns, Wallace ordered all able-bodied Scots to join the army and invade the enemy's country in order to find food there for the winter. He had lists drawn up naming all men between the ages of 16 and 60. Gallows were built in all main towns so that anyone who invented an excuse not to join the army could be hanged. Some men from Aberdeen had not come and Wallace, with some of his army, marched to Aberdeen where he hanged those who had not joined the army and had no excuse.

He then returned to his army and marched to Northumbria, defeating everyone and destroying all of Northumbria up to Newcastle. After burning all of Allardale the Scots returned home, safe and sound, with all the supplies and treasures they had taken from the English.

King Edward had planned to go to war against France but, when he heard about the slaughter and destruction inflicted by the Scots, he was so ablaze

with anger that he called off that war (to the relief of the French who were at risk of losing land and) and made for his destroyed territories.

He wrote  William Wallace a letter saying that, if he, the King, had been in England, Wallace would not have dared invade his lands. He threatened Wallace that, if he dared to invade England again, he would feel the avenging hand of the King himself. In reply Wallace sent a

letter  back saying that he would revisit England before Easter.

With both armies gathered near Stainmore it looked like conflict could not be avoided. Some courageous young squires wanted to goad the English in order to win their spurs but Wallace commanded them to maintain their position and advance in an orderly fashion. The King of England, with his huge army and with trumpets blaring, claimed that he would easily destroy the Scots army. But when he saw the Scots advancing in such a disciplined way, he turned his army around and fled. The Scots wanted to pursue but Wallace forbade them under pain of death. He said that, in future struggles,

the plan was to gain a splendid victory. To do this they had to wait until the arrogant King of England with his huge, fearsome army fled before ordinary Scottish patriots on land occupied by him even before the Scots had drawn their swords, the plan was to gain a splendid victory. To do this they had to wait until the arrogant King of England with his huge, fearsome army fled before ordinary Scottish patriots on land occupied by him even before the Scots had drawn their swords.

When they heard this eloquent speech, the whole Scottish army threw themselves to the ground, praising God, St. Andrew and the confessor Cuthbert who had died on this day. Through such a brave leader as Wallace



the power of their enemies withered away, giving the Scots and Scotland a memorable victory. The English however, said that the King had not been there in person but someone who looked like him had put on his armour.

These verses were written on the battle of Stirling Bridge.

“When the said man named Wallace gathers the Scots,
He gathers them like grains because he is called “Valais” in French,
He pursues the English in order to continue the war,
And to renew the freedom of Scotland by war,
Then was the destruction of the English of such a kind and magnitude as the
Northern regions have never experienced the like.
The whole of Northumbria perished as far as Newcastle.
Thus towards Stainmore the Scots achieve their aims.
In the aforesaid year of the Lord once more made the English return
Ready to fight for Berwick, I tell you,
On the feast of Cuthbert in the spring, steadfast.
The Scots looked on, they thought they were to fight on the battlefield
As the English had promised; but they did not keep
To what they had promised, but at once took to flight.


When the Scots saw this, they departed sorrowfully;
England bears backwards the disgrace of their King’s shield.
The Scottish assembly, praising the latest gifts,
Gave thanks in their need, even if the gifts were not complete.
Every house rises and exults and resounds with praise.
Then the King flees; hence England groans sorrowfully.”





Scotland was thriving and everyone was safe on his own property thanks to the cleverness of its guardian, William Wallace in defeating the enemy. However some powerful Scottish men were now jealous of Wallace and plotted against him, while pretending to be loyal to him. Even some who had regained their lands from the English thanks to Wallace muttered against him, saying that they did not want him as their guardian. The ordinary people loved and supported him because they were now safe in their own homes. Why are some people so stupid? Wallace did not force himself on them as guardian but, because of his family line, was made guardian after others had failed. When Scotland was weak and helpless Wallace had appeared as its saviour. Why are Scottish people so jealous? Why do Scots hate happiness not only in others but also in themselves? Some Scots were jealous of Wallace's greatness and because of this its people were ruined and its kingdom collapsed.



In 1298 the King of England,  annoyed at the numerous difficulties inflicted upon him by William Wallace gathered a large army and entered Scotland ready to do battle. Some Scottish nobles helped him! He met William and the rest of the nobles supporting him at Falkirk on 22nd July. A fierce battle took place with severe losses in the Scottish force but, eventually, the English fled. They abandoned the field with their accomplices, the Comyns who were jealous of Wallace. When he heard of their treachery, Wallace, wanting to save his own men and himself, hurried to flee by a different road.

Robert the Bruce was pursuing Wallace's men from the other side. He called out loudly to Wallace, asking why he was so arrogant as to rashly fight the powerful King of England and the more powerful section of Scots nobles. William Wallace replied that it was because of Bruce's own inactivity and cowardice that he had been spurred on to free his country. He said that Bruce was too used to his own comforts to fight for his own country. William then sought safety with his men.

The power of Wallace's words had such an effect on Robert the Bruce that, like someone awakening from a deep sleep, he realised he could no longer support the English. Every day he became braver and braver, remembering Wallace's words.


When Wallace and his men had slipped away from the battle, due to the arrogance and jealousy of both kingdoms, the nobles of Scotland were brought to their knees. The valiant John Steward with his men of Bute and McDuff, Earl of Fife, with all his men were completely defeated. It is said that Robert the Bruce, who at that time supported the King of England, helped secure this victory for the English. When the Scots were standing firm, Robert, with a force commanded by Anthony de Bek, took a long detour and attacked the Scots from the rear. In this way the Scots who had stood firm throughout the battle were overcome. It was through jealousy and treachery that the Scots were defeated by the English.

After this English victory, Wallace realised how wicked the Comyns and their supporters were. Declaring that he would rather be with the common folk than be a leader who caused them suffering, he voluntarily gave up his office as guardian not long after this. John Comyn the younger was chosen as guardian of Scotland and remained in office until he accepted the authority of the King of England in 1304. His colleague was John of Soules who had been appointed by John Balliol. Balliol, himself, had now been released from prison but was not firm enough to take control. He was held in such contempt that he fled to France where he later died.

A truce was declared between England and Scotland brought about by the King of France from 1st November (feast of all Saints) 1300 until Pentecost. (21st May 1301) However the King of England's intention was to overthrow completely the Kingdom of Scotland and subject it to his rule. Sir John de Soules, as chief guardian sent, special envoys to the Pope, Boniface VIII to complain about the King of England's treatment of Scotland. They waited until 1304 when many Scots nobles and priests had been imprisoned by Edward, King of England. One of these, Sir William Olifard, was captured by King Edward with a strong force after besieging Stirling Castle.

Despite assurances to the contrary, Edward had him sent to prison in London along with Robert and Mark, the bishops of Glasgow and Sodor. When the Pope heard of this, he sent sealed letters to the archbishop of Canterbury and to King Edward of England.

The English reply was that, from ancient times Scotland had been in feudal subjection to Edward's ancestors and that Edward should maintain all rights given to them. John Balliol, King of Scotland, swore an oath of loyalty to the English king but later changed his mind, committing an act of high treason. He then acted in a hostile manner towards England, invading and destroying some English counties. The English replied by subjecting Scotland to English rule. King John Balliol agreed voluntarily to this. Therefore they claimed that the Kingdom of Scotland legally belonged to England.

Various other letters  were sent to the Pope, hiding King Edward's deceit towards the Scots. Pope Boniface had them carefully examined and gave strong historical reasons for the Kingdom of Scotland belonging to the Roman church and not subject to England. Master Baldred Bisset, a proctor, gave a brilliant argument plainly demonstrating that all Edward's claims were false.

When the guardians of Scotland, John Comyn and John of Soulis, heard that King Edward had failed to prove his case at the court in Rome they became bolder.

After the Battle of Falkirk the King of England had sent a huge force, which ravaged all of Fife and Perthshire, killing numerous people. Edward himself had returned to England, where he was preoccupied with other matters, but left sheriffs in control of Scottish castles beyond the Forth.

John Comyn, the chief guardian of Scotland, with the help of Simon Fraser, began to harass the English and any Scots who supported them inflicting death and injury. When Edward found out about this he sent Ralph the Cofferer with a large force to punish the Scots. The two armies met at Roslin on 24th February 1303.



The English divided into three contingents. John Comyn and Simon Fraser, eager to surprise the enemy, marched rapidly with a few brave and loyal followers to Roslin. The first contingent of the English, alarmed at their arrival, stoutly faced the Scots but were beaten. However, when the Scots were dividing their booty, a second contingent of English, larger than the first, came upon them. The Scots were alarmed at this but using the arms and spoils of the dead, they courageously defeated this contingent too. Just when they thought they were finished a third contingent of English, much larger than the other two, appeared. The Scots were stunned! They were exhausted and were losing because of their wounds. They began to falter until John and Simon inspired them with promises and thoughts of freedom.

The Scots found new strength and advanced fiercely on the enemy. Many of them died in this advance and many were wounded. Both sides, suffering from weariness, withdrew to the hills. After being cooled by the fresh wind and replacing the wounded horses with new ones, the Scots overcame the attacks of the enemy more through divine intervention than human strength.

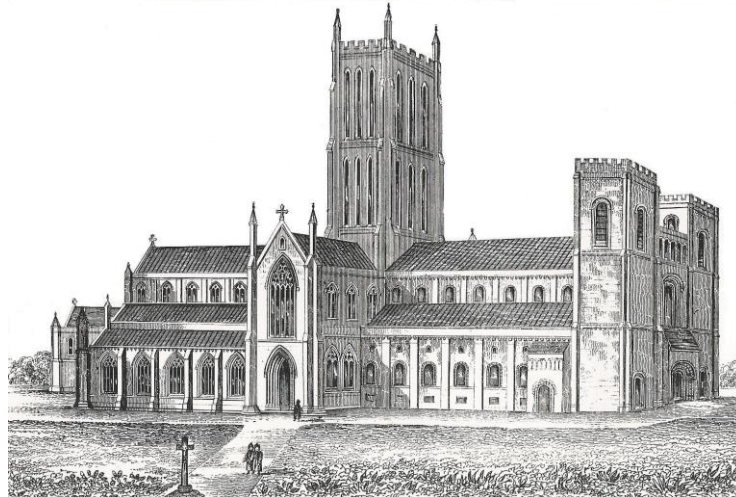
In this way the Scots defeated the English three times in one day. It is said that the English troops numbered thirty thousand and the Scots troops eight thousand.

In the year one thousand, three hundred and two,
When dawned the day of the feast commemorating St. Mathias,
In the field of Roslin grace shone anew from on high,
For under John Comyn, leader of the Scots
The English were confounded and gave victory to the Scots.



On the 16th May 1303 King Edward of England, with a large force from England, Wales, Ireland, Gascony and Savoy entered Scotland by land and sea, intent on either occupying Scotland entirely and making it submit to him or destroying its inhabitants and land. The Prince of Wales was also with him. After he had scoured the highlands and lowlands he arrived in Lochindorb. He received the submission of all the communities

in which he travelled and placed his own officials in all the castles and towns surrendered to him. After many journeys he reached Dunfermline on 5th November 1303 and remained there till 2nd February 1304. The Prince of Wales, Edward of Caernarfon, spent some time in Perth where there was an abundance of food and wine.



Dunfermline's Great Abbey Church

In the same year (1304) John Comyn, the chief guardian, and the other nobles and communities submitted to King Edward, handing over all their castles – all except the keeper of Stirling castle, William Wallace and his followers. William was afraid of the treachery of his own countrymen. Some were jealous of him, others were seduced by the promises of the English, others were plotting him, hoping to receive the favours of the English king. Even some of his close friends were advising him to submit to King Edward in order to achieve peace in Scotland. As well as this King Edward himself sent envoys to him, promising earldoms and riches in Scotland and England if he submitted. William Wallace despised all these approaches and, speaking for Scotland's liberty, he said;

“Scotland, desolate as you are, you believe too much in false words and are too unwary of woes to come! If you think like me, you would not readily place your neck under a foreign yoke. When I was growing up, he said, I learned from a priest who was my uncle to set this one proverb above all worldly possessions and I have carried it in my heart.

***I tell you the truth, freedom is the finest of things:
Never live under a servile yoke, my son***

And that is why I tell you briefly that (even) if all Scots obey the king of England so that each one abandons his liberty, I and my companions who wished to be associated with me in this matter shall stand up for the liberty

of the kingdom. And (may God be favourable to this) we others shall obey no one but the king (of Scots) or his lieutenant.”

In the same year King Edward spent Lent (March) at St. Andrews, calling together all the nobles of the kingdom. He held his parliament there and issued decrees for the state of the kingdom, believing that he had gained it for himself and his successors for ever.

After Easter 1304 King Edward besieged Stirling Castle for three months



Stirling Castle

and had all the lead from the monastery at St. Andrews taken there to build siege engines. The castle surrendered to him on 24th July and certain terms were agreed. However, once the king had gained the castle, he broke his word and sent the famous knight, William of Olifard, to prison in London in chains.

All the castles of Scotland from Wick to Galloway were surrendered to Edward and repaired. Keepers were then placed in them. After receiving oaths of loyalty from all the Scots, Edward returned to England with his son, leaving Aymer of Valence in charge as chief guardian. Edward never set foot in Scotland again.

The Scots were now under the yoke of bondage to the English. Many were insulted, wounded and killed. However God in his mercy found a saviour for them. Robert the Bruce, seeing the misery of the Scots, decided



to take up arms to free them. He endured unbearable burdens not only from the enemy but also from his own deceitful fellow countrymen.

“Believe that the prophecies of those of old are true, though slow in being fulfilled.

Thus your hopes lie in the goodness of God.

For you who are suffering so much, and who now seem to be captive,
Will finally be released and rule an empire.

You will be given power from on high, Scotland, your latter state
Will be more prosperous than your former state.

The men of old promise that you will have a warrior heir
Who, renewing his rights in the kingship, will strive triumphantly.

He will strive as a Scottish sword with immense slaughter:

The avenging king will everywhere destroy the battalions of the
guilty.

By his hand the English people will be destroyed with much anguish,
By the sword, thirst, distress, plague, fear and panic.

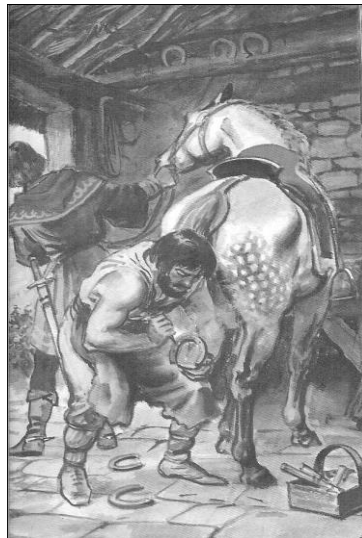
With your enemies distressed, slain and conquered in battle,
Scotland, you and your citizens, rejoice that you are enjoying peace.”

One day when Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick, was riding into Stirling with John the Red Comyn, a brother-in-arms, he explained to him how he hoped to improve the lot of his fellow countrymen and free them from cruelty and harassment. Although Bruce was the rightful successor to the kingdom of Scotland, he made an offer to John to chose between the following two alternatives: either to reign over the kingdom himself, while granting Robert all his lands and possessions or to take over the rights of these for himself, while leaving the kingdom to Robert. John preferred the second alternative and an agreement was made between them and confirmed in good faith by swearing oaths and setting their seals to it. Unfortunately John broke his word and sent private letters to Edward of England, giving away Robert’s secrets and hoping to gain control of Scotland for himself with the agreement of King Edward. Because of John’s betrayal Robert was questioned many times about a conspiracy by King Edward who was very suspicious of him. Robert was clever enough to moderate the king’s rage but, because of his suspicions, Edward ordered him to live at his own court in England. The reason that Edward did not order Robert killed or imprisoned was that he was waiting for Robert’s brothers to gather together so that he might punish all of them together by death.



John Comyn had been the first to persuade Bruce to assume royal power but now he piled up one accusation after another against him. One night, after drinking wine, when King Edward had gone to bed, he plotted to kill Robert the next day. However Robert had a true friend at the court, the Earl of Gloucester, and, when he heard about this plot, he sent a servant to Robert with twelve pennies and a pair of spurs. Robert, shrewdly guessing from this that he was in danger, gave the pennies to the servant and sent him back to his master.

He then summoned the master of his household telling him to put on a brave face and be generous with wine because he needed to deal with difficult matters privately in his room. It happened that there had been a heavy fall of snow that day. He summoned a blacksmith and, unbeknown to anyone except the smith, his groom and his secretary, he had all the shoes removed from the three best horses and fastened them back on their hooves



the wrong way round. Mounting secretly the three of them hurried towards Scotland, not stopping until they were far away from Edward's rage. A cry was raised that Robert had escaped and they were all astonished to see the horses' tracks lead into the stable and none away from it.

Sir Robert Bruce travelled so quickly that he reached Lochmaben seven days after leaving London. There he met his brother, Edward, who was very surprised at his secret arrival and told him how he had been betrayed to the King of England.



On the journey to Lochmaben, when he was in the Borders, Robert met a man travelling on foot who he expected was Scottish. When he was asked where he had come from and where he was going to the man gave excuse after excuse. When he was searched, letters with the seal of John the Red Comyn addressed to the King of England were found. These letters contained information about either keeping Robert confined to Edwards court or executing him because he was a danger to Edward. The letters were taken from him, the messenger was beheaded and thanks was given to God for guiding them to the messenger.

As John the Red Comyn was at that time staying in Dumfries Bruce hurried there to pay him back for betraying him. He found him in front of the high altar in the abbey of Dumfries. After making conversation for a little time, the letters were produced and John was attacked for his treachery. Sir Robert wounded John and he was carried behind the altar by the friars. Robert the Bruce, like a demented person, headed for the horses tied up at the entrance to the cemetery. When he told his kinsmen, Sir James Lindsay and Sir Roger Kirkpatrick, that he thought he had killed John the Red Comyn, they headed back to the abbey to check. On entering the vestry, Lindsay asked if it was possible that Comyn might live and the reply came from Comyn himself, "I can if I have a doctor." At this reply the two men dealt him another blow along with his kinsman, Sir Robert Comyn. They died on 10th February 1305, cheating King Edward of his desire to punish Bruce.

The next night the corpse was put on a funeral bier and the friars said prayers for the dead until they fell asleep. One old friar, more vigilant than the rest, was able to stay awake and heard a voice, like a child crying, say "How long, Lord, will you put off your vengeance?" An answer in another unknown voice was given "Wait patiently for what you seek, and on the fifty second anniversary of this day you will achieve your aim." These verses were written about this killing:

"In the thirteen hundred and fifth year
Saint Scholastica brought a mournful festival to the Scots,
For the death of John Comyn in Dumfries
cast many down and amazed their minds.

The cause of his death is an old and serious quarrel.
From this the Scots should learn about their discords,
So that they come to their senses
And be united, or they will be worn out in the struggle.”

In the same year (1305) William Wallace totally unsuspecting of any deceit, was treacherously captured by John of Mentieth at Glasgow. He was handed over to the King of England and executed in August 1305. He was dismembered and his limbs were hung up in towers in England and Scotland to dishonour the Scots. In this way the King of England hoped to destroy Wallace’s fame forever by means of such a shameful death. However this was not to be the case as these lines show:

“ The sudden death of a just man after a good life does not lessen if he dies thus.”

This shows that there are three kinds of men. Men like Edward who boast about themselves, men like John Mentieth who became known for betrayal and others, like William Wallace, who are famous as an inspiration to others. William Wallace was a man who fought for faithfulness for his native land, and a man who never submitted to the English. Therefore “The fame of his name grew every day,” This proverb applies to Wallace and the two others. “The righteous are remembered in blessings and the name of the wicked falls into decay.”

After the death of Sir John the Red Comyn, Robert the Bruce, earl of Carrick, hurried to Scone taking as many men with him as he could. There, on 27th March, he was crowned king of Scotland.

“ In the thirteen hundred and sixth year
when Robert Bruce was discovered to be of royal stock
he assumed at Scone the diadem of the kingdom of Scotland.
This took place on the sixth day before the Kalends of April.”

He took upon himself the tasks of challenging the mighty King of England and of winning all the Scots, except for very few already on his side, over to himself. He went through many hardships such as hunger and thirst, ambushes, exiles, captures, imprisonments, killings of friends while he lived as a fugitive at the beginning of the war against Edward. However, because he had a great spirit, he was able to overcome these and went on to achieve great victories.



Capped Monk of the Order of St. Benedict.

Arnald, *alias* John Blair, was born in the county of Fife, in the reign of King Alexander III., and educated with Sir William Wallace, at the school of Dundee. He went to France, studied at Paris, entered into holy orders, and became a monk of the order of St Benedict. On his return to Scotland, he retired to the Benedictine cloister of Dunfermline; but when Sir William Wallace was made Governor or Viceroy of the kingdom, in 1297, he was called out of the monastery, and made his chaplain; and being an eye-witness of most of his actions, he composed the history of his Life in Latin; but there is only a fragment of it, or, rather, there are only excerpts taken out of it by some other hand, remaining. This fragment was copied by Sir James Balfour, out of the Cotton library, and published with a commentary, or notes upon it, by Sir R. Sibbald, in 1705, Edinburgh, 8vo. The history or fragment is entitled, as given in the text, “Relationes quaedam [mis-printed quondam] Arnaldi Blair,” &c., 1327.

What became of Blair after his master’s death is not certainly known; but it is highly probable that he retired again from the world into his monastery, and that he changed his name from John to Arnald, which makes some authors call him John and others Arnald [or Arnold]; and, from the fragment still extant, it is certain that he died in the beginning of the reign of King Robert Bruce. Dempster says, that he wrote two books, the one called “Gestae Guliemi Walacii,” and the other “De Liberata Tyrannide Scotiae.” But perhaps these were but one, out of which the excerpts were taken, since published by Sir Robert Sibbald. It has been supposed, that his account of the deeds of Wallace furnished materials to the life of the warrior, by Henry the Minstrel, commonly called Blind Harry. – M’Kenzie’s Scots Writers, fol. Vol. I., pp.247-264. [Historical & Statistical Account of Dunfermline by Rev P Chalmers Vol. 1 p.530]

