

Events During the Life of Sir William Wallace

c. 1272 William Wallace, the grandson of Richard Wallace, is born in Elderslie, which is now a district of Paisley.

1286 King Alexander III, a descendant of William the Lion is accidentally killed returning from Edinburgh to his wife at Kinghorn. He crosses the Firth of Forth safely, but becomes separated from his companions and plunges over the cliffs at Pettycur. Edward I of England, who already had invaded Ireland and conquered Wales, turns his gaze north. Princess Margaret, granddaughter of Alexander and daughter of the queen-consort of Norway becomes the heiress to the throne. Called the “Maid of Norway,” Margaret is already intended for eventual marriage to Edward’s son, which would have resulted in an eventual union of crowns. Unfortunately, the child Margaret took ill on the voyage from Norway and died on Orkney.

1291 With no less than 14 claimants to the throne, and John Balliol and Robert Bruce (grandfather to the future king) having the strongest claims, Scotland effectively has no government. To avoid the prospect of civil war, the Scottish nobles request of Edward I of England to adjudicate the pretenders’ claims. Edward summons English and Scottish barons to the parliament at Berwick, demands their fealty, and shortly thereafter it becomes apparent that Scotland is being occupied. Around this time, Wallace’s first recorded affray with an Englishman takes place in Dundee.

1292 With King Edward Plantagenet’s consent, John Balliol is crowned at Scone, and made his feudal vassal.

1293 England and France go to war over Edward’s continental possessions. Edward demands that Scotland (whose king is his vassal) fight for him in France. The Scottish court refuses. Instead King John allies himself to France, and mobilizes his forces at the English border.

1296 Edward, enraged, reacts by attacking Berwick with 5,000 cavalry and 30,000 infantry. The English soldiers kill, pillage and burn for almost three days, killing 17,000 men, women and children—almost the entire population. He then marches further into Scotland, capturing the Stone of Destiny from Scone and arranges its removal to Westminster. Balliol, captured, is publicly humiliated by Edward, and forced to abdicate. John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, is appointed “Guardian of Scotland.” Around that time, at Loudoun Hill, near Lanark, Wallace ambushes and kills Fenwick, the knight who had killed his father.

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1297 Hazelrig, the Sheriff of Lanark, attempts to capture Wallace then kills the woman who hides him. Wallace sneaks into Lanark and kills Hazelrig and his son. This event leads to a local uprising, developing quickly into a national revolt against the English occupiers. That September, Scottish resistance meets the English at the Stirling Bridge. Wallace positions his men on the Abbey Craig, where the Wallace monument now stands, and waits until half the English army is across the bridge before giving the order to attack. In the mayhem on the bridge, the cavalry already across is trapped between the Scots and the rest of the English infantry behind them. The Scots decimate the helpless English cavalry. Although the Scottish losses were relatively light, Wallace's friend, the fellow general, Sir Andrew Moray is mortally injured and would die several weeks later. After the victory at Stirling Bridge, Edinburgh castle surrenders without a fight, and Wallace is declared "Guardian of Scotland," effectively making William Scotland's head of government.

1298 In August, the English army takes revenge for their terrible defeat at Stirling Bridge at the Battle of Falkirk. Edward musters 15,000 men north and meets Wallace on a hill just outside Falkirk, now known as Wallacestone. At the first English charge, the Scottish cavalry, under the command of disaffected nobles, fled the field, leaving the Scottish infantry defenceless. Edward's new and deadly force, the Welsh longbowmen (considered the most terrible weapon of the age) decimate the Scottish army remaining on the field. Wallace manages to escape to safety in the Tor Wood, and soon after resigns his commission as Guardian. It is believed that he travels to France to enlist the aide of France's Philip IV. Armed with only promises, he returns to Scotland.

1305 After years of a guerilla-style campaign against the English occupation, Wallace was betrayed to the English on 03 August 1305 by his friend, Sir John de Menteith, and taken to London. To the charge of treason, Wallace denied owing allegiance to Edward. He is hanged, cut down when unconscious, castrated and disemboweled, his heart flung into the fire and then beheaded. His body is then cut into four pieces. His limbs are sent for public exhibition in Newcastle, Berwick, Perth and Dundee, and his head impaled on a pole on London Bridge.