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The Sydney Society for Scottish History
Edmund Barton Chambers
Level 44, M.L.C. Building
Sydney N.S.W. 2000
AUSTRALIA
Tel. (02) 9220 6144 Fax. (02) 9232 3949

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***Braveheart* and William Wallace: Myth and Reality**

Introduction

This volume of the *Journal of the Sydney Society for Scottish History* is a departure from the previous four volumes in that it firstly, presents the arms on the cover of our Treasurer, Major Iain MacLulich E.D., a Scottish Armiger,¹ and secondly publishes the papers, presented by members of the Society at the University of Sydney's Centre for Continuing Education at a study-day, '*Braveheart* and William Wallace: Myth and Reality', which was held to commemorate the 700th Anniversary of the battle of Stirling Bridge when the Scots, commanded by William Wallace, defeated an English army on 11th September 1297, and in which it examined the myth and reality of the film *Braveheart* in the context of Scottish history, warfare, literature and society.

Of his Arms Iain says that his grandfather registered the MacLulich Arms in November 1895, even though they had been used by the family for a much longer time, having ignored the requirement of 1672 that all Arms be registered by the Lyon's Court, as had many other Highland families. There were sound political reasons for not registering: the MacLulich's adopted the name 'Smith' after the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, only considering it safe to resume their name and Arms 150 years later in 1895. The name MacLulich derives from Lulach who was King of Scots from 1057 to 1058. He was the son of Gruoch, grand-daughter of Kenneth III, whose widowed mother married MacBeth, and although Gruoch and MacBeth had sons of their own, Lulach was acknowledged as MacBeth's tanaist,² through his mother's line; from his father he inherited the title of the Earl of Moray. The central figure of the MacLulich Arms is a shield with a gold wyvern on a blue field which is believed to have been the ancient device of the Celtic Earls of Moray. The head of the wyvern is turned away from the flagpole side, which position in heraldry is known as 'dis-graced' (i.e. fallen from grace), and the sword piercing its body from lower left to upper right side (the sinister position) denotes treachery. In heraldic terms this device means that the ancient Earls of Moray were brought from power by treachery, which is what happened when Malcolm Canmore had Lulach murdered.³ The crest and motto: *curuid*

¹ An armiger is a person who holds a blazon of Arms registered with one of the Courts of Heraldry. For Scots this is the Lyon Court in Edinburgh, *The Scottish Australian Heritage Council Newsletter* (hereafter S.A.H.C.), (Oct., 1997), p.1.

² Tanaistry: by Celtic practice a 'tanaist' or successor to a king or chief could be designated from among the kindred group, *Dictionary of Scottish History*, eds., G. Donaldson and R.S. Morpeth (Edinburgh, 1977).

³ S.A.H.C. *Newsletter* (Oct., 1997), p. 1. Malcolm III (c. 1031-93) called 'Canmore' (i.e. great head or chief), was the son of Duncan I. He lived in England during the reign of Macbeth and possibly acquired southern Scotland in 1054, then overthrew Macbeth in 1057

s'un uirc is Gaelic for a 'Friend in Need' and derives from an incident in the fourteenth century when a MacLulich, who was being pursued by the Black Knight of Lorne,⁴ sought sanctuary with a MacGregor blacksmith who aided him by diverting his pursuers.

As convenor of 'Braveheart and William Wallace: Myth and Reality', it was my pleasure to welcome a large audience to this study-day, held on the 25th October 1997 at the University of Sydney, in which we examined the historical myths and reality of Mel Gibson's Academy Award winning film, *Braveheart*.

In the documentary, *The Making of Braveheart*, Mel Gibson speaks not only of his passionate involvement with the character of William Wallace but also of what he conceives and perceives as the meaning and spirit of the film. For him it is, quite simply, 'Freedom', for Scotland. Gibson adds an epilogue to the film showing that Scottish 'Freedom' was not achieved by Wallace *per se* but by his sacrifice and martyrdom, which laid the foundations for the Scottish army of Robert I (the Bruce) to defeat the English king, Edward II's army nine years after Wallace's execution. This is expressed in the film's stirring epitaph:

in the year of our Lord 1314, patriots of Scotland, starving and outnumbered, charged the fields of Bannockburn. They fought like warrior-poets. They fought like Scotsmen. And they won their freedom. Forever.

Well not quite forever but it is this aspect of the film, this spirit, this desire for 'Freedom' which attracted me to *Braveheart* as being a worthwhile project for study, not only because of the abundant historical inaccuracies, but more particularly for what I consider to be the perceptive and extremely accurate portrayal of the concept of the time-honoured Scottish desire for their liberty, their independence, their 'Freedom'. Since time immemorial this desire for 'Freedom' was applied universally to all invaders of Scotland but it is from the time of English overlordship, rule and, not to put too fine a point on it, English tyranny, that the Scots to their great cost have striven to overcome for hundreds of years. Not long after Bannockburn, on 6 April 1320 at Arbroath, the Scottish Lords signed a letter of Declaration to the French Pope, John XXII, at Avignon, affirming their determination to maintain Scottish independence and support Robert I. They declared that:

and Lulach in 1058. His ancestor, Malcolm I, King of Scots from 943, was the son of Donald II and was killed in battle (perhaps at Fetteresso) by the men of Moray in 954, *Dictionary of Scottish History*.

⁴ The Black Knight of Lorne: Sir James Stewart who married Joan Beaufort, the English widow of James I, in 1439; their sons were Sir John of Balveny, earl of Atholl, James, earl of Buchan, and Andrew, bishop of Moray, *Dictionary of Scottish History*.

For so long as there shall be but one hundred of us alive, we will never consent to subject ourselves to the dominion of the English. For it is not glory, it is not riches, neither is it honours, but it is liberty alone that we fight and contend for, which no honest man will lose but his life.

Two hundred years later, Henry VIII and the Duke of Somerset during the reign of his son, tried by force to annex the kingdom of Scotland to England, using the same methods as Edward I had used in Scotland in the 1290s. Thus, on 20 May 1547, according to the deliberations of the Scottish Privy Council,

my Lord Governor and the Lords of the Council are advertised, that our old enemies of England are ready with a navy of English ships to come and invade the realm, ... to burn, harry, slay and destroy the leiges of the same, as they have done in times by past.⁵

It is not often mentioned, but the only country to invade Scotland, after the last Norwegian incursion into the west of Scotland terminated with a Scottish victory at the battle of Largs on 2nd October 1263, was England; and this continual state of Anglo-Scottish mutual enmity endured up to the latter part of the eighteenth century. Therefore, when Scots spoke about their desire for liberty, independence or 'Freedom' it is from England and the English that they wanted to be set free. Independence is a strong and constant thread which runs through Scottish history from early medieval times up until 1788. With the death of 'Bonny Prince Charlie' in 1788 and the outbreak of the French Revolution the following year, the Scots finally accepted that they could no longer expect the possibility of a return of their monarchs and, *ipso facto*, their independence. Therefore, the Scots appear to have submitted themselves to Westminster and the heavy hand of the Hanoverians and began to participate in, and enjoy the spoils of, the British Empire during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.

Mel Gibson may have produced a film which bears little resemblance to historical reality but, in my opinion, he has captured the spirit of the time of William Wallace and it is this spirit, I believe, which has earned *Braveheart* world-wide popularity and the Academy Award for Best Picture for 1995.

I would now like to introduce my friends and colleagues, all of whom are members of the Sydney Society for Scottish History, and all of whom have been associated with Sydney University at one time or another either as students and/or lecturers in History, who will examine the myth and reality of *Braveheart* in the context of Scottish history, warfare, literature and

⁵ *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, ed., John Hill Burton (Edinburgh, 1877), Vol. I (1545-1569) p. 73 (NB. Medieval Scottish has been modernized).

society. We make no claims to be specialists in Scottish Medieval History and Literature, our aim is simply elucidate to a general audience the salient points, such as they are known, of the life and times of William Wallace. In order of appearance, I presented the first paper which sketches in the background of the origins of the Wars of Independence in Scotland from 1290 to 1296.

Next, Dr Gwynne Jones, examined soldiers, weapons and warfare in the late thirteenth century, with special reference to the battle of Stirling Bridge, 11th September 1297, the 700th anniversary of which was celebrated in 1997. Dr Jones taught Early Modern European History for twenty-five years at Sydney University, one of his courses being, 'Society, Soldiers and the State', covering topics from Ancient Sparta to the nineteenth century.

After morning coffee, Malcolm Broun QC, president and founder of the Sydney Society for Scottish History, whose passion for Scottish History and legal skills have equipped him well to probe the historical myths and reality of the film *Braveheart*, showed extensive excerpts of the film and elaborated the historical reality of the epoch.

Following lunch, Neil Morrison, latterly a barrister but formerly an English Master with a particular interest in the literature of the land of his birth, looked at not only what medieval writings and poetry had to say about Wallace, but also what Robbie Burns had to say of him in the eighteenth century.

Associate-Professor Sybil Jack brought to bear decades of experience in teaching Early Modern European History at Sydney University when she examined Scottish society during the times of Wallace in the late-thirteenth and early-fourteenth centuries.

Finally, my old friend and postgraduate colleague, Ethel McKirdy-Walker, with whom I studied when we both researched our respective theses in Scottish History at Sydney University under the supervision of Professor Jack, presented a paper on Wallace memorials over the centuries as well as the celebrations in Scotland during 1997 which was the 700th anniversary of the great Scottish victory over the English at Stirling Bridge.

Elizabeth Ann Bonner
Department of History
University of Sydney