

Would the Real William Wallace Please Stand Up

The object of this paper is to give a brief outline of the life of William Wallace, and to make references in passing to the film, *Braveheart*, loosely based on the life of William Wallace, starring the Australian actor Mel Gibson. Without wishing to detract in any way from the marvellous spirit of Scottish nationalism which the film produced, the comments on the film will inevitably point primarily to just a few of the film's historical inaccuracies. Films for popular consumption should perhaps not be expected to be historically accurate. The image of Wallace in the minds of such parts of the public who have heard of him at all, is largely myth. Great historical figures gather myths around them and the Scots are among the great myth builders. *Braveheart* the film builds on the myths of Wallace, but at the expense of adding invention where there was no need. Edward I of England is portrayed as deliciously evil, by Patrick McGooan, but the most evil thing Edward I did in Scotland, the sack and slaughter of Berwick in 1298, does not appear in the film. When there was so much real horror, heroism, honour and deception in reality, what is the need for more myth building?

It is generally accepted that William Wallace was born at Elderslie, a small town southwest of Glasgow, the son of a local significant landholder. The date or even year of his birth has never been established. Since his activities between 1297 and 1305 could only have been the work of a man in his prime,¹ he must have been at least twenty and probably not more than thirty-five in 1297. That would put his date of birth at somewhere between 1262 and at latest 1277.

The effective English occupation of southern and eastern Scotland began, at earliest, and the only to a partial extent, by the voluntary delivery of the kingdom into the hands of Edward I on 11 June 1291² by the four regents of Scotland. They did so as a first step in solving the disputed succession after the death of Alexander III's last remaining heir, his grand-daughter known as the 'Maid of Norway' in 1290. The invitation to Edward was given to prevent civil war between the supporters of John Balliol and those of Robert the Bruce The Claimant (also known as The Competitor), grandfather of the future Robert I (1306-1329). Complete military occupation of south and east Scotland and the formal deposition of King John Balliol only followed on 27 April 1296 after the battle of Dunbar³ and the subsequent surrender of

¹ Andrew Fisher, *William Wallace* (Edinburgh, 1986), p. 6.

² Patrick Fraser Tytler, *History of Scotland* (1866 Edition), Vol. 1, p. 74.

³ *Chronicles of Fordun*, translated by Felix J. Skene, *The Historians of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1872), chapter XCII. King John Balliol's formal deposition followed in the same year at Montrose Castle, *Fordun*, ch. XCV.

Roxburgh and Dumbarton Castles and the fortress of Jedburgh the same year.⁴ When the English presence in Scotland first began in 1291 Wallace must have been somewhere between fourteen and twenty-nine years old, and the full-scale occupation began only a year before he 'lifted up his head from his den'.⁵

The film, *Braveheart*, uses a number of dramatic scenes to suggest that Scotland had been struggling under English occupation and oppression for many years. The 'Barns of Ayr'⁶ is moved into his early childhood, and the English are portrayed as having total control of southern Scotland much earlier than the fact. To heighten the drama William Wallace is shown as becoming a lonely orphan when quite young.

We know that William Wallace had an older brother, Sir Malcolm Wallace, who was named after his father and heir to the family estates, and another brother, John. According to 'Blind Harry' or 'Henry the Rhymor', he also had two sisters.⁷ The family of Wallace was well connected: William's maternal grandfather was Sir Reginald Crawford, hereditary Sheriff of Ayr, and especially with the Steward of Scotland⁸ who was their immediate lord. William himself was well educated, knowing both Latin and French.

The film portrays the lonely child orphan William Wallace being taken under the wing of his 'uncle' Argyll. Presumably the screenwriter was trying to look for names that would be readily recognised by audiences in both Britain and the United States and in other English-speaking countries. But the Earldom of Argyll was not established until 1457 when it was granted by James II to Colin Campbell.⁹ There is no record or suggestion that the Wallaces were in any way connected to ancestors of the Campbells. Indeed, in William Wallace's time the Wallaces were then a more established family than the known ancestors of the Earls of Argyll.

The film also introduces another familiar Scottish name of Hamilton which is given to one of the Scottish lords assisting Edward I in London and Scotland. Indeed, there was a Walter fitz Gilbert, son of Gilbert de

⁴ Tytler, *History*, Vol., 1, pp. 100-102.

⁵ *Fordun*, ch. CXCVIII.

⁶ 'Barns of Ayr': supposed to have been the barracks of English troops, attacked and burned by William Wallace in May 1297, G. Donaldson and R.S. Morpeth, eds., *Dictionary of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1977).

⁷ Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 8.

⁸ See *Supra*, p. 5 and n. 2.

⁹ *Bourke's Peerage*, (106th Edition, London, 1999), p.104. The earliest identified antecedent of the 1st Earl of Argyll referred to in *Bourke's* was born in about 1280.

Hamilton, active in Scotland at the time of Wallace. He was one of the signatories to the Ragman Roll of submission to Edward I in 1296, but he appears to have been only a minor landholder and certainly not a lord. His descendant James was created Lord Hamilton in 1445.¹⁰ There is no record of any Lord Hamilton in Edward's Scottish supporters.

Another historical inaccuracy in the film also includes a wedding scene designed to suggest the depth of English oppression. The celebrations are proceeding, in a way more suggestive of an eighteenth-century post Jacobite wedding than a thirteenth-century Ayrshire occasion, when a local English lord arrives with troops and demands as his right, that the bride should come to his bed for her first night — the so-called *ius prima noctis*. This supposed right is someone's sexual fantasy, but is has been used in literature many times - e.g. Beaumarchais' and Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*. It never existed. It seems to have been derived from some misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the medieval feudal system of *ius prima fructis*. This was a common system, at least in the later Middle Ages, somewhat akin to death duties. The first year's income or profit was paid to the feudal lord or the ecclesiastical land-owner by each new holder of the land. Even more regularly it was paid by the new holder of each ecclesiastical benefice or office of profit to his superior, (Lord of the Manor, Bishop, etc).¹¹ However, the myth of *ius prima noctis* is well known, and it serves the dramatic purpose of explaining why the English occupation was so bitterly resented, and why Wallace was able to raise men to fight with him.

The traditional story of how William Wallace first attracted wide attention in May 1297 comes from 'Blind Harry'. It has been often repeated and according to a recent account:

He [Wallace] had recently married a young woman who lived in Lanark. Visiting her by stealth, as a marked man, he clashed with an English patrol. Fighting his way clear, he retreated to her house and as his pursuers hammered on the front door he escaped by the back to the rocky Cartland Crags. Enraged by the failure to capture him, Sir William Heselrig, Sheriff of Lanark, ordered the house to be burned and all within it, wife and servants, to be put to the sword. From that day Wallace vowed an undying vengeance against the English. Gathering together a band of desperate men, he fell by night on the sheriff and his armed guard, hewed the sheriff into

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4; in listing the lineage of the present Duke of Abercorn, and Duke of Châtellerault.

¹¹ *Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles* (1973).

small pieces with his own sword and burned the buildings and those within them.¹²

Although it is not entirely clear why William Wallace was already a marked man, it would seem at least likely that it was because neither he nor his older brother, Sir Malcolm Wallace, had formally submitted to Edward at Berwick earlier that year and signed the 'Ragman Roll'.¹³

Wallace's wife was also well connected. She was Marion Braidfoot, the heiress of Lamington.¹⁴

The film portrays the murder of Wallace's wife and his murder of the English Sheriff, Sir William Heselrig, as arising out of a fight started by an English soldier's attempted rape of his wife; the English Sheriff then cutting his wife's throat in cold-blood as an example of what happens to those who cause a disturbance; and then an action packed sequence by which Wallace and his supporters take the English fort and kill the English sheriff and garrison. It probably makes better film footage than the traditional version and produces the same general impact on the life of Wallace. The depiction of the English fort in this scene seems to be quite a realistic reconstruction of the period.

'Blind Harry' (or 'Henry the Rhymer') gives an account of the English retaliation for the death of Heselrig. The English invited a large number of local landholders and gentry to a meeting, each to bring with him only one squire or page. When assembled the English hanged all of the Scots in a barn — the event known as 'The Barns of Ayr'. According to 'Blind Harry', Wallace led a retaliation in which the English perpetrators were killed.

The film depicts the barn in which the dead Scots and their pages were hanged in a very dramatic scene. But the film puts the event into Wallace's early childhood. If it happened at all, and there is some doubt as to whether it was a poetic invention by Blind Harry, it certainly happened after Wallace was already leading a band of Scots against the English and after the slaying of Heselrig.

¹² Ronald McNair Scott, *Robert the Bruce* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 39.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 39; Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 28. The author's ancestor of the day, Ralph Broun of Colstoun did submit and sign the 'Ragman Roll'. A significantly different account of what happened in Lanark in May 1297 is preferred by Tytler, *History*, Vol., 1, p. 110.

¹⁴ Lamington has travelled geographically to Australia in the name of the Lamington Plateau in south eastern Queensland, but the Lamington which is best known in Australia is a cube of sponge cake coated with a chocolate sauce and sprinkled on all sides with shredded coconut. This now characteristically Australian recipe came from an Australian edition of a 19th -century Scottish cookbook.

The primary sources of Scottish resentment of the English occupation seem to have been the taxes which Edward I sought to exact in Scotland, and the compulsory recruitment of men for his armies. Both were needs of his European wars.¹⁵

The death of the English Sheriff of Lanark at Wallace's hand and his other early successes brought a large number of supporters to him, but Wallace was by no means the only leader of the Scottish resistance to the English. Probably far more important at the time was Sir Andrew Murray,¹⁶ a knight who had been captured by the English in the rout of the battle of Dunbar. He escaped to his family lands of Moray where he raised a rebellion in the north causing the English there to send for help from Edward I.¹⁷ It was this plea for help that led Edward to send an army north under the Earl of Surrey and Treasurer Cressingham. Wallace, after Lanark, had kept up attacks on the English in the south, progressively gaining more support.

Sir Andrew Murray and William Wallace were not the only leaders of the rebellion against the English. A significant force led by a number of Scottish nobles ecclesiastics and landed gentry also gathered an army together which faced the English under Henry Percy, earl of Northumberland, near Irvine in early July 1297. After an initial skirmish the Scots submitted to the English army and signed an instrument on 9 July 1297, acknowledging Edward I as their rightful ruler.¹⁸ Wallace did not join in this submission, and since the lords and traditional leaders had given up, Wallace became the remaining leader of opposition to the English in Southern and Central Scotland. He continued his attacks on the English and progressively gained more support.

Murray and Wallace and their followers came together to face the main English army under the Earl of Surrey at the battle of Stirling Bridge on 11 September 1297. The English army was superior in number to the Scottish forces. There were a number of notable Scots with the English, including the Steward of Scotland and the Earl of Lennox,¹⁹ as well as a large party of Welsh bowmen. The battle turned on English error and Scottish tactics. The two armies were separated by the upper reaches of the Forth to the north east of the Castle. The English were on the western side; the Scots were on the

¹⁵ M. Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), p. 476.

¹⁶ Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History*, (London, 1991), p. 119. In other works and elsewhere in this *Journal* he is known as Sir Andrew Moray.

¹⁷ *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland, 1108-1509*, ed., J. Bain (Edinburgh, 1881-84), pp. 922 and 931.

¹⁸ Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 116; Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 477.

¹⁹ Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 120; Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 478. The Steward and Lennox changed sides after the battle and attacked the fleeing English. Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 124.

opposite bank concealed behind a hill.²⁰ The English started to cross a narrow wooden bridge, and when a number had crossed the Scots charged them from their concealment behind the hill slaughtering them on the eastern side, sending panic into the remaining English on the other side. 'Blind Harry' tells of a clever Scottish carpenter who at Wallace's direction had contrived for the bridge to collapse as Wallace attacked, so preventing an English escape, but the English historians tell of some English knights being able to recross the bridge after the Scottish attack began.²¹ Sir Andrew Murray died in November 1297 of wounds he suffered in the battle leaving Wallace as the surviving successful commander, and since the capitulation at Irvine by the lords and notables, the only available Scottish leader.

The film's version of the battle of Stirling Bridge does not include a bridge, or Sir Andrew Murray. It makes a great film spectacle but is nothing like what happened.²²

One problem we have in judging Wallace's abilities as a commander is that we do not know whether the tactics of the battle of Stirling Bridge were his or Sir Andrew Murray's. The only other major conflict where Wallace was in command was at the battle of Falkirk (22 July 1298) where he was convincingly defeated by an English army commanded by Edward I. A further problem for Wallace after the battle of Stirling Bridge was to hold his army together with the inadequate resources in Scotland to feed and accommodate an army. He solved this by invading the north of England. He appointed as his partner in command Sir Andrew Murray, son of his previous co-commander.²³ They ravaged Cumberland and Northumberland, the booty both feeding and paying the army. The Scots dominated the area from 18 October to 11 November 1297.²⁴ During that period he attacked the area both around Carlisle and Newcastle, but did not capture either of those well fortified and well garrisoned cities.

The film deals with this period by having Wallace attack and capture York, a city that he did not go near. Perhaps this choice was made because York is a name more readily recognised by American and non-

²⁰ The hill is now readily identifiable, since the 19th-century Wallace Memorial is built on top of it. The river may not be in the exact position that it was 700 years ago, but is broadly in the same area. The bridge of 1297 was further up-stream than the present stone footbridge.

²¹ Hemingford quoted by Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 124.

²² For a detailed discussion of the battle of Stirling Bridge and the historical inaccuracies of the film see, Gwynne Jones, 'Arms and the Man', *Supra*, pp. 12-16.

²³ Sir Andrew Murray (died 1338), Guardian of Scotland 1332, captured Kildrumny Castle in 1335 and Bothwell Castle in 1336, Donaldson and Morpeth, *Dictionary of Scottish History*; Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 127.

²⁴ Hemingford quoted by Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 128.

British audiences than Carlisle and sounds much more romantic than the present industrial city of Newcastle.

Soon after his return to Scotland about Christmas 1297, an assembly was held at the Forest Kirk in Selkirkshire attended by the Earl of Lennox, William Douglas and others of the principal nobility of Scotland who were not still held captive or had family members held as hostages by Edward I. At this convocation Wallace was elected Governor of Scotland in the name of King John Balliol. Following his appointment as Governor of Scotland, Wallace seems to have been a vigorous and effective administrator, restoring order, raising money and expelling the last of the English. During his governorship he always purported to act on behalf of the absent King John Balliol, refusing to accept the formal deposition of the King by Edward I in 1296²⁵ No record or suggestion exists of Wallace and King John Balliol ever having met.

The film has a brief appearance by a character who identified himself to Wallace as John Balliol who asserts a claim to be the rightful King, as if the question of who was the rightful King was being disputed after Wallace “lifted up his head”. Of course John Balliol had become King and left the scene before then. Wallace never acknowledged Robert the Bruce, the claimant, as the rightful King and indeed after the capitulation at Irvine, Wallace had attacked the Bruce holdings in Galloway, as being part of the English establishment in Scotland.

In the Spring of 1298 Edward I, not without some resistance from his nobles, assembled a large army and advanced again on Scotland. There are extensive and romantic accounts of his army, its progress through southern Scotland, the divisions within Scotland, the near rebellion of Edward’s Welsh contingent,²⁶ and of Wallace adopting a burnt earth policy in front of the advancing English Army. It went close to succeeding in forcing an English retreat, and it may have done so but for the ultimate treachery of the Earls of Dunbar and Angus, who revealed Wallace’s position. On 22 July 1298, Edward I’s army came upon Wallace’s army at Falkirk. The Scots adopted a position on high ground with a forest at their back, with a large army of foot soldiers arranged in four schiltrons, circles of spearmen, protected by a small force of bowmen and cavalry vastly outnumbered by the better equipped English cavalry. The battle of Falkirk turned on the superiority of the Welsh long bowmen and the overwhelming strength of the English cavalry and the size of the English Army which was about three times larger than the Scottish

²⁵ Lynch, *A New History*, p. 119.

²⁶ Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 480, for one short account.

Army. The Scots were severely defeated. Wallace and the remnant of his army escaped through the forest to Stirling.²⁷

The film depicts the battle of Falkirk as a spectacular display of two large armies lined up in a straight line facing each other which was not the case.

There were Scottish nobles fighting on the English side, but controversy continues as to whether Robert the Bruce (the future Robert I), was one of those fighting on the English side. Robert I was born in 1274, so at the time of the battle of Falkirk he was twenty-four years old and the *Chronicles of Fordun* and Walter Bower place him there. Fordun reports that 'it is commonly said' that Robert the Bruce was not only there but played a significant part in the English victory. Walter Bower has Robert the Bruce fight on the English side and adds a notable exchange of remarks between Robert the Bruce and William Wallace: 'Pursuing them from the other side, Robert de Bruce, when a steep and impassible deep valley between the troops of the two armies came into view, is said to have called out loudly to William, asking him who it was that drove him to such arrogance as to seek so rashly to fight in opposition to the exalted power of the king of England and of the more powerful section of Scotland. It is said that William replied like this to him: "Robert, Robert, it is your inactivity and womanish cowardice that spur me to set authority free in your native land. But it is an effeminate man even now, ready as he is to advance from bed to battle, from the shadow into sunlight, with a pampered body accustomed to a soft life feebly taking up the weight of battle for the liberation of his own country, the burden of the breastplate — it is he who has made me so presumptuous perhaps even foolish, and has compelled me to attempt or seize these tasks." With these words William himself looked to a speedy flight and with his men sought safety'.²⁸

The great Scottish philosopher and less notable historian David Hume in his *History of England* reports a meeting between Wallace and Robert the Bruce following Falkirk along the lines of Fordun and Bower, in which Wallace upbraids Bruce for not supporting the Scottish cause and calls on Bruce to rally the people behind him with a view to liberating Scotland. Professor Barrow's definitive biography of Robert the Bruce says there is doubt.²⁹ Andrew Fisher says convincingly that we do not know if Bruce was at Falkirk, and the probability is that he was not, since the English chroniclers

²⁷The accounts of the battle come mainly from the English historians, Hemingford, Guisborough, Langtoft, and Wasingham. See accounts in Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, pp. 143-46; Fisher, *William Wallace*, chapter 6; Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 481. The account in *Fordun* ch. CI is very brief.

²⁸*Fordun*, ch. CI; Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, Vol., 6, Book XI, Chapter, 34.

²⁹G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert the Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1976).

list many Scots by name on both sides but Bruce is not mentioned. If he had been there his presence would have been so significant that it is unlikely it would not have been mentioned.³⁰

The film places Bruce at the battle of Falkirk on the English side and pictures him as actually fighting with Wallace, being beaten and being spared by Wallace because Wallace saw Bruce as the future King of Scotland. Whether Bruce was there or not, Wallace certainly never gave any indication of seeing Bruce as the future King. Wallace was so brutal in his dealing not only with English supporters, but Scottish laggards, it is likely he would not have hesitated to kill Bruce if he had the chance in that battle.

After the defeat at Falkirk Wallace lost all power and shortly after resigned as Governor of Scotland.

The most powerful family then left in Scotland which had not submitted to England were the Comyns and John Comyn of Badenock, (the son of the Comyn of the same name who had been one of the guardians after the death of Alexander III) and John de Soulis became the governors. Soon after, Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick, and William Lamberton, bishop of St. Andrews, were added to the Governors of Scotland.³¹

The best information of what happened to William Wallace at this time is that he went to Norway and France, and also spent some time in Rome.³² Wallace returned to Scotland not later than during Edward I's campaign against Scotland of 1303-4, but in a minor role. Since 1301 de Soulis had become the sole Governor of Scotland, Bruce having finally, clearly and unambiguously defected to the English in 1302.³³ With Comyn and Sir Simon Fraser, Wallace led a number of raids against the English, and English supporters, including Bruce, most notably the raid into Bruce's territory Annandale and Cumberland of June 1303.³⁴ Overall, Edward's campaign was so successful that on 9 February 1304 there was a general submission, even Comyn accepting the banishment and other penalties imposed on him.³⁵ The general settlement allowed the submitting lords and landholders to retain their lands and freedom. There was however a short list of Scots that Edward I was

³⁰ Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 82.

³¹ Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 150. Other accounts suggest that it was Comyn and Bruce from the beginning, Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 90.

³² One of the manuscripts of Fordun gives an account of him in France, discussed by Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 150. A full account is given by Fisher, *William Wallace*, pp. 96-98.

³³ Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 103; Barrow, *Robert the Bruce*, pp. 172-75; McNair Scott, *Robert the Bruce*, pp. 60-61.

³⁴ Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 107.

³⁵ Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 177.

not prepared to allow reasonably generous terms: Robert Wishart, bishop of Glasgow, James the Steward of Scotland, Sir John Soullis, David de Graham, Alexander de Lindsay, Simon Fraser, Thomas Bois and William Wallace. To all those but Wallace he offered rigorous terms which allowed them at least to retain their lives and liberty; conditions which they all ultimately accepted. At an English Parliament held in St. Andrews shortly after the general submission, attended by the defeated Scottish lords, Wallace and Simon Fraser were declared outlaws. Not long after Simon Fraser gave up hope and accepted banishment. Wallace was a marked man whose capture and death from then on seemed certain. Wallace stood alone.³⁶

Edward tried to involve his son, the future Edward II, in his campaigns against Scotland. Edward I had created his son Prince of Wales — the first heir to the English throne to be so styled.³⁷ At the time of the battle of Stirling Bridge he was in the north of England, and it was to the Prince and his force that the Earl of Surry retreated following the English defeat.³⁸ Edward I brought the Prince of Wales with him again into Scotland in the campaign of 1301 and entrusted the submission of the south-west of Scotland to him. Edward I expressed the wish that the Prince should have 'the chief honour of taming the pride of the Scots'.³⁹ In Edward I's final crushing of Scotland in the campaign of 1303-4, the Prince of Wales had command of one part of the army which occupied south western Scotland.⁴⁰ The Prince of Wales was almost certainly what we would now call bi-sexual. His close friendship with Piers Gaveston, almost certainly homosexual, actually led King Edward I to violence on his son the Prince.⁴¹ However, Edward II did ultimately perform his kingly duty by having four children by Queen Isabelle.

Wallace was eventually captured near Glasgow on 3 August 1305, by Sir John Stewart of Menteith.⁴² He was sent to London, arriving there on 22 August 1305. He was brought to Westminster Hall for a 'trial' the next day. Edward I nominated the presiding Judge, Peter Mallory,⁴³ and the King selected the commission who were to conduct the 'trial' and they accompanied Wallace in the procession through the streets. One of the commission had

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 177-78.

³⁷ Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp. 226-27.

³⁸ Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 124.

³⁹ Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 103; see also Fiona Watson, *Under the Hammer*, (East Linton, 1998), pp.129-39.

⁴⁰ Tytler, *History*, Vol. 1, p. 173. As to the Prince of Wales' involvement in the Scottish Wars see, Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp. 485, 501 and 506-09.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 552.

⁴² Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 119.

⁴³ For a brief biography of Mallory, see Foss, *The Judges of England* (London, 1870), p. 426.

actually fought against Wallace at Falkirk.⁴⁴ There were no witnesses and no jury. There was no plea taken, no defence allowed. As an 'outlaw' he was not entitled to any of these refinements. Wallace was taken to his execution immediately at the end of the 'trial'. He was hanged, cut down while still alive, disembowelled and beheaded. His head was placed on a pole on London Bridge. The rest of his body was quartered and sent to Newcastle, Berwick, Perth, the fourth either to Aberdeen or Stirling.⁴⁵

The film's depiction of the execution of Wallace is one of the more realistic portrayals of a hanging, drawing and quartering in any film. In the film the victim is hanged, and cut down before he is dead, which is correct, but then is subjected to a 'racking' (having his joints dislocated by being pulled by a horse) which in fact is not recorded as having happened in this execution, but was not uncommon. We are spared the opening of the victim's abdomen and the drawing out of his entrails while he is still alive, although this is shown in mime by the dwarfs who entertain the waiting crowd before the victim arrives at the scaffold. One of the dwarfs lies on the bench while the other pulls pieces of string from his middle. The film however departs from its accuracy of the execution by having the officer in charge invite Wallace to acknowledge his guilt and the right of the King by kissing the royal emblem, which would earn an immediate dispatch from his pain. The emblem offered for the kiss is a Tudor rose, which did not become a royal emblem until the advent of Henry VII and the Tudor dynasty in 1485. The film switches back and forth from the execution scene to a deathbed scene of Edward I in London. In fact Edward did not die then and not in London.

Edward I outlived Wallace by two years, dying a lingering and painful death on 7 July 1307 at Burgh-by-Sands, north west of Carlisle.⁴⁶ He was succeeded by his still unmarried son, Edward II, who married Isabelle, daughter of the King of France at Boulogne on 25 January 1308. Isabelle was then only 12 years old. Although he did not renounce the friend of his youth, Piers Gaveston, whom he left as the effective ruler of England while he was in France.⁴⁷

The film introduces a second romantic interest for Wallace, namely Isabelle, Princess of Wales, a title which she never held since Edward II was already King by the time she married him in 1308. The film shows

⁴⁴ Fisher, *William Wallace*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128. For a good discussion of the impact of the trial and execution see Fiona Watson, *Under the Hammer*, pp. 211-14.

⁴⁶ Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 556.

⁴⁷ McKisack, 'The Fourteenth Century', *The Oxford History of England* (Oxford, 1985), p. 4.

Edward I sending Isabelle, the supposed Princess of Wales, to Scotland to negotiate with, or trap Wallace in 1298. The future Queen Isabelle was then only two years old. The film then shows Isabelle falling in love with the manly charms of Wallace, as compared to her sexually ambiguous husband, and Wallace falling in love with her French beauty. It makes good film drama but is historical nonsense. The romance goes on to point that Isabelle becomes pregnant to Wallace, and it is suggested that the future Edward III is Wallace's natural child. Edward III was born to King Edward II and Queen Isabelle on 13 November 1312 by which time Wallace had been dead for more than 7 years.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 29.