

Robert the Bruce (1306-1329)



Name: King Robert the Bruce of Scotland

Father: Robert de Brus

Mother: Marjory Countess of Carrick

House of: Bruce

Ascended to the throne: February 10, 1306 aged 31 years

Crowned: March 27, 1306 at Scone Abbey, Perthshire

Married:(1) Isabella of Mar, 1295

Married:(2) Elizabeth de Burgh, 1302

Children: Marjorie, David, John, Matilda and Margaret

Died: June 7, 1329, at Cardross, Dumbartonshire, aged 54 years,

Buried at: Dunfermline Abbey (body) and Melrose Abbey (heart)

Succeeded by: his son David

When Robert Bruce was born on July 11, 1274, probably at Turnberry Castle, Ayrshire, his father Robert de Brus, the 6th Lord of Annandale, may have hoped that his son would become king but the political situation in Scotland was in turmoil, so nothing was certain. Bruce's grandfather was one of the claimants to the Scottish throne during a succession dispute in 1290 - 1292. The reason for the dispute was that in 1286, King Alexander III of Scotland fell from the cliffs at Kinghorn, Fife whilst riding, leaving Margaret, Maid of Norway as his heir. She died sailing to Scotland and there was no clear successor to the throne. The English king, Edward I, was asked to arbitrate and chose John Balliol to be king. Both Bruce and his father declined to back Balliol and supported Edward I's invasion of Scotland in 1296 to force Balliol to abdicate. Edward I of England was a strong, battle hardened king, known

for good reason as “the hammer of the Scots” he saw that a weakened Scotland was up for grabs and ruled Scotland as a province of England. Bruce then supported William Wallace’s attempts to rise up against English rule. Because Bruce changed between supporting and opposing the English he had problems later on getting people to trust him.

In the year that Wallace was captured, Bruce killed John Comyn, his closest rival for the throne of Scotland at Greyfriars Monastery, Dumfries in 1305. After this Bruce had no choice but to assert his right to the throne or go on the run. He chose to go to Glasgow where Bishop Robert Wishart granted him absolution for the killing and rallied the clergy around the cause of Bruce. Within six weeks of Comyn death Bruce’s army took on the opposition and won. Bruce was crowned king. However, peace did not come to Scotland, Edward’s army marched north and after many battles captured Bruce’s wife and daughters, executed three of his brothers, and Bruce was forced into exile. Then Bruce’s luck turned, Edward I died leaving his son, Edward II to carry on his project to conquer and subdue Scotland. Edward II was not a great leader.

It was to this Edward that Bruce wrote the letter in 1310, as the English army was heading north from Biggar, only forty miles away. Edward was becoming more unpopular with the men in his court and Robert was tightening his powerbase in Scotland – only Stirling Castle and strongholds near the English border eluded him. The letter is from one king to another, calling on the English to make peace with Scotland and avoid more bloodshed. Bruce was writing a very conciliatory letter, but from a position of strength not desperation.

Edward II’s failure as a military leader and Bruce’s guerrilla tactics combined with the ability to unite the factions in Scotland against their common enemy proved too great, eventually. Three years after this letter, Edward II returned to Scotland with a large army. However, when with two armies met at Bannockburn, it was the smaller Scottish army that defeated the invaders. Bruce now had military control of Scotland.

It was not until 1328 that Robert the Bruce and Edward III, son of Edward II, sign the Treaty of Edinburgh bringing peace to the two countries after 30 years of war. Bruce died the following year having secured Scotland’s independence, for a short while at least.

Where is Kildrum?

We know Kildrum today as a district in the new town of Cumbernauld, but the Kildrum referred to in Bruce's letter is thought to be old Cumbernauld Castle. Little survives of the castle but some clues do exist. The stone from the original castle was re-used in Cumbernauld House; a beautiful eighteenth century William Adam building near Cumbernauld Village that is now private flats.



Cumbernauld House today

The original man made hill or motte of the earliest castle survives to the north east of Cumbernauld House. This first castle, of a motte and bailey style, was owned by the Comyn family. After Robert the Bruce killed John Comyn in 1306, his land was given to the Robert Fleming family which was loyal to Bruce. So it would seem likely that the king stayed at Cumbernauld Castle with his allies.



The remains of the motte, Cumbernauld

After Bruce's death in 1329 his five year-old son became David II of Scotland. David was married to Joan, daughter of Edward II to whom Bruce wrote the Kildrum letter. Robert Fleming's son, Malcolm Fleming, was close to the young king and played a part in sending the boy-king safely into exile in France. On his return David created the title Earl of Wigtown for Malcolm Fleming and gave him much of western Galloway.

The remains of the second castle, built by the Flemings can also be seen. Once Cumbernauld House was built in the eighteenth century, the second castle, an L-shaped stone tower was converted to stables, it was burnt down by soldiers posted there in 1746. Only one original wall can be seen in the allotment area.



Ponts map showing Cumbernauld Castle

Timeline for Robert the Bruce

1274	Robert Bruce was born on July 11, 1274
1296	- 1306 Interregnum period with no Scottish monarch and rule by Edward I of England.
1297	Andrew de Moray and William Wallace lead the Scots to victory over England at Stirling Bridge.
1298	Edward invades Scotland again and defeats William Wallace at the Battle of Falkirk
1303	France and England make peace, releasing forces to attack Scotland
1304	Stirling Castle, the last of the Scottish castles to be captured by Edward I
1305	Wallace is captured and taken to London, where he is tried for treason, and hanged, drawn, and quartered. Bruce kills John Comyn at Greyfriars Monastery.
1306	Robert Bruce is crowned king at Scone but is driven into hiding by the English occupation army of Edward I
1307	Edward I sets out to invade Scotland but dies on his way north. Bruce begins campaign to drive the English out of Scotland
1307	English forces defeated by Bruce at Loudon Hill
1309	King Robert the Bruce convenes his first parliament, at St Andrew
1310	Bruce writes the letter to King Edward II of England, from Kildrum, Cumbernauld to appeal for peace and recognise Scotland's sovereignty.
1311	The Scots plunder the North of England
1314	Bruce besieges Stirling Castle. An English army sent to break the siege is routed at the Battle of Bannockburn
1318	Robert the Bruce captures Berwick on Tweed.
1320	Nobles assert Scottish independence in the Declaration of Arbroath.
1323	Truce between Bruce and Edward II fails to stop warfare between the two countries
1328	Treaty of Edinburgh between King Robert I and Edward III which recognised Scotland's independence, ending the 30 years of Wars of Independence.
1329	Robert the Bruce dies at Cardross Castle possibly of leprosy.

From Britroyal.com

Letter of Robert I to Edward II. Kildrum (parish of Cumbernauld), 1 October 1310.

The manuscript where the letter was found in the British Library is a 'scrapbook' of material chiefly relating to British history, copied by a number of monks of Kirkstall Abbey over a couple of generations, c.1475–c.1525.

Text (punctuated as in the manuscript)

Serenissimo principi domino E. dei gracia Regi Anglie illustri; Robertus eadem gracia Rex Scot/torum salutem in eo per quem troni regnancium gubernantur. Cum sub pacis dulcedine mentes / fidelium exquiescunt propianorum vita moribus adornatur. Ac vniversa sancte matris ecclesie. / Regnorum quia omni negocia vbique prosperius diriguntur. Nostra duxit humilitas vestram / celcitudinem nunc et alias deuocius exorare quatinus deum ac publicam honestatem pre oculis. / habentes. a persecucione nostri et inquietudine populi regni nostri cessare curetis. vt cesset de cetero / clades et effusio sanguinis propiani. Omnia quippe que nos et populus noster per seruicia corporum. / per largicionem rerum facere poterimus. siue pati pro redempcione bone pacis. et pro gracia vestre bene/uolencie perpetuo prouierenda: parati sumus et erimus conuenienti modo et honesto perficere puro / corde. Et si super hiis nobiscum habere tractatum vestre cederit voluntati nobis litteratorie / remandet vestra sublemitas regia per presentis portitorem. Scriptis apud kyndromyn' / in leuenax. kalendas Octobri. Anno. regni. nostri. quinto.

Translation of the letter of Robert the Bruce (by Professor Dauvit Broun, University of Glasgow)

To the most serene prince the lord Edward by God's grace illustrious king of England, Robert by the same grace king of Scots, greeting in Him through whom the thrones of those who rule are governed. When, under the sweetness of peace, the minds of the faithful find rest, then the life of Christians is adorned with good conduct, and also the whole of Holy Mother Church, because the affairs of all kingdoms are everywhere arranged more favourably. Our humility has led us, now and at other times, to beseech your highness more earnestly so that, having God and public decency in sight, you would take pains to cease from the persecution of us and the disturbance of the people of our kingdom in order that devastation and the spilling of Christian blood may henceforth stop. Naturally, everything which we and our people will be able to do by bodily service, or to bear by giving freely of our goods, for the redemption of good peace and for the grace of your good will for all time, which must be earned, we are prepared and shall be prepared to accomplish in a suitable and honest way, with a pure heart. And if it accords with your will to have a discussion with us on these matters, may your royal sublimity send word in writing to us, by the bearer of this letter.

Written at Kildrum in Lennox, the Kalends of October in the fifth year of our reign [1 October 1310].

Link to the British Museum

<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2013/06/robert-the-bruce-letter-found-at-british-library.html>

Q2. Research Robert the Bruce and William Wallace. Fill in this chart with the facts that you find.

	William Wallace	Robert the Bruce
Battles won		
Battles lost		
Years of peace		
Scottish independence achieved?		
Escaped execution by the enemy?		
Still famous today as a great leader?		

Once you have done this answer these questions:

Q2a) Of Wallace and Bruce, which one do you consider was the better Scot? Support your answer with facts and argument.

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Q2b) Which is the best way to assess someone's success without bias?

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Q2c) Was Robert the Bruce fighting for a free Scotland, or just to make himself king?

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