

Sir William Wallace (c.1270–August 23, 1305) was a knight and Scottish patriot who led a resistance to the English occupation of Scotland during the Wars of Scottish Independence.

Wallace was the inspiration for the poem *The Acts and Deeds of Sir William Wallace, Knight of Elderslie* by the 15th century minstrel *Blind Harry*. This work is responsible for much of the legend encompassing Wallace. The 1995 film *Braveheart* is based on the poem.

Scotland in Wallace's time

William Wallace Monument

At the time of Wallace's birth, *King Alexander III* had reigned for over twenty years. His rule had seen a period of peace and economic stability, and he had successfully fended off continuing English claims to suzerainty [: overhøjhed]. In 1286, Alexander died after falling from his horse. None of his children survived him. The Scottish lords declared Alexander's four year-old granddaughter, *Margaret* (called "the Maid of Norway"), Queen. Due to her age the Scottish lords set up an interim [: midlertidig] government to administer Scotland until she came of age. *King Edward I of England* took advantage of the instability by arranging the Treaty of Birgham with the lords, betrothing Margaret to his son, *Edward* (the later *Edward II of England*), on the understanding that Scotland would preserve its status as a separate kingdom. Margaret, however, fell ill and died at only eight years old (1290) on her way from her native Norway to Scotland (Edward II married later Isabella of France in 1308). A number of claimants to the Scottish throne came forward almost immediately.



With Scotland threatening to descend into a dynastic war, the "leading men" of the realm invited Edward's arbitration [: mægling]. Before the process could begin, he insisted that all of the contenders recognize him as Lord Paramount of Scotland. After some initial resistance, all, including *John Balliol* and *Robert Bruce*, the chief contenders, accepted this precondition. Finally, in early November 1292, at a great feudal court held in the castle at Berwick-upon-Tweed, judgment was given in favour of *John Balliol* having the strongest claim in law. Formal announcement of the judgment was given by Edward on 17 November.

Although the outcome of the Great Cause had been both fair and legal, Edward proceeded to use the political concessions he had gained to undermine the independence of Scotland and to make King John's position difficult. Balliol broke his promise and renounced [: frasige sig] his homage [to king Edward] in March 1296 and by the end of the month Edward stormed Berwick-upon-Tweed, sacking the then-Scottish border town. He slaughtered almost all of his opponents who resided there, even if they fled to their homes. In April, the Scots were defeated at the Battle of Dunbar (1296) and by July Edward had forced Balliol to abdicate [: abdicere/træde tilbage] at Kincardine Castle.

Military career

Wallace's exploits begin

Blind Harry notes that Wallace's father was killed along with his brother John in a skirmish at Loudoun Hill in 1291 by the notorious Lambie's, who came from the clan Lamont.

Wallace's activities between 1294 and 1296 are undocumented, but Harry states that Wallace was under the protection of his uncle *Ronald Crawford*, Sheriff of Ayrshire. In the period from

1291 until 1297 Wallace was involved in several actions where the English invariably lost. Wallace and 40 kinsmen slew and dismembered William Heselrig, the English Sheriff of Lanark, in May 1297, purportedly [: efter sigende] to avenge [: hævne] the death of *Marion Braidfute of Lamington* — the young maiden Wallace courted and married in Blind Harry's tale.

Supporters of the growing revolt suffered a major blow when Scottish nobles agreed to terms with the English in July. In August, Wallace left Selkirk Forest with his followers to join *Andrew Moray* at Stirling. Moray began another uprising, and their forces combined at Stirling, where they prepared to meet the English in battle.

According to Harry, these hit and run tactics eventually led King Edward to address [: tage sig af] the problem by executing most of the Council of Barons in the Barns of Ayr (June 1297), with a similar event in Renfrewshire - although these events are unattested elsewhere. Ronald Crawford was apparently first to be hanged, sending Wallace, who had arrived at the location late after running an errand for his uncle, into action and killing the entire English garrison in Ayr, locking the doors as the garrison slept and firing the structures. Wallace and his men retired to Selkirk Forest for safety. When word reached the Crawford family that Ronald had been killed, Ronald's son, William, joined Wallace in the forest.

As Wallace's ranks swelled, information obtained by John Graham prompted Wallace to move his force from Selkirk Forest to the Highlands. But on the way to the Highlands, Wallace met up with Andrew Moray at Stirling. From this point, the guerrilla war became open war.

The Battle of Stirling Bridge

Stirling Bridge as of 2006

On 11 September 1297, Wallace won the Battle of Stirling Bridge. Although vastly outnumbered, the Scottish forces led by Wallace and Andrew Moray routed [: tilføje nederlag, slå] the English army. The Earl of Surrey's professional army of 300 cavalry and 10,000 infantry met disaster as they crossed over to the north side of the river. The narrowness of the bridge prevented many soldiers from crossing together (possibly as few as three men abreast), so while the English soldiers crossed, the Scots held back until half of them had passed and then killed the English as quickly as they could cross.



A pivotal [: afgørende] charge, led by one of Wallace's captains, caused some of the English soldiers to retreat as others pushed forward, and under the overwhelming weight, the bridge collapsed and many English soldiers drowned. The Scots won a significant victory which hugely boosted the confidence of their army.

Upon his return from the Battle of Stirling Bridge, Wallace was knighted along with his second-in-command *John Graham* and his third-in-command *William Crawford*, possibly by *Robert the Bruce*, and Wallace was named "Guardian of Scotland and Leader of its armies".

In the six months following Stirling Bridge, Wallace led a raid into northern England. His intent was to take the battle to English soil to demonstrate to Edward that Scotland also had the power to inflict the same sort of damage south of the border. Naturally, Edward was infuriated but he refused to be intimidated.

The Battle of Falkirk

A year later, Wallace lost the Battle of Falkirk. On 1 April 1298, the English invaded Scotland at Roxburgh. The Scots adopted a scorched-earth policy [: den brændte jords taktik] in their own

country, and English quartermasters' failure to prepare for the expedition left morale and food low, but Edward's search for Wallace would end at Falkirk.

Wallace arranged his spearmen in four "schiltrons" — circular, hedgehog [[: pindsvin]] formations surrounded by a defensive wall of wooden stakes. The English gained the upper hand, however, attacking first with cavalry, and breaking up the Scottish archers. The Scottish knights withdrew, and Edward's men began to attack the schiltrons.

Gaps in the schiltrons soon appeared, and the English exploited these to crush the remaining resistance. The Scots lost many men. Wallace escaped, though his military reputation suffered badly. John Graham was killed and William Crawford became Wallace's second.

By September 1298, Wallace had decided to resign [[: træde tilbage]] as Guardian of Scotland in favour of Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick, and John Comyn of Badenoch, ex-King John Balliol's brother-in-law, because of the lack of support from the Scottish nobility. Bruce became reconciled with King Edward in 1302, while Wallace spurned [[: foragte]] such moves towards peace.

According to Harry, Wallace left with William Crawford in late 1298 on a mission to the court of *King Philip IV of France* to plead the case for assistance in the Scottish struggle for independence.

He served with the Scots Guard in France in two battles with the English and made a side trip to Rome to plead for Scotland. In 1303 Squire Guthrie was sent to France to ask Wallace and his men to return to Scotland which they did that same year. They slipped in under the cover of darkness to recover on the farm of William Crawford, near Elcho Wood. Having heard rumors of Wallace's appearance in the area, the English moved in on the farm. A chase ensued and the band of men slipped away after being surrounded in Elcho Wood

Wallace's capture and execution

Wallace evaded [[: undgik]] capture by the English until 5 August 1305 when John de Menteith, a Scottish knight loyal to Edward, turned Wallace over to English soldiers at Robroyston near Glasgow. Wallace was transported to London and tried for treason. He responded to the treason charge, "I could not be a traitor to Edward, for I was never his subject." The absent John Balliol was officially his king. Wallace was declared guilty.

On 22 August 1305, following the trial, Wallace was taken from the hall, stripped naked and dragged through the city at the heels of a horse to Smithfield Market. He was hanged, drawn and quartered — strangled by hanging but released while still alive, emasculated [[: kastrere]], eviscerated and his bowels burnt before him, beheaded, then cut into four parts — at the Elms in Smithfield. His preserved head was placed on a pike atop London Bridge. It was later joined by the heads of his brother, John, and Simon Fraser. His limbs were displayed, separately, in Newcastle, Berwick, Stirling, and Aberdeen.