

## Robert the Bruce (1274 - 1329)



**King Robert the Bruce** ©

*Robert I, known as Robert the Bruce, was the heroic King of Scots who secured Scotland's independence from England.*

Robert was born on 11 July 1274 into an aristocratic Scottish family. Through his father he was distantly related to the Scottish royal family; his mother had Gaelic antecedents. Bruce's grandfather was one of the claimants to the Scottish throne during a succession dispute in 1290 - 1292. The English king, Edward I, was asked to arbitrate and chose John Balliol to be king. Both Bruce and his father refused to back Balliol and supported Edward I's invasion of Scotland in 1296 to force Balliol to abdicate. Edward then ruled Scotland as a province of England.

Bruce then supported William Wallace's uprising against the English. After Wallace was defeated, Bruce's lands were not confiscated and in 1298, Bruce became a guardian of Scotland, with John Comyn, Balliol's nephew and Bruce's greatest rival for the Scottish throne. In 1306, Bruce quarrelled with Comyn and stabbed him in a church in Dumfries. He was outlawed by Edward and excommunicated by the Pope. Bruce now proclaimed his right to the throne and on 27 March was crowned king at Scone. The following year, Bruce was deposed by Edward's army and forced to flee. His wife and daughters were imprisoned and three of his brothers executed. Robert spent the winter on the island off the coast of Antrim (Northern Ireland).

Returning to Scotland, Robert waged a highly successful guerrilla war against the English. At the Battle of Bannockburn in June 1314, he defeated a much larger English army under Edward II, confirming the re-establishment of an independent Scottish monarchy. Two years later, his brother Edward Bruce was inaugurated as high king of Ireland but was killed in battle in 1318. Even after Bannockburn and the Scottish capture of Berwick in 1318, Edward II refused to give up his claim to the overlordship of Scotland. In 1320, the Scottish earls, barons and the 'community of the realm' sent a letter to Pope John XXII declaring that Robert was their rightful monarch. This was the 'Declaration of Arbroath' and it asserted the antiquity of the Scottish people and their monarchy.

Four years later, Robert received papal recognition as king of an independent Scotland. The Franco-Scottish alliance was renewed in the Treaty of Corbeil, by which the Scots were obliged to make war on England should hostilities break out between England and France. In 1327, the English deposed Edward II in favour of his son and peace was made with Scotland. This included a total renunciation of all English claims to superiority over Scotland. Robert died on 7 June 1329. He was buried at Dunfermline. He requested that his heart be taken to the Holy Land, but it only got as far as Spain. It was returned to Scotland and buried in Melrose Abbey.