

# Did William Wallace aspire to be King of Scotland?

May 16 2011

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The William Wallace statue in Aberdeen.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Historians from the University of Glasgow have found evidence to show that, as far as the English were concerned, Scots patriot and hero William Wallace aspired to be King of Scotland.

A newly discovered English source, which also marks the earliest record of Wallace's gruesome execution, confirms outright what [historians](#) had only suspected before: the reason that Edward I dealt so harshly with Wallace was that he viewed him as a pretender to the Scottish crown.

Accounts of [King](#) Edward I's Exchequer for the financial year 1304–1305, known as the 'Pipe Roll', describe Wallace as, "...a robber, a public traitor, an outlaw, an enemy and rebel of the king, who in contempt of the king, throughout Scotland had falsely sought to call himself king of Scotland."

Researcher, Dr. John Reuben Davies made the discovery as part of an AHRC-funded study of cross-border society and Scottish Independence during the years 1216–1314 involving researchers from the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, King's College London and Lancaster.

Dr. John Reuben Davies explains: "In the pipe roll for the financial year 1304–1305, there is an entry which has until now gone unnoticed: it is the account for expenses incurred in the execution of William Wallace and for taking his quartered body to Scotland.

"The financial account is also made up of a descriptive account of Wallace's crimes, the manner of his death, and the fate of his dismembered body. The record shows quite vividly the extent to which English civil servants saw Wallace's trial and execution as an extraordinary event, so exciting that they broke from their usual routine to note down the details in what would normally be a dull and dry record of income and expenditure."

Not only is the pipe roll a new source for the trial and death of Wallace, it also includes the otherwise unrecorded indictment that, 'he had falsely sought to call himself king of Scotland'.

"This is a startling revelation," says Dr. Davies. "The view presented in Scottish histories has always been that Wallace never sought the Scottish crown, and certainly never called himself king of Scotland – a view not otherwise explicitly contradicted in English sources.

“However, we should treat this account with caution: Wallace was always scrupulous, in the very few documents issued in his name, to say that he acted on behalf of King John Balliol. The pipe roll may not be a credible source for the notion that Wallace actually sought to call himself king of Scotland. The accusation could, in fact, signify English incomprehension of Wallace’s role as Guardian of Scotland. The English perspective of Wallace’s time as sole guardian, when he did what a king would have done (issuing writs and appointing bishops, for example), could have been that he behaved like, and therefore called himself, king of Scotland.”

**More information:** A full account of the research by Dr John Reuben Davies can be found at the project’s website, The Breaking of Britain: Cross border society and Scottish Independence 1216 – 1314 website: [www.breakingofbritain.ac.uk](http://www.breakingofbritain.ac.uk)

Provided by University of Glasgow

Citation: Did William Wallace aspire to be King of Scotland? (2011, May 16) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-05-william-wallace-aspire-king-scotland.html>

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