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*John Reuben Davies*

## **The Execution of William Wallace: the earliest account**

On a recent visit to the National Archives at Kew, I took the chance to look at a manuscript referred to in Michael Prestwich's historical biography of Edward I.<sup>1</sup> The document in question is a book recording payments made by the king's wardrobe. The wardrobe was the largest office of the royal household, it travelled with the king, and was responsible for spending the greatest proportion of his revenues. The book of payments is 44 pages long, though no longer complete, and is of particular interest to a historian of Scotland because, a few pages in, it offers up a graphic reference to the dead William Wallace. The text has not been published before, so I have provided a transcription and a translation.

### **Kew, The National Archives, MS E101/367/16**

*Imperfect book of payments in the Wardrobe, 33 & 34 Edward I (1304–6)*

J. DE SEGRAVE

Domino Johanni de Segraue de prestito super cariagio circa corpus Willelmi le Waleys scoti in quatuor partes diuisum usque Scociam per manus Johannis de Lincolnia et Rogeri de Paris uicecomitum Londonie soluentis ei denariis per breue regis sub priuato sigillo et litteras patentes dicti domini Johannis receptionem denariorum testificantes in Garderoba liberatas apud Westmonasterium uicesimo tertio die Aprilis anno tricesimo quarto  
\_\_\_\_\_ quindecim solidi

J. OF SEAGRAVE

To lord John of Seagrave, as an advance for conveying the body of William Wallace the Scot, divided into four parts, to Scotland; by the hands of John of Lincoln and Roger of Paris, sheriffs of London; the money having been paid to him by the king's writ under the privy seal and the said lord John's letters patent testifying to the receipt of the money, [which were] delivered in the Wardrobe at Westminster on 23rd day of April in the 34th year [AD 1306]  
\_\_\_\_\_ 15 shillings

The grisly phrase, *in quatuor partes diuisum*, 'divided into four parts', jumps out of the page in what one expects to be a dull and dry record of expenditure. John Seagrave, the official to whom 15 shillings had been paid out, was the king's lieutenant in Scotland; he had been responsible for the entire process of Wallace's transportation as a prisoner from Scotland to London, the trial, and his execution. The money was a cash advance or loan, in technical terms called a 'prest' or 'imprest' (Latin, *prestitum*), to cover Seagrave's expenses. The wardrobe must have taken responsibility for the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), 503, note 137.

payment and used the privy seal, which it controlled, to get it made through the sheriffs of London. Here we have a glimpse of the banal administrative processes behind the scenes of Edward I's exemplary justice. Students of history should not forget that even the most gruesome aspects of medieval punishment had to be organised and paid for by someone.

The entry in the wardrobe accounts is counterpart to a better-known record from the memoranda rolls noticed by Joseph Stevenson 140 years ago.<sup>2</sup> The memoranda rolls recorded, among other things, notes, calculations and decisions made by the Exchequer when it heard the accounts of sheriffs and other collectors of revenue. Here is the text and a translation.

**Kew, The National Archives, MS E368/76**

*Memoranda Roll, Michaelmas 33–34 Edward I (1305–1306)*

Johannes de Lincolnia et Rogerus de Paris nuper uicecomites Londonie computarunt hic modo in crastino sancti Andree [. . .] Et quindecim solidos quos liberarunt Johanni de Segraue mense Augusti anno tricesimo tertio pro cariagio corporis Willelmi le Waleys ad partes Scocie, per breue regis et litteras ipsius Iohannis de recepcione. **/Postea allocantur in rotulo decem solidi/**

John of Lincoln and Roger of Paris lately sheriffs of London have accounted in this manner on the morrow of St Andrew [1 December . . .] And 15 shillings which they have paid to John of Seagrave in the month of August in the 33rd year [AD 1305] for the conveyance of the body of William Wallace to parts of Scotland, by writ of the king and letters of the same John for receipt. **/Afterwards 10 shillings are allowed in the roll./**

This record is more terse than the one in the wardrobe accounts. We do not learn that the body had been quartered, but we do have the same basic information. Fifteen shillings had been paid to John Seagrave by the sheriffs of London, John of Lincoln and Roger of Paris, for transporting Wallace's body; authorisation for payment had been made by a letter from the king under the privy seal; Seagrave had provided letters of receipt. The important lead, however, is the additional entry made between the lines in darker ink, for this points to 'the roll', where 10 rather than 15 shillings have been allowed for the payment. The 'roll' must be the pipe roll. The pipe rolls were drawn up by clerks of the exchequer every year, and embodied the accounts of the farm of the counties, the farm being the fixed sum that the sheriffs annually paid to the king. In this case, the amount being 'allowed in the roll' was the sum that the sheriffs were claiming against the money they owed the exchequer from the farm of London and Middlesex. Although I have not been able to find this allowance of 10 shillings in the pipe rolls, my search has nevertheless led to an important discovery.

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<sup>2</sup> *Documents illustrative of the History of Scotland*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1870), II.485.

In the pipe roll for the accounting period Michaelmas 1304 to Michaelmas 1305, under the section for London and Middlesex, there is an entry that 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. A transcription and translation of the text follows.

**Kew, The National Archives, MS E372/150**

*Pipe Roll of 33 Edward I (Michaelmas 1304–1305)*

Ciues Londonie Johannes de Lincolnia et Rogerus de Parys pro eisdem ciuibus reddunt computum [etc.] Et in expensis et missis factis per eosdem uicecomites pro Willelmo le Waleys, latrone, proditione puplico, utlagato, inimico et rebellione regis, qui in contemptum regis per Scociam se regem Scocie falso fecerat nominare, et ministros regis in partibus Scocie interfecit atque duxit exercitum hostiliter contra regem per iudicium curie regis apud Westmonasterium, distrahendo, suspendendo, decolando, eius uiscera concremando ac eius corpus quarterando, cuius quarterie ad quatuor maiores uillas Scocie transmittabantur. Hoc anno sexaginta unus solidi, decem denarii.

Citizens of London John of Lincoln and Roger of Paris for the same citizens render account [etc.] As expenses and payments made by the same sheriffs for William Wallace, as a robber, a public traitor, an outlaw, an enemy and rebel against the king, who in contempt of the king had, throughout Scotland, falsely sought to call himself king of Scotland, and slew the king's officials in Scotland, and also as an enemy led an army against the king, by sentence of the king's court at Westminster being drawn, hanged, beheaded, his entrails burned, and his body quartered, whose four parts were dispatched to the four principal towns of Scotland. This year, 61 shillings 10 pence.

There is much more to be said about these records, and I shall do this elsewhere in print. For the moment, however, I wish to point out the pipe roll as a new source for the trial and death of William Wallace, Scotland's pre-eminent patriot and hero.

There are three main points to be made. First, as a more or less exactly contemporary record, the pipe roll must represent the earliest account of the charges imputed to Wallace, and of the manner of his execution; it could represent a description provided to an exchequer clerk by the sheriffs themselves.

Secondly, it is remarkable that in an administrative document of this nature, Wallace's crimes and the exact manner of his execution were recorded in such detail. Similar entries occur in earlier pipe rolls, but only the bare essentials are given in order to identify the criminal and the reason for a payment. Although we already know that William Wallace was a notorious figure in English eyes, we are now led to conclude that both the nature of his crimes and the manner of his execution were so

remarkable that an exchequer clerk wanted to supply a narrative of them in the normally unembellished financial accounts.

Finally, the record of the charges against Wallace includes the otherwise unrecorded indictment that, 'in contempt of the king, he had throughout Scotland falsely sought to call himself king of Scotland'. This is a startling revelation. The 'Annals of London' are the only other source even to imply that Wallace had pretensions to kingship, telling us that, 'in the Great Hall of Westminster he was . . . crowned with laurel leaves inasmuch as it was commonly said that in past times he had claimed that he should wear a crown in that same hall'. But this is not the same as claiming to be king of Scotland. The view of the Scottish histories has always been that Wallace never sought the Scottish crown, and certainly never called himself king of Scotland – a view not otherwise contradicted in English sources.

In light of the weight of evidence in the other direction, the pipe roll may not be a credible source for the notion that Wallace in reality thought of himself as a king, or indeed sought to call himself king of Scotland. He was always scrupulous, in the very few documents in his name, to say that he acted on behalf of King John Balliol. We should nevertheless take note of the pipe roll as a source for the charges laid against Wallace. The accusation could signify English incomprehension of Wallace's role as Guardian of Scotland (probably from late 1297 to not long after the Battle of Falkirk, 22 July 1298). Wallace was, besides, not the usual material for a guardian, being a man of obscure origin who owed his position entirely to military success. An unsympathetic view 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.

One may therefore conclude that all this confirms outright what historians had only suspected before: the reason that Edward I dealt so harshly with Wallace was that, above all else, he viewed him as a pretender to the Scottish crown.

## SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

For an introduction to William Wallace in general, see Andrew Fisher, 'Wallace, Sir William (d. 1305)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28544>]. See also *The Wallace Book*, ed. E. J. Cowan (Edinburgh, 2007), and Andrew Fisher, *William Wallace* (Edinburgh, 1986). A description of Wallace's execution is given in the Westminster continuation of a chronicle kept at St Albans, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard, Rolls Series 95, 3 vols (London, 1890), III.134; another account, together with the destination of the body parts, is given in the 'Annals of London', from London, BL, MS Add. 5444, and the fragments of BL, MS Cotton Otho B. iii, in *Documents illustrative of Sir William Wallace, his Life and Times*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, Maitland Club 54 (Edinburgh, 1841), 192–3, or *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II. I. Annales Londonienses and Annales Paulini*, ed. W. Stubbs, Rolls Series 76 (London, 1882), 141–42.

For a full account of the Wardrobe in the reign of Edward I, see T. F. Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England: the Wardrobe, the Chamber and the Small Seals*, 6 vols (Manchester, 1920–33), II.1–163, esp. 10–130; and J. H. Johnson, ‘The king’s wardrobe and household’, in *The English Government at Work, 1327–36*, volume I, ed. J. F. Willard and W. A. Morris (Cambridge MA, 1940), 206–49 (221–237). A more recent overview has been provided by Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (London, 1988), 134–43. See also the essays by David Carpenter and Nick Barratt in *English Government in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Adrian Jobson (Woodbridge, 2004), 49–86.

For Sir John Seagrave, see A. J. Musson, ‘Seagrave, John, second Lord Seagrave (1256–1325)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25038>]

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