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In Search of Robert Bruce

Martin MacGregor

On a radio comedy show in 2008, the historian David Starkey indulged in one of his favourite pastimes – baiting the Scottish nation – by charging the Scots with ‘adoring failure’.¹ To find oneself on the same side of the argument as David Starkey is usually a cause for reflection, but as far as the Scottish reception of Robert Bruce is concerned, he may have a point. A degree of ambivalence or distance in our attitude to Bruce is there in modern Scotland, from the relatively measured reaction to the discovery of what were immediately assumed to be his grave and skeletal remains at Dunfermline in 1818, to present day opinion polls inviting us to choose the greatest Scot of all. In these, the successful and blue-blooded Bruce never seems to come higher than third, with Wallace and Burns – glorious failures and ‘lads o’ pairts’ who died young – invariably above him.²

As a secondary school pupil studying the ‘Scotland and England 1100-1328’ Certificate of Sixth Year Studies option in 1978-9, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* was the first book on Scottish History I ever read. G. W. S. Barrow’s study of Robert I king of Scots, first published in 1965, inspired me, gave me a vague inkling of a future career path, and left me with an enduring fascination for its primary human subject.³ In 2017 it can still lay fair claim to be the best Scottish history book ever written. That is in no sense to denigrate what Scottish historians have achieved in the intervening 50 years. It is in every sense to pay tribute to the special qualities of Barrow’s book: less the historiographical

¹ ‘Starkey in “Scotland adores failure” rant’; *The Scotsman*, 18 October 2008.

² Michael A. Penman, ‘Robert Bruce’s Bones: Reputations, Politics and Identities in Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, *International Review of Scottish Studies* 34 (2009), 7-73, at 7-8, 51-2.

³ G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (1965: 2nd edn. Edinburgh, 1976; 3^d edn. Edinburgh, 1988; 4th edn. Edinburgh, 2005). Subsequent references are to the 3^d edition.

jousting in which it engages, and which has inevitably dated, and more its ability to read the primary sources to achieve an intimate understanding of the period and its protagonists, and to communicate this in concise and memorable prose. One source of that intimacy was brought home to me in my years as an undergraduate at the University of Edinburgh, where I had the good fortune to be taught by Professor Barrow at various stages, including his final-year Special Subject on *Scotland and England, 1286-1328*. Filling much of one wall of his office was a large-scale map of Scotland, dense with place-names, and in any one class this would invariably be consulted several times. It soon became clear that Professor Barrow was able to speak so knowledgeably of these points on the map because he had been there. As the Gaelic saying has it, *bha e thall 's a chunnaic*: he had been yonder, and seen. That might serve as a commentary on the sort of history which Professor Barrow was able to write; the sort of history defined by Simon Schama as ‘the archive of the feet’.⁴ One of the hallmarks of Robert Bruce’s kingship was the intensity of his engagement with the land and sea of Scotland, which he criss-crossed over long years, in war and peace. Few if any other Scottish monarchs can have known their kingdom so well, or come into contact with as many of their subjects in the process; no other Scottish monarch, to my knowledge, has left us a charter dated at Loch Broom in wester Ross.⁵ Their first-hand experience of the country to which they dedicated themselves is one connection between Robert Bruce and his leading biographer, and one pointer as to why both succeeded so well.

Professor Barrow’s presence in the past finds one outlet in the pen portraits he drew of some of the leading actors in the story. James the Stewart is ‘cautious and devious, possessed of a recognisably “Stewart” canniness’.⁶ Robert Wishart bishop of Glasgow, has

⁴ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995), p. 24.

⁵ A.A.M. Duncan (ed.), *Regesta Regum Scottorum V: The Acts of Robert I King of Scots 1306-1329* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 297-8.

⁶ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 81.

this sentence: ‘Agile, perhaps rather plausible, fertile of ideas, Wishart was not of the stuff of which martyrs and heroes are made, though by the close of his long life he had suffered deeply in the cause of Scottish independence’.⁷ I would defy anyone to get closer to Wishart than this in as few words, or indeed in many more. Wishart famously performed homage or fealty to Edward I on six known occasions, and, one suspects, lost little sleep in the process.⁸ William Wallace’s inability to follow suit even once is what defines him most for us, yet in drawing attention to Wishart’s indefatigability – ‘again and again he bent under English pressure, but he never broke’ – Barrow points to a deeper connection between two men who we know were friends and allies.⁹ Wallace himself is ‘utterly fearless, violent but not lacking in compassion, possessed of a certain grim humour’: this last doubtless deriving from the English chronicler William Rishanger’s report of Wallace’s words to his men before the battle of Falkirk: ‘I have browghte yowe to the ryng, hoppe gef ye kunne’.¹⁰ Here Barrow seems to me to be less convincing, but perhaps in this respect he is no different from us all, in struggling to comprehend the phenomenon that was Wallace. Of Edward I, all one can say is that here there was no meeting of minds between the historian and his subject.

With Robert Bruce it was otherwise. Barrow’s portrait is the product of empathy, respect and admiration, no more so than in his book’s short concluding chapter, ‘In Search of Robert Bruce’, which gives this paper its title. Here Barrow confronts the question: how close to a temporally distant figure like Bruce can the historical sources take us? He notes that stripping away the legend is easy, ‘but clearing away the legend does not necessarily reveal the man’.¹¹ He considers, as he must, the portrait offered by Bruce’s first biographer, John

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ James Primrose, *Mediaeval Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1913), pp. 46-64.

⁹ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 82-3.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 102; Henry Thomas Riley (ed.), *Chronica Monasterii S. Albani Willelmi Rishanger* (London, 1865), p. 187. Barrow’s translation: ‘I have brought you into the ring: now see if you can dance’; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 102.

¹¹ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 312.

Barbour, the archdeacon of Aberdeen who wrote his epic Scots poem *The Bruce* in the 1370s. We are fortunate to possess Barbour in the form of a splendid modern edition produced by the late Archie Duncan, Professor of Scottish History at Glasgow from 1962 to 1993, and whose own contribution to the scholarship on Robert Bruce and the First War of Scottish Independence is as immense as that of Geoffrey Barrow.¹² Duncan and Barrow's deep knowledge of the period left them both in no doubt of the essential historicity and reliability of Barbour: in Barrow's words, 'that he must be reckoned a biographer, not a romancer'.¹³ But there is still a need to ask how far Barbour's unquestionable strength in matters of detail extends to his representation of human conduct and personality. When Barbour, uniquely, tells us that with the Scots on the retreat and vulnerable while campaigning in southern Ireland in 1317, Bruce brought his entire army to a standstill to allow a poor laundry woman to give birth, do we believe him?¹⁴ His is a work of chivalric literature, casting a romantic and optimistic glow over an era which brought death, destruction, terror and horror to Scotland, northern England and parts of Ireland. The quit claim of York of 1 March 1328, by which the young Edward III accepted English responsibility for the war, says that 'a grievous burden of wars has long afflicted the realms of Scotland and England ... killings, slaughters, crimes, destruction of churches and ills innumerable ... so often befell the inhabitants of each realm, by reason of these wars'.¹⁵ From a solely Scottish perspective, and with an eye to its intended recipient, Pope John XXII, The Declaration of Arbroath speaks of 'the deeds of cruelty, massacre, violence, pillage, arson, imprisoning prelates, burning down monasteries, robbing and killing monks and nuns, and yet other outrages without number which he [Edward I] committed against our people, sparing neither age nor sex, religion nor rank'.¹⁶

¹² A.A.M. Duncan (ed. and trans.), *John Barbour. The Bruce* (Edinburgh, 1997).

¹³ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 312.

¹⁴ Duncan, *John Barbour. The Bruce*, pp. 592-5.

¹⁵ E.L.G. Stones (ed.), *Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174-1328: some selected documents* (London, 1965; 2nd edn. Oxford, 1970), pp. 362-3.

¹⁶ James Fergusson, *The Declaration of Arbroath* (Edinburgh, 1970), pp. 6-9.

Robert Bruce lost his four brothers to the war, while his sister Mary was imprisoned, for how long we know not, in a latticed cage of timber and iron at Roxburgh Castle.¹⁷ Bruce did not die in war, but waging it broke his health at points, and may have been the primary factor, or a contributory factor, in his death. *Gesta Annalia*, a Scottish chronicle compiled around 1363, speaks of ‘his mishaps, flights, and dangers; hardships, and weariness; hunger, and thirst; watchings, and fastings; nakedness, and cold; snares, and banishment; the seizing, imprisoning, slaughter, and downfall of his near ones and – even more – dear ones (for all this had he to undergo, when overcome and routed in the beginning of his war) – no one, now living, I think, recollects, or is equal to rehearsing, all this’.¹⁸ The Declaration of Arbroath is at once more concise and vivid: ‘He, that his people and his heritage might be delivered out of the hands of our enemies, met toil and fatigue, hunger and peril, like another Maccabeus or Joshua and bore them cheerfully’.¹⁹ Yet of Barbour it cannot be said that his subject is war and the pity of war; in Barrow’s phrase, ‘he touches on the miseries, but he dwells on the splendours’.²⁰

Barrow’s estimation of Barbour’s estimation of Bruce is of ‘a man at once humane and kingly, generous and firm of purpose’.²¹ He notes the rarity of moments in the poem when the halo slips, and we see Barbour fumbling for explanations for his hero’s failings, as confirmation of Bruce’s ‘essential goodness’.²² Barrow himself had given his own verdict on Bruce’s defects in his penultimate chapter, as follows: ‘a conservatively feudal prince, an exponent of a particularly brutal and destructive form of warfare, a dynast prepared to defend his inherited claim to the throne on occasion at the expense of national unity, and use his

¹⁷ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 162.

¹⁸ William F. Skene (ed.) and Felix J.H. Skene (trans.), *John of Fordun’s Chronicle of the Scottish Nation* (Edinburgh, 1872), p. 333. For the Latin original see William F. Skene (ed.), *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum* (Edinburgh, 1871), p. 341.

¹⁹ Fergusson, *The Declaration of Arbroath*, pp. 8-9.

²⁰ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 312.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 313.

country's resources in furtherance of family aggrandizement in Ireland, an accessory, if not a principal, in a deed of plain assassination'.²³ This last, of course, is with reference to the murder of John Comyn before the high altar of the Greyfriars kirk in Dumfries on 10 February 1306: what Michael Brown has called 'the defining political act of fourteenth-century Scottish history',²⁴ and whose reverberations in truth extended far beyond 1400. It is notable that between the second edition of *Robert Bruce* in 1976 and the third edition of 1988 Barrow had deleted an item from that list: that Bruce was –and these are Barrow's words – 'a begetter of bastards'. Robert Bruce was married firstly to Isabel of Mar, who died young, and then in 1302 to Elizabeth de Burgh daughter of the earl of Ulster; and we know of five sons and daughters he had to other women.²⁵ Some of them were born in the eight years when Bruce was separated from his second wife, who was captured by the English in 1306 and confined to a manor house in Yorkshire – with two female companions who Edward I stipulated were to be 'elderly and not at all cheerful' – and then released after Bannockburn in 1314.²⁶ The point is relevant to the discussion of Bruce's appearance and medical history below, because it has sometimes been suggested that he may have suffered facial disfigurement and then death because of a sexually transmitted disease rather than the more usual explanation offered, that of leprosy.²⁷

Barrow qualified his list of Bruce's failings with one of his book's most memorable phrases: 'that the feet only seem to be made of clay if we choose to idolize the man'.²⁸ I have no wish to see Bruce as other than he was, but would suggest that there are other items in the list whose presence can be questioned. In the preface to his first edition Barrow said that the

²³ Ibid., p. 262.

²⁴ Michael Brown, *The Wars of Scotland 1214-1371* (Edinburgh, 2004), p. 200.

²⁵ Archibald H. Dunbar, *Scottish Kings: A Revised Chronology of Scottish History 1005-1625* (Edinburgh, 1906), pp. 141-2.

²⁶ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 162, 231.

²⁷ Michael Penman, *Robert the Bruce, King of the Scots* (New Haven and London, 2014), p. 304.

²⁸ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 262.

Scottish invasion of Ireland ‘was largely a digression as far as Bruce himself was concerned’, and although by 1976 he was to modify that stance in the wake of the work of Robin Frame, he made no response to the further work of Séan Duffy, and his persuasive argument that the Bruce brothers, Robert and Edward, ‘sought [a Celtic league] wholeheartedly’.²⁹ As an undergraduate student of Professor Barrow’s, this was the issue on which I saw reason to disagree most with him. One of the qualities he ascribes to Bruce is imagination, ‘which allowed him to be revolutionary in more than just the political sense’.³⁰ I would agree, but wonder if it was not in the political sense that Bruce was most revolutionary of all. Might his vision have extended to contemplate a fundamental realignment of political relationships among the constituent nations of the British archipelago, as the best means of securing Scottish sovereignty in the long term? Séan Duffy’s paper to a symposium at Trinity College Dublin in September 2015, and soon to be published, brought out how close to success the Scottish enterprise came, and that there is still more to say on Robert Bruce and Ireland.³¹

Robert Bruce was indeed an exponent of a destructive form of warfare,³² and an outstanding one at that. But that is not to say that he was a warmonger. After 1306 and his seizure of the throne, war was literally the only means available to Bruce to achieve his objectives. Before 1306 the Scots had used diplomacy, initially with great success, to try to free their kingdom and their king, John Balliol.³³ Bruce, by contrast, had no formal French support available to him until 1326, and faced entrenched Scottish opposition in addition to

²⁹ Robin Frame, ‘The Bruces in Ireland 1315-8’, *Irish Historical Studies* 19 (1974), 3-37, revised in Robin Frame, *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450* (London, 1998), pp. 71-98; Séan Duffy, ‘The Bruce Brothers and the Irish Sea World, 1306-29’, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 21 (1991), 55-86, at 85, reprinted in Séan Duffy, *Robert the Bruce’s Irish Wars: The Invasions of Ireland, 1306-1329* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 45-70, at p. 70.

³⁰ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 313.

³¹ Séan Duffy and Peter Crooks (eds), *The Irish-Scottish World in the Middle Ages: Trinity Medieval Ireland Symposium 2* (Dublin, forthcoming).

³² For the fate of the tenants of Easingwold and Huby in the Vale of York, attacked by the Scots in 1319 and 1322, see Colm McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces: Scotland, Ireland and England, 1306-28* (East Linton, 1997), p. 115.

³³ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 109-31.

an intransigent English king in Edward II, operating in close alliance with an equally intransigent papacy. For Robert Bruce the unpalatable truth was that he had to wage war to win peace. We see this in the approach he took in northern England, where major Scottish raids were invariably followed by interludes in which Bruce sought to open negotiations with Edward II, leading eventually to the 13 year truce made in 1323.³⁴ On the very night of Edward III's coronation on 1 February 1327, Bruce sent the boy-king his calling card by sending his men over the ramparts of Norham Castle in Northumberland, a prelude to a summer and autumn of sustained Scottish pressure in the region.³⁵ Fittingly, it was before the walls of Norham, where the Scots had bowed the knee to Edward I in his prime in 1291 – a failure of nerve they could never get over – that English envoys came to Bruce to open the negotiations concluded by the Treaty of Edinburgh in March 1328, which ended the war.³⁶ For Bruce, war was a surrogate for diplomacy and the means to bring peace, but he displayed his imaginative powers in using it for other ends. The northern English communities which paid protection money to buy off Robert Bruce helped him to finance the war – no small consideration given the devastated economic condition of much of his kingdom.³⁷ Most importantly of all, war was the means by which Bruce legitimised his right to the throne in the eyes of his own people and others, acting as one of the kings of Scots of old in restoring by the sword a kingdom which had been deformed and lost, to use the language of the Declaration of the Scottish Clergy in his favour in 1309.³⁸

War shed its own peculiar and penetrating light on the virtues of Robert Bruce: the courage which doubtless was always there; the patience that he had to acquire; the willingness to learn from mistakes and adapt accordingly; tactical and strategic intelligence;

³⁴ McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces*, pp. 77-8, 104-5.

³⁵ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 251-4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-8, 254-61.

³⁷ McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces*, pp. 131-40.

³⁸ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, pp. 284-5.

coolness in decision-making; born leadership. Humour may not be a quality automatically associated with the battlefield, but Bruce had his own moment at Bannockburn to rival Wallace at Falkirk when he slew Sir Henry de Bohun in single combat, and then used humour and self-deprecation to deflect the anger of his generals at the risk he had taken, as he rued the loss of his favourite battle-axe, shattered in the act of cleaving Bohun's helmet and skull.³⁹ The aftermath of Bannockburn showcased Bruce's generosity and magnanimity: returning to Edward II the shield and privy seal abandoned on a field from which he barely escaped with his life; returning the bodies of the earl of Gloucester and Sir Robert Clifford to their loved ones without condition.⁴⁰ These same qualities were again present in the Treaty of Edinburgh, in the stipulation that Scotland would pay England £20,000 sterling over three years as part of the peace.⁴¹ This has sometimes been seen as compensation for damage done to the north of England,⁴² but that is surely ruled out by Edward III's quit claim of York, issued shortly before the final treaty, by which he unambiguously accepted English responsibility for the war and all its dreadful consequences, along with Scottish independence from English overlordship, and the legitimacy of Bruce's kingship.⁴³ Already at Stanhope Park in early August of the previous year, after the Scots had run rings around a numerically superior English army and then slipped away northwards into the night, Bruce had caused the young Edward to shed tears of mortification.⁴⁴ At York on 1 March 1328, as Edward surveyed the contents of this devastating document and set his seal to it, one suspects that he may well have felt the urge to shed some more. Bruce, surely, was seeking to sweeten this bitterest of pills, and to demonstrate good faith as a means of starting to rebuild peace and

³⁹ Duncan, *John Barbour. The Bruce*, pp. 448-53; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 218.

⁴⁰ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 230-1.

⁴¹ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, pp. 336-9.

⁴² Jean Scammel, 'Robert I and the North of England', *English Historical Review* 73 (1958), 385-403, at 402.

⁴³ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, pp. 322-7.

⁴⁴ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 253.

goodwill between the kingdoms.⁴⁵ By January 1331, the monies promised had been paid in full.⁴⁶ Before 1286 and the start of it all, and for several years thereafter, the Scots had not helped their relationship with Norway by failing to honour the annuity promised when they gained the Isles from Man to Lewis by the Treaty of Perth of 1266, along with the dowry payments promised when Alexander III's daughter Margaret married the Norwegian king Eric IV in 1281.⁴⁷ In contrast, Robert I always paid on time.⁴⁸ This was a mark of his integrity, the quality without which his 'protection for payment' strategy in the north of England would have been still-born. The Scottish raids here may have been destructive, but they were also highly disciplined, and northern English communities and chroniclers developed an intriguing attitude towards Bruce: deploring what he visited upon them even as they acknowledged that here was the genuine article, a king who was protecting his people in way in which their own king manifestly was not, and who would treat them as they treated him.⁴⁹ The *Chronicle of Lanercost* is particularly revealing in this regard, describing Robert Bruce as king of Scotland as early as 1312, and saying that after Bannockburn Bruce 'was commonly called King of Scotland by all men, because he had acquired Scotland by force of arms'.⁵⁰

The *Chronicle of Lanercost* reminds us that sometimes the best insights into human character come not from those who are well-disposed towards us – Barbour in Bruce's case – but from those whose standpoints are sceptical or downright antagonistic. It is hostile English sources which are most forthcoming about Bruce's conduct after Bannockburn. It is one of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

⁴⁶ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, p. 337.

⁴⁷ Knut Helle, 'Norwegian Foreign Policy and the Maid of Norway', *Scottish Historical Review* 69 (1990), 142-56, at 145-6, 148-50, 152-4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴⁹ Herbert Maxwell (trans.), *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272-1346* (Glasgow, 1913), pp. 197, 210; c.f. *ibid.*, pp. 194-5, 199-200, 203, 205-6, 210-11, 213, 216-17, 221, 237-42; McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces*, pp. 75, 79, 138-9, 154-5.

⁵⁰ *The Chronicle of Lanercost*, pp. 197, 210.

our most astonishing sources for the period, the breathless English newsletter written in March 1306 only a few weeks after John Comyn's murder, that records for us what must surely be an authentic Bruce utterance: that if Edward I would not accede to his claim to the throne, then Bruce 'would defend himself with the longest stick that he had'.⁵¹ It was a Scot on the English side, writing a few days after Bruce's important victory at Loudon Hill in Ayrshire in May 1307, who wrote: 'I hear that Bruce never had the good will of his own followers or of the people generally so much with him as now. It appears that God is with him, for he has destroyed King Edward's power both among English and Scots'.⁵² That same sense of being confronted with someone more than flesh and blood, someone irresistible, is present in letters written by two other Scottish opponents, the earl of Ross and the lord of Argyll, as Bruce bore down upon their respective territories in late 1307 and – probably – March 1308.⁵³ All these sources bear witness to how Bruce's army grew exponentially within two years – from 60 men-at-arms in early 1306 to 10 or 15, 000 by the time of the Argyll campaign⁵⁴ – and for all the likely major exaggeration of that last figure, this surge of support as Scots actively chose to join Bruce gives substance to the Declaration of the Clergy's claim in 1309 that the 'faithful people of the realm' accepted his right, and 'with him the faithful people of the realm wish to live and die'.⁵⁵

It is another hostile source that provides us with what the eighteenth-century historian Lord Hailes believed was 'the best original portrait of Robert Bruce which has been preserved to our times';⁵⁶ by which he meant a character portrait in words. This is the first-

⁵¹ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, p. 266-7.

⁵² Joseph Bain (ed.), *A Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*, 5 vols (London, 1881-1970), vol. 2, no. 1926; trans. Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 172.

⁵³ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 175, 179.

⁵⁴ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, pp. 266-7; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 179.

⁵⁵ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, p. 282-3.

⁵⁶ David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes, *Annals of Scotland from the accession of Malcolm III to the accession of the House of Stewart*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1797), vol. 2, p. 84. For the original Latin text discussed and in part translated by Lord Hailes see Thomas Rymer, *Foedera*, 17 vols (London, 1727-9), vol. 2, pp. 340-1.

hand testimony of the papal legates who came to Scotland in 1317 to try and persuade Bruce to abide by the will of Pope John XXII and accept a two-year truce between Scotland and England. An impasse had been reached because in writing to Bruce, the pope refused to address him as king of Scots. Bruce in turn refused to read anything which did not address him as king, explaining his position to the legates as follows:

Among my barons, there are many of the name of Robert Bruce, who share in the government of Scotland; these letters may possibly be addressed to some one of them; but they are not addressed to me, who am King of Scotland; I can receive no letters which are not addressed under that title, unless with the advice and approbation of my parliament. I will forthwith assemble my parliament, and with their advice return my answer ...⁵⁷

The legates then made the fatal mistake of arguing that the pope did not want to address Bruce as king in case it left him open to the charge of favouring one side over the other in the ongoing dispute between Scotland and England. Bruce's retort, as Barrow notes,⁵⁸ was unanswerable:

Since, then, my spiritual father [the pope] and my holy mother [the church] would not prejudice the cause of my adversary, by bestowing on me the appellation of King during the dependence of the controversy, they ought not to have prejudiced my cause by withdrawing that appellation from me. I am in possession of the Kingdom of Scotland; all my people call me King; and foreign Princes address me under that title; but it seems that my parents are partial to their English son. Had you presumed to present letters with such an address to any other sovereign Prince, you might, perhaps,

⁵⁷ Hailes, *Annals*, vol. 2, p. 85.

⁵⁸ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 247.

have been answered in a harsher style; but I reverence you as the messengers of the holy see'.⁵⁹

There is here, one feels, much of the real Bruce: courtesy and humour alongside uncompromising firmness and clarity of purpose, and above all else the desire to uphold the *regia dignitas*, the 'royal dignity', of the kingdom of Scotland. We can never know how much of Bruce is in the most famous document of his reign, and the most famous Scottish document of all, the Declaration of Arbroath sent by the barons and whole community of the realm of Scotland to John XXII in 1320, but in its attitude to the pope it is very close to the Bruce of 1317. Pope John is reminded that his predecessors protected the Scots, who had long been the special charge of Andrew, Peter's brother; and that 'with Him Whose vicegerent on earth you are there is neither weighing nor distinction of Jew and Greek, Scotsman or Englishman'.⁶⁰ The Declaration is rightly regarded as a masterpiece of literature and rhetoric, but overlooked by comparison is the compelling logic of its argument which places *libertas* or freedom upon a pinnacle, and judges all parties by their behaviour towards that high ideal. From the first, the argument runs, the Scots had been free. They were protected in their freedom by their kings, and by the pope. Edward I took away that freedom. Bruce restored it, and set his people free. People and king were now bound together in the maintenance of that freedom. We have now reached the famous 'deposition clause', where it is said that if Bruce reneged, and agreed to English overlordship, the Scots would 'exert ourselves at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own rights and ours, and make some other man who was well able to defend us our King',⁶¹ because the Scots fought for freedom alone, and valued freedom more than life itself. The 'deposition clause' is often seen as a precocious and indeed revolutionary contribution to political thought – in Ted

⁵⁹ Hailes, *Annals*, vol. 2, p. 85.

⁶⁰ Fergusson, *The Declaration of Arbroath*, pp. 8-9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Cowan's words, 'the first national or governmental expression, in all of Europe, of the contractual theory of monarchy which lies at the root of modern constitutionalism'.⁶² That may be so, but viewed purely in terms of the stance adopted towards Scottish freedom down to this point in the text, the 'deposition clause' is where the argument must naturally go. The other dimension of the 'deposition clause' I would highlight is its relationship to 1306 and the key act of Robert Bruce's life, his taking of the throne, in effect deposing King John Balliol in the process. Professor Barrow has noted that Balliol was never formally deposed by his subjects,⁶³ but it could be argued that by defining the primary responsibility of a king of Scots as keeping Scotland free from English overlordship – which Balliol had signally failed to do, and Bruce had conspicuously done – the 'deposition clause' effectively endorsed Bruce and deposed Balliol. It adds to the richness of the Declaration of Arbroath that a clause ostensibly subverting Bruce's authority in fact does quite the reverse. The choice was serfdom and Balliol – now in 1320 in the person of John's son Edward, since John had died in 1314 – or Bruce and the freedom to which he dedicated his kingship, and which was his greatest legacy to the Scottish nation.⁶⁴

A great strength of Professor Barrow's study is its appreciation that Robert Bruce was thoroughly conversant with Gaelic-speaking society wherever it existed, in Scotland, the Isle of Man and Ireland.⁶⁵ His mother belonged to the ruling family of the Gaelic-speaking earldom of Carrick in south-west Scotland, and Bruce and his siblings must surely have counted Gaelic as one of their spoken languages. Fosterage – the raising of children away from their own family home by foster parents, as a means of establishing or deepening social

⁶² Edward J. Cowan, *'For Freedom Alone': The Declaration of Arbroath, 1320* (East Linton, 2003), p. 62.

⁶³ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 146, 246, 291.

⁶⁴ On Edward Balliol's place in the conspiracy to overthrow King Robert in 1320, see Michael Penman, "'A fell coniuacion agayn Robert the douchty king": the Soules conspiracy of 1318-20', *Innes Review* 50 (1999), 25-57. On the case for seeing Edward Balliol as the intended subject of the 'deposition clause', see Dauvit Broun, 'Rereading the "deposition clause" in the Declaration of Arbroath': <http://www.breakingofbritain.ac.uk/blogs/feature-of-the-month/july-2012/> (accessed 10 October 2017).

⁶⁵ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 26, 316, 320.

and political ties – was a prominent Gaelic social institution. Robert’s brother Edward was fostered in Gaelic Ireland, probably with Domhnall Ó Néill, who was king of Tír Eoghain or Tyrone in Ulster from 1283 to 1325.⁶⁶ If so, it was his own foster-father who backed Edward’s bid to become king of Ireland, and who may indeed have personally inaugurated him as king in 1316. We do not know if or with whom Robert was fostered, but his earliest appearances on record, including the famous Turnberry Band of 1286, situate him within a western and predominantly Gaelic world including Carrick, Arran, Kintyre, Argyll and Ulster, and rubbing shoulders with personages including the chief of the MacDonalds and his son and heir, and the bishop of Argyll.⁶⁷ Robert’s first wife Isabel, who died before 1302, belonged to the ruling family of the earldom of Mar, to whom the Bruces were very close.⁶⁸ Then and long after, Mar was a Gaelic-speaking region, and Isabel must have been a Gaelic speaker.

From 1306 onwards, Bruce’s personal association with Gaelic Scotland, especially the western *Gáidhealtachd* or Gaelic speech zone, was a hallmark of his kingship, frequently involving direct contact with its inhabitants, or his presence there. After initial defeat, necessity drove him to pass the winter of 1306-7 as an exile from mainland Scotland, most probably in the Hebrides in the company of a key ally, ‘Christiana of the Isles’, who belonged to the ruling family of the MacRuairies, one of the most powerful of the western clans.⁶⁹ He spent the summer and autumn of 1309 ‘traversing the west from Loch Broom in the north to Dunstaffnage in Argyll’.⁷⁰ According to Barbour, the division of the Scottish army under Bruce’s personal command at Bannockburn in 1314 comprised the men of Carrick, Kintyre,

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 332.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 18, 25-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 44, 141.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 166-71.

⁷⁰ 190.

Argyll and the Isles, along with men from the ‘plane land’ or Lowlands.⁷¹ Returning from helping to launch his brother’s expedition to Ireland in 1315, Bruce had his fleet of *birlinnean* or west Highland galleys pulled under full sail across the narrow isthmus at Tarbert which separates Kintyre from Knapdale, thereby fulfilling the prophecy that whoever did so would rule all the Isles in the Scottish west, Kintyre included. As Barbour’s account brings out fully, Bruce must have known how such an act would resonate and inspire.⁷² Bruce’s choice of Cardross, near Dumbarton on the north shore of the Firth of Clyde, as the site of the house where he spent what leisure time he had in his final years of life, meant that ‘he chose to die in a strongly Gaelic district,’ bearing out ‘his love of the west’.⁷³

As king of Scots, Robert Bruce understood the immense strategic significance of the Gaelic west he knew so well: the value of its human and other resources if properly governed; the threat to national security it might present if neglected. His settlement of the west redrew the political map here as across Scotland, rewarding key allies such as the MacDonalds, MacRuairies and Campbells in return for service to the crown based upon the galley or *birlinn*.⁷⁴ A second staple of regional power was the coastal castle, and nothing is so revealing of Bruce as king and master strategist as his stance towards castles in the war’s different theatres.⁷⁵ In northern England, his aim was not to capture, occupy or build them, thereby declaring that here was no conqueror bent on annexation. Across most of Scotland he demolished the castles which had facilitated English conquest, even royal castles – but not in the west, where the likes of Dumbarton, Dunstaffnage and probably Inverlochy were left untouched, because Bruce knew that galley power depended upon its relationship to

⁷¹ Duncan, *John Barbour. The Bruce*, pp. 420-3.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 564-5; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 291-2.

⁷³ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 319-21.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 288-92.

⁷⁵ David Cornell, ‘A Kingdom Cleared of Castles: The Role of the Castle in the Campaigns of Robert Bruce’, *Scottish Historical Review* 87 (2008), 233-57.

fortresses like these.⁷⁶ The aforementioned Tarbert between Kintyre and Knapdale was the site chosen for what may have been the only royal castle built during Bruce's reign.⁷⁷ Fleets of galleys allowed for the swift transportation and deployment of the third staple of regional power: the highly trained and skilled fighting men in whom the western Scottish *Gáidhealtachd* abounded, and who for long now had found an outlet in service in Ireland, settling permanently there as professional military castes known as *galloglauch* or 'galloglass'.⁷⁸

It is well-known that the Robert Bruce who returned to the Scottish mainland in early 1307 practised a different warfare from the Robert Bruce who had departed the mainland in defeat in autumn 1306. Explanations for his abandonment of conventional medieval aristocratic warfare in favour of 'guerrilla warfare' usually have recourse to Bruce's military genius, without considering whether Gaelic warfare – characterised by speed, mobility and surprise, the avoidance of prolonged sieges and pitched battles in favour of small-scale skirmishing, and the use of the charge preceded by a missile volley and followed by hard pursuit – might not provide at least part of the answer.⁷⁹ It was a form of warfare with which he must have been familiar through upbringing, and was tailored both to the war he needed to fight, and the resources available to him. It would be a reasonable assumption that Hebridean soldiery recruited during his sojourn there was a conspicuous part of the army with which he renewed the war from early 1307 onwards. It was with soldiery from the Isles, perhaps MacDonalds in particular, that Edward Bruce took Galloway in summer 1308.⁸⁰ Barbour

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 240; Martin MacGregor, 'Warfare in Gaelic Scotland in the Later Middle Ages' in Edward M. Spiers, Jeremy A. Crang and Matthew J. Strickland (eds), *A Military History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 209-31, at p. 213.

⁷⁷ Duncan, *John Barbour. The Bruce*, p. 564; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, p. 295.

⁷⁸ Séan Duffy, *The World of the Galloglass: Kings, Warlords and Warriors in Ireland and Scotland, 1200-1600* (Dublin, 2007); Katharine Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 19, 126-8.

⁷⁹ MacGregor, 'Warfare in Gaelic Scotland', pp. 223-7.

⁸⁰ Duncan, *John Barbour. The Bruce*, p. 344; Joseph Stevenson, *Chronicon de Lanercost M.CC.I-M.CCC.XLVI*. (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 212.

does not specify the soldiery with Robert when he defeated the MacDougalls of Argyll at the battle usually located in the Pass of Brander in August 1308, but his description – of lightly armed and mobile infantry outflanking the enemy, and the use of higher ground to launch a charge consisting of a volley of arrows as a prelude to the use of the sword at close quarters, turning the enemy and instigating a bloody rout – is textbook Gaelic warfare.⁸¹ The same could hardly be said of Bannockburn, the full-scale pitched battle Bruce had avoided since 1307, and would continue to avoid after 1314. However, with the English archers routed by the Scottish horse and the tide turning, Bruce chose the moment to unleash his own, predominantly Gaelic soldiery, in a decisive charge, thus bringing all his infantry into a united front.⁸² On his campaign in northern England in 1322 Bruce's army included a substantial Gaelic contingent. The climactic Battle of Old Byland on 20 October reprised elements of Brander and Bannockburn. With the outcome finely poised, Bruce deployed his men from Argyll and the Isles to scale and seize the heights, and outflank and charge the entrenched English forces, turning the battle.⁸³

War offered a microcosm of the challenge confronting medieval and late medieval kings of Scots. As commanders-in-chief of the army of a heterogeneous kingdom, their task was to synchronise and optimise the military resources available to them. In this respect, as in others, Robert Bruce was without peer. Linguistically and in every other sense, he was a true king of all Scots. As an historian, Professor Barrow was confronted by his own version of these challenges. In the 1960s, when his book on Bruce was first published, medieval Scottish history was still understood in predominantly ethnic terms, and specifically as a clash between an older 'Celtic' Scotland on the one hand, and the rise of a 'Teutonic',

⁸¹ Duncan, *John Barbour. The Bruce*, pp. 360-4.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 484-91; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 227-8.

⁸³ *Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 247; Duncan, *John Barbour. The Bruce*, pp. 688-9; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 319-21.

‘Anglo-Norman’ or ‘feudal’ Scotland on the other.⁸⁴ Evan MacLeod Barron had applied this model to the First War of Independence by arguing that it was ‘Celtic’ Scotland that best resisted English overlordship and conquest, ‘Teutonic’ Scotland that signally failed to do so.⁸⁵ This approach to the medieval Scottish past has been increasingly questioned and found wanting by historians of the current generation, but left its inevitable mark on Barrow’s great book. His opening, scene-setting chapter analyses medieval Scotland in terms of its Celtic and anti-Celtic characteristics, and the weakest parts of the book are those in which Barrow feels compelled to address the Barron thesis.

Barrow’s own reading of medieval Scotland, perhaps owing much to his own training, gave centre-stage to feudalism, while hints of cultural stereotyping, even mild prejudice, can be traced in his references to certain Hebrideans who appealed their legal cases to Edward I as ‘malcontents’; to the Gaels in Bruce’s division at Bannockburn as ‘chafing with impatience (as one may imagine)’ to join the fray; to the Gaels at Old Byland as executing ‘a wild highland charge’, and to ‘the relative lawlessness of the west’.⁸⁶ Yet Geoffrey Barrow was far too good an historian, far too immersed in the sources, to allow his book and its human subject to fall prey to universal paradigms and glib classifications. He could present the marriage of Bruce’s father to Marjorie of Carrick as ‘indeed a marriage of Celtic with Anglo-Norman Scotland’, only to immediately point out the limitations of such a proposition. He cited various contexts in which historians had attempted to place Bruce in their attempts to understand him, including that of ‘an Anglo-Norman unsympathetic towards a conservatively kin-based Celtic-speaking society’. Using the same lexicon, Barrow reversed the polarity and returned it with interest: to him, Bruce ‘was no Anglo-Norman fish out of

⁸⁴ Matthew H. Hammond, ‘Ethnicity and the Writing of Medieval Scottish History’, *Scottish Historical Review* 85 (2006), 1-27.

⁸⁵ Evan Macleod Barron, *The Scottish War of Independence* (2nd edn, Inverness, 1934).

⁸⁶ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 57, 228, 244, 290.

water, grassed on a Celtic river bank'. But the deeper point he went on to develop was that Bruce's Scotland was 'a society too complex to allow us to project into it sharp divisions of race and culture', and that 'in his own time Bruce was unlikely to have been forced into any of these categories'.⁸⁷ One index of Bruce's horizons was the medical expertise available to him during his final illness: 'King Robert I, in appointing his two chief physicians Gille Pàdraig (Patrick) Beaton and Maino de Maineri, looked both west, to the Isles and Ireland, to classical Gaelic learning and culture, and south, to France, and to the University of Paris'.⁸⁸ Bruce's background was diverse, but Barrow is surely right to conclude that what came to matter most to him was his Gaelic inheritance. In reaching that verdict – of Bruce as 'a potentate in the immemorial mould of the western Gaidhealtachd, inured since youth to a rough country and to rough warfare by land and sea'⁸⁹ – Professor Barrow had to go against the grain of his own understanding of the trajectory of the medieval Scottish kingdom, and, perhaps his own predilections: fit comment on his quality as an historian.

No contemporary or near-contemporary words survive, not even in Barbour, to give us any clue as to what Bruce looked like, and the images we see on the seals and coinage of his reign are too stylised and formulaic to be of service in this regard. All modern attempts to recreate the face of Robert Bruce trace their origin to 17 February 1818, when workmen engaged in building a new parish church to replace its ruined predecessor, situated within the ruins of the Benedictine abbey of Dunfermline, uncovered a burial vault, 'in line with the very centre of the ancient cathedral'.⁹⁰ The medieval sources tell us that Bruce was buried at

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 25, 321-2.

⁸⁸ Caroline Proctor, 'Physician to The Bruce: Maino De Maineri in Scotland', *Scottish Historical Review* 86 (2007), 16-26; John Bannerman, *The Beatons: A Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1986 and 1998), pp. 10-11, 58-9, 82; John Bannerman, 'The residence of the king's poet', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 17 (1996), 24-35, at 33.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 321.

⁹⁰ *Report to the Right Hon. The Lord Chief Baron, and the Hon. The Barons of his Majesty's Court of Exchequer in Scotland, by the King's Remembrancer, relative to the Tomb of King Robert the Bruce, and the Cathedral Church of Dunfermline* (Edinburgh, 1821), p. 28.

Dunfermline, in the middle of the choir,⁹¹ and the immediate assumption made in 1818 was that this was Bruce's burial vault.⁹² Assumption is the appropriate word because David I king of Scots is also said to have been buried there in 1153, 'before the high altar, under the paved part of the middle of the choir'; to be followed by his grandson King Malcolm, buried on David's right in 1165, the location being described in one source as 'the customary place for the burial of kings'.⁹³ This seems also to have been the burial place of Alexander III, whose untimely death in 1286 had ultimately precipitated dynastic crisis, English overlordship, and war.⁹⁴ Nothing further was done until 5 November 1819, by which time the roof and walls of the new parish church had been completed, and the vault was reopened. The skeleton within was exhumed and examined; a cast of the skull was made in plaster of Paris; the public was allowed to pay its respects while the skeleton lay exposed; the remains were immediately reburied where they had been found, in a vault in a lead coffin filled with melted pitch, and an official report was compiled containing the images reproduced here (see Illustration 1).⁹⁵

Whose remains and skull these were is a matter of debate and probabilities rather than certainty. Various copies of the skull cast exist, including one held in Glasgow University's Hunterian Museum (see Illustration 2), and in 2016 a joint initiative between the universities of Glasgow and Liverpool John Moores culminated in the publication of a new craniofacial reconstruction, based upon the Hunterian's cast (see Illustration 3).⁹⁶ However, without the original skull, the bone was lacking from which to obtain the DNA which could then have been tested against those believed to be living descendants of Robert Bruce. It was alleged at the time of the exhumation that not all the bones were returned to the coffin for reburial, and

⁹¹ D.E.R. Watt (gen. ed.), *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, 9 vols (Aberdeen, 1987-1998), vol. 7, pp. 44-5; Dunbar, *Scottish Kings*, p. 140.

⁹² *Report by the King's Remembrancer*, p. 30.

⁹³ Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. 4, pp. 250-1, 280-1; Dunbar, *Scottish Kings*, pp. 64, 73-4.

⁹⁴ Dunbar, *Scottish Kings*, p. 99.

⁹⁵ *Report by the King's Remembrancer*, pp. 31-43.

⁹⁶ <https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/visit/exhibitions/virtualexhibitions/robertthebruce/> (accessed 5 June 2018).

various specimens claiming association with Bruce are now dispersed across Scotland and beyond. One was discovered by a student in a drawer in the Hunterian Museum in 2003, the label claiming it to be the toe-bone of Robert the Bruce. That does not inspire confidence, but as the Scotsman reported in 2004, in an article which ran under the inevitable headline, 'Toe think again', research by the Hunterian's curators linked the bone to Joseph Paton, a wealthy Dunfermline industrialist who took part in the events of 1819, and would have had access to the corpse.⁹⁷ However, obtaining DNA is a destructive process, and since no guarantee can be given that this bone fragment would emerge unscathed, the Hunterian has thus far been unable to release it for testing. It may be that advances in technology will allow the revisiting of this avenue in the future, with this or other pieces of bone. Close comparison of the several existing skull casts might be another useful part of a future research agenda.

Michael Penman, Bruce's most recent biographer, and director of a project investigating Dunfermline Abbey's role as a medieval royal mausoleum, is sceptical about the association of this vault and skull with Robert Bruce, and inclines to the view that they may rather belong to David I. Part of his argument is to suggest that it was more likely that Bruce and Queen Isabella, who had predeceased him in 1327, were buried side by side not in the middle of the choir, but in its north aisle.⁹⁸ The case for a Bruce identification might start with the fact that the sources we have locate the burial place of Bruce and his queen in the middle of the choir.⁹⁹ The historian needs to have a very good reason to justify disregarding the evidence which does exist, and advancing an alternative interpretation for which no direct evidence exists. In death no less than in life, Bruce's key objectives were to assert the legitimacy of his kingship, the independence of his kingdom, and the 'royal dignity' of Scotland. Burial before the high altar in the middle of the choir would unite King Robert with

⁹⁷ 'Toe think again ... relic of The Bruce'; *The Scotsman*, 7 March 2004.

⁹⁸ Penman, *Robert the Bruce*, p. 306.

⁹⁹ For Isabella's death and burial see Watt, *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, pp. 34-5.

the previous ruling dynasty as represented by David I, Malcolm IV and Alexander III;¹⁰⁰ and it should be remembered that in terms of much of the substance of his reign, including the language of its formal diplomatic acts, Bruce looked back to ‘the time of Lord Alexander of good memory, king of Scotland, our predecessor last deceased’, as if the Balliol years had never been.¹⁰¹ It is difficult to imagine Bruce seeing any other location within the church as befitting either his achievements, or the ‘royal dignity’ of Scotland. His tomb itself, which would have sat above the burial vault, but is long since destroyed, was the finest that contemporary Europe could offer. It was carved in a Parisian workshop from gilded white Italian marble which may have been offset by a black limestone plinth, in conscious imitation of the tombs favoured by the Capetian dynasty which ruled over medieval France (see Illustration 4).¹⁰² From the grave, Bruce continued to affirm that the kingship and kingdom of the Scots was inferior to none other in Christendom. Unable in life to take part in a crusade as he had desired, on his deathbed he asked that his heart be removed from his body and taken towards the Holy Land. In the Declaration of Arbroath the Scots barons had declared ‘how cheerfully our Lord the King and we too would go there [the Holy Land] if the King of the English would leave us in peace, He from Whom nothing is hidden well knows’.¹⁰³ In death Bruce sought to keep those words alive, and, perhaps, to keep the claims of Scotland on the conscience of John XXII. Poignantly, it was only six days after Bruce’s death on 7 June 1329 that the pope finally conceded to Scottish monarchs the rite of crowning and anointing for which they had been campaigning for over a century; proof of papal acceptance of the

¹⁰⁰ Lucinda H.S. Dean, ‘Projecting Dynastic Majesty: State Ceremony in the Reign of Robert the Bruce’, *International Review of Scottish Studies* 40 (2015), 34-60, at 44.

¹⁰¹ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 294-6; Penman, *Robert the Bruce*, p. 270; Duncan, *Regesta Regum Scottorum V*, pp. 6-7, 48, 128, 297 and *passim*.

¹⁰² Penman, *Robert the Bruce*, pp. 307-8. For the virtual reconstruction of Bruce’s tomb which featured in an exhibition at the Hunterian Museum in 2014, see

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/visit/exhibitions/virtualexhibitions/robertthebruce/> (accessed 5 June 2018).

¹⁰³ Fergusson, *The Declaration of Arbroath*, pp. 10-11.

independence of king and kingdom, and just reward for the tenacity of Bruce's papal policy.¹⁰⁴

The craniofacial reconstruction published in December 2016 is of a male of the appropriate age bracket who was buried in the right place; who had a very powerful physique consistent with the vanquisher of Sir Henry de Bohun, and bearing comparison to the super-athlete of today; who exhibits signs of tooth and facial bone loss which could be symptomatic of the disease – whatever it was – from which Bruce is said to have suffered;¹⁰⁵ and whose sternum or rib-cage had been sawn through from top to bottom, presumably to allow for the removal of the heart.¹⁰⁶ Of the leading candidates, the fuller evidence available for Bruce allows him alone to be tested against all relevant benchmarks, which individually and collectively give no grounds for ruling him out, although they do not put the matter beyond reasonable doubt. On that basis, it can be said that there is a strong probability that the image created by Professor Caroline Wilkinson and her team is the nearest we have yet come to the face of Robert Bruce.

¹⁰⁴ Stones, *Anglo-Scottish Relations*, pp. xxii, 58-9, n. 1; Brown, *The Wars of Scotland*, p. 231.

¹⁰⁵ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, pp. 322-3; Penman, *Robert the Bruce*, pp. 302-4.

¹⁰⁶ *Report by the King's Remembrancer*, p. 37.

ILLUSTRATION 1



Body of King Robert Bruce before the leaden covering was removed.



ILLUSTRATION 2



ILLUSTRATION 3



ILLUSTRATION 4

