Sir William Wallace (Scottish Gaelic: Uilleam Ùallas, pronounced ['u̯əm ˈuɬəs]; c. 1270 – 23 August 1305) was a Scottish knight who became one of the main leaders during the First War of Scottish Independence.[4]

Along with Andrew Moray, Wallace defeated an English army at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in September 1297. He was appointed Guardian of Scotland and served until his defeat at the Battle of Falkirk in July 1298. In August 1305, Wallace was captured in Robroyston, near Glasgow, and handed over to King Edward I of England, who had him hanged, drawn and quartered for high treason and crimes against English civilians.

Since his death, Wallace has obtained an iconic status far beyond his homeland. He is the protagonist of Blind Harry's 15th-century epic poem The Wallace and the subject of literary works by Sir Walter Scott and Jane Porter, and of the Academy Award-winning film Braveheart.
Resting place | London, England, in unmarked grave
Nationality | Scottish
Spouse(s) | Marion Braidfute [2] (supposed)
Relations | Alan Wallace (father)
Children | None recorded
Occupation | Military leader

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**Background**

William Wallace was a member of the lesser nobility, but little is definitely known of his family history or even his parentage. Blind Harry’s late-15th-century poem gives his father as Sir Malcolm of Elderslie; however, William’s own seal, found on a letter sent to the Hanse city of Lübeck in 1297,[5] gives his father’s name as Alan Wallace.[6][7] This Alan Wallace may be the same as the one listed in the 1296 Ragman Rolls as a crown tenant in Ayrshire, but there is no additional confirmation.[8] Blind Harry’s assertion that William was the son of Sir Malcolm of Elderslie has given rise to a tradition that William’s birthplace was at Elderslie in Renfrewshire, and this is still the view of some historians,[9] including the historical William Wallace Society itself.[10] However, William’s seal has given rise to a counterclaim of Ellerslie in Ayrshire. There is no contemporary evidence linking him with either location, although both areas had connections with the wider Wallace family.[11] Records show early members of the family as holding estates at Riccarton, Tarbolton, and Auchincruive in Kyle, and Stenton in East Lothian.[12] They were vassals of James Stewart, 5th High Steward of Scotland as their lands fell within his territory. Wallace’s brothers Malcolm and John are known from other sources.[13]

The origins of the Wallace surname and its association with southwest Scotland are also far from certain, other than the name’s being derived from the Old English *wylisc* (pronounced “wullish”), meaning “foreigner” or “Welshman”. [14] It is possible that all the Wallaces in the Clyde area were medieval immigrants from Wales, but as the term was also used for the Cumbric-speaking Strathclyde kingdom of the Celtic Britons, it seems equally likely that the surname refers to people who were seen as being “Welsh” due to their Cumbric language.[15][16]
When Wallace was growing up, King Alexander III ruled Scotland. His reign had seen a period of peace and economic stability. On 19 March 1286, however, Alexander died after falling from his horse.[17][18]

The heir to the throne was Alexander’s granddaughter, Margaret, Maid of Norway. As she was still a child and in Norway, the Scottish lords set up a government of guardians. Margaret fell ill on the voyage to Scotland and died in Orkney in late September 1290.[19] The lack of a clear heir led to a period known as the “Great Cause”, with a total of thirteen contenders laying claim to the throne. The most credible claims were John Balliol and Robert Bruce, grandfather of future king.[20]

With Scotland threatening to descend into civil war, King Edward I of England was invited in by the Scottish nobility to arbitrate. Before the process could begin, he insisted that all of the contenders recognise him as Lord Paramount of Scotland. 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 based on being senior in genealogical primogeniture even though not in proximity of blood.[21]

Edward proceeded to take steps to progressively undermine John’s authority, treating Scotland as a feudal vassal state, demanding homage be paid towards himself and military support in his war against France — even summoning King John Balliol to stand before the English court as a common plaintiff. The Scots soon tired of their deeply compromised king, and the direction of affairs was allegedly taken out of his hands by the leading men of the kingdom, who appointed a Council of Twelve —in practice, a new panel of Guardians—at Stirling in July 1295. They went on to conclude a treaty of mutual assistance with France—known in later years as the Auld Alliance.[22]

In retaliation for Scotland’s treaty with France, Edward I invaded, storming Berwick-upon-Tweed and commencing the Wars of Scottish Independence. The Scots were defeated at Dunbar and the English took Dunbar Castle on 27 April 1296.[23] Edward forced John to abdicate, which he did at Stracathro near Montrose on 10 July 1296.[24] Here the arms of Scotland were formally torn from John’s surcoat, giving him the abiding name of “Toom Tabard” (empty coat).[25] By July, Edward had instructed his officers to receive formal homage from some 1,800 Scottish nobles (many of the rest being prisoners of war at that time).[26]

Some historians believe Wallace must have had some earlier military experience in order to lead a successful military campaign in 1297. Campaigns like Edward I of England’s wars in Wales might have provided a good opportunity for a younger son of a landholder to become a mercenary soldier.[26][page needed] Wallace’s personal seal bears the archer’s insignia,[27] so he may have fought as an archer in Edward’s army.

Walter Bower states that Wallace was “a tall man with the body of a giant ... with lengthy flanks ... broad in the hips, with strong arms and legs ... with all his limbs very strong and firm”.[28] Blind Harry’s Wallace reaches seven feet.[29]

The first act definitely known to have been carried out by Wallace was his murder of William de Heselrig, the English High Sheriff of Lanark, in May 1297. He then joined with William the Hardy, Lord of Douglas, and they carried out the raid of Scone. This was one of several rebellions taking place across Scotland, including those of several Scottish nobles and Andrew Moray in the
The uprising suffered a blow when the nobles submitted to the English at Irvine in July. Wallace and Moray were not involved, and continued their rebellions. Wallace used the Ettrick Forest as a base for raiding, and attacked Wishart's palace at Ancrum. Wallace and Moray met and joined their forces, possibly at the siege of Dundee in early September.

### Battle of Stirling Bridge

Main article: [Battle of Stirling Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Stirling_Bridge)

On 11 September 1297, an army jointly led by Wallace and Andrew Moray won the [Battle of Stirling Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Stirling_Bridge). Although vastly outnumbered, the Scottish army routed the English army. John de Warenne, 6th Earl of Surrey's feudal army of 3,000 cavalry and 8,000 to 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. The infantry were sent on first, followed by heavy cavalry. The Scots' schiltron formations forced the infantry back into the advancing cavalry. A pivotal 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. Thus, the Scots won a significant victory, boosting the confidence of their army. Hugh Cressingham, Edward's treasurer in Scotland, died in the fighting and it is reputed that his body was subsequently flayed and the skin cut into small pieces as tokens of the victory. The Lanercost Chronicle records that Wallace had "a broad strip [of Cressingham's skin] ... taken from the head to the heel, to make therewith a baldrick for his sword".

After the battle, Moray and Wallace assumed the title of Guardians of the Kingdom of Scotland on behalf of King John Balliol. Moray died of wounds suffered on the battlefield sometime in late 1297.

The type of engagement conducted by Wallace was characterised by opportunistic tactics and the strategic use of terrain. This was in stark contrast to the contemporary views on chivalric warfare which were characterised by strength of arms and knightly combat.

Around November 1297, Wallace led a large-scale raid into northern England, through Northumberland and Cumberland.

In a ceremony, at the 'Kirk o' the Forest' (Selkirk), towards the end of the year, Wallace was knighted. This would have been carried out by one of three Scottish earls—Carrick, Strathern or Lennox.

### Battle of Falkirk

Main article: [Battle of Falkirk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Falkirk)

In April 1298, Edward ordered a second invasion of Scotland. Two days prior to the battle 25,781 foot soldiers were paid. More than half of them would have been Welsh. There are no clear cut sources for the presence of cavalry, but it is safe to assume that Edward had roughly 1500 horse under his command. They plundered Lothian and regained some castles, but failed to bring William Wallace to combat; the Scots shadowed the English army, intending to avoid battle until shortages of supplies and money forced Edward to withdraw, at which point...
William Wallace Statue, Aberdeen

Edward received intelligence that the Scots were encamped nearby at Falkirk, and he moved quickly to engage them in the pitched battle he had long hoped for.\[41][42]

Wallace arranged his spearmen in four schiltrons—circular, defensive hedgehog formations, probably surrounded by wooden stakes connected with ropes, to keep the infantry in formation. The English, however, employed Welsh longbowmen, who swung tactical superiority in their favour. The English proceeded to attack with cavalry and put the Scottish archers to flight. The Scottish cavalry withdrew as well, due to its inferiority to the English heavy horses. Edward's men began to attack the schiltrons, which were still able to inflict heavy casualties on the English cavalry. It remains unclear whether the infantry shooting bolts, arrows, and stones at the spearmen proved the deciding factor, although it is very likely that it was the arrows of Edward's bowmen. Gaps in the schiltrons soon appeared, and the English exploited these to crush the remaining resistance. The Scots lost many men, including John de Graham. Wallace escaped, though his military reputation suffered badly.\[41][42]

By September 1298, Wallace resigned as Guardian of Scotland in favour of Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick and future king, and John Ill Comyn, Lord of Badenoch, King John Balliol's nephew.\[43][42]

Details of Wallace's activities after this are vague, but there is some evidence that he left on a mission to the court of King Philip IV of France to plead the case for assistance in the Scottish struggle for independence. There is a surviving letter from the French king dated 7 November 1300 to his envoys in Rome demanding that they should help Sir William.\[44]\ It also suggests that Wallace may have intended to travel to Rome, although it is not known if he did.\[45]\ There is also a report from an English spy at a meeting of Scottish leaders, where they said Wallace was in France.\[46]\ By 1304 Wallace was back in Scotland, and involved in skirmishes at Happrew and Earnside.\[42]\ Capture and execution

Wallace evaded 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. (The site is commemorated by a small monument in the form of a Celtic cross.) Letters of safe conduct from Haakon V of Norway, Philip IV of France, and John Balliol, along with other documents, were found in Wallace's possession and delivered to Edward by John de Segrave.\[47]\ Wallace was transported to London, lodged in the house of William de Leyrer, then taken to Westminster Hall, where he was tried for treason and for atrocities against civilians in war, 'sparing neither age nor sex, monk nor nun.' He was crowned with a garland of oak to suggest he was the king of outlaws. He responded to the treason charge, 'I could not be a traitor to Edward, for I was never his subject.'\[48][49]\ Following the trial, on 23 August 1305, Wallace was taken from the hall to the Tower of London, then stripped naked and dragged through the city at the heels of a horse to the Elms at Smithfield.\[50]\ He was hanged, drawn and quartered—strangled by hanging, but released while he was still alive, emasculated, eviscerated and his bowels burned before him, beheaded, then cut into four parts.\[51]\ His preserved head (dipped in tar) was placed on a pike atop London Bridge. It was later joined by the heads of the brothers, John and Simon Fraser. His limbs were displayed, separately, in Newcastle, Berwick, Stirling, and Perth. A plaque unveiled 8 April 1956, stands in a wall of St. Bartholomew's Hospital near the site of Wallace's execution at Smithfield. It includes in Latin the words 'Dico tibi verum libertas optima rerum nunquam servili sub nexu vivito fili' (I tell you the truth. Freedom is what is best. Sons, never live life like slaves.), and in Gaelic 'Bas Agus Buaidh' (Death and Victory), an old Scottish battle cry.\[52]\ In 1869 the Wallace Monument was erected, very close to the site of his victory at Stirling Bridge.
The **Wallace Sword**, which supposedly belonged to Wallace, although some parts were made at least 160 years later, was held for many years in **Dumbarton Castle** and is now in the **Wallace Monument**.\(^{[53]}\)

### In popular culture

**Film**

- A well-known account of Wallace’s life is presented in the film *Braveheart* (1995), directed by and starring **Mel Gibson** as Wallace, written by **Randall Wallace**, and filmed in Scotland and Ireland. The film was criticised for inaccuracies regarding Wallace’s title, love interests, and attire.\(^{[54]}\)
- In the film *Outlaw King* (2018), **Robert the Bruce** is prompted to plan a revolt against the English after observing rioting induced by the public display of the **quartered** body of Wallace.\(^{[citation needed]}\)

**Literature**

- **Blind Harry**’s 15th-century poem has been a major influence on the legend of Wallace, including details like a wife called Marion Braidfute, and claiming that Wallace killed the Sheriff of Lanark in revenge for the killing of his wife. However, much of this poem is unsubstantiated or at variance with contemporary sources.
- In 1793 **Robert Burns** wrote the lyrics to *Scots Wha Hae* wi Wallace bled.\(^{[55]}\)
- In the early 19th century, **Walter Scott** wrote of Wallace in his short essay *Exploits and Death of William Wallace, the “Hero of Scotland”*.\(^{[56]}\)
- **Jane Porter** penned a romantic version of the Wallace legend in the historical novel *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810).\(^{[57]}\)
- In her prize-winning poem of 1819, *Wallace’s Invocation to Bruce*, **Felicia Hemans** imagines Wallace urging Bruce to continue the struggle for freedom after defeat at the **Battle of Falkirk**.
- **G. A. Henty** wrote a novel about this time period titled *In Freedom’s Cause: A Story of Wallace and Bruce* (1885). Henty, a producer of and writer for the **Boy’s Own Paper** story paper, portrays the life of William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, The Black Douglas, and others, while dovetailing the events of his novel with historical fiction.\(^{[58]}\)
- **Nigel Tranter** wrote a historical novel titled *The Wallace* (1975), “admirably free of anything to do with Braveheart”.\(^{[59]}\)
- *The Temple and the Stone* (1998), a novel by **Katherine Kurtz** and **Deborah Turner Harris**, includes a storyline creating a fictional connection between Wallace and Templar Knights.\(^{[60]}\)

**Gaming**

- Wallace is the subject and protagonist of the tutorial campaign in **realtime strategy game** *Age of Empires II*.\(^{[citation needed]}\)
- Wallace is the protagonist of the Britain campaign in **realtime strategy game** *Medieval II: Total War: Kingdoms*.\(^{[citation needed]}\)

**Beer**

- A number of beers are named for Wallace. A brewery in **Bridge of Allan**, Scotland, makes a Scottish ale named “William Wallace”, and Scottish **Maclays Brewery** had a beer called “Wallace”.\(^{[61]}\)

### See also

- **Auchenbathie Tower** – Wallace’s Knowe
- **Clan Wallace**
- **Wallace’s Heel Well** – an imprint of Wallace’s heel in stone
- **Wallace’s Well** – Robroyston, Glasgow

### Notes

1. ^ This translation is disputed.

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2. ^ http://wallace.scran.ac.uk/man_and_myth/
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### External links

- Wallace and Bruce
- The Lübeck letter
- Wallace letters to go on show
- Portraits of Sir William Wallace at the National Portrait Gallery, London

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wallace

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