ROBERT I

Robert I, or Robert the Bruce, was king of the Scots from 1306 to 1329. He is considered the greatest of all Scottish heroes.

Robert I, the eighth Robert the Bruce, was born on July 11, 1274. It is not known where he was born, although it was probably at Turnberry Castle in Ayrshire. He came from the Anglo-Norman family of Bruce; Robert's parents were the seventh Robert the Bruce and Marjory. His father, also the earl of Carrick, gave the earldom to Robert in 1292.

In 1286, King Alexander III died. He left as heir his granddaughter Queen Margaret, an infant and the daughter of the king of Norway. King Edward I of England consummated a treaty in which Margaret was to marry his son. Under the treaty, Scotland was to remain "separate, distinct, and free in itself without subjection from the realm of England." As part of that treaty, Edward wanted to maintain garrisons in some Scottish castles. Margaret, however, died on her way to Scotland. The succession was contested, with John Balliol and Robert's grandfather as the strongest claimants. Edward supported the weaker Balliol as king, and he was crowned in November 1292.

Edward demanded that Balliol answer for the unpaid bills of Alexander III. Edward also demanded that Scottish complaints against Balliol be heard in the English courts. His most controversial demand was that Balliol serve in the English Army against Philip IV of France. Balliol refused, and in October 1295, the Scots made an alliance with France.


In 1297, Robert refused to join Edward in Flanders and instead joined William Wallace's uprising while his father stayed on the side of Edward. However, there remains no evidence that Robert took part in any battles. After Wallace was defeated at the Battle of Falkirk, Robert continued with the resistance, and in December 1298, he was appointed a guardian of the realm. In 1302, however, Robert pledged fealty to Edward while others continued the revolt. It is believed that Robert did so out of fear that Edward would restore Balliol to the throne. Robert stayed in the favor of Edward until after the resistance ended and Wallace was executed.

In continuing his conflict with Balliol, Robert killed Balliol's nephew, John Comyn, in Greyfriar's Kirk at Dumfries on February 10, 1306 during a meeting between the two surviving claimants to the Scottish throne. The murder of Comyn, however, got Robert excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

Nonetheless, on March 25, 1306, Isabella, the countess of Buchan, crowned him king of Scotland at Scone. Edward responded by sending a large army that defeated Robert at the Battle of Methven on June 19. Robert fled and spent a year as an outlaw; he sought shelter on Rachrine Island, on the north coast of Antrim.
After a year of English domination, during which two of his brothers were killed, Robert emerged from hiding. He returned to Arran and then to Carrick. With the help of his chief lieutenant, Sir James Douglas, he attacked the English and won the Battle of London on May 10, 1307.

Unlike his father, English king Edward II did not want to be involved in Scottish affairs. Edward II's withdrawal allowed Robert to consolidate his control over Scotland in a successful campaign against the Comyns and their allies.

In 1309, the king of France recognized Robert as the sole ruler of Scotland. The Scottish clergy recognized him as the king of Scotland the following year, despite his excommunication. In 1311, Robert began a campaign against the English garrisons in Scotland, except for Stirling. In 1312, the king of Norway ceded the Hebrides to him. Robert then raided northern England during 1312-1314.

In response, Edward sent a large army north to Scotland. Robert defeated the larger army of Edward II at the Battle of Bannockburn on June 24, 1314. The victory freed Scotland from British control. Robert was able to subdue the Hebrides in 1316, and in 1317, he invaded Ireland, where his brother Edward had been crowned king. In 1322, Robert defended Scotland against an invasion by Edward II. He attacked Yorkshire in return.

In 1323, the pope, who had excommunicated everyone in Scotland who did not swear allegiance to Edward II, recognized Robert as the king of Scotland. Scotland became the first European nation to have territorial unity under a single king. After an appeal to the pope, Robert’s excommunication was ended.

In the spring of 1328, Robert concluded the Treaty of Northampton with English king Edward III. Under the treaty, Robert was recognized as king of Scotland, and the English overlordship of Scotland was abolished. Scotland remained independent until 1603.

Robert died on June 7, 1329, possibly of leprosy. He was buried at Dunfermline Abbey.

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Further Reading


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