

# Recent Research on the Scottish Wars of Independence

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# Four obvious ways to advance our historical knowledge and understanding

- Discover a new original document
- Discover new information in a later manuscript
- Propose a new way to read/explain an existing document
- Develop new research tools that allow you to see and use sources in different way



### **3. Propose a new way to read/explain an existing document**

**The 'deposition clause' in the  
Declaration of Arbroath**

## The ‘deposition clause’

- ‘Yet if he (King Robert) should give up what he has begun, seeking to make us or our kingdom subject to the king of England or to the English, we would strive at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own right and ours, and we would make some other man who was able to defend us our king.’

## Who wrote this/approved it?

Dated 6 April, at Arbroath, but almost certainly drafted at assembly at Newbattle in March, finalised on 6 April at Arbroath, and sealed over following weeks. It must have been approved by Robert I and his government.

## Who was the intended audience?

- Not just the pope! Also the 50+ barons who sealed it.
- Unlikely that anyone put their seal to document without getting their chaplain to tell them what it said

## **A constitutional statement?**

- Justifying replacement of John Balliol (and his heir Edward) by Robert Bruce in March 1306 [Cowan, Grant].

## **A one-off letter of a particular kind?**

- Similar letters to pope by barons explain that they will not allow their king to obey pope [Simpson]

## A constitutional statement?

- Justifying replacement of John Balliol (and his heir Edward) by Robert Bruce in March 1306 (Cowan, Grant).

**Robert's position as king is justified elsewhere in text**

## A one-off letter of a particular kind?

- Similar letters to pope by barons explain that they will not allow their king to obey pope (Simpson)

**No other letter of this kind threatens to replace the king**

## Declaration elsewhere defines how Robert became king

- *Quem [Robertum] eciam diuina dispositio et iuxta leges et consuetudines nostra, quas usque ad mortem sustinere volumus, juris successio et debitus nostrorum omnium consensus et assensus nostrum fecerunt principem atque regem.*
- ‘Him [Robert I], too, divine providence, the succession to his right according to our laws and customs (which we shall maintain to the death), and the due consent and assent of us all, have made our prince and king.’



## Three elements to making a king

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- ‘Him [Robert I], too, **divine providence**, the **succession** to his right **according to our laws and customs** (which we shall maintain to the death), and the **due consent and assent of us all**, have made our prince and king.’

**(i) divine providence**

**(ii) succession according to our laws and custom**

**(iii) due consent and assent of us all**

## The ‘deposition clause’

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## The 'deposition clause'

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### **CLEAR MESSAGE**

**Freedom from England paramount:**

**this overrides constitution – law of succession + previous assent and consent would count for nothing**

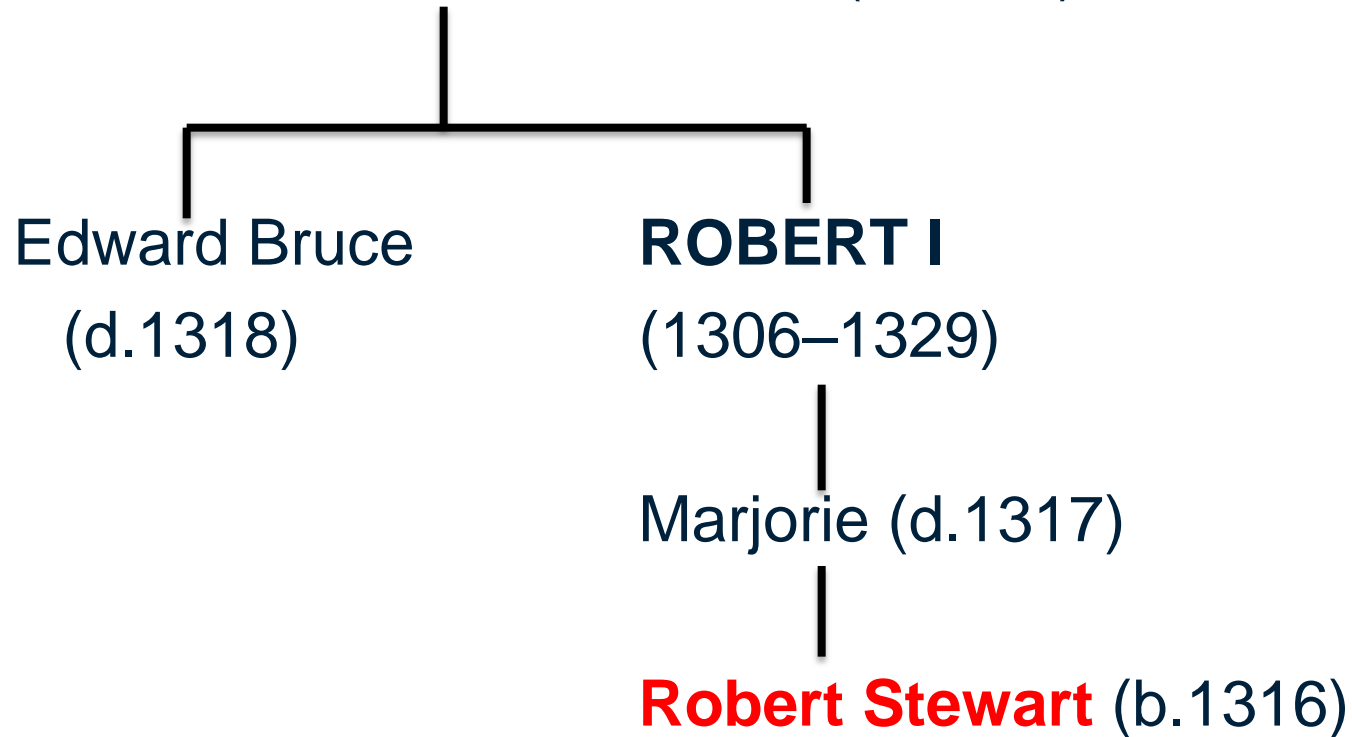
## **Puzzles (esp. if the barons were the intended audience for the ‘deposition’ clause).**

- If this was drafted by Robert and his government, why did they accept idea that he could be deposed by his barons?
- There was no chance of Robert seeking to subject himself to Edward II: why mention this?
- It seems to say that anyone could be king, as long as they can defend the realm. Why would Robert and his government encourage such a radical idea?

## Context: how secure was Robert I?

- Succession to throne a critical issue
  - Edward Bruce recognised as heir in 1315, but killed at Dundalk, 14 October 1318
  - The infant Robert Stewart (b. 1316) recognised as heir in 3 December 1318

Marjorie of Carrick : Robert Bruce (d.1304)



## Analysis: look again at the text

- ‘Yet if he (King Robert) should give up what he has begun, seeking to make us or our kingdom subject to the king of England or to the English, we would strive at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own right and ours, and we would make some other man who was able to defend us our king.’
- **1) King who submits to English will be expelled**
- **2) Another king will be made who will preserve Scottish independence**

# 1) *king who submits to the English.* What do they have in mind?

- Inconceivable that Robert I would submit to English, so *who did they have in mind?*
- Edward Balliol the obvious alternative: *his best/only hope of success would be English support*



# 1) *king who submits to the English.* What do they have in mind?

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- Edward Balliol the obvious alternative: *his best/only hope of success would be English support*
- **A real threat: ‘Soules Conspiracy’ (August 1320) was almost certainly aiming to make Edward Balliol king**

## ***2) Another king will be made who will preserve independence. Is there a specific message?***

- Is there be a reason why a successor to Robert is left vague?
  - ('we would make some other man who was able to defend us our king)'
- Robert's only relative with royal blood the 4-year-old Robert Stewart.
  - Is the Bruce party saying that, come what may, they will always find a king to lead them?

Adam of Kilconquhar : Marjorie of Carrick : Robert Bruce

(d.1304)

Thomas Randolph : daughter

**ROBERT I**

(1306–1329)

**Thomas Randolph**

earl of Moray (d.1332)

Marjorie (d.1317)

Robert Stewart (b.1316)

The most likely leader of Bruce party  
if Robert I died in 1320?

## Rereading the 'deposition' clause

- A specific political statement: aimed against Edward Balliol and his supporters?
- A defiant statement that the Bruce party will remain in charge even if there is no obvious heir: they will chose a new king?

## Insights

- 4. The rise and triumph of Robert Bruce
- Bruce government very nervous in 1320: 'deposition clause' an extreme message to anyone doubting their determination to continue, even if Robert no longer king.
- It was going beyond the constitution: should be read as political declaration, not a statement about a constitutional norm (e.g., 'popular sovereignty')

## You can read this at:

- Dauvit Broun, 'A new look at the 'deposition clause' in the Declaration of Arbroath'  
<http://www.breakingofbritain.ac.uk/blogs/feature-of-the-month/fom-july-2012/>