

***Reputations in Scottish History: King Robert the Bruce (1274-1329)***  
**by Michael Penman.**

The initial concerns of this *Reputations* study were twofold. Firstly, that it would find that Robert Bruce only existed in the shadow of his predecessor in Scotland's medieval fight against England, the purer patriot William Wallace (d. 1305). Secondly, in working its way through works of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, that it would find that Bruce's image had become effectively fossilised as a result of the acceptance and perpetuation by writers like Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) of Archdeacon John Barbour's near-contemporary poem, *The Bruce*, of the 1370s. An initial glance at the structure of most works on Bruce from the late fourteenth-century to the present day seems to justify this fear. Barbour's poem, some 14,000 lines long, takes over three-quarters of its length to follow Bruce from his seizure of the throne in 1306 through many struggles to his triumph in battle against England at Bannockburn in 1314: the remaining fifteen years of 'Good King Robert's' reign is then covered quickly by Barbour [Duncan, 1997]. This shape to the story of Bruce can, as we'll see, be found in general histories, biographies, fiction, poetry and even visual imagery to the present day.

However, a selective look at works on Bruce to c.1945 may help us tackle two important questions, the first of which our introduction has already aired. That is - can professional historians really make an impact on the popular image of an iconic national figure or does the essence of reputation remain the preserve of oral and local tradition, fiction, verse, song and the visual arts - a popular image that has even come to dictate the establishment view? And beyond this, have peculiarly Scottish circumstances and

processes of change over time coalesced to leave this hero king with a reputation which would, in another country, have taken a more vibrant form far sooner?

### **John Barbour**

Since its first publication in Edinburgh in 1571, John Barbour's *The Bruce* has been issued in some twenty subsequent editions, although eleven of these were issued before the Parliamentary Union of 1707 and only one further by 1800: in the same period to 1800, some thirty-three editions of the medieval counterpart of Barbour's *Bruce*, Blind Hary's *The Wallace* of c.1470, were printed [Brunsden, 2000, p. 88-89]. However, whereas the historical authenticity of Hary's verse on William Wallace was queried in print as incredible as early as the 1520s [Maior, 1892], it was not until the late eighteenth-century that historians and editors began to tentatively question the value of Barbour's epic as fact, even then only to continue to reproduce many of the tales it contained as 'traditionary' or 'typical' of Bruce's adventures, especially of the years 1306-14 [Innes, 1856; Skeat, 1870-1889]. The courtly romance value and antecedents of Barbour's 13,000 lines of vernacular middle Scots verse have been well discussed by modern literary commentators. Sufficient comment has also been made about the Anglo-Scottish political context of the 1370s in which Barbour's take on Bruce formed part of the emergent 'mirror of princes' tradition, giving loyal advice to rulers, using history as allegorical lesson [e.g. McDiarmid & Stevenson, 1985; Ebin, 1972].

But Barbour's most recent editors have also brought to light the likely *pre*-1370 sources which the poet must have used. This includes now-lost verse and/or chronicle lives of Bruce and his key followers. These lost works were most likely commissioned by these men themselves shortly after 1314 [Duncan, p. 14-32]. Above all, such an evolution

of sources underlines the degree to which, quite understandably, Bruce wanted his contemporaries and posterity to focus upon God's legitimation of his regime and its achievement of an independent Scottish realm at Bannockburn – hence that battle and Bruce's role therein dominate the earlier lost sources and Barbour's poem. Yet Bruce was also anxious to craft his reputation to highlight and, more importantly, to *hide* other very specific things. Thus Barbour asserts that the Bruces were the true heirs to Scotland's throne - not John Balliol who briefly succeeded in 1292; and it follows that Barbour needed to make no mention at all of either William Wallace's fight in Balliol's name or of what we will see is the crucially difficult issue for almost all other commentators of Robert Bruce's uncertain loyalties between 1297 and 1306. Barbour also exonerated Bruce's sacrilegious murder in a church of his other rival, John Comyn, as the just slaughter of a traitor. But this is no mere whitewash. The grave suffering which Bruce and his supporters then endure after his inauguration as king in 1306 also represent a series of chivalrous and moral adventures in which Bruce proves himself worthy of his prize. A long set-piece description of Bannockburn then provides Barbour's Bruce with the stage to establish his fame. The remaining fifteen years of the reign is condensed by Barbour but presents Bruce's part just as carefully: for example, blaming his brother, Edward Bruce, for the Scots' failed invasion of Ireland.

This then is a highly selective narrative. In its production Barbour has provided future readers with a reservoir of striking vignettes, most of which later commentators would insist could be verified from documentary evidence. As we shall see, well into the twentieth-century, these tableaux would long survive the challenge of scholars and remain the core of popular representations of Bruce. Here, though, we might first raise

the chicken-and-egg question of provenance for such stories. Incidents like Bruce's single-combat with an English knight at Bannockburn could be verified from (near)contemporary English chronicles. But did this and further key events also exist as traditional oral tales or ballads popular among Bruce's common and courtly subjects alike? Or were many of these tales – like the English hunt for Bruce through Galloway with bloodhounds in 1307 – best remembered in a particular locality? Or did such tales circulate orally only *after* Barbour or the now-lost sources had given them currency, perhaps even invented them or borrowed them from other literary works replete with such motifs (such as Bruce's repeated slaying of enemy groups of three)? Is it the case that many of these stories were only popularly disseminated with the advent of cheap print in early-modern Scotland? These are questions not made any easier to answer when further famous tales of Bruce were added to the Barbour repertoire.

### **The Late-Medieval Chronicles**

A number of such tales crucial to Bruce's image are certainly added to Barbour's poetic history by the late medieval Scottish chroniclers. Crucially, unlike Barbour, clerical historians like John of Fordun's anonymous Latin source of the 1380s [Skene, 1871-1872] and the continuator of this work, Abbot Walter Bower, author of the Latin *Scotichronicon* c.1440-9 [Watt, 1987-1999], could not so easily avoid those events in Bruce's life which were potentially *damaging* to his reputation. Again both Fordun's source, Bower and others clearly had access to now-lost sources commissioned about 1314-29 as well as to Barbour's poem. A large amount of courtly verse was certainly commissioned from Abbot Bernard of Arbroath, Bruce's Chancellor; at least three different poets were also called on to celebrate Bannockburn (including a speech to his

troops attributed to Bruce) and also to compose epitaphs for the king at death [Watt, vi, p. 353-377]. One of the latter - reproduced by Bower – underlines the heights to which Robert himself and his supporters wished to push his reputation as a defence against future enemies. This poem equates Bruce with Hector, Achilles, Ulysses, Arthur, Caesar, Charlemagne and Solomon. It renders almost faint the praise given to Bruce in Barbour. In conjunction with Bruce's specified funerary arrangements - his body was to be buried at the royal mausoleum, Dunfermline, while his heart was to rest in the border abbey of Melrose after it had been taken to the Holy Land - this must have been designed to awe his subjects and enemies [Simpson, 1999].

Unless, that is, Bower made up or embellished such iconic stories to his own ends. That he may well have done so is suggested by a further vignette from Bruce's career which Bower introduces. For it is in Bower that we first encounter the tale of William Wallace's dialogue with Bruce across the river Carron after the Scots' defeat at the battle of Falkirk (1298) during which, according to Bower's history, Bruce had fought for the English against Wallace's Scots (Barbour never mentioned the battle). In reply to Bruce's taunt that Wallace, a lesser knight, should seek power, Bower's Wallace rebukes the claimant king for his 'inactivity and womanish cowardice'. According to Bower:

On account of all this Robert himself was like one awakening from a deep sleep; the power of Wallace's words so entered his heart that he no longer had any thought of favouring the views of the English. Hence, as he became every day braver than he had been, he kept all these words uttered by his faithful friend...

[Watt, vi, p. 95-97]

It is known from documentary records - first scrutinized by modern historians - that Bruce was not at Falkirk in 1298 but he did resubmit to England in 1302 in fear of a Balliol revival [Barrow, 1988, p. 121-124]. But Bower gives us none of this: his Bruce

re-emerges a patriot in 1305 with his bid for the throne betrayed by Comyn *before* Wallace is executed, a direct reversal of historic events [Watt, vi, p. 313-7]. Now it is possible that Bower had to produce such a tale. Fordun's incomplete annals had left hanging fire the assertion that Bruce had fought Wallace at Falkirk: thereafter, really, Fordun followed the elements and chronology to 1329 given by Barbour, whom both Fordun and Bower acknowledged they had read [Skene, ii, 323]: the other great Scottish chronicle source, *The Original Chronicle* of Prior Andrew Wyntoun (c.1355-1422) merely refers readers to Barbour. But Bower may also have sought to forge a narrative 'mirror of princes'. By allowing his Wallace, the subject, to correct Bruce, the ruler, Bower could advocate Bruce's reform through 'good counsel' as a model for the kings whom Bower himself served in the fifteenth-century, James I and II [Brown, 2000].

However, it is also possible that Bower felt compelled to include the Carron Shore interview both because of the growing reputation since 1297 of William Wallace as a patriot against Scotland's natural enemy by 1400, England [Morton, 2001], and because of lingering public doubts about Bruce's behaviour before 1306. The suggestion that Wallace and Bruce were friends, that the first passed the torch to the second, was not merely a convenient way to gloss over black marks in Bruce's career and justify the deposition of Balliol whom Wallace had served; but the essence of this exchange at Carron Shore has become and remains an accepted assumption of Scottish nationalism and popular history.

### **Blind Hary and Early-Modern Writing**

It is, of course, Blind Hary's fabulous poem, *The Wallace*, which, after Bower, and borrowing heavily from that source and Barbour, cements in place as part of Scotland's

'usable past' this component of Bruce's reputation – as a hero brought to duty by Wallace. Hary's twentieth-century editors have persuaded us that this vernacular verse of 11,000 lines also had a 'mirror of princes' agenda. Composed c.1474-8, Wallace's just wars and his turning of Bruce according to Hary were designed as an allegory for the reform of the then King James III's anglophile policies [McDiarmid, 1968]. So in Hary's work Bruce's conversion at Carron Shore is further imagined: word of Wallace's execution is conveyed at the poem's close to a vengeful Bruce by his brother - Bruce bursts into tears but his path to 1306 and 1314 is thus inspired. It was to be the huge influence of the many editions of Hary's poem after c.1508 (some fifty by 1900 if we include all the runs of William Hamilton of Gilbertfield's anglicised version of Hary after 1722) and the growing importance of Wallace as a highly usable Scottish political icon which would ensure the perpetuation of this seminal moment in the development of Bruce's reputation [King, 1998, p. xi-xxix].

For those writing new histories after 1500, however, the figure of Bruce could not remain so clear-cut. The problem was, though, that the historical stories of Wallace and Bruce had been so authentically set by Barbour, Hary and the chroniclers that it was difficult to recraft the careers of these two icons to exactly suit rapidly changing politico-religious circumstances after c.1560. This perhaps explains why Scottish writers as diverse as John Maior, the pro-British regnal-union academic (1521), or Aberdeen humanist Hector Boece (1522), or - after the Reformation in 1560 - pro-French Bishop John Leslie or Presbyterian legitimist and tutor to James VI, George Buchanan, could all include in their *Histories* essentially the same version of the years 1286-1314 and Bruce's career [Maior, 1892, p. 193-287; Boece, 1938-41, p. 247-292; Leslie, 2 vols., 1895, i, p. 345- and ii, p. 1-14; Buchanan, 2 vols., 1827, ii, p. 386-447]. Inherited sources dictated that these writers should all uphold the Bruces' claim over Balliol's, all report the Carron Shore exchange and gloss over Bruce's movements pre-1306 and follow Barbour and Bower for achievements of Bruce *in detail* to 1314 and less detail to 1329.

However, in such works as Buchanan we do find the first hint of *divergence* between the narratives of scholarly works and the popular, folk perception of Bruce. For Buchanan does not openly assert that Wallace's words after Falkirk genuinely converted Bruce. Buchanan preferred to emphasise Bruce's responsible aristocratic removal of tyranny rather than that of the potentially socially-subversive lesser knight, Wallace. In addition, of course, pro-English/British Presbyterian writers after 1567 could only make subdued use of such an anti-English, Roman figure as Bruce [Pittock, 1991; Kidd, 1993]. This surely explains why much of the Scottish writing of the sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries failed to make convincing use of Bruce. For example, the enigmatic royalist Patrick Gordon (c.1589-1650), probably of Aberdeen, took apologist pains to play down the anti-English sentiment in his *Famous Historie of the Renown'd and Valiant Prince Robert sirnamed the Bruce...* of 1613, a decade after the union of the Crowns. Gordon's verse work adapted Barbour, Bower and Hary, opening in 1305 with the death of Wallace and trotting out all the standard Bruce tales until his conclusion at Bannockburn in an attempt to commemorate what he saw as 'the never enough praised virtues of that most admirable prince'. But Gordon's derivative work could not be comfortably used by Covenanters, Absolutists or Republicans in the mid-seventeenth century [Allan, 1993, p. 61]. In many senses, Gordon's work typifies what might be described as the vague invocation of the 'spirit' of Wallace and Bruce or their victories of 1297 and 1314 without making either figure historically specific. For the sake of space, it might be stated that very similar constraints affected the mostly poetic writing about Bruce during the periods of Restoration, Parliamentary Union and Jacobitism of the late



seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries [e.g. John Harvey's Homeric *Life of Robert Bruce* (Edinburgh, 1729)].

### **Modern Scholarship**

However, the spirit of enlightened documentary scholarship of the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries [Ash, 1988] launched a century of reassessment of Bruce's career. Lord of Session, David Dalrymple Lord Hailes, in his *Annals* of the events of 1057 to 1371, first published in Edinburgh in 1769, examined evidence for Bruce's movements before 1306 and revealed a 'capricious and desultory' record of uncertain loyalties. But Hailes offered, too, evidence that Bruce had not fought at Falkirk in 1298. Thus Hailes expressed amazement that the 'trash' story of Wallace and Bruce's exchange at Carron Shore should have 'gained credit'. He gave similar scrutiny to Bruce's justification in killing Comyn, questioning in part the established Barbour/Fordun/Bower view, but with the diffident admission that he knew his readers - reared on Barbour and Hary - would not be pleased with such 'pragmatical and dangerous' alternatives. Nonetheless, although Hailes' *Annals* described Barbour's tales of the years 1307-14 as 'romantic' and 'fabulous', he still recounted these within the established chronology to be found in Barbour and Bower: in Hailes, too, there was little or no focus on the years after Bannockburn [Hailes, 1819, ii, p. 25-26, 298-360].

Yet Hailes set the ball of scholarly debate slowly rolling, encouraged by the publication of medieval documents by Historical Clubs. Those studies which were not merely general histories of Scotland bear particular scrutiny. Whiggish Edinburgh pamphleteer, Robert Kerr, was the first to produce a prose biography of *Robert Bruce* in two volumes in 1811. He followed Hailes in criticising Bruce's actions before 1306 but,

crucially, tried to explain them within the specific ‘circumstances’ of the times. Nonetheless, there are interesting tensions within this work and its successors. Kerr was reluctant to dismiss all Barbour’s traditional tales. The same was true of Sir Patrick Tytler in the 1820s/30s – in both his *History* and *Worthies* - written at the urging of Sir Walter Scott. However, Tytler also argued that Bruce’s behaviour before 1306 – not influenced by Wallace – was not capricious, but utterly consistent to himself [Tytler, 1841, iii, p. 113-361]. Alternatively, the Reverend William Burns – in his well-received two volume *The Scottish War of Independence – its Antecedents and Effects* of 1874, which again closed with Bannockburn, cited documentary proof of Bruce’s movements in 1298 to argue that he *was* on the English side at Falkirk but his behaviour was dictated by the ‘special conditions’ of the time: nonetheless, for Burns, although there was no meeting at Carron Shore, after 1306 Bruce was inspired by Wallace:

Had there been no Wallace, there would have been no Bruce; had there been no Stirling bridge, there would have been no Bannockburn; and it may be added, humanely speaking, had there been no Bannockburn there would have been no John Knox and no Scottish Reformation.’ [Burns, 1874, ii, p. 518-521]

It was, though, a clutch of studies written at the turn of the century which proved most challenging to Bruce’s reputation. Sir Herbert Maxwell, a Conservative Member of Parliament for Galloway and a Cabinet minister – in a sorely neglected scholarly work, *Robert the Bruce– the Struggle for Independence* (1897), damned all histories of Scotland before Hailes’, refuted the value of Barbour’s tales and argued that Bruce was very much an ambitious Anglo-Norman lord with a ‘humiliating record’ of loyalty before 1306. Maxwell even hinted that Bruce may have seen Wallace executed in London [Maxwell: 1897, p. 5-12, 121-122]. These were themes taken up by Aberdeenshire crofter’s son,

scholar and lawyer, A.F. Murison, in his 1899 volume on Bruce for Edinburgh publisher Oliphant's *Famous Scots* series. Murison found Bruce before 1306 'spotted and inconstant', condemning the servile adulation - as he put it - of Barbour and subsequent writers but nonetheless concluding that thanks to Bruce's building on Wallace's foundations 'the figure of the hero still remains; Bruce completed the national deliverance' [Murison, 1899, p. 8, 25, 156]

The popular backlash to Maxwell and Murison was quite strong with critics rising to Bruce's defence in a considerable section of the press and especially in journals dedicated to political independence, or Home Rule, for Scotland - e.g. *The Thistle*. However, crucially, much of this defence of Bruce had the allied desire to defend people's champion, Wallace. Alec McMillan, Professor of Indian History and Law at King's College London, rounded on Bruce's critics in his *Vindication* (1901) but reserved his greatest ire for the suggestion that Bruce had seen Wallace executed. Arguably, such patriotic denial is representative of a potent uneasiness about Bruce's early loyalties which affected both these new scholarly treatments and the popular perception of Bruce, a universal reluctance to give up the patriotic link provided by Bower and Hary at Carron Shore.

The importance of this link had, of course, been emphatically underlined for modern Scots by that other great working-class national hero for the future, Robert Burns (1759-96). Inspired by the 'Scottish prejudice poured into [his] veins' by Hamilton's version of Hary's poem, Burns had composed his ballad, '*Robert Bruce's Address at Bannockburn*', as well as two poems entitled '*The Ghost of Bruce*', in 1793 [King, 1998, p. xiv; McIlvanney, 2002, p. 212-214]. Burns admired Bruce - he had himself pseudo-

knighted while wearing a relic said to be Bruce's helmet during a visit to Bannockburn. But the fact that Burns' incredibly popular work opens '*Scots Wha Hae wi' Wallace Bled*' confirms the popular belief that Wallace had inspired Bruce and such verse as allegories for contemporary political liberties. The potency of this collective forgetting and remembering about Bruce was further perpetuated by the more popular works of history of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries written by nonetheless historically-aware authors, very often churchmen: for example, George Grant's *Life of Robert Bruce – the Restorer of Scottish Independence*, printed in Dublin in 1849; the Reverend Alexander Low's two volume *Scottish Heroes in the Days of Wallace and Bruce* (London, 1856) or the Reverend William Graham of Trinity, Edinburgh's telling pamphlet of 1873, *Robert Bruce and John Knox*.

In sum, the questioning of Bruce's early career and reputation then underway in scholarly circles either does not seem to have penetrated works more accessible to the literate public or favoured by those more readily shaping popular opinion; or it had provoked refutation. It should come as no surprise, then, that works of a populist and fictional nature about Bruce and the Wars were even more resistant of blackening 'Bruce of Bannockburn' and, above all, as a friend of Wallace.

Here, the study took a sample of over twenty *School Readers* of c.1810-1940, many of them by Scottish publishers. The younger the audience aimed at in these works the simpler the version of the Wars depicted, really, through a series of anecdotal tableaux which could all-so-easily be lifted from Barbour, Bower, Hary and – as we'll see – Walter Scott. Very often this meant avoiding completely such difficult issues as Bruce's behaviour before 1306 but in works such as the Reverend Thomas Thompson's *History*

*of Scotland for the Use of Schools* (1849) or H.W. Meikle's *The Story of Scotland for Junior Classes* (1907), the link between Wallace and Bruce was firm: 'when Wallace was dead, it came into the heart of Bruce to try to save the country' [Meikle, 1907, ch. 19]. Most such school works then follow Barbour's vignettes of Bruce from the murder of Comyn through the trials of 1306-7 to the height of 1314, adding little of events to 1329.

Content similar to these scholastic works can also be discerned in the tradition of cheap 1d or 2d *Chapbooks* popular from the eighteenth-century on. The National Library of Scotland preserves a large sample of such frequently reprinted 'juvenile literature' on both Wallace and Bruce [e.g. NLS ABS.1.203.018]. In many of these books (with naive illustrations) Carron Shore features prominently as do the tales of Barbour and Bower up to Bannockburn. As with many of the *School Readers* these works often contain obvious messages of self-improvement, for example duty, repentance and perseverance. And, of course, as with most works in this period – including even some 'academic' histories - these also assert that Wallace and Bruce thus kept Scotland independent so that she could later enter into a union of equals with England after 1707, 'enjoying the blessings of international tranquility' in Empire [Morton, 1999, ch. 7].

However, if the message in such works about Bruce is obvious it is much more emotively felt in that genre which had the greatest influence in shaping public perceptions of this icon: popular fiction in prose, verse and drama. One of the earliest of such updates of Barbour and Hary was the most influential. Borders-born Jane Porter saw her novel, *The Scottish Chiefs*, published in 1800, and it would go through over twenty editions worldwide by c.1930. Like Hary its main hero was Wallace with Bruce's image shaped by light thrown from that figure. Porter's work underlines the difficulty many

clearly perceived in dealing with Bruce before 1306 and the wish-fulfillment that he could be shown to be a true patriot and friend of Wallace. Thus Porter's Wallace is attacked at Falkirk by the *middle* Robert Bruce, the future king's father. The younger Bruce then comes for his interview at Carron Shore and is a committed ally thereafter. The novel closes with Bruce invoking Wallace at Bannockburn, clearly influenced by Robert Burns' hit poem. In the preface to her 1835 edition, Porter remembers that such tales of Wallace and Bruce *as friends* were told to her as a child by an old neighbour woman living as a cottar, a memory similar to those shared by Walter Scott, Hugh Miller, R.L. Stevenson, Andrew Carnegie and John Muir [Ash, 1990].

The power of that image of Bruce and the Wars – passed on so intimately - was very difficult for professional historians to challenge. It had been difficult, indeed, even for a Unionist Tory like Sir Walter Scott to completely resist. Scott's anecdotal *Tales of a Grandfather* (1827) included no meeting at Carron Shore – surely to downplay the role of a potentially radical Wallace: Scott's Bruce was brought to contrition by imagining the blood of his countrymen on his hands. Scott clearly preferred Bruce, making sure he secured a cast of Bruce's skull in 1818 and also, of course, adding the tale of Bruce in the cave and the persevering spider in 1306, borrowing from the sixteenth-century chronicler of the Douglas family, Hume of Godscroft. But in some of the last of his poetry and fiction, Scott yielded some ground to pressure from his publisher for a book on Bruce and the notion of a Wallace link [Grierson, 1979, iv, p. 23, vii, p. 280, xi, p. 9]. In the novel *Castle Dangerous* (1831) – which like his poem *The Lord of the Isles* (1815) was based mostly on Barbour – Scott imagines Wallace as a supporter of Bruce's claim against the background of the events of 1305-8 [Robertson, 1894, p. lxxxix]. If this link was good

enough for Scott, it is little wonder that subsequent playwrights and novelists also obsessed about Bruce as Wallace's friend, for example, David Anderson's *King Robert Bruce or the Battle of Bannockburn* (1833) or Gabriel Alexander's five-hundred page romance *Robert Bruce – the Hero King of Scotland* (1852, written after his *Wallace – the Hero of Scotland*) or Imperialist author, G.A. Henty's *In Freedom's Cause* of 1894 and many subsequent editions.

Furthermore, there is strong evidence that this fixed need to improve Bruce by association with Wallace increased over time after 1800, especially with the growth of class consciousness and calls for electoral reform. Turning to a selection of the Public Commemorations and Monuments associated with Bruce c.1800-1945, the press material covering almost annual Electoral Reform or Home Rule meetings held on the battlefield on Bannockburn day from 1800 onwards shows that the crowds focused more upon Bruce's association with Wallace and the independence won for the people of Scotland than on the king himself. To give just one example, reporting on 1914's gathering on Bannockburn Day the *Glasgow Herald* could remark that 'it was noticeable how insistent during the day was the harking back to Wallace's fight at [Stirling] Bridge' and how songs about Wallace, not Bruce, dominated: Burns' '*Scots' Wha Hae*' was always first choice. The twentieth-century Scottish National Party's adoption of Bannockburn Day (although thrown into doubt in 2003) intensified this evocation of Wallace rather than Bruce, an association heightened from 1995 with the Oscar winning film *Braveheart's* dependence upon Hary's poem: the film itself contained a version of Bruce's conversion at Carron Shore [Edensor, 1997].

It is clear that it was Bruce's aristocratic heritage which made him second choice as a national icon in the meritocratic later nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. As Dr Richard Finlay has remarked Bruce was not a martyred 'lad o'pairs' [Finlay, 1997, p. 111-118]. This surely goes a long way, too, to explaining why monuments to Bruce trailed behind those to Wallace and why public subscription often failed to pay for such works. One would perhaps have expected the discovery of Bruce's bones at Dunfermline Abbey in February 1818 to prompt an explosion of interest in the King. Indeed, between then and the ceremonial re-interment of the remains in November 1819, Ebenezer Henderson, minister and historian of Dunfermline insists that the talk in 'newspapers, magazines and fly-sheets' was all absorbing [Henderson, 1879, p. 594-605; Jardine, 1821]. However, a search of the *Scotsman*, *Edinburgh Courant*, *Glasgow Herald*, *Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Times* for the period suggests that this may be an exaggeration for a local's hero. King George IV would not visit Dunfermline in 1822 [Mudie, 1822]. A campaign for a large statue of Bruce overlooking the Forth nearby failed to raise interest. Besides, what comment lingered in public again leant towards Wallace: *Blackwood's Magazine* [December 1819, p. 496] even ran a poetry and dialogue competition to pen the best exchanges between Wallace and Bruce at Carron Shore! Imagine the wider popular reaction, though, if Wallace's remains had been found?

Even the National Wallace Monument's foundation stone had been laid at Stirling on Bannockburn day in 1861 in front of 50,000 people who had heard Stirling's Provost remark upon the purity of Wallace above the politicking of the Wars [*Scotsman*, 25 June 1861]. Indeed the focus on Burns' song to the detriment of Bruce's own reputation was noticed in print. J.B. Mackie in his 1910 *Bruce: Patriot or Statesman*, a pamphlet for



*Dunfermline's Men of Mark* series remarked that Burns' song – translated into 'a dozen languages' – had stifled the revival of Bruce's individual image after 1818. This regret is echoed in the memoirs of millionaire industrialist and philanthropist (another 'lad o'pairs') Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) who, although he refused to donate money to a 1904 campaign for a Bruce statue because it celebrated a King, and he favoured Wallace's work for 'the people' in letters to Germany's Kaiser, admitted that in learning his Scottish history as a boy from his uncle's tales and books 'Bruce never got justice' as a hero [Carnegie, 1920, p. 18, 367].

### **Conclusion**

Further themes and periods in the formation of Bruce's reputation remain to be fully studied, including Heritage presentation, relics, portraiture, ballads, local legends or place names. But a final illustration may serve to illustrate the ambivalence and contradictions active in shaping Bruce's image. Lewis-born Agnes Mure Mackenzie, a trained historian, nationalist and Secretary of the Saltire Society, remarks in the introduction to her 1935 study, *Robert Bruce King of Scots*, that she, like Walter Scott, had to be persuaded by her publisher to attempt such a work because, despite the popularity of Barbour, Hary and Porter:

I had, like most of my generation, been bred to the conventional view of Bruce, as a treacherous and rather contemptible figure who somehow, by a violent conversion, was changed into the strong and beloved leader of a national struggle.

However, Mackenzie then adds that her examination of the original sources – and her reading of Professor Evan Barron's *The Scottish War of Independence* (1914), now caused her to find the opposite to be the case: that the charges of disloyalty leveled by the

likes of Maxwell were wrong and that: ‘the old folk-tradition was right, and that the old popular hero was a hero. Such a conclusion I know is very shocking’ [Mackenzie, 1935, p. vii-ix] Nevertheless, in 1944 Mackenzie penned a well-bought novel, *Apprentice Majesty*, which follows Bruce from 1297 to his inauguration in 1306. Yet despite the author’s earlier confidence in scholarship to exonerate Bruce she still felt compelled – like Bower, Hary, Burns and Porter before her - to forge a link between Bruce and Wallace. In her version Bruce is a patriot hamstrung by his father but whom Wallace persuades to the rightful path. This work and its well-read author are suitably emblematic of the widespread difficulty which all Scottish commentators since 1329 – and probably within Bruce’s own lifetime - seem to have had with this king’s reputation and to be part of the long-term *Scottish* processes whereby Bruce’s image has been muted and skewed.

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