

The Ragman Rolls

The background scenario to the first so-called 'Ragman's Roll' was the indeterminate situation prevailing in Scotland after the death of Alexander III. The Scottish King left no direct heir when he died in 1286; certainly, no male heir in direct succession. He did have a wee granddaughter who was the offspring of his daughter Margaret, who had died giving birth to the child, who was also called Margaret. After Alexander's death, Scotland's nobility gathered in Scone and prepared to welcome their infant Queen with pledges of loyalty. They formed a six-man Guardianship to rule on her behalf, but significantly, the composition of the Guardians excluded two men. Those were Robert Bruce, the 6th Lord of Annandale, and John Balliol; both were men who would be King.

When it became obvious that Scotland couldn't make the decision without all-out clan wars, King Edward I of England graciously offered to hear their cases and decide who had the most valid claim.

When the noblemen who were involved met with Edward at Norham-on-Tweed in 1291, Edward was not so gracious and insisted on having them sign oaths of allegiance to him, partly because he was afraid of making an unpopular choice and causing a riot among the Scots, but, as it would later turn out, to help facilitate his own subsequent nefarious behavior. This oath of allegiance document, signed by most of the noblemen present, is called the first and smaller of the Ragman Rolls.

King Edward recognized John Balliol as King of Scotland as he was the male primogeniture heir to the Crown of Scotland. This shocked many Scots because Robert the Bruce was one of King Edward's kinsmen.

The inauguration of John Balliol in 1292, over whom Edward I had great influence, led to a great deal of unrest. The newly enthroned king acknowledged King Edward of England as his feudal superior and thus sowed the seeds of his own demise. King Edward repeatedly humiliated the new king of Scotland at every opportunity.

Edward had a set of standing orders drawn up to be used for the hearing of Scottish complaints against the Scots' monarch. Under those orders, the King of Scotland was required to attend the hearings of every appeal against him, in person, before the English courts. If the English court adjudged a miscarriage of justice, then King

John was to be held *personally* liable for damages, both to the appellant and to his lord superior, King Edward himself!

This harassment came to a head in October 1293 when King John was summoned to appear in person in London to hear an appeal against him by John Macduff, younger son of Malcolm, Earl of Fife. When King John presented himself as requested, he was treated with deliberate discourtesy and made to stand at the bar like a private malefactor. After refusing to testify on the basis that he was King of Scotland and that the court had no jurisdiction in Scottish affairs, the court declared him guilty of extreme contempt, and ordered that he should not only pay all damages to claimant MacDuff, but also to hand over to King Edward I three principal castles in his Scottish realm together with their neighbourhood towns until he had purged his contempt.

In a twist of irony, King Philip the Fair of France, who had observed the arbitrary manner by which Edward had treated the Scot's King, decided to pull the same tactic, but against King Edward.

Edward, in his capacity as Duke of Aquitaine in France, owed fealty to Philip. Claiming that the English navy had attacked French ships without provocation, Philip cited Edward I to appear in person before the parliament in Paris and to there submit to the judgment of *his* lord superior, King Philip. When Edward failed to attend, King Philip seized Edward I's lands in Gascony, France as forfeit. On 24 June, 1293, Edward I of England retaliated by renouncing his homage as duke and dispatched a formal declaration of war against France.

Then Edward, in turn, in 1294 demanded that King John Balliol send Scottish troops into his war with France. Shortly thereafter, Edward summoned King John *himself* to fight. The King of Scots to do military service for the King of England? Unthinkable!

King John Balliol of Scotland rebelled, not only by refusing to supply military service to Edward, but also by making a treaty with France: should England attack France, Scotland would march on England. In return, the French promised support should Scotland be attacked.

When King Edward learned of this, he decided that the conquest of Scotland took priority over that of Gascony in France and he prepared to take on the Scots.

King John issued a national call to arms in Scotland. When Edward went to War with France in 1296, the Scots duly marched into England.

On March 30, 1296, King Edward sent an army of 30 *thousand* men north into Scotland. The first stop was Berwick-Upon-Tweed. The English forces quickly overwhelmed the Scots and over the next two days streams of blood from the massacre flowed into the River Tweed. Even though the local garrison had quickly surrendered, men, women and children were slain ... 7,500 souls in all. It was only after the local Catholic clerics pleaded with Edward to show some pity that the slaughter was stopped.

English forces then took on the Scots at the Battle of Dunbar (1296). Contrary to Hollywood, William Wallace and Andrew Moray were not supporters of Robert the Bruce, but instead were ardent supporters of King John Balliol's claim to the Throne of Scotland. Wallace and Moray led the Scots forces at Dunbar. Unfortunately, the Scots were quickly overwhelmed and capitulated.

Thereafter resistance buckled. Castle after castle fell. Most of the Scots' nobility were captured and imprisoned. After Edward had defeated the Scots' forces, he then turned his attention to Balliol.

Edward I deposed King John Balliol at Montrose Castle.

The broken and humiliated Balliol was dispatched to the Tower of London, then eventually to exile in France.

Not content to humiliate the man, King Edward plundered the country. He set about systematically stripping Scotland of all its important artifacts of Scottish sovereignty and independence, including:

- the Stone of Destiny, where Scot Kings had been inaugurated from the earliest times;
- the Scottish Crown;
- the archives of Scottish Records;
- and the Black Rood of St. Margaret. (St. Margaret (c 1045-1093), was a Saxon Princess of England, born in Hungary. She fled Hungary for Scotland, where she married Malcolm III of Canmore, King of Scotland. She is said to have brought the "Holy Rood", a fragment of Christ's cross, from Hungary to Scotland with her. It was known as the Black Rood of Scotland, likely for the black case in which it was kept.) It is interesting that the residence of the monarch in Edinburgh is Holyroodhouse, which is in the district of Holyrood, where the Scottish Parliament is also located.

Edward I of England, and now as King of Scotland, on August 28, 1296, again called together the Scots nobility, clergy, and military and asked them to swear allegiance to him as King, Lord, and Master of Scotland - and to sign another Ragman Roll.

As the noblemen signed, they affixed their wax seals to the parchment and they often attached their own ribbon to the wax. It is popularly believed that the name “Ragman Roll” came from the colourful bits of cloth and ribbons of all widths and lengths that were attached by the signatories’ seals, but the name may also have been derived from an earlier record compiled for the purposes of Papal taxation by a man called Ragimunde, whose name was corrupted to Ragman. The name “ragman roll” survives in the colloquial word “rigmarole”; often meaning bureaucratic red tape.

It was signed by most of the leading Scots of the day including Robert Bruce, the sixth Lord of Annandale, his son, the 2nd Earl of Carrick and William Wallace’s uncle, Sir Reginald de Crauford, and, perhaps most notably, the recalcitrant John Baloil. The 1296 ‘Ragman Roll’ was originally four great rolls, comprising thirty-five pieces of parchment sewn together, and containing almost 2000 signatures, making it one of the most valuable Scottish historical statistical documents, and a boon to future researchers. That original has long since disappeared, but faithful copies of both ‘Ragman Rolls’ are preserved in the Records Office in London.

The Ragman Roll, heavy taxes, and the forcing of Scotland to send her troops to support Edward's war with France, would lay the seeds of rebellion in the years to come. In Edward's efforts to claim the Kingdom and Crown of Scotland, he grossly underestimated the people of Scotland. His determination to crush the Scots people had served only to steel the Scots’ resolve.

This treatise should end here but, as many of may have already observed, I love tangents.

One of the most interesting players of the time was John III 'Red' Comyn, Lord of Badenoch and Lord of Lochaber, also known simply as the Red Comyn. He was Guardian of Scotland during the Second Interregnum 1296–1306. He is best known for having been stabbed to death by Robert the Bruce before the altar at the church of the Greyfriars at Dumfries in 1306.

The Red Comyn was among the Scots captured in the English victory at the Battle of Dunbar, and he was subsequently imprisoned in the Tower of London. Later in

1296, after all resistance in Scotland had been overcome by Edward, the Red Comyn was released, on condition that he fight with the English army in Flanders against the French. He was among a number of Scots who deserted the English after the 1297 uprisings of William Wallace and the defeat of the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge.

After William Wallace resigned the Guardianship of Scotland, the Red Comyn was appointed in his place, albeit as joint Guardian with Robert Bruce the younger. At a meeting of prominent Scots at Peebles in August 1299 an argument erupted, during which the Red Comyn is said by an English spy to have seized Bruce by the throat. In order to act as a mediator, William Lamberton, the Bishop of St. Andrews, was appointed as a third Guardian.

By 1306, there were only two credible candidates to become King of Scotland, Robert Bruce himself, and John III 'Red' Comyn. On 10 February 1306 the two met to discuss their differences in the safe and neutral Church of the Grey Friars in Dumfries. It seems they disagreed, either because both wanted the Scottish crown for themselves, or because Comyn refused to lend his support to Bruce's planned uprising against the English. Robert Bruce drew a dagger and stabbed Comyn, right in front of the high altar of the church.

I am way off the topic of the Rolls, but this whole presentation would seem to have no point for a Burns Club meeting, except for this interesting tidbit:

In 1788, Robert Burns acquired Ellisland. Ellisland had once belonged to the family of John "Red" Comyn. On the estate, there were several farms, two of which were rich high ground suited to growing wheat, and the third, Ellisland, not nearly so rich. Burns made a poet's choice, not a farmer's. It is clearly the most beautifully situated, with the river Nith flowing through its banks which are crowned by the richest woodland. Dalswinton with its deep groves stands on the other side of the stream. Friars Carse is just a little way to the north-west. The farmhouse now, as it did then, overlooks the river. Arguably, this location is the prettiest, most romantic, and striking piece of scenery, which has any permanent connection with the history of Burns.

To conclude this presentation then, it is only fitting that I read a poem that Burns wrote to recognize this age of Scottish history and to rally behind his predecessor in title to Ellisland. The song is a call to arms and plays up not only the monarchical disputes behind the conflicts, but also the divisions between Scotland and England.

It is called: Johnie Lad, Cock Up Your Beaver:

When first my brave Johnie lad came to this town,

He had a blue bonnet that wanted the crown,

But now he has gotten a hat and a feather -

Hey, brave Johnie lad, cock up your beaver!

Cock up your beaver, and cock it fu' sprush!

We'll over the border and gie them a brush:

There's somebody there we'll teach better behavior -

Hey, brave Johnie lad, cock up your beaver!

Prepared and Presented by Jim Hope-Ross for the Calgary Burns Club

February 13, 2018