



DG L NEWS

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The Declaration of Arbroath, 1320

'It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom - for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself.'

Extract from the Declaration of Arbroath, 1320.

The Declaration of Arbroath is without doubt the most famous document in Scottish history. Like the American Declaration of Independence, which is partially based on it, it is seen by many as the founding document of the Scottish nation. It was drafted on the 6th April 1320 - a day the United States of America has declared to be Tartan Day.

The Declaration is a Latin letter which was sent to Pope John XXII in April/May 1320. It was most likely drafted in the scriptorium of Arbroath Abbey by Abbot Bernard on behalf of the nobles and barons of Scotland. It was one of three letters sent to the Pope in Avignon, the other two being from King Robert Bruce himself and from four Scottish bishops, attempting to abate papal hostility. The document received the seals of several Scottish barons and it then was taken to the papal court at Avignon in France by Sir Adam Gordon.

Cunning Diplomatic Letter or Constitutional Document?

There is considerable debate over the Declaration's significance. For some it is simply a diplomatic document; while others see it as a radical movement in western constitutional thought. It could be viewed as a cunning diplomatic ploy by the Scottish barons to explain and justify why they were still fighting their neighbours when all Christian princes were supposed to be united in crusade against the Muslims. All this, just at the point when they were about to retake Berwick: Scotland's most prosperous medieval town. As an explanation, it failed to convince the Pope to lift his sentence of excommunication on Scotland.

Others analyse what the Declaration of Arbroath actually says. The Scots clergy had produced not only one of the most eloquent expressions of nationhood, but the first expression of the idea of a contractual monarchy. Here is the critical passage in question:

'Yet if he (Bruce) should give up what he has begun, and agree to make us or our kingdom subject to the King of England or the English, we should exert ourselves at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own rights and ours, and make some other man who was well able to defend us our King; for, as long as but a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any conditions be brought under English rule. It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom - for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself.'

Extract from the Declaration of Arbroath

The threat to drive Bruce out if he ever sold Scotland to English rule was a fantastic bluff. There was nobody else to take his place. The point is that the nobles and clergy are not basing their argument to the Pope on the traditional notion of the Divine Rights of Kings. Bruce is King first and foremost because the nation chose him, not God, and the nation would just as easily choose another if they were betrayed by the King. The explanation also neatly covers the fact that Bruce had usurped John Balliol's rightful kingship in the first place.

In spite of all possible motivations for its creation, the Declaration of Arbroath, under the extraordinary circumstances of the Wars of Independence, was a prototype of contractual kingship in Europe.



This Month's Law:

Law 227: A Past Master of a Lodge does not rank as such in any other Lodge of which he is a member, but not a Past Master. He may be received in the last mentioned Lodge as a visiting Past Master only if he comes clothed as such.

Masonic Etiquette:

Applause: It is not accepted practice in Lodges operating under the Grand Lodge of Scotland to applaud any working performed on the floor. This practice should be discontinued as it not only detracts from the solemnity of the ceremony but can also dishearten the Brother who is attempting a working for the first time and is somewhat nervous and does not receive the same accolade as the more experienced among us.

Your comments and suggestions would be appreciated.

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The Declaration of Arbroath (English Translation)

To the most Holy Father and Lord in Christ, the Lord John, by divine providence Supreme Pontiff of the Holy Roman and Universal Church, his humble and devout sons Duncan, Earl of Fife, Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, Lord of Man and of Annandale, Patrick Dunbar, Earl of March, Malise, Earl of Strathearn, Malcolm, Earl of Lennox, William, Earl of Ross, Magnus, Earl of Caithness and Orkney, and William, Earl of Sutherland; Walter, Steward of Scotland, William Soules, Butler of Scotland, James, Lord of Douglas, Roger Mowbray, David, Lord of Brechin, David Graham, Ingram Umfraville, John Menteith, guardian of the earldom of Menteith, Alexander Fraser, Gilbert Hay, Constable of Scotland, Robert Keith, Marischal of Scotland, Henry St Clair, John Graham, David Lindsay, William Oliphant, Patrick Graham, John Fenton, William Abernethy, David Wemyss, William Musher, Fergus of Ardrossan, Eustace Maxwell, William Ramsay, William Mowat, Alan Murray, Donald Campbell, John Cameron, Reginald Cheyne, Alexander Seton, Andrew Leslie, and Alexander Straiton, and the other barons and freeholders and the whole community of the realm of Scotland send all manner of filial reverence, with devout kisses of his blessed feet.

Most Holy Father and Lord, we know and from the chronicles and books of the ancients we find that among other famous nations our own, the Scots, has been graced with widespread renown. They journeyed from Greater Scythia by way of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Pillars of Hercules, and dwelt for a long course of time in Spain among the most savage tribes, but nowhere could they be subdued by any race, however barbarous. Thence they came, twelve hundred years after the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea, to their home in the west where they still live today. The Britons they first drove out, the Picts they utterly destroyed, and, even though very often assailed by the Norwegians, the Danes and the English, they took possession of that home with many victories and untold efforts; and, as the historians of old time bear witness, they have held it free of all bondage ever since. In their kingdom there have reigned one hundred and thirteen kings of their own royal stock, the line unbroken a single foreigner. The high qualities and deserts of these people were they not otherwise manifest, gain glory enough from this: that the King of kings and Lord of lords, our Lord Jesus Christ, after His Passion and Resurrection, called them, even though settled in the uttermost parts of the earth, almost the first to His most holy faith. Nor would He have them confirmed in that faith by merely anyone but by the first of His Apostles -- by calling, though second or third in rank -- the most gentle Saint Andrew, the Blessed Peter's brother, and desired him to keep them under his protection as their patron forever.

The Most Holy Fathers your predecessors gave careful heed to these things and bestowed many favours and numerous privileges on this same kingdom and people, as being the special charge of the Blessed Peter's brother. Thus our nation under their protection did indeed live in freedom and peace up to the time when that mighty prince the King of the English, Edward, the father of the one who reigns today, when our kingdom had no head and our people harboured no malice or treachery and were then unused to wars or invasions, came in the guise of a friend and ally to harass them as an enemy. The deeds of cruelty, massacre, violence, pillage, arson, imprisoning prelates, burning down monasteries, robbing and killing monks and nuns, and yet other outrages without number which he committed against our people, sparing neither age nor sex, religion nor rank, no one could describe nor fully imagine unless he had seen them with his own eyes.

But from these countless evils we have been set free, by the help of Him Who though He afflicts yet heals and restores, by our most tireless Prince, King and Lord, the Lord Robert. He, that his people and his heritage might be delivered out of the hands of our enemies, met toil and fatigue, hunger and peril, like another Macabaeus or Joshua and bore them cheerfully. Him, too, divine providence, his right of succession according to or 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. To him, as to the man by whom salvation has been wrought unto our people, we are bound both by law and by his merits that our freedom may be still maintained, and by him, come what may, we mean to stand.

Yet if he should give up what he has begun, and agree to make us or our kingdom subject to the King of England or the English, we should exert ourselves at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own rights and ours, and make some other man who was well able to defend us our King; for, as long as but a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any conditions be brought under English rule. It is in truth not for glory, nor riches,

nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom -- for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself.

Therefore it is, Reverend Father and Lord, that we beseech your Holiness with our most earnest prayers and suppliant hearts, inasmuch as you will in your sincerity and goodness consider all this, that, since with Him Whose Vice-Regent on earth you are there is neither weighing nor distinction of Jew and Greek, Scotsman or Englishman, you will look with the eyes of a father on the troubles and privation brought by the English upon us and upon the Church of God. May it please you to admonish and exhort the King of the English, who ought to be satisfied with what belongs to him since England used once to be enough for seven kings or more, to leave us Scots in peace, who live in this poor little Scotland, beyond which there is no dwelling-place at all, and covet nothing but our own. We are sincerely willing to do anything for him, having regard to our condition that we can, to win peace for ourselves.

This truly concerns you, Holy Father, since you see the savagery of the heathen raging against the Christians, as the sins of Christians have indeed deserved, and the frontiers of Christendom being pressed inward every day; and how much it will tarnish your Holiness's memory if (which God forbid) the Church suffers eclipse or scandal in any branch of it during your time, you must perceive. Then rouse the Christian princes who for false reasons pretend that they cannot go to help of the Holy Land because of wars they have on hand with their neighbours. The real reason that prevents them is that in making war on their smaller neighbours they find quicker profit and weaker resistance. But how cheerfully our Lord the King and we too would go there if the King of the English would leave us in peace, He from Whom nothing is hidden well knows; and we profess and declare it to you as the Vicar of Christ and to all Christendom.

But if your Holiness puts too much faith in the tales the English tell and will not give sincere belief to all this, nor refrain from favouring them to our prejudice, then the slaughter of bodies, the perdition of souls, and all the other misfortunes that will follow, inflicted by them on us and by us on them, will, we believe, be surely laid by the Most High to your charge.

To conclude, we are and shall ever be, as far as duty calls us, ready to do your will in all things, as obedient sons to you as His Vicar; and to Him as the Supreme King and Judge we commit the maintenance of our cause, csating our cares upon Him and firmly trusting that He will inspire us with courage and bring our enemies to nought.

May the Most High preserve you to his Holy Church in holiness and health and grant you length of days.

Given at the monastery of Arbroath in Scotland on the sixth day of the month of April in the year of grace thirteen hundred and twenty and the fifteenth year of the reign of our King aforesaid.

Endorsed: Letter directed to our Lord the Supreme Pontiff by the community of Scotland.

Additional names written on some of the seal tags: Alexander Lamberton, Edward Keith, John Inchmartin, Thomas Menzies, John Durrant, Thomas Morham (and one illegible).

For further information regarding this article, contact Century Lodge of Research.

September Installations:

Nelspruit United 1402 – Saturday 2 nd.
Golden Thistle 744 – Tuesday 5 th.
St. John in the South 747 – Saturday 9 th.
Welcome-Rendezvous 1286 – Saturday 16 th.
St Andrew 954 – Tuesday 19 th.
Unity 1006 – Thursday 21 st.
Peglerae 1749 – Saturday 23 rd.