

William Wallace Working Group Meeting Notes 7 March 2011

Attendees

Mr George MacKenzie (National Archives of Scotland)
Dr Alan Borthwick (National Archives of Scotland)
Dr Alexander Grant (Reader in Medieval British History, Lancaster University)
Dr Fiona Watson (independent researcher)
Professor Marc Smith (Professor of Palaeography at l'Ecole Nationale des Chartes, Paris)
Dr James Ross (The National Archives)
Dr Sean Cunningham (The National Archives)
Ms Jackie Marfleet (The National Archives)

Apologies: Professor Nicholas Vincent (Professor of Medieval History, University of East Anglia) (Professor Vincent contributed to the meeting by a telephone link)

The terms of reference for the working group were:

- **To establish provenance and original intent of the 'Wallace document' (SC 1/30/81)**

Context for the letter

This was outlined by Drs Grant and Watson. The long-term basis was the Anglo-French war that began in 1294, and the ensuing Franco-Scottish alliance against England of 1295; that led to Anglo-Scottish warfare and Edward I's forcible removal of King John (Balliol) in 1296. Thereafter, the Scots needed the French king, Philip IV, to maintain his promise not to make peace with England unless Scotland was included, and his implied threat of military help for the Scots if necessary. The papacy was involved too. Boniface VIII was attempting to broker a peace between England and France (with an eye to a crusade), and in June 1299 his mediation led to an Anglo-French truce (but not a peace), and shortly after his bull *Scimus fili* reasserted the claim to papal superiority over Scotland. One consequence of the truce was Edward I's release of Balliol into papal custody (within what is now eastern France) in July 1299. That was a catalyst for what happened next.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, the resistance, under Wallace and others, consistently fought for King John's restoration. But there were internal divisions, especially between Wallace and the powerful Comyns (who had been made to serve Edward I against France in 1297, and, on their return, were bitterly jealous of Wallace). After the defeat at Falkirk in 1298, Wallace lost his leadership of the resistance cause, but the Comyns were forced to share the Guardianship with their arch-rival, Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick. Then, by mid 1299, Bishop Lamberton of St Andrews was promoted to join them; Lamberton had recently returned from Rome *via* Paris, and Wallace's journey to France (which infuriated the Comyns) may have been his idea.

French financial accounts show that Wallace and several other Scottish knights (all with Balliol links) were in France from November 1299, and received remarkable amounts of money – though we cannot be sure what it was used for. One of Wallace's aims was no

doubt to make contact with Balliol (and so possibly to outflank the Comyns); another was presumably to encourage Philip IV's support for Scotland. There was English concern that they would return with French military support, and though it is most unlikely that Philip IV would have ordered that, the threat (and the more realistic possibility of new attacks on English-held Gascony) did put effective pressure on Edward I. This made Edward I agree a truce with Scotland at the end of October 1300 – a week before the 'Wallace document' was issued.

That timing suggests the start of a new stage in Wallace's mission – but the specific nature of his business at the papal curia is not known. It probably concerned John Balliol, however – his restoration, or perhaps transfer to French custody (as Philip IV achieved in 1301 by in effect kidnapping him). That may be indicated by the fact that Wallace had a safe conduct from John Balliol (and others from the French and Norwegian kings) in his possession when he was captured in 1305. This must date from the time of his French mission, since he cannot have been directly in touch with the Scottish king at any other time, and its purpose was presumably to assist him when travelling *outside* France. However, it must be stressed that those safe conducts no longer exist (and therefore their actual dates of issue are unknown) – and that the document currently under consideration is something entirely different.

Contemporary documents in TNA

The meeting considered a small portfolio circulated of images of documents in the TNA Exchequer, Chancery and Special Collections classes. They included original letters of Philip IV, English transcripts of his letters, and some Scottish documents mostly sent to Edward I. They gave a representative sample of the English, Scottish and French hands to be found in TNA's collections from this period.

While it is very common for diplomatic correspondence to refer to the risk of letters being stolen or lost en route, few examples of contemporary intercepts had so far been found. The Thomas Turberville treason case, 1295, provides an example, with a reference to Scottish letters from France being intercepted, as well as letters of Philip IV being transcribed to demonstrate the treason. (The Scottish letters mentioned may not necessarily be of 1295: the evidence is open to differing interpretations.) There are many examples of letters sent to Edward I by spies or informers giving him news of affairs in Scotland and on the continent.

The letter of recommendation

The meeting noted that it would be best to refer to the document as a letter of recommendation. As stated at the August 2010 meeting, the letter could be styled a *mandement* or *lettre missive*. The meeting confirmed that it is certainly not a safe conduct as has often been asserted. The meeting agreed that it is dated at Pierrefonds, in Picardy, on the Monday after the feast of All Saints, to be construed as 7 November 1300. It was noted that the phrase in the letter "in hiis que apud eum habuerit expedire" would imply that Wallace was expected to attend on the pope to carry out his business.

The meeting considered whether Wallace would necessarily have possessed the letter of recommendation. It was noted that Wallace was not named as "bearer of the presents" in the letter: if he had been, then there would have been no doubt that he would have been expected to carry the letter himself. As he is not named as bearer, then there must be at least some doubt that he would have been the bearer, as another

messenger could have borne it. The meeting concluded that it can be stated as likely that the letter was in his possession at some point.

The meeting further concluded that they would have expected a letter of recommendation to have been handed over to the addressee(s) if the person(s) being recommended had actually made the journey to the expected destination, and that the addressee(s) would have kept the letter. As the Wallace letter did not appear to have been kept by the addressee(s), given where it is now preserved, it would be reasonable to assume that Wallace had either not travelled to Rome, or, if he had, he had made no contact with the (unnamed) French agents there to whom the letter was addressed. It was noted that there is no other evidence known of Wallace having been at Rome.

Outcome of group's deliberations

The group agreed first to produce a short note of their main conclusions to form a press release (see <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/03/16172138>). The second and final product would be a longer meeting note, which is this document. Both the press release and the meeting note would be posted on the NAS and TNA web-sites.

The group agreed that, after confirming the meeting note, its business was now concluded and it would not meet again.

Other work which might be undertaken later

The meeting noted that other research could be done in French archives about the activities of Wallace and/or the other Scottish knights who are known to have been in France in the late 1290s, which may help to elucidate further the general context in which the Wallace letter was written. This work was beyond the remit of this group, however.

Dr Grant suggested that, assuming that a formal article suitable for publication in a learned journal could be drafted, it should be considered for 2013, given commitments that many group members face at present. This would be taken forward as and when practicable.