

The Declaration of Arbroath, 1320

A declaration sent to the Pope by the nobles of Scotland. Translated from the original Latin:

To our most Holy Father in Christ, and our Lord, John, by Divine Providence chief Bishop of the most holy Roman and Universal Church, your humble and devoted sons: Duncan Earl of Fife, ... [38 other nobles] ... , and the rest of the barons and freeholders, and whole community, of the kingdom of Scotland, send all manner of filial reverence, with devout kisses of your blessed and happy feet.

Most holy Father and Lord, we know and gather from ancient acts and records, that in every famous nation this of Scotland has been celebrated with many praises: This nation having come from Scythia the greater, through the Tuscan Sea and the Pillars of Hercules, and having for many ages taken its residence in Spain in the midst of a most fierce people, could never be brought in subjection by any people, no matter how barbarous: And having removed from these parts, above 1,200 years after the coming of the Israelites out of Egypt, did by many victories and much toil obtain these parts in the West which they still possess, having expelled the Britons and entirely rooted out the Picts, despite the frequent assaults and invasions they met with from the Norwegians, Danes, and English; And these parts and possessions they have always retained free from all manner of servitude and subjection, as ancient histories do witness. This kingdom has been governed by an uninterrupted succession of 113 kings, all of our own native and royal stock, without the intervention of any foreigner.

The true nobility and merits of those princes and people are very remarkable, from this one consideration (even if there were no other evidence for it): that the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ, after His Passion and Resurrection, honoured them as it were the first (though living in the uttermost ends of the earth) with a call to His most Holy Faith: Neither would our Saviour have them confirmed in the Christian Faith by any other instrument than His own first Apostle in calling (though the second or third in rank) St Andrew, the most worthy brother of the Blessed Peter, whom He would always have to be over us, as our patron or protector.

... our nation has hitherto lived in freedom and quietness, ... till the magnificent King Edward, father to the present King of England, did under the colour of friendship and alliance, or confederacy, with innumerable oppressions infest us, who had in mind no fraud or deceit, at a time when we were without a king or head, and when the people were unacquainted with wars and invasions. It is impossible for any whose own experience has not informed him to describe, or fully to understand, the injuries, blood and violence, the depredations and fire, the imprisonments of prelates, the burning, slaughter and robbery committed upon holy persons and religious houses, and a vast multitude of other barbarities, which that king executed on this people, without sparing of any sex or age, religion or order of men whatsoever.

But at length it pleased God, who only can heal after wounds, to restore us to liberty, from these innumerable calamities, by our most serene prince, king, and lord Robert [ie King Robert I, Robert the Bruce] Divine Providence, the right of succession by the laws and customs of the kingdom (which we will defend till death) and the due and lawful consent and assent of all the people, made him our king and prince. To him

we are obliged and resolved to adhere in all things, both upon the account of his right, and his own merit as being the person who has restored the people's safety in defence of their liberties. But if this prince shall leave these principles he has so nobly pursued, and consent that we or our kingdom be subjected to the king or people of England, we will immediately endeavour to expel him, as our enemy and as the subverter both of his own and our rights, and we will make another king, who will defend our liberties: For so long as there shall but one hundred of us remain alive we will never give consent to subject ourselves to the dominion of the English. For it is not glory, it is not riches, neither is it honours, but it is liberty alone that we fight and contend for, which no honest man will lose but with his life.

For these reasons, most Reverend Father and Lord, We do with earnest prayers from our bended knees and hearts, beg and entreat Your Holiness that ... with a tender and fatherly eye you may look upon the calamities and straits brought upon us and the Church of God by the English; and that you may admonish and exhort the king of England ... to suffer us to live at peace in that small land of Scotland beyond which there is no habitation, since we desire nothing but our own.

...

We commit the defence of our cause to Him who is the Sovereign King and Judge, we cast the burden of our cares upon Him, and hope for such an issue as may give strength and courage to us and bring our enemies to nothing. The Most High God long preserve your Serenity and Holiness to His Holy Church.

Given at the Monastery of Arbroath in Scotland, the sixth day of April in the year of Grace 1320, and of our said king's reign the 15th year.

Translation adapted from G. Donaldson (ed.), *Scottish Historical Documents* (1970).
For the full text see:

<http://www.shc.ed.ac.uk/courseInfo/ScottishHistory1/docArbroath.htm>