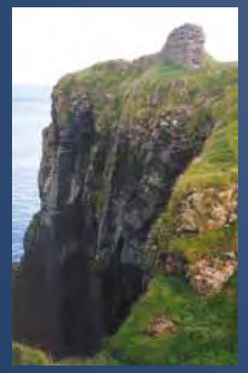
BRUCE INVASION 1315/2015

Why a Scottish king of Ireland? Why not? In a sense, the Scots *were* Irish. In the early Middle Ages, Ireland was known in Latin as *Scotia*, and the Irish as *Scoti*. But when an Irish dynasty — Dál Riata of Antrim — gained ascendency in northern Britain, it now became known as the land of the *Scoti* and Scotland was born.

Why Edward Bruce? Again, why not? Although the Bruce family was, on the surface, thoroughly Anglo-Norman, Edward and Robert Bruce were of Gaelic extraction on their mother's side, and had close connections with the Gaelic world of Western Scotland and the Isles — it was even said that the young Edward had been fostered in Ireland with the man who encouraged his invasion, Domhnall Ó Néill of Ulster.



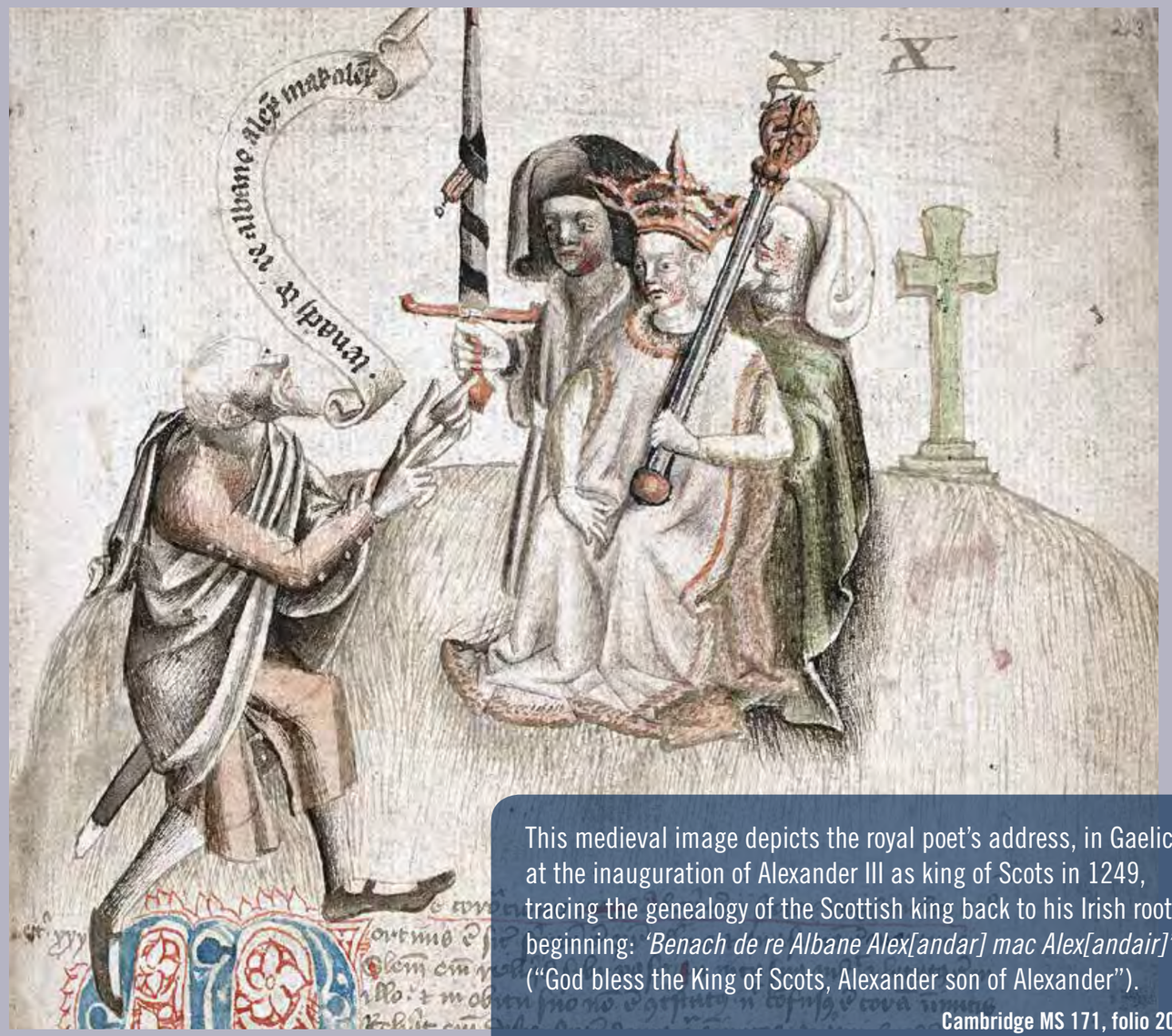
Bruce's Castle, Rathlin Island

From Rathlin in 1306–7 Robert Bruce sent a letter to the people of Ireland, in which he seeks an alliance with the Irish, and speaks of them and the Scots as a single nation:

"Our people and your people…stem from one seed of birth…and are urged to come together… by a common language and by common custom…so that with God's will our nation [nostra nacio] *may recover her ancient freedom."*

A SCOTTISH KING OF IRELAND?

700 years ago, in 1315, the Irish chose a high-king for the last time. The man they chose was a Scot. He was Edward, brother of Robert Bruce, King of Scots, fresh from his great victory over the English at Bannockburn.



This medieval image depicts the royal poet's address, in Gaelic, at the inauguration of Alexander III as king of Scots in 1249, tracing the genealogy of the Scottish king back to his Irish roots, beginning: *'Benach de re Albane Alex[andar] mac Alex[andair]'* ("God bless the King of Scots, Alexander son of Alexander").

Cambridge MS 171, folio 206r

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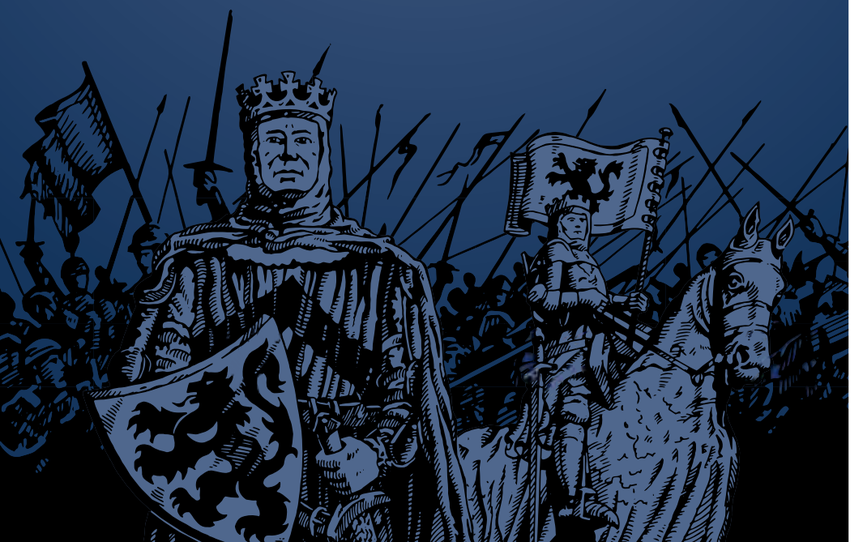
Dublin was the capital of the English royal administration in Ireland and the Dubliners were fiercely loyal to the English crown.

In February 1317 the city came close to being captured by the Bruce brothers. The king of Scotland Robert Bruce joined his brother Edward, who had been made king of Ireland in 1315. The Bruce brothers were encamped at Castleknock within sight of the city walls.

In panic the Dubliners burned the suburbs of their city and dismantled the Dominican priory north of the Liffey bridge in order to re-fortify the city walls. They also broke the bridge across the river.

The Bruce brothers decided not to lay siege to the city. They proceeded south to Munster and so missed their opportunity to capture the headquarters of English Ireland before reinforcements could arrive from England.



DUBLIN UNDER THREAT IN 1317

1: The great western suburb of Dublin, which lay outside the city walls, was set on fire by order of the mayor of Dublin, Robert de Nottingham, in order to deter the advance of the Scots.

2: The bridge over the Liffey was also broken by the Dubliners.

3: St Saviour's Dominican Priory (located on the site now occupied by the Four Courts) was demolished by the Dubliners as the Bruce brothers approached the city in 1317. The stones were re-used to fortify the quayside against the Scots.

4: Christ Church Cathedral.

5: The church of St Mary del Dam (from which Dame Street takes its name) was also partially demolished to re-fortify Dublin castle.

6: This street (which followed the route of today's Dame Street) led to the Priory of All Hallows, now the site of Trinity College Dublin.

7: Dublin castle, the administrative and military headquarters of English rule in Ireland.

8: St Patrick's Cathedral.

The English royal city of Dublin, with its circuit of stone walls, as it would have appeared in 1317.

Right: Robert Bruce, king of Scots, with his second wife, Elizabeth de Burgh, daughter of Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster, as depicted in the Seton Armorial (1591).

Amid the panic of 1317, the Dubliners threw the leading English landholder in Ireland — Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster — into prison because they suspected he sympathized with the Scots. Robert Bruce had married Richard de Burgh's daughter, Elizabeth — another indication of the close ties between Ireland and Scotland in the Middle Ages.

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BRUCE INVASION 1315/2015

FIRE, FAMINE AND SWORD: THE BRUCE BROTHERS' CAMPAIGNS IN IRELAND

1. May 1315: A Scots army, up to 6,000 strong, under King Robert Bruce's brother Edward, lands on the **Antrim** coast. Many Irish flock to Bruce's cause, hoping to overthrow English rule in Ireland. There are even plans for a pan-Celtic alliance of Scots, Irish and Welsh to end English domination.

2. June 1315: Near **Carrickfergus** many Gaelic lords led by Ó Néill of Ulster gather to join Bruce, the Irish annals saying: "All the Gaels of Ireland agreed to grant him lordship and they called him King of Ireland". Most English colonists in Ireland tenaciously oppose him.

3. August 1316: The Battle of **Athenry**, the bloodiest of the whole invasion didn't feature the Scots at all. A disastrous defeat for the Irish of Connacht — 1,500 of whom are said to have been decapitated — it was a morale boost for the English settlers. Here, Athenry's municipal seal commemorates the victory, showing the heads of Irish kings impaled over the town walls.

4. February 1317: The Bruce brothers, having advanced as far as Castleknock, decide not to lay siege to the city of **Dublin**. The arrival of English reinforcements ends an attempt to link up with the Irish of Munster, and Bruce's starving army soon retreats.

"We call to our help and assistance Edward Bruce, illustrious earl of Carrick, brother of Robert by the grace of God most illustrious king of the Scots, who is sprung from our noblest ancestors … and we have unanimously established and set him up as our king and lord in our kingdom [of Ireland]."

Famous "Remonstrance" sent in 1317 to Pope John XXII by Domhnall Ó Néill — Edward Bruce's principal Irish ally — seeking papal support for the Scottish Invasion.

5. October 1318: Marching south from Ulster for one last push, Edward Bruce risks open battle with an English army north of Dundalk at **Faughart**, loses his life, and with it his Irish kingdom. Although the traditional site of his 'grave' is still marked, his corpse was in fact dismembered, portions of it hung over the gates of various Irish towns, and his decapitated head brought in person by the victor, John de Bermingham, to King Edward II of England. Such was the relief at the defeat of this greatest threat yet to English rule in Ireland that this minor Anglo-Irish baron who brought the Bruce Invasion of Ireland to an end was elevated to the status of 'Earl of Louth'.

Autumn 1315: Bruce's invasion coincides with the Great European Famine (1315–17) and, as the first of three consecutive harvest failures brings widespread hardship, disillusionment sets in among his Irish supporters, the annals ruefully commenting: "falsehood and famine and homicide filled the country, and undoubtedly men ate each other in Ireland."

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