

## Wales and Scotland: Edward I's Imperial Dream?

The reign of Edward I was one in which the English crown engaged in an aggressive phase of expansionism, at the expense of the native rulers of Wales, and the kingdom of Scotland. One of the most important questions of the reign was why Edward's success in Wales was not repeated in Scotland.

*The conquest of Wales:* Edward's subjugation of Wales, and the annexation of the principality to the crown, numbered among his most spectacular achievements. However, Edward's campaigns need to be seen in the context of the longer-term expansionism of the English lords of the marches (i.e. the border with Wales). Reasons for Edward I's successes -

- English military and logistical superiority. In order to raise the necessary forces, including foreign mercenaries, Edward I was prepared to risk major domestic political hostility by demanding massive sums of taxation. Edward was able to draw on resources as far afield as Ireland and Gascony. The royal earldom of Chester was an ideal base for the invasion of north Wales, and many men were willing to take wages to serve in Edward's army. Ships could also be employed to shift stores, munitions and troops around the Welsh coastline.
- Welsh military inferiority. Llywelyn and his allies lacked a defensive strategy, and were seldom able to concentrate their forces to resist the English advances.
- The pre-existing strengths of the lords of the Welsh marches. Powerful dynasties such as the Bohuns, Mortimers, Bigods, Clares and Fitzalans had already carved out great lordships on the marches, and had every incentive to serve Edward in the expectation of substantial grants of territory confiscated from the native Welsh leaders.
- The consolidation of the English hold through the seizure of fortifications and the installation of garrisons. Also, a massive programme of building new castles, and renovating existing ones, was begun. Edward employed a master mason, James of St George, who had served his Savoyard cousins.

*Edward I and Scotland:* Military intervention in Scotland came to dominate the final years of Edward I's reign. Why did Edward fail to repeat in Scotland the military successes he had enjoyed in Wales?

- Scottish kingship. Unlike Wales, Scotland was a unitary kingdom with its own well-established bureaucratic, civil and judicial institutions. The crown and its institutions had succeeded in forging a kingdom containing numerous ethnic groups - Gallovidians and Scots (south-west and west), Celts and Norse (north) and English, Normans and Flemings (eastern and central lowlands).
- Although the Scottish aristocracy was a remarkable mix of great Celtic earls in the north, Norman and Flemish knightly families in Lothian and central Scotland, and maritime warlords in Galloway, Argyll and the western isles who lived in a world of customary law and blood feuds, they shared a general loyalty to the Scottish crown.
- Community and nationhood. In spite of the absence of an adult Scottish monarch from 1289-92, and the abolition of Scottish kingship by Edward I in July 1296, the Scottish nobility, church and mercantile classes acted in the name of 'The Community of the Realm' (*Communitas Regni*) and appointed guardians to lead the nation in war. The strength of Scottish institutions, and the loyalty which they commanded, ensured that Edward I was unable to capitalize fully on the support which he enjoyed from some Scottish noble families such as the Umfravilles and Comyns.
- Geography and logistics. The Scots were able to exploit their distance from the centre of English kingship, and the massive physical geographical barriers which confronted English invaders. The Firth of Forth ('Scottish Sea') was a major obstacle to the invasion of the north. Throughout 1306, Robert Bruce was able to evade capture in the western isles, where large armies were of little use. Throughout the north and west, the English forces made little impression, whilst their garrisons at Stirling, Edinburgh and elsewhere were difficult to supply and re-enforce, and were vulnerable to siege and

starvation. Although Edward comprehensively defeated the Scots at Falkirk in 1298, he lacked the enormous forces necessary to suppress all points of resistance in the north and west.

- France and Aquitaine. Philip IV of France exploited Edward's difficulties in Scotland to foment disturbances in Aquitaine.

- Domestic political opposition to Edward I. Great lords such Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk, and Humphrey Bohun, earl of Hereford, withheld their forces in protest against Edward I's financial demands. Moreover, Edward's increasing demands for taxation aroused intense opposition - and he had to divide his financial and military resources between Gascony, Scotland and Wales.

## **Edward II and the war with Scotland**

The Bruce cause: The guerilla war of Robert Bruce, Sir Thomas Randolph and Sir James Douglas concentrated on isolating and overwhelming English-held garrisons and towns in lowland Scotland. He also had to contain and defeat the supporters of his murdered rival, John Comyn. 1313-14: Perth, Roxburgh and Edinburgh all taken into Scottish hands.

Stirling Castle and the Battle of Bannockburn: In 1313, the Bruce forces commenced the siege of the English garrison at Stirling. The garrison at Stirling undertook to surrender if it were not relieved by June 1314.

26 June 1314: The English army routed at Bannockburn by the Scots. The earl of Gloucester is killed, and Edward II flees the field of battle.

The consequences of Bannockburn:

- Total collapse of the English military position in Scotland.
- Extreme vulnerability of the northern English counties to repeated raiding. Scottish commanders extorted tribute from English towns with the threat of destruction.
- Economic devastation of the north of England. Northern counties unable to contribute towards taxation.
- Fuelling of domestic political opposition to Edward II's kingship.

The Fall of Edward II and the Treaty of Edinburgh/Northampton:

Edward II's failure to destroy the kingship of Robert Bruce was one of the major factors behind his fall. His personal military inadequacies led to widespread alienation among his own subjects.

After their murder of Edward II, Queen Isabella and Roger Mortimer were determined to extricate themselves from the Scottish war at any cost.

The Treaty of Edinburgh/Northampton of 1328 recognised the independence of Scottish kingship. This was a humiliating reversal of the imperial ambitions of the English crown, and marked the final failure of Edward I's designs for the domination of the British Isles.