

Candidate 1 evidence

Advanced Higher History Dissertation



Q: To what extent was Edward I's political decisions the main reason for his ultimate failure in conquering Scotland?

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Introduction

King Edward I of England had always been an ambitious and calculating king who craved power. As well as ruling England, he had successfully claimed overlordship of Wales and was a dominating force in prominent areas of France. Edward was confident that he could continue to gain control of new lands and assert his power and authority over them. In 1286, Edward's neighbouring monarch, Alexander III, died as a result of an accident; and the English king firmly set his sights on taking control of Scotland. As Alexander had no surviving children, his young granddaughter, Margaret Maid of Norway, was now heir to the throne and Edward I saw this as his opportunity to gain control of Scotland. In the Treaty of Birgham, a marriage contract was agreed on behalf of Margaret and his own young son, Edward, meaning that young Edward would eventually become King of Scotland when he and Margaret were of marriage age. In the meantime, Edward planned to involve himself in influencing the decision making in Scotland. Unfortunately, disaster struck when Margaret died during her journey from Norway to Scotland. This left the Scots in a vulnerable position as they did not have a monarch to rule the kingdom, or to lead and represent them beyond their borders. Edward I no longer had the level of control and influence over Scotland that the promise of the marriage had provided him with. This did not suppress Edward's desire to gain Scotland as part of his kingdom and he was determined to take any opportunity that presented in order to succeed. In this dissertation it will be argued that Edward's political decisions throughout his dealings with Scotland were the main reasons for his failure in ultimately being able to conquer Scotland. Through his constant strong arm tactics and his lack of attempts to get the Scottish people on his side, the Scottish people became angered by his attitude and through this decided to rebel. This dissertation will examine the political decisions, military tactics and the underestimation of the Scots that led to Edward being unable to firmly control Scotland.

Chapter 1

In the absence of a monarch, the decision making in Scotland was undertaken by a group of noblemen known as the 'Guardians of Scotland'. After Margaret Maid of Norway died there was no obvious heir and thirteen claimants asserted their rights to the throne. It was felt that no-one in Scotland would be able to independently come to a fair decision so, as Edward I was the leader of Scotland's neighbour and had a reputation as a wise and able monarch, he was chosen to help select the new king. This was an opportunity for Edward to get what he

wanted and he worked to manipulate and control the proceedings. His actions here were the beginning of a series of mistakes which ultimately led to him failing in his desire to conquer and maintain control of the kingdom of Scotland. Edward's first tactic was to get the main claimants to pledge allegiance to him and recognise him as overlord of Scotland prior to making his final decision. He also interfered in the proceedings when he was only supposed to have an advisory role. Edward had agreed that the process of choosing the new king would be quick but he did not make a final decision for a year, instead travelling around Scotland gaining more oaths of loyalty and taking control of some lands and castles. The presence of the English army and the demands that Edward made before agreeing to reach a decision did not please the Scottish Guardians or many of the noble families and there was suspicion regarding Edward's intentions. While negotiating the marriage agreement between Margaret and young Edward, the Scottish Guardians were concerned about Scotland's independence and the Treaty of Birgham stated that Scotland would be 'separate, free in itself and without subjection.'¹ Clearly the death of Margaret had altered Edward's attitude towards Scotland and its claimants as he saw the country as a new opportunity for power. After his success in managing to put Wales under his influence he may have believed that he could do the same with Scotland. This would ultimately increase his supremacy as a leader, something he dearly desired, hence why his focus was pointed towards gaining Scotland for himself.

The two final claimants to the throne were John Balliol and Robert Bruce, with Edward ultimately choosing Balliol as the new king in November 1292. There are conflicting arguments from historians regarding this decision, with many believing that Edward chose Balliol in a strategic political move, thinking that he could control the new king. Others, such as Penman, argue that Balliol did have the more legitimate claim and that Edward recognised this. He had a very legal mind and honestly believed that Balliol had the strongest claim, so it is possible his decision was purely based on his beliefs. Regardless of the reasons for Edward's choice his intentions towards Scotland and the new king were made clear as he confidently declared his priority was 'to reduce the king and kingdom of Scotland to his authority'.² Edward humiliated and undermined King John constantly and did not recognise his authority. He insisted that an Englishman be made chancellor in Scotland and agreed to listen to complaints against John. John had difficulty making decisions as king due to

¹ Treaty of Birgham, 1290, <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/>

² Marc Morris, *A Great and Terrible King*, Windmill Books, London, 2008, p260

Edward's interference, threats and aggressive tactics. Edward demanded that John fight with the English against France in 1294 and he was sure he would not meet with any resistance from the weak king and the Scots. Conversely, Prestwich defends Edward's actions through the argument that during this time period a king could never have enough power. He was from an age where it was expected that he gather as much influence as he possibly could, and gaining Scotland would quench this need.³ Be that as it may, the Scottish people were furious as not only had they been under England's rule while waiting for a king but it now seemed that this had become permanent. The Scots were a proud people who wanted to have power over themselves and were enraged by the fact that Edward had forced their highest nobles to swear loyalty. An agreement, 'The Auld Alliance', was made between Scotland and France in 1296 stating that both countries would support each other against England. This was not something Edward had considered as he felt he had control over Scotland already but this was not the case. If Edward had realised the national pride the Scottish people held the he may have made better political decisions. As it is, Edward's domineering attitude towards King John and the Scots was poorly judged as it led to rebellious attitudes. Therefore, it is clear that these political decisions were the main reason for his failure to fully conquer Scotland.

Edward made the decision to teach Scotland a lesson for defying him and planned to force King John and the nobles to recognise that he had total authority over them. Edward invaded Scotland and targeted Berwick first, the richest town in Scotland. However, the citizens of Berwick attempted to stop Edward from entering and in an act of defiance set Edward's ships on fire. Edward attacked the town, brutally and fiercely. "When the town had been taken in this way and its citizens had submitted, Edward spared no one, whatever the age or sex, and for two days streams of blood flowed from the bodies of the slain, for in his tyrannous rage he ordered 7,500 souls of both sexes to be massacred".⁴ As Marc Morris acknowledges "The king has often been criticised for his behaviour at Berwick, and stands accused of having ordered the indiscriminate massacre of the townspeople".⁵ This act was a poor political move as it only stirred up hatred and fear among the Scots, and did not lead the people to willingly serve Edward. Edward was seen as a murderer of innocents. The English king continued to march through Scotland with his army with the aim of removing Scotland's national identity.

³ Michael Prestwich, *Edward I*, Methuen London Ltd, Great Britain, 1988, p370

⁴ Bower's *Scotichronicon*, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Scotichronicon>

⁵ Morris, p287

King John Balliol was forced to surrender and was imprisoned, along with many Scottish nobles. Edward removed the Stone of Destiny, where all Scottish kings had been crowned, the Scottish crown and holy relics. In 1296, nobles were forced to swear allegiance to Edward by attaching their seals to the 'Ragman Rolls' recognising Edward as overlord. The Scots appeared to be crushed and it seemed that Edward's political moves had enabled him to take total control of Scotland. However, these political decisions contributed to his ultimate failure in keeping control of Scotland. The Scottish people were very patriotic and Edward underestimated how much they valued their freedom and identity. The Scots knew they could not win against Edward for the time being but they were not going to stand for being ruled by a foreign king who had stolen their lands and possessions, bullied them into obeying him and murdered their people.

Chapter 2

Another factor which may have caused Edward to fail in his attempts to overtake Scotland was his military tactics. As previously discussed, Edward and his army had marched into Scotland forcing the Scots to bow down to him, tactics which succeeded at first as the Scots were no match for Edward at this time. However, the Scottish people were furious and many were hoping an opportunity would arise that would allow them to take their country back, as they began to conduct small uprisings. Michael Brown states "...identifiable aliens were killed and driven out by groups of locals led by knights and townsmen".⁶ These attacks by the Scots were not taken seriously enough, allowing them to grow. The Scots knew they were unable to face the English in battle and continued to use guerrilla tactics, often at night time. Prominent figures were rising, notably William Wallace and Andrew Murray, who both led groups of rebels against the English. Even when the uprisings began to grow in size and success Edward did not see them as problems and was sure they could be easily crushed by the men he had trusted to oversee Scotland. He saw sending more soldiers up to Scotland as a waste of resources. This proved to be a mistake as, by failing to deal with the small uprisings at the earliest opportunity, they continued, eventually turning into large rebellions. William Wallace and Andrew Murray took part in many uprisings that started to gather wide scale support. They had both successfully taken control from the English in many parts of Scotland and when they met they decided to join forces and fight in the name of King John.

⁶ Michael Brown, *The Wars of Scotland 1214-1371*, Edinburgh University Press Ltd, Edinburgh, 2004, p182

Stirling was extremely important as having control of the town meant having control of movement between the north and south of Scotland. In September 1297, Wallace and Murray prepared to battle the English. The Earl of Surrey, Edward's representative in Scotland, had no concerns about defeating the Scots in battle. Surrey did not have Edward's military mind or skills and the decisions he made proved catastrophic for the English when they met the Scots at Stirling Bridge. Surrey made no preparations for the battle and even sent soldiers back to England to save money. His plan was to send his army across the bridge and quickly defeat the Scots who were outnumbered. Wallace and Murray had carefully planned their military tactics and, as a result, were able to defeat the English. The Scots watched the English army from a hill on the Abbey Craig and waited until many of them had crossed the bridge. The Scots then formed a 'schiltron' and managed to take control of the end of the bridge, separating the English army into two parts. Using their skills in short hand combat the Scots were able to kill many of the English who had little experience in fighting this way. The horses became stuck in the mud and many Englishmen drowned trying to escape in their heavy armour. Seeing their men trapped and killed, Surrey was unable to lead a counter attack and retreated with the English army. For the first time in many years the Scots had defeated the English in battle. Edward was humiliated and Wallace and Murray were recognised as the Guardians of Scotland. David Santiuste is of the opinion that this defeat came largely because it was not Edward himself leading the battle and he put his faith in the wrong man as "his obsession with the French campaign, had undoubtedly hindered his administration's efforts in Scotland".⁷ The fact that so many Scots supported the end of Edward's reign in their country and their ferocity to fight was the reason he struggled in conquering them. Fisher is even of the opinion that Wallace's action and inspiring rebellion helped gain more nobles as part of the cause which only helped weaken the English fight further. By over-estimating his own military tactics and under-estimating the Scots' tactics, Edward failed to defeat the Scots. If he had addressed the small uprisings at the start these could not have developed, ultimately leading to the Scots' victory at the Battle of Stirling Bridge. Edward's political decisions and ambitions could still be considered as the main factors leading to him losing control of Scotland. It was these decisions that ultimately caused the discord among the Scots and caused the unrest which led to the uprisings in the first place. Edward needed to control the Scottish nobles but after Stirling he lost this control as the nobles saw that the English could be defeated and gave their support to Wallace and

⁷ David Santiuste, *The Hammer of the Scots*, Pen and Sword Books Ltd, South Yorkshire, 2015, p81

Murray, two men who had managed to lead a small army to victory against the mighty Edward.

After the English defeat, Edward made new plans to regain control of Scotland. Andrew Murray had died as a result of wounds he suffered during the battle so Edward only had to contend with William Wallace. Edward would not be defeated again and in July 1298 marched into Scotland with a massive army who, this time, did not underestimate the military abilities of the Scots. The Scots had trained hard but were no match for the English and were easily defeated, forcing William Wallace to resign as Guardian and to go into hiding, until he was betrayed by some of his allies and hung, drawn and quartered by the English in 1305. Edward, once again, had control of Scotland. Despite this there continued to be small scale attacks against the English, showing that the Scots were still unwilling to accept Edward as their ruler. Robert Bruce the Younger and John Comyn had replaced William Wallace as Guardians of Scotland and both had their sights set on taking the Scottish throne. Edward may have had control of Scottish lands and castles but was still unable to stop the Scottish people's determination to have a Scottish king. Bruce killed Comyn in 1306 and was quickly crowned King Robert of Scotland by the nobles. Unlike William Wallace, Bruce was from a noble family and had recognition and support from the Scottish elite as well as the common people. As Michael Brown states "a significant body of Scots gathered round King Robert's banner"⁸ threatening Edward's position in Scotland once again. For a year Bruce led losing battles against the English but he soon began to gain control of many castles and towns and these campaigns gained more support from the Scottish people. His leadership was seen as inspirational and Edward recognised him as a threat and was determined he would not be in the situation with Bruce that he had been in with Wallace. He had ordered many members of Bruce's family and his supporters to be killed or imprisoned to stop Bruce but this did not work. Edward was travelling to Scotland when he died in July 1307 before reaching the border. It would never be known who would have won if Edward and Robert Bruce had met in battle. Edward I did have control of Scotland on many occasions and it can be argued that military tactics and strong Scottish leaders stopped Edward from maintaining that control. However, even although Murray and Wallace defeated the English, Edward's army was able to easily regain control, and Bruce was only becoming a big concern for Edward shortly before his death. Penman argues that Bruce was actually very lucky that Edward I passed

⁸ Brown, p200

away at this time as it removed a serious threat which could seriously have changed the outcomes of the war if he had lived.⁹ The political decisions Edward made and the strong arm tactics he used to try to control the Scots need to be considered more when deciding why Edward failed to keep control of Scotland. These were the reasons the Scots were so determined not to be bullied and beaten by the English king, and were the reasons why they looked for strong leaders to follow.

Chapter 3

During Edward's attempts to gain control of Scotland, he made a fatal error in underestimating the Scottish people. It has been previously discussed how Edward's underestimation of the Scots' military tactics led to the English being defeated in small and large scale attacks. Edward was under the impression that it would be very easy for him to take over Scotland as they had fewer resources, protection and, in Edward's opinion, lacked the same level of sophistication as the English, another significant factor in Edward's failure to conquer Scotland. Therefore, he thought he could easily manipulate the Scots into bowing to his rule. However, the Scots defied the English king from the beginning, subtly at first such as the incident in Berwick in which they insulted the English army by baring their buttocks to them to show the low level of respect they had for them, through to risking their lives in fighting against Edward and his army. David Santiuste confirms that Edward had a "complacent attitude towards Scotland"¹⁰ and viewed the defiance from the townspeople of Scotland as unimportant and continued to underestimate the threat the Scottish people had on his claim over their kingdom. In their dealings with the Scottish people the English treated them badly and with little respect, meaning there was never a chance of acceptance. Edward paid no attention to the fact that his men behaved inappropriately, including stealing, raping and killing, and perhaps if he had attempted to ensure Scotland was ruled fairly, he may have had more support. Instead the Scots became more determined to rid themselves of the English who they saw as a threat to their safety. If Edward had seen this he may have been able to prevent this hate from growing which in turn could have stopped many men from acting against the English and fighting in wars against them. Without these men the Scots would never have won their wars and Edward would have had a much firmer grip on Scotland so it can be argued that his underestimation of the Scots resulted in his inability to

⁹ Michael Penman, Robert the Bruce: King of Scots, Yale University Press, London, 2014, p196

¹⁰ Santiuste, p61

conquer Scotland. Clearly Edward himself felt he had underestimated the Scots and tried to redeem this but he left it too late. In an attempt to fix this Edward offered peace wherein the Scots were promised no more lives would be lost and he would allow them to become more involved in their country. Marc Morris notes Edward's desperation as he says it was "a tactical acknowledgement of their persisting power. Once upon a time he regarded the Scots as little more than a joke... The king may not have cared to admit it, but these were men who had earned his respect".¹¹ Certainly, his treatment of the Scots resulted in a determined defiance that was a strong reason for many bravely volunteering to battle, preventing the English from having complete control over Scotland. These significant failings in Edward's politics and approaches to ruling Scotland ensured he never had strong control over the country. Perhaps if he had treated the Scots with respect and recognised their nationalism, abilities and needs, he may have been able to exert his power without the levels of resistance he faced. Although, it was Edward's political decision which resulted in these mistakes and this is therefore a more important factor as if he had treated the Scots as equals he may have been able to rule harmoniously.

Similarly, Edward also underestimated the Scottish army. At the beginning of the conflicts with Scotland, Edward paid little attention to the impending battles as he felt the Scottish army had little experience in battles compared to the English as well as the fact he saw the Scots as a less dignified people so did not think anyone would come up with effective battle tactics or strategies. This was a serious mistake which led to his ultimate defeat. Before Stirling, there had already been small uprisings which Edward had paid little attention to, yet, Edward realised too late after Stirling Bridge, that the Scottish army was a force to be reckoned with. The Scots began to try to take back their country and Michael Brown shows that "The capture of this key fortress [Stirling Castle] demonstrated the effectiveness of the Scots' localised approach to warfare".¹² This proves the Scots clearly had better military skills than Edward thought and could defeat the English. However, due to the fact Edward underestimated them from the beginning he had little time to turn his full attentions to Scotland without facing a large opposition that he could not handle, showing this was a big mistake on his part. In an attempt to fix this Edward offered peace wherein the Scots were promised no lives lost and he would allow them to become more involved in their country. Marc Morris notes his desperation as he says it was "a tactical acknowledgement of their

¹¹ Morris, p342

¹² Brown, p190

persisting power. Once upon a time he regarded the Scots as little more than a joke... The king may not have cared to admit it, but these were men who had earned his respect".¹³ This revelation came too late and the Scots soon fought back in order to gain their freedom and under Bruce began to win more battles. If Edward had taken the Scottish people seriously at the start he could have used his full military capabilities to squash the rebellion before it started and would have had Scotland but he failed to do this and as a result cost himself complete control of the country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Edward I made many mistakes in his attempts to ultimately conquer and control Scotland. The military tactics used by Edward caused serious discord among the Scottish people. The fact his attentions were not fully focused on Scotland and important military decisions were left to others resulted in small rebellions that led to large uprisings. If these had been stopped at the earliest opportunity by Edward then serious military campaigns, such as Stirling Bridge, may never have happened. By doing this the significant leaders who inspired the Scots to fight for their freedom, including, Wallace, Murray and Bruce, may never have become important. However, even if this was the case squashing the Scots by using force would still not guarantee that the Scots would accept Edward's rule or stop trying to remove him and the English from their lands. It can also be argued that although Edward did make military errors he did ultimately succeed in most of his military campaigns and defeated the Scots, including Wallace and Murray. Edward totally underestimated the Scottish people's desire to be a free nation and he miscalculated his ability to control them. Yet, overall it was Edward's political decisions that were the main reason for his inability to fully conquer Scotland. Edward had many opportunities to make political decisions that could have enabled him to take control of the country while possibly gaining support and acceptance from the Scots. He was faced with a country in 1296 that had no ruler and if he had given more thought to finding ways of gaining control without the urgency and forceful tactics he used, he may have found himself in a very different position. Edward continued to make these same mistakes in his quest for control, something he eventually recognised and tried to amend, but it was too late. He had also allowed those English people in powerful positions in Scotland to mistreat the Scots and make decisions in affairs they were incapable of doing. Edward had tried to remove their national identity and force them to submit to his

¹³ Morris, p342

control and these political decisions ultimately led to a backlash from the Scots who were determined to be free. This led to Edward's demise in his quest for the country and was the main reason for his ultimate failure in conquering Scotland.

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