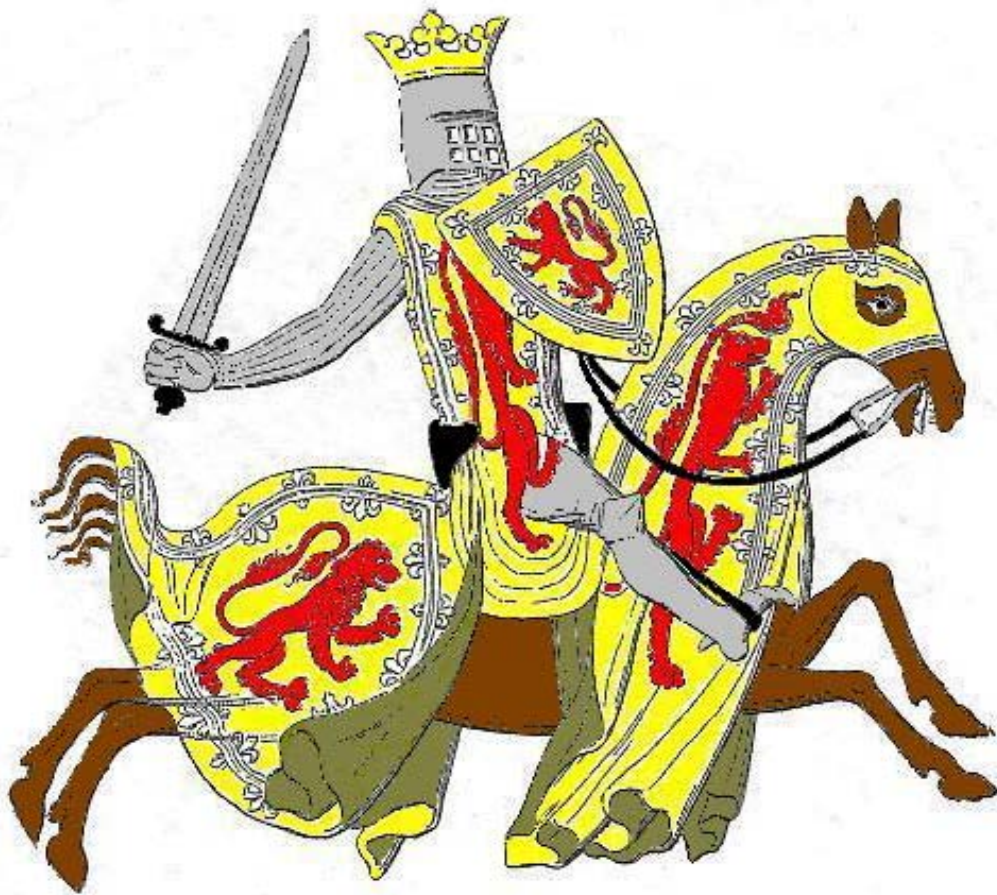


ROYAL DUNFERMLINE



KING ROBERT THE BRUCE



Compiled by Sheila Pitcairn
Edited by W. T. Johnston

ROBERT THE BRUCE

His claim to the throne

Robert the Bruce was born in 1274, probably at Turnberry, Ayrshire. He was the eldest son of Robert Bruce, a competitor in the succession case that followed the death of King Alexander III.



Seal of Alexander III.

A succession case occurred because the death of Alexander in 1286 and the death of the only heir to the throne, his granddaughter, Margaret, Maid of Norway, in 1290, meant Scotland had no direct heir. To avoid civil war, the Scottish nobility asked for the assistance of the English king, Edward I, to decide who was to become the King of Scots. In the choice between the two claimants, Robert Bruce and John Balliol, the latter was chosen by a Court of Claims in 1292.



Seal of John Balliol.

Robert the Bruce, later King of Scots, used the claim to the throne which had passed down through his grandfather and father. The Bruce family belonged through marriage to the line of decendency which

began with King Malcolm III and his Queen Margaret.



*King Malcolm III and Queen Margaret.
By Sir. Joseph Noel Paton*

This line of descent had been introduced to the Bruce family through Isobel of Huntingdon, daughter of David, Earl of Huntingdon, and granddaughter of Prince Henry, son of David I.

The struggle to regain independence

Despite having earlier sworn allegiance to Edward I, John Balliol



Seal of Edward I..

rebelled against him, only to be defeated and forced to resign the kingdom to him. Scotland was once again left without a king.

The year 1296 witnessed the end of the hundred years' peace between England and Scotland. In the following year, 1297, William Wallace was appointed Guardian of Scotland



Sir William Wallace.

The Wars of Independence had begun and bitter conflict was to rage on until 1328. This was a period of national conquest and ultimate victory for the Scots, inspired and led by Robert the Bruce.



Seal of King Robert the Bruce.

Resistance

The continued resistance against Edward I by Scots patriots was a strong feature of Scottish history at the turn of the fourteenth century. Defeats by the English, such as at the Battle of Falkirk in 1298, had only encouraged the Scots to be more determined in the fight to regain their independence.

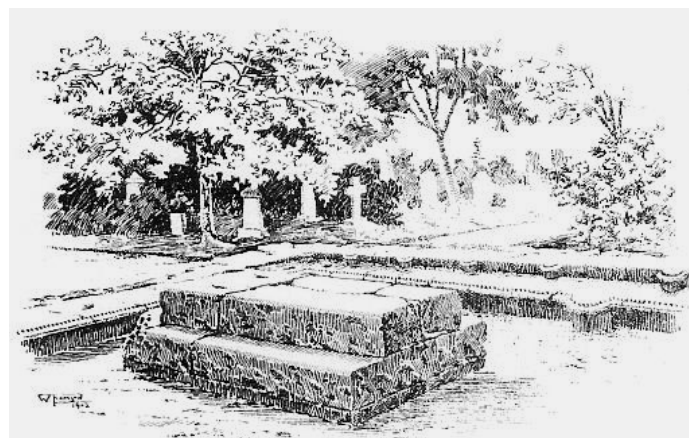
Edward's frustration with the resurgence of the Scots saw him venture into Scotland with his army on numerous occasions to fight against the patriots. These campaigns brought Edward I to Dunfermline, which played an important part in the wars against England.

Destruction of the Abbey, 1303

Edward I is known to have been in Dunfermline on at least five occasions. The most important of these was a visit in 1303, during which Edward stayed for ninety-seven days in the Monastery of Dunfermline. On his departure, Edward stole lead from the Abbey Church for use in the siege of Stirling Castle later that year and he ordered the monastery to be destroyed by fire. These orders may have been given because of Wallace's association with Dunfermline. Why a Christian king of England should destroy a Christian abbey in Scotland surely indicates Edward's real intention of genocide.

Assuming the mantle

It is known that Sir William Wallace and his mother travelled in disguise to Dunfermline in 1302. This is believed to have been a pilgrimage to visit the Shrine of St Margaret.



The Shrine of Saint Margaret.

Wallace was in Dunfermline soon after this visit, hiding from the English in the forest of Dunfermline, where he held meetings with his associates. His mother died whilst Wallace was in Dunfermline. A thorn tree in the Abbey Churchyard traditionally marks the site of her grave.



Thorn Tree in Dunfermline Churchyard.

Wallace's mother, it is said, had family in Moncur in Dunfermline, now known as Townhill. These events occurred shortly before Edward I commenced his stay in Dunfermline.

The involvement of the Abbot and the monks in the burial of Wallace's mother may have been reason enough for Edward to fire the monastery.

Wallace was captured by Edward I's army in August 1305. In London, he was found guilty of treason and executed. The loss of Wallace did not mean the end of the fight for Scotland's freedom. The heroic death of Wallace created a stronger sense of unity among the Scots and a greater will to fight the oppression and tyranny of the English. They just needed a leader to guide them in achieving their freedom. Robert the Bruce would fulfill this role and finish what Wallace had begun.

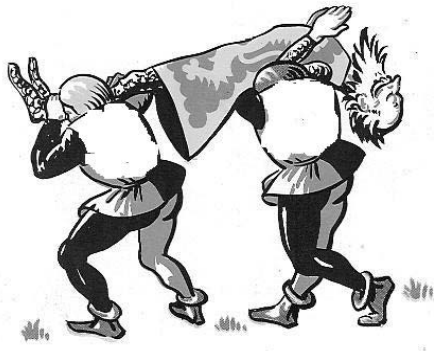


Wallace plaque on wall outside Abbot House.

A king for his people

In March 1306, Robert the Bruce was enthroned and crowned King of Scots at Scone, near Perth. He was crowned by the Countess of Buchan. Robert the Bruce was the first Scottish king to be crowned without the Stone of Destiny, which had been removed in 1296 and taken to Westminster Abbey by Edward I. Scotland once more had a king.

Cruel and ruthless Edward I died in 1307.



Bruce was still at large and Scotland still unconquered by England.

Edward's failure to succeed after eleven years of war gave the Scots hope that his son, Edward II, would also end his reign with the conquest unfulfilled. The Scots were well aware that Edward II did not have the same perseverance and interest in war with Scotland as that of his father. Edward's poor skills as a soldier gave Bruce and the Scots hope that soon the English would be defeated by them in battle. This would not happen until the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 but until then, their will to fight and desire for freedom would grow greater. Scotland was steadily moving towards a period in which it would experience real union under the leadership of Robert the Bruce.

Gradually Robert I began bringing the people of Scotland together. In March 1309 the first Parliament of his reign was held at St Andrews, at which his right to be King of Scots was affirmed and its loyalty and support offered.

Victory, and independence restored



Robert the Bruce statue at Banockburn.

Prior to victory at Bannockburn, Bruce succeeded in surviving nine years as an outlaw, hiding in caves, forests and in the hills, whilst being hunted by the English. During this time, he was able to take control of strategic castles and most importantly, the people of various towns in Scotland declared for him. However, there was still an English garrison present at Stirling Castle.

Bruce arranged a battle between the armies of the two kings. For Edward, the loss of the last English stronghold in Scotland meant losing the whole country. The battle took place not far from the castle, at Bannockburn, and victory for the Scots highlighted Bruce's ability to unify the Scots as had never been achieved before. On this glorious day, the 24th of June 1314, Scottish independence was restored and Robert the Bruce has since been remembered for his part in this great achievement.

“It is in truth not for glory, nor riches,
nor honours that we are fighting,
but for *freedom*, which no
honest man gives up
but with his life.”
Bernard de Linton,
Abbot of Arbroath, 1320.

The Declaration of Arbroath, which was presented to Pope John to help him understand Scotland's position against the English, symbolizes what

Bruce and the Scots stood for. The right of the Scottish nation to govern itself as a free country. Conflict between the two nations still continued as a result of Edward's refusal to accept Scotland as an independent kingdom, a refusal supported by the Papacy.

The succession is secured

On the 5th of March 1323, Queen Elizabeth gave birth to a boy, in the Palace of Dunfermline. King Robert the Bruce now had a Prince of Scotland and the Scottish royal succession was secured. The baby was christened David after its ancestors, David I and David, Earl of Huntingdon. He was later to become King David II. At only two years of age, he was designated as Successor to his father. At the time of his birth it was believed that he would rival the success and fame of his father but this never came to fruition.

Queen Elizabeth, the second wife of Robert the Bruce, died at Cullen Castle in 1327, and was interred in the choir of Dunfermline Abbey. From an old charter, made out in the name of Queen Mary, it would appear that Elizabeth's body was embalmed at Cullen and was then brought to Dunfermline shortly afterwards, but not before her bowels had been removed and interred in the "Lady Chapel of Cullen." The place where she was buried in the choir of the Abbey was adjacent to the site chosen by her husband, King Robert, as his place of sepulture. The Charter also mentions land and money being given to the Abbey by King Robert. This was for the soul of Queen Elizabeth to be continually prayed for. She had lived to see the guarantee for peace offered through the proposed marriage of King Edward II's younger sister, Joan of England, to her own son, Prince David of Scotland. Sadly, she died before this marriage took place.

Peace in Dunfermline

The Treaty of Northampton was signed between England and Scotland in May 1328. King Robert the Bruce had not only won Scotland's freedom and independence but now had the fullest acknowledgement of her right to it from her traditional enemy, England. All claims to sovereignty were renounced by King Edward and Scotland was free to have its own entity. Short-lived as the peaceful relations between the two nations were, it was still a landmark and a great achievement in the history of Scotland. The Treaty and the start of peace were cemented by the marriage of the Prince of Scotland to Joan, the princess of England. King Robert the Bruce was

unable to be present at the ceremony because of his malady, now known to be leprosy.

1328 is the year in which King Robert the Bruce appears to have spent a great deal of time in Dunfermline. This also enabled him to take the waters at Scotland Well, thought to possess healing qualities. There is still a great deal of debate as to what the King was suffering from.

On the 13th of June 1329 the Pope authorised that Bruce and his successors be the crowned and anointed kings of Scotland. Bruce did not know of this final recognition of Scotland's independence. 'Good King Robert' had died six days earlier, on the 7th of June.

The bad health and sickness he had been suffering from throughout the previous year had weakened an already ageing man. Three generations of English kings had wanted to see the end of the reign of King Robert I and his quest for Scottish liberty, but King Robert the Bruce had survived to die knowing that his country was united and free.

Death of a hero king



King Robert I died at Cardross Castle, Dumbartonshire. His heart was removed to begin its journey to the Holy Land. His body was embalmed and carried across Scotland to its final resting places in Dunfermline. The royal interment of the king was an occasion of great pomp and ceremony, one of the largest funerals ever held in Scotland, with everyone sharing in their sorrow at the loss of their great king. Sir Gilbert Hamilton, one of the knights closest to the King, made an oration over the grave and then the coffin was lowered.

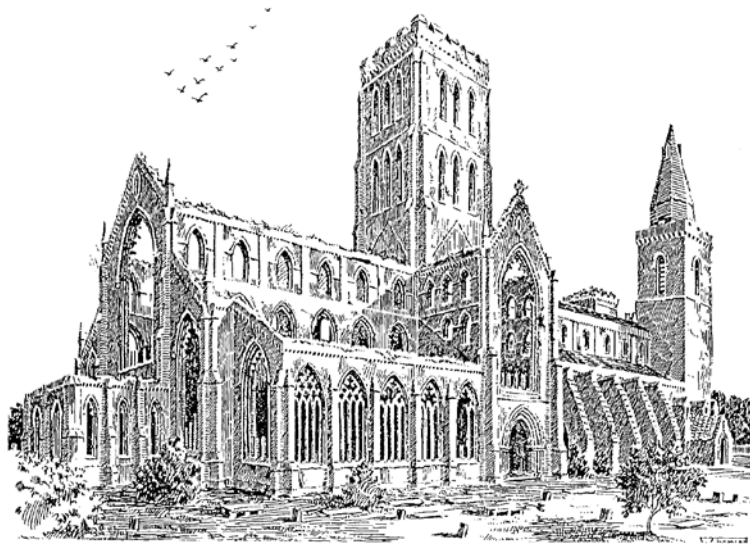
The marble tomb of King Robert the Bruce was erected in 1330. It was made in Paris by Thomas of Chartres and transported to Dunfermline via Bruges. It was erected over the grave of King Robert the Bruce in the autumn of 1330.

There is no description of the shape or design of the tomb but it was most certainly a tomb of grandeur and worthy of the stature of King Robert the Bruce. A few marble fragments are to be seen in the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. The tomb was engraved with the epitaph of the King which read:

HIC JACET INVICTUS ROBERTUS, REX BENEDICTUS.
QUI SUA GESTA LEGIT, REPETIT QUOT BELLA PEREGIT.
AD LIBERTATEM PERDUXIT, PER PROBITATEM,
REGNUM SCOTORUM; NUNC VIVAT IN ARCE POLORUM.

[Here lies the invincible Robert,
blessed King.
Let him who reads his exploits,
repeat how many wars he carried on.
He led the Kingdom of the Scots to freedom,
by his uprightness,
Now let him live in the citadel of the heavens.]

Destruction of the Abbey, 1560

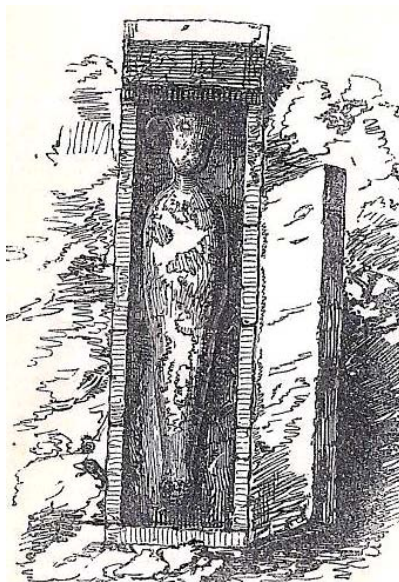


The Reformation arrived in Dunfermline on the 28th of March 1560, with the Reformers who attacked the Abbey of Dunfermline. The choir, or eastern part of the Abbey, was at the centre of the destruction and the royal tombs were also damaged and destroyed, including that of King Robert the Bruce. Dunfermline Abbey was rendered “a mass of ruins”. The ruinous state of Dunfermline Abbey following the Reformation and the length of time which elapsed since the burial of the King meant the exact place of Robert the Bruce’s sepulture was forgotten.

It was during the rebuilding of the choir of the Abbey in 1818 that the remains of King Robert the Bruce were accidentally discovered.

King Robert rediscovered

A monument erected to the memory of the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine, who died in 1771, had to be removed when the new church was built and a stone vault was discovered, in which lay the skeleton of a lady, with long hair. It is most likely this is the body of Queen Elizabeth, the second queen of King Robert the Bruce. This vault was found very close to another vault, believed to be that of Bruce; the accidental discovery of this vault, near the east end of the old Abbey, took place on the 17th of February 1818. It was situated in the place where the High Altar had stood. The vault had been covered with two large flat stones of unequal size. The smaller sized stone had a width of 28½ inches and a length of 18 inches. The second stone shared the same width but was 6 foot in length. The smaller stone was positioned on the west and formed the headstone of the vault, whilst the lower stone covered most of the surface of the inner vault. Onto the larger stone, six iron rings or handles had been fixed, which had decayed and in some places detached from the cover. The vault which lay underneath the stones, held a body encased in thin sheet-lead and covered with an embroidered linen cloth interwoven with gold, which would suggest that it was used as a shroud. The lead had wasted slightly to reveal the feet and one knee of the skeleton and had also decayed over the breasts, but the skeleton was in a state of high preservation.



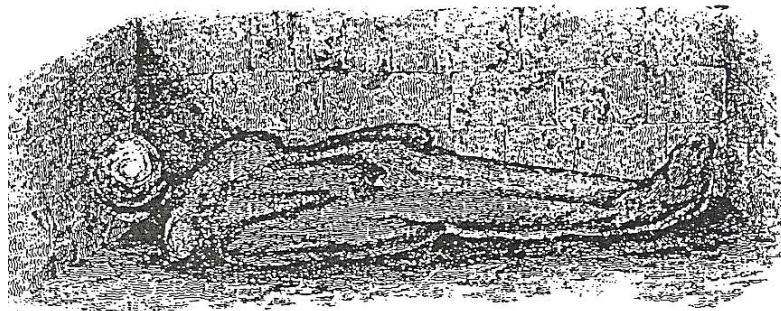
The body of King Robert Bruce discovered at Dunfermline in 1818.

Over its head, the lead was formed into the shape of a rude crown.

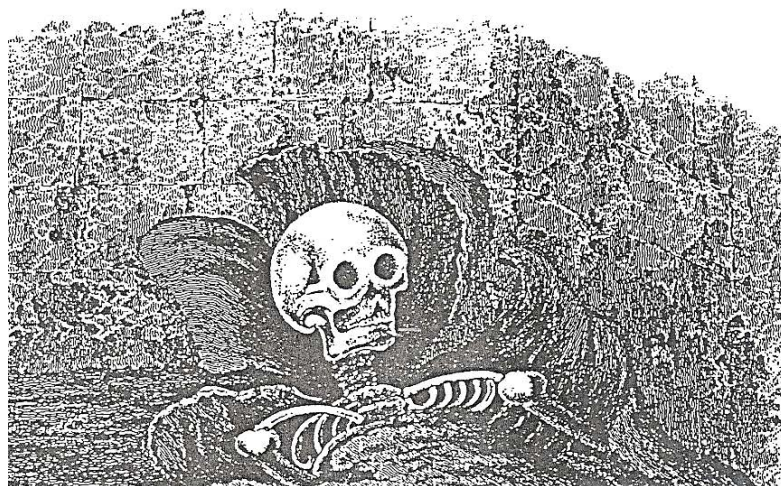
Fragments of deeply decayed wood, some with iron nails attached, were found surrounding the skeleton. These would appear to be the remains of

the coffin that had encased the body. From this evidence it was assumed that this was the tomb of King Robert the Bruce.

But a more accurate, professional investigation needed to be carried out. At this point the investigation was stopped and the vault secured. Constables of the Burgh kept watch over the vault and protected it until the intentions of the Barons of the Exchequer had been made clear. When this great discovery became public knowledge, there was a resurgence of interest in King Robert the Bruce and his achievements, and in the history of Dunfermline, the ancient Capital of Scotland.



Body of King Robert Bruce before the leaden covering was removed.



Identity established

On the 5th of November 1819, after months of preparation, the remains of King Robert the Bruce were re-entombed. Those present at the ceremony of the re-entombment were the Barons of The Exchequer, The King's Remembrancer, Dr Gregory, Dr Munro and other principal persons of Dunfermline.

Before re-entombment, the skeleton was examined and the skull found to be in a near perfect state, so much so, that the sculptor, Mr. Scoular, was able to take a cast of it in Paris plaster. The skeleton was measured and from this it is known that King Robert the Bruce was about 5 feet 11

inches to 6 feet in height. The most important evidence that this was the remains of King Robert the Bruce was the fact that:

‘the sternum had been sawed asunder
longitudinally from top to bottom’

Report made by His Majesty’s Remembrancer in Exchequer.

This showed that the King’s heart had indeed been removed previous to his interment.

The skeleton was wrapped up again in the lead covering, ready to be placed in a large leaden coffin. Melted pitch was poured into the coffin to a depth of about four inches. A number of items were then placed in the coffin in lead boxes.

Those items were:

Barbour, John. *Life of Bruce*. 4th edition. 1714. [This edition not found.]

Dalrymple, David, Sir, Lord Hailes. *Annals of Scotland* ... 3 volumes.
Edinburgh, 1819.

Kerr, Robert. *History of Scotland during the reign of Robert I, surnamed the Bruce*. 2 volumes. Edinburgh, 1811.

Fernie, John. *A history of the town and parish of Dunfermline*.
Dunfermline, 1815.

The Edinburgh Almanack and Directory. Edinburgh, 1819.

A variety of contemporary Edinburgh newspapers, gold and silver coins belonging to the reign of the then Majesty, King George III, were also put in the coffin.

The skeleton was then placed on the top of the coffin for the crowd to observe. People were allowed to pass along the side of the vault and once the public had paid their respects, the coffin was placed in the exact position in which it had been found, on a bed of bricks laid in mortar in the now raised vault. The body was carefully placed in the coffin, two more inches of melted pitch were added and the top was soldered on.

The following inscription:

KING ROBERT BRUCE
1329 - 1819

was engraved into the top of the coffin and the vault was then bricked in. The site of this vault, bearing the remains of King Robert the Bruce, is under the pulpit stair of the present Abbey Church.

The new Abbey Church was completed and opened for worship in September 1821.

Around the great tower are the words:

KING
ROBERT
THE
BRUCE



Engraved by J Greig from a Painting by G Arnald A.R.A.
For the Boarders Antiquities of England & Scotland
Published March 1 1815 for the Proprietors.

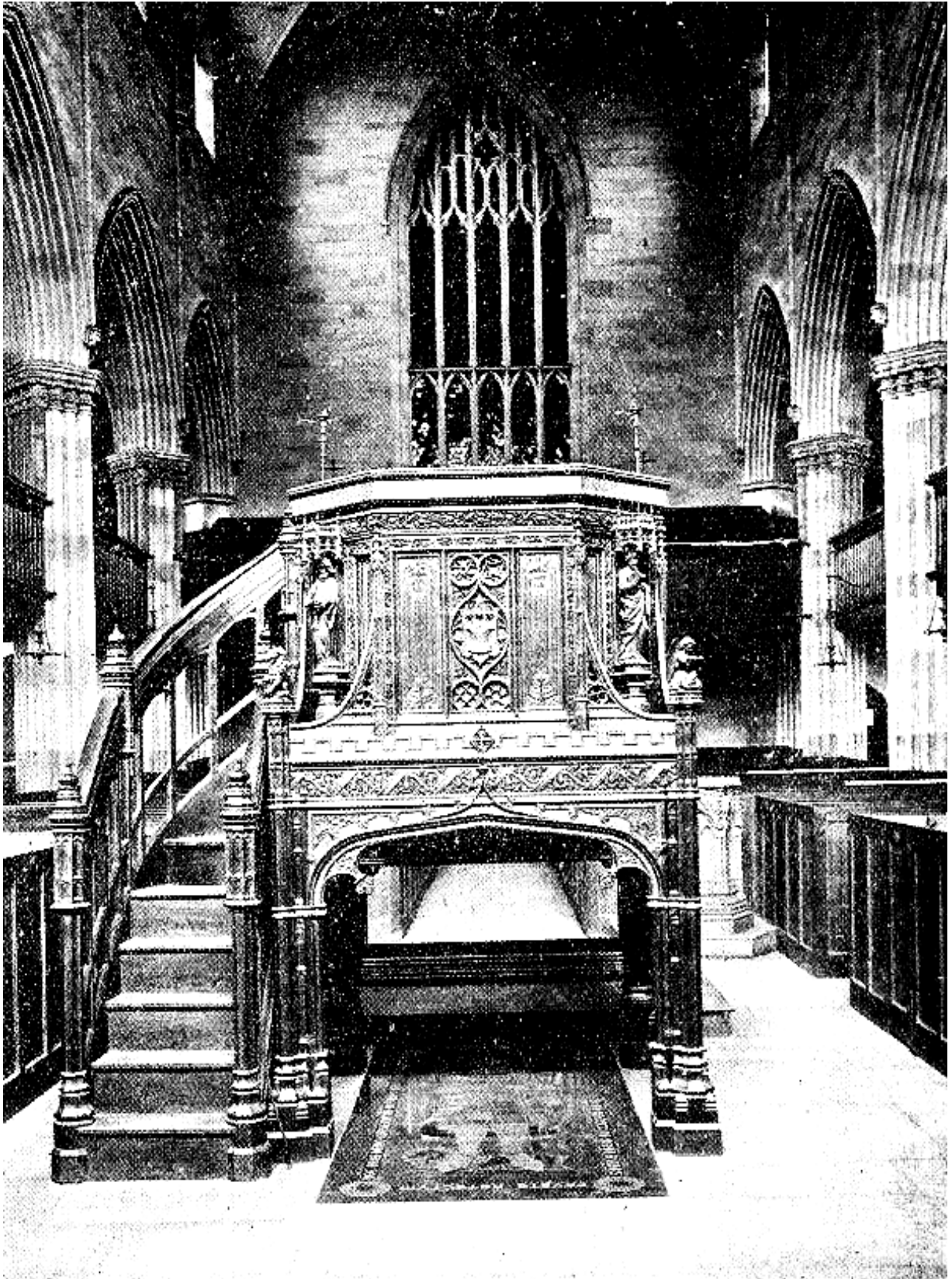


Abbey Church, Dunfermline.

Leighton, John M. *History of the county of Fife*. Glasgow, 1840, 222.

Drawn by James Hope Stewart (1789-1856). Engraved by Joseph Swan (1796-1872).

DUNFERMLINE ABBEY
KING ROBERT BRUCE'S TOMB TODAY



Dunfermline Abbey Church
King Robert The Bruce's Tomb - under the Pulpit