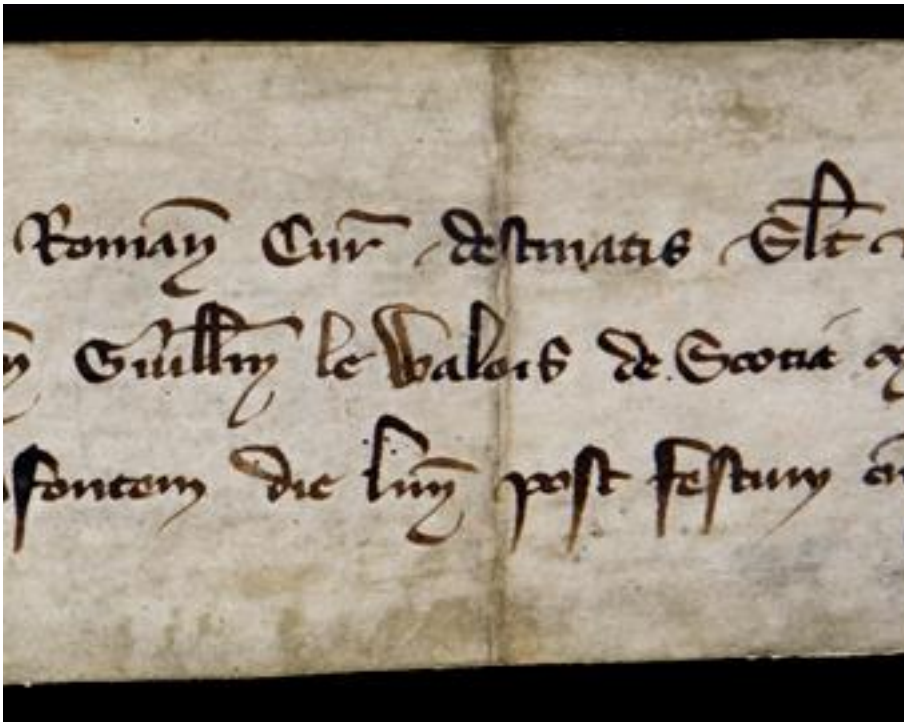


Braveheart letter to Pope returns to Scotland



Edinburgh, Scotland, Jan 13, 2012 / 03:52 pm (CNA/EWTN News).- A 14th-century letter asking Pope Boniface VIII to look favorably upon the Scottish patriot Sir William Wallace during his visit to Rome has been returned to Scotland.

“This document is an enigma,” said George MacKenzie, head of National Records of Scotland at the unveiling ceremony in Edinburgh on Jan. 12.

“It’s a letter from the French king to his officials at the Vatican mentioning Wallace, but we don’t know what his business was with the Pope. What we do know is that the document still fascinates, 700 years after it was written.”

The life of Sir William Wallace was famously portrayed by Mel Gibson in his 1995 Oscar-winning film “Braveheart.” Until Jan. 12, the letter about the real-life Wallace was held in England, since being discovered in the Tower of London in the 1830s.

The letter was originally written in 1299, when Wallace traveled to the court of Philip IV of France to try and persuade him to support the Scots against Edward I of England. A year after Wallace’s arrival, Philip IV wrote the letter in question to his agents in Rome.

The letter, begins, “Philip by the grace of God, king of the French, to his beloved and loyal people appointed at the Roman Court,” and commands the French officials to “ask the Supreme Pontiff to consider with favor our beloved William le Wallace of Scotland, knight, with regard to those things which concern him that he has to expedite.” It is signed at the royal castle of Pierrefonds on the Feast

of All Saints, Nov. 7, 1300.

“We do not have a lot of tangible links with Wallace as most of the documentation has been destroyed, so to have something that Wallace actually touched is a massive boost for Scotland,” said Duncan Fenton of the Society of William Wallace, who had campaigned for the return of the letter.

The document suggests that Wallace intended to visit the papal court of Pope Boniface VIII, but it is unknown whether he actually reached Rome.

Wallace was later betrayed and captured by English forces near Glasgow in 1305. He was then taken to London where he was executed following a show trial at Westminster Hall. Scotland’s freedom was subsequently secured, however, when Pope John XXII recognized the country’s independence in 1320.

“I am delighted to welcome the Wallace letter back to Scotland,” said Scottish Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop. “To have it here in Scotland, where it can be viewed by the Scottish public, is very significant indeed.”

The historic document will now go on public display this summer at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, alongside another rare letter associated with Wallace that dates back to 1297.

David Kerr