

King James I of Scotland

Pg 1/2



Born: 10 Dec 1394 Dumferline, Scotland

Married: Joan Beaufort

Died: 21 Feb 1437 Perth, Scotland

Parents: Robert Stewart & Annabella Drummond

The future James I was born on 10th December, 1394, the second son of Robert III and Annabella Drummond. His elder brother, David, Duke of Rothesay, the heir to the throne, had died under mysterious circumstances, for which, it was claimed, his ambitious uncle, Robert, Duke of Albany was responsible.

Robert III had attempted to send his younger son to France to guard him from the machinations of his uncle, but he was captured by English ships just off Flamborough Head. On hearing the lamentful news, his depressed father is reported to have died of grief and despair. James thus found himself King of Scotland and the most unwilling guest of his English enemies at the age of twelve. His captor, Henry IV, had him provided with an education at Windsor Castle.

While the young King grew to manhood in English captivity, his ambitious and self-serving uncle, Robert, Duke of Albany, was appointed Regent and Governor of Scotland in his absence and exhibited no haste in securing his nephew's release. During his long imprisonment, James wrote the King's Quair an allegorical romance and major early work of Scottish Literature.

The Regent died at the remarkable age for the time of of eighty-three in 1420 and was succeeded as governor of Scotland by his son Murdoch Stewart. Murdoch was not the strong ruler his father was and Scotland slid back into a state of anarchy and lawlessness. After eighteen long years of captivity, James I was finally released by the English. For his return the English demanded forty thousand pounds.

The King returned to his homeland with his English bride, Joan Beaufort, the granddaughter of John of Gaunt, the powerful Duke of Lancaster and great granddaughter of Edward III. His marriage to Joan, a celebrated beauty, was said to have been a genuine love match rather than the political alliances favoured at the time. They were married in London on 2nd February, 1428.

The new King was crowned at Scone in May, 1424. James, unlike his father, possessed a strong and resolute character, and was determined to crush the threat posed by the power of the Albany Stewarts and promptly confiscated their estates. Murdoch Stewart and his two sons were executed on Castle Hill, at Stirling.

The King, aged thirty on his return to Scotland, was now a thick set man, athletic, musical and cultured. Faced the onerous task of restoring law and order to a country rent with

Pg 2/2

dissension, but resolute and determined, James was to prove himself equal to it. King James turned his attention to the Highlands, he summoned the Highland chiefs to a parliament at Inverness. They were all thrown into a dungeon pit and three of them executed, although the rest were eventually released. A new judicial system was established in Scotland. In 1426 James founded a new court, called the Session, which was responsible for hearing cases which were formerly brought before the King or

Parliament. James' concern that all his subjects should receive justice was amply exhibited by his provision of a poor man's advocate to represent those who did not have the means to pay for their own defence, an innovation at the time. He made Scots coinage exchangeable for foreign currency only within Scottish borders, encouraging trade. He introduced changes to the Scottish Parliament, bringing it more into line with the English, which he had experience of in his years of captivity.

The King's marriage to Joan Beaufort was a stable and happy one, the couple were to have two sons, the future James II and Alexander, who died in infancy. Margaret, one of James' six daughters was to become the wife of Louis XI of France, re-establishing the 'Auld Alliance' with that country.

James I engendered much resentment in Scotland by his re-establishment of a strict, but just, system of government. At Christmas 1436, which the King and Queen spent at the Dominican priory at Perth, a conspiracy was hatched to murder King James.

The plot centred around Sir Robert Stewart. The ambitious Earl of Atholl, his co-conspirator, had designs on the throne himself, both were descended from Robert II by his second marriage to Euphemia of Ross, and therefore considered themselves to have a greater right to the crown than James, who descended from Robert's liason with his then mistress, Elizabeth Mure, whom he only later made his wife.

On the fateful night of 20th February, 1437, Sir Robert Stewart dismissed the King's guards and allowed the party of assassins, lead by Sir Robert Graham, to enter his chamber. They found the King preparing for bed and rushed at him, James fought back heroically. He attempted to escape his assailants through a sewer but was overpowered and died of multiple stab wounds. Queen Joan was also wounded in her frantic attempts to protect her husband.

The conspirators found little support amongst the Scottish people. James was sincerely mourned by his subjects, itself a testament to what he had accomplished. James I is considered one of the greatest of Scotland's Kings. His young son, James II, succeeded him.

http://www.englishmonarchs.co.uk/stewart_3.htm