

Wallace letter's rare Edinburgh show

A letter taken from Sir William Wallace by his English captors over 700 years ago is to go on public display in Edinburgh to mark St Andrew's Day.

The fragile letter known as the "Wallace Safe Conduct" is considered one of the most important Scottish artefacts in existence.

Dated 7 November 1300, it was with the freedom fighter when he was captured in 1305.

Written in Latin, the message from King Philip IV of France to his people in Rome commands them to support the Scottish hero in "those things which he has to transact" before Pope Boniface VIII.

The document was discovered in the Tower of London in the 1830s and is now officially part of the collection of The National Archives in Kew.

It is currently on loan to the National Records of Scotland (NRS) in Edinburgh.

It will go on display free of charge at General Register House in Princes Street from just 10am until 3pm on November 30.

Alan Borthwick, Head of medieval and early modern records at NRS, said: "While Wallace is known to have been in France in 1300 it is not known why.

“Some have suggested he may have been seeking support to have the deposed Scottish king, John Balliol, restored to the throne.

“What is certain is that this is a rare document and a wonderful opportunity for the public to see it in person. It is the first time it has been on display since 2018 and it is free of charge to visit.”

The letter is one of only two surviving documents with a personal connection to Wallace. The other is the “Lubeck Letter” that Wallace and Andrew de Moray wrote to German merchants to encourage them to resume trade with Scotland following their victory over the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in September 1297.

Wallace left Scotland for France in 1298, after his defeat to English King Edward I at the Battle of Falkirk.

He travelled to the court of King Philip IV in an effort to persuade him to support the Scottish Cause against Edward.

English records state that Wallace was carrying a safe conduct letter from the King of France when he was captured before being taken to London where he was hanged, drawn and quartered for treason on 23 August 1305.

The letter was returned to Scotland in 2012 for the first time in 707 years on an initial two year loan to NRS, which has since been extended.

Because of its age and fragility, however, the letter can only be displayed for limited periods of time and spends much of its time in Scotland in safe storage.

Gary Stewart, of the Society of William Wallace, which has campaigned for the letter to be kept in Scotland permanently, said: “It is a rare direct link to Scotland’s national hero. It’s important that people in Scotland should have every

chance to see it."

Two tapestries inspired by the only two surviving original letters known to mention Wallace will also be on display.

Skilled weavers from the Dovecot Studios created the tapestries, inspired by the intricate lettering and historic parchment of the documents.

