

Hundreds visit National Records Office to see the Wallace letter

More than 250 people went to the National Records Office at the weekend to see a letter taken from Sir William Wallace by his English captors more than 700 years ago.

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

It was with the freedom fighter when he was captured in 1305 and the letter was dated 7 November 1300.

The document went on public show for the first time in six years on St Andrew’s Day last weekend. The letter is usually kept out of the light for years at a time to preserve it for future generations. It was displayed free of charge at General Register House in Edinburgh for just five hours.

Archivist Jocelyn Grant said: “It was a pleasure to put this rare document on show, alongside two tapestries inspired by it, and the so-called Lübeck letter.

“It was nice to see so many people take advantage of one of the few opportunities to see this document in-person.”

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.

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

The letter, seized from Wallace in 1305, was rediscovered in the 1830s in the Tower of London and is now officially part of the collection of The National Archives in Kew.

It was returned to Scotland in 2012 for the first time in 707 years on loan to the National Records of Scotland (NRS). But because of its age and fragility it can only be displayed for very limited periods of time.

Gary Stewart, of the Society of William Wallace, spent seven years campaigning for the letter to be returned to Scotland.

He was among those who travelled to the capital for a rare glimpse of the document on Saturday.

He said: "The Wallace Safe Conduct is a rare direct link to Scotland's greatest hero.

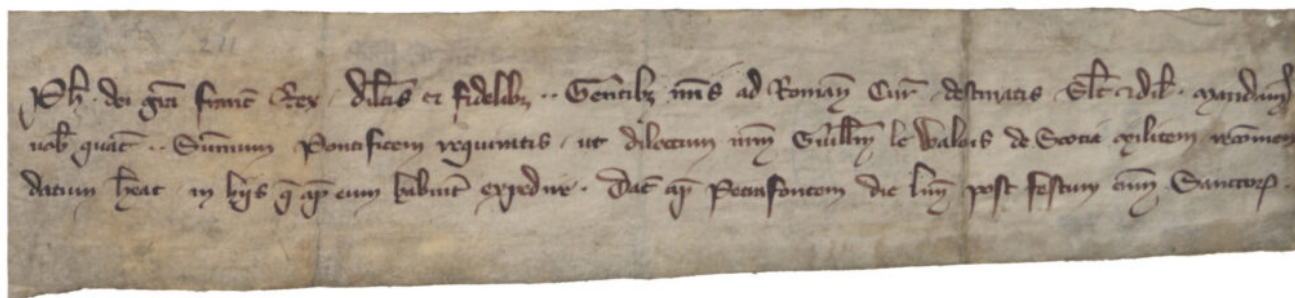
"It was in his possession when he was captured and taken to London so this is something he held in his own hands.

"It allows you to feel that connection to Wallace. It was good to see so many people share that experience."

The letter is one of only two surviving documents with a personal connection to Wallace, together with the Lübeck letter, which he 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.

English records state 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.



Wallace letter