

Today's episode is called Debunking Scottish Stereotypes and Interesting Midnight Facts

First off, let's deal with the woad-splashed hephalump in the room: Braveheart is bollocks.

The script is a hollywood-ized version of the heavy metal poison fueled rantings of a half-assed, wannabe biographer named Henry the Minstrel, or (especially for those of us who've had to wade through his lunacy whilst attempting to gather facts on the subject) the far more accurate "Blind" Harry.

The writer of the screenplay, Randal Wallace (I didn't bother to find out whether or not he's an actual Wallace anymore than he bothered to fact check even one of the bits he threw into his script), pretty much took the blithering idiocy spewed by Blind Harry and regurgitated it back into the little beaks of America's puling masses...and for that we chucked a golden statuette at him. Seems fair.

So the list of historical faux pas stands at:

1) William Wallace was not some poor, son-of-a-son-of-a farmer. If you believe Blind Harry, his Da was a minor lord and land owner. If you believe the one seal left behind by the actual man, his Da was Alan Wallace...who no one can find record of, and who's last name comes from the Old English Wylisc (Pronounced "Wullish"), meaning "Foreigner" or "Welshman". That last derivation will become particularly interesting in the next few facts when I tell ye how Ol' Willy got his martial skills. Either way, Wallace did not grow up an illiterate dirt and sheep farmer like the rest of his contemporaries.

2) William Wallace was kind of a huge bastid...definitely larger than Ol' Mel. Mel "the Anti-Semitic looney tune" Gibson is 5' 10". Wallace was, to all best estimates 6' 5", and if you believe Blind Harry he was 7ft even. This is not as nutty as it sounds. The average height of British men in the 1200s was 5' 6" and falling, due to poor farming and food shortages, whereas (thanks to years of being invaded by hulking Viking raiders) Scottish men averaged 6'-7' feet tall, and were frequently described as bulky (17 inch calves was one rando measurement I came across, in a report on a sample of 600 crofters). Put another way, remember the big redheaded lad that was constantly punching Wallace in the movie? That shoulda been Wallace.

3) Wallace died at 35, childless and unmarried. Yup, Marion (Marr-on) from the movie was not a thing. Blind Harry likely made her up as motivation for killing the Sherriff of Lanark in 1297, something historians agree was likely his first real act of rebellion.

4) Wallace did not learn his "keen martial prowess" from a mysterious, sword-prayin' uncle on his way to cavort in Rome. Nope, he likely learned war whilst a mercenary archer in the army of Edward "De Longshanks" the First (you remember him, the guy who Wallace would end up fighting for the better part of his final decade on this planet) *FIGHTING THE FOOKIN' WELSH in the WAR on WALES!!!* You heard it right! The great hero of Scotland cut his teeth learning to kill his Clanfolk's people (remember, the Wallace Clan were likely Welsh immigrants). History can be fun.

5) Wallace was not some military genius. Nope. He was an opportunistic guerrilla fighter like all other highlanders. The Battle of Stirling (or, more accurately, Stirling Bridge) was, essentially, a Highlander's parody of the battle of Thermopylae. Wallace and his battle bro Andrew Moray hid as the army of the Earl of Surrey, which vastly outnumbered their own (Wallace and Moray had around 5300 to 6000 men, only 300 of which were cavalry, versus 9-10000 men, 2-3000 of them cavalry), slowly crossed the

Bridge of Stirling...which could only allow for 3 men abreast AT MOST. They waited until a little less than half the army had crossed and then descended on them like crows on roadkill. The Infantry still on the bridge panicked, and tried to retreat...only to be crushed by the Cavalry attempting to cross the bridge behind them. The weight got to be too much, and the fookin' bridge collapsed, drowning the better part of what was left of the Earl's army. What was left retreated, but was caught when Wallace and Moray used a ford up the river a ways. All in all, good use of terrain and surprise...as any good guerilla tactician should do.

6) Wallace was only declared Guardian of Scotland (and its unclear if this was a Title given him, or merely self-declared), for about a year. Yup. A calendar year was all he lasted until he biffed the battle at Falkirk.

7) Braveheart was the nickname of Robert the Bruce, not friggin' Wallace.

7.5) Also, Robert the Bruce never betrayed Wallace...that was all John de Menteith, a Scottish knight loyal to Edward the First.

Discussion

NEXT TOPIC

Scottish Facts and Fictions

1) Mac Vs Mc. I was taught, growing up, that the difference in MacBain and McBain delineated where in Scotland a clan was from: Mac for highland (Inverness, Fort William, Perth, etc), Mc for lowland (Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, etc). This is bollocks. It came from lazy, inconsistent census workers throughout the centuries.

2) The saying, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again", though popularized by the "Teachers Manual" written by Thomas H. Palmer in 1840, is actually accredited to Robert the Bruce. The myth of the saying's creation comes from a story that, after gettin' his arse handed to him by the English, Robert hid in a cave. Whilst there he watch a spider attempt to weave a web. Every time the spider failed, due to gusts of wind, and yet went back to work (as though it knew only one way to get food or something) diligently forging its supper table/hammock, it inspired the King, and he took it as a sign he should go back to kickin' British ass...and he did.

3) Slavery in Scotland is an entire episode in and of itself, but from what I was able to track down with regard to timing and historical evidence, it may have become "fashionable to have a young black boy or girl waiting on a upper-crust family" as early as the 1500s, but Scotland was granted (via a decree from England) official access to the slave trade in 1707. What this meant was that a large number of young Scottish men sailed of to the Caribbean, usually to become Overseers, to make their fortune. Problem was, they had an unfortunate tendency to fall in love with black slaves, marry them, and then bring them home or live there. Also, allegedly because the Scots loved religiosity more than slavery, they regularly had their slaves baptized...which, under Scottish law meant they could not be kept as slaves and were soon freed thereafter. One of the few times, historically speaking, that religious bollocks was found to be self correcting. Also, I could find no accurate, academically supported historical record of white slaves being

used or shipped off someplace (most often cited during the Jacobite rising of 1745). However, considering that there are damn few historical written records from the actual Scottish peoples during and after the Roman occupation of England until around the 11 to 1200s, and Wallace began his rebellion for SOME REASON around that time, there had to have been abuses stemming from that time period that encouraged the Scottish people to lash out. Smoke, Fire, and so on.

4) The Surgical College at Edinburgh is the premier surgical college in England, and one of the top in the world...and it funded a grave-robbing duo, who turned to serial murder to cut financial corners, during 1827-28. The two entrepreneurs began their start up gathering cadavers for the surgical college in 1827, but since only the corpses of criminals, Suicides, and Orphans could be legally sold as cadavers, they quickly began grave robbing. Towns folk soon got wise to this and started guarding graves 24/7, so when a boarder in Hare's home died whilst still owing him 4 pound sterling, Hare and Burke sold the dudes corpse. From then on, it became easier to simply create the dead bodies from living prostitutes, homeless folk, and boarders in their home. After 16 murders (that we know of), Burke was hanged and Hare went free. In an Ironic twist, Burke's Skeleton was sold to and is now on display at the Edinburgh Medical School...so that's fun.

5) Scotland is home to the worlds tallest hedge. Located at Meikleour Beech it is 100ft high and 1700 ft long. So there's that.

6) Scottish paper currency, due to its ease of forging, was used as a way to destabilize the British economy by the Nazis, and this led to Scottish bank notes being widely rejected for years afterward.

7) The most popular Curry dish in England was created by a Scotsman. Chicken Tikka Masala was invented by a Scottish restaurant owner in Glasgow in the 1970s.

8) Nessie has a cousin, Morag. It lives in Loch Morar, the deepest Loch in all of Scotland.

9) The largest collection of UFO sightings in Scotland are centered around the town of Bonnybridge.