

# What is the Declaration of Arbroath?

The Declaration of Arbroath is one of Scotland's most famous and important documents held by the National Records of Scotland. It is a copy of a letter written 700 years ago in 1320 during the Scottish Wars of Independence.

The letter was one of three sent to the Pope asking him:

- to accept Robert the Bruce as King of Scotland
- to tell King Edward II of England to stop trying to rule over Scotland
- to lift the ban on all church services in Scotland
- to lift the ban on Robert the Bruce attending church



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If you couldn't attend church, you couldn't receive the special rituals/ceremonies you needed to get to heaven. This was a really important belief held by people in Medieval times.

The letter was originally known as the Barons' Letter because it was sent in the name of eight earls and 31 barons who supported it (the other two letters were from the Church and the King). The barons and earls, who owned large areas of land, were some of the most powerful people in Scotland.

Documents at this time were not signed. Seals were used instead of signatures by people to show their support and so they could be easily identified. Seals were commonly used by the king, his officials, landowners, churchmen and merchants.

Other people who are not named also attached their seals to the letter. The actual number of seals originally on the document was probably 40+. Only 19 seals survive; the rest have been lost or damaged.

You can find out more about the Declaration in these film clips:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0887h83>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0117w8t>