

BISHOP ROBERT WISHART

Born c.1240, Died 1316

Bishop of Glasgow 1273–1316

Guardian of Scotland 1286–1292

One of the seven Guardians

Robert Wishart was probably in his early thirties when he became bishop of Glasgow on 29 January 1273. This made him one of the leading men of the kingdom. It was no surprise that he was chosen on 30 April 1286 as one of the seven guardians to govern the kingdom following Alexander III's death. He helped persuade Edward I to recognise Scottish independence in writing on 28 August 1290 (the 'treaty of Birgham-Northampton'). When Alexander III's young granddaughter Margaret, daughter of the king of Norway, died on her way to Scotland in September 1290, the Guardians asked Edward I to arbitrate between Robert Bruce (grandfather of Robert the Bruce) and John Balliol, who both claimed to be the next king. When Edward I finally met the Scottish leaders on the border at Norham on 10 May 1291, and insisted that he should be recognised as overlord of Scotland, it was Robert Wishart who spoke up against Edward. This was a brave thing to do. Edward I could be terrifying when he was angry. In 1304 the archbishop of York died after Edward I gave him a severe row for disobeying him.

Reign of John Balliol and resistance to English occupation

Robert Wishart took a back seat during John Balliol's personal rule from 1292 to 1296. When Edward I conquered Scotland Wishart submitted to him. In the summer of 1297, when William Wallace and Andrew Murray led rebellions in the south and north of the kingdom, Robert Wishart joined with Robert the Bruce (who was then earl of Carrick) and James the Steward in leading a rising against Edward I at Irvine. (James the Steward and Robert Wishart were two of only three surviving Guardians who had governed Scotland from 1286 to 1292.) They surrendered on 7 July. Robert Wishart then remained in prison until September 1300.

A crucial supporter of Robert the Bruce

Robert Wishart's most important and daring moment in history came when Robert the Bruce killed John 'the Red' Comyn on 10 February 1306. Bruce committed sacrilege by killing Comyn in a church. This did not stop Wishart from helping Bruce. Not only did he give Bruce the church's forgiveness for his crime, but he gave him the royal standard of Scotland and urged him to become king. Robert Bruce then went to Scone, where he was inaugurated as king on 25 March. Robert Wishart took part in Bruce's revolt by leading an attack against the English garrison at Kirkintilloch before moving on to lay siege to Cupar in Fife. On 8 June 1306 he was captured, and spent the next two years in chains until he was passed to the pope for judgement on 25 November 1308. Although the pope refused to remove him from being bishop of Glasgow, he was handed back to English custody in 1312. He was finally released early in 1315 as part of an exchange of prisoners following the Battle of Bannockburn. By then he was blind. He died on 26 November 1316 and was buried in Glasgow Cathedral, a building he had helped to finish forty years earlier.

Birgham (Northumberland): Friday 17 March 1290

Bishop Robert, as one of the Guardians, is part of an agreement that Prince Edward (son of Edward I) should marry Lady Margaret (daughter of King Eric of Norway).

William and Robert, bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow, John Comyn, and James, Steward of Scotland, Guardians of the Kingdom, to Eric, the King of Norway: greeting.

The Pope has granted special permission for the son and heir of the king of England to marry your daughter. We have agreed to this, and ask that you arrange for her to come to England very soon. She should arrive by 1 November.

Kelso (the Borders): 31 July 1290

Bishop Robert is appointed as a representative of the Guardians in negotiations with the king of Norway about the lady Margaret.

The Guardians of the realm of Scotland and its community to Edward, king of England: greeting.

We have nominated Robert and Alan, bishops of Glasgow and Caithness, and Sir John Comyn, as our representatives and messengers for negotiations about the marriage of the Lady Margaret, daughter of the king of Norway, our lady, and queen of the realm of Scotland.

Norham (Northumberland): Thursday 20 November 1292

Bishop Robert is present when King John Balliol promises loyalty to Edward I. Bishop Robert is among those who fix their seals to this document.

I, John, king of Scots, let it be known that I have made an oath and sworn to my liege-lord, Edward, king of England and overlord of the realm of Scotland, at Norham on Thursday, the feast-day of St Edmund in the year 1292 [20 November], in the presence of William, bishop of St Andrews, Robert, bishop of Glasgow, John, earl of Buchan, William, earl of Ross, Patrick, earl of March, Walter, earl of Menteith, James, steward of Scotland, Alexander of Argyll, Alexander Balliol, lord of Cavers, Patrick Graham, and William Sinclair, in this way:

“My lord, Edward, king of England, overlord of the realm of Scotland, I, John Balliol, king of Scots, give my loyalty to you for the realm of Scotland, which I hold from you. I bring to you my faith and loyalty against all men, and I faithfully recognise and give to you the service which is owed from Scotland, as God may favour me and these Holy Gospels.”

Rome: 23 December 1295

The Pope (Boniface VIII) asks some abbots and a prior to encourage the bishop of Glasgow (Robert) to pay the rector of Renfrew for his loss of income.

Boniface, to the abbots of Kelso and Jedburgh, and to the prior of Coldingham: greeting.

We have been informed by Master John of Berwick, rector of the church of Renfrew, that he and his predecessors were allowed a tenth of the fish and other things in that parish. Yet, the bishop of Glasgow [Robert] and his official Master Alexander Kennedy have been taking half of the fish and other things which the parishioners sell at Glasgow.

Master John has asked that justice be done to him. And so we command you to

warn and encourage the bishop of Glasgow and his official to compensate Master John, within one month, for his loss.

Partick: Friday 17 January 1296

Bishop Robert warns the earl of Lennox not to judge matters about Church lands in his own court, because this is the right of the Scottish Church.

Robert, bishop of Glasgow, to the Dean of Christianity of Lennox: greeting.

I command you to warn Malcolm, earl of Lennox, as well as the officials of his court and those who bring cases to court there, that they should not summon or harass the abbot and monks of Paisley Abbey to appear before a forbidden or secular court concerning their lands that belong to their church of Old Kilpatrick. Complaints concerning such lands belong to the Church courts alone, according to the liberties that have always belonged to the Scottish Church – liberties which are granted by the king. I am prepared to show the full weight of justice on these and other matters to anyone who complains.

Berwick: 28 August 1296

After Edward I's conquest of Scotland in the summer 1296, over 1,600 Scots surrendered to Edward by promising him their faith and service. Bishop Robert did this twice: once at Elgin on 26 July and once more at Berwick on 28 August. The document from Berwick is below.

Bishop Robert, along with other bishops, has become faithful to Edward I and subject to Edward's will.

Robert, bishop of Glasgow; Henry, bishop of Aberdeen; Thomas, bishop of Whithorn: We have come to the faith and will of the most noble prince, our dear lord, Edward, by the grace of God King of England, Lord of Ireland, and Duke of Aquitaine. And we do promise, upon pain of body and possessions, that we and our successors shall serve him well and loyally. And each one of us has performed fealty [loyalty] to our lord, the King.

Irvine: 7 July 1297

Bishop Robert has taken part in an uprising against Edward I.

Henry Percy and Robert Clifford [King Edward's loyal men] announce that Robert, bishop of Glasgow, Sir Robert Bruce, the earl of Carrick, and Sir James Stewart have risen against Edward, king of England, lord of Ireland and duke of Aquitaine, burning and destroying towns and castles. The king and his council have considered these matters which are to the great damage of themselves and of many others of Scotland. King Edward, wishing this disturbance to be settled in some good way to avoid greater peril, has removed the bishop [Robert], the earl, Sir James, and others who were of their party and on their side.

Irvine: 9 July 1297

Bishop Robert acts as one of the guarantors for Robert Bruce's agreement with the king. Bruce has agreed to give Edward I his daughter, Marjory, as a hostage as a promise for his good behaviour.

Robert, bishop of Glasgow, James, Stewart of Scotland, and Alexander of Lindsey:

We note the recent war made by Sir Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick, against our lord, Edward, king of England.

Since Robert afterwards surrendered to the king's peace by negotiations between himself and his allies on the one side, and Sir Henry Percy and Sir Robert Clifford for

the king, we now become guarantors for Robert, on pain of our life and limbs, until he delivers Marjory, his daughter, as hostage to Sir Henry and Sir Robert, as was agreed.

24 July 1297

The Bishop of Glasgow is named among the king's enemies at Roxburgh.

The keeper of Berwick Castle to my lord, King Edward: greeting.

Your treasurer of Scotland assembled a large troop of soldiers and led them to Roxburgh to attack your enemies, who were in the company of the bishop of Glasgow [Robert], the earl of Carrick, and the Steward of Scotland.

Sir Henry Percy and Sir Robert Clifford then came to Roxburgh, and brought with them Sir Alexander Lindsay and Sir William Douglas, who told me that they had captured the enemies on this side of the Scottish Sea [i.e. south of the Firth of Forth] and forced them to come into your peace.

I have returned to Berwick to await the arrival of my lord, the Earl Warenne [governor of Scotland for Edward I].

August 1297

Bishop Robert acknowledges receipt of a confidential letter from Sir Hugh Cressingham, the Treasurer of Scotland, and informs him that he has completed the task he has been asked to do.

Robert, bishop of Glasgow, to my special friend, Sir Hugh Cressingham, treasurer of Scotland: greeting.

I have recently received from you a certain confidential letter by Sir Reginald Crawford, which I have understood in full, and I have completed the task as far as possible (as God knows), and as my clerk, who brings you this letter, will tell you. Sir Reginald, who took part personally in this secret business, will meet you so that he can tell you the details in full.

I have also sent my clerk to the bishop of Durham on this business.

Berwick-upon-Tweed: 5 August 1297

Hugh Cressingham writes to Edward I, informing him that he expects to have Bishop Robert and the other rebel leaders at Berwick on 10 August to settle a pact.

Hugh Cressingham to Edward, king of England: greeting.

I expect to have the bishop of Glasgow [Robert], the earl of Carrick, and the Steward of Scotland at Berwick to confirm and settle the peace next Thursday [10 August].

Anagni (Italy): 27 June 1299

This document is often called 'Scimus fili' ('We know, my son'). See 'Scottish Government' or 'Religion and the Church' for a full translation.

Part of a document from Pope Boniface VIII to Edward I, telling Edward that he has no right over Scotland. The Pope commands Edward to release Wishart.

Pope Boniface to Edward, king of England: greeting ...

We note how you have seized and imprisoned Robert, bishop of Glasgow, and Mark, bishop of Man and the Western Isles, and we request that these bishops be restored to their liberty and that you recall all of your officials from Scotland.

Holmcultram Abbey (Cumbria): 7 October 1300

Bishop Robert has sworn to be faithful to Edward I, holding two pieces of the Holy Cross upon which Jesus was crucified as he did so.

Robert, bishop of Glasgow, has sworn loyalty to Edward, king of England, upon the *Y Groes Naid* [the main holy relic of the princes of Gwynedd, which Edward I had taken after conquering Wales] and the Black Rood of Scotland [the main holy relic of the kings of Scots, which Edward I had taken after conquering Scotland].

Anagni (Italy): 13 August 1302

The Pope (Boniface VIII) tells off Bishop Robert for causing trouble between the English and the Scots.

Boniface VIII to Robert, bishop of Glasgow: greeting.

We command you to stop stirring up conflicts between the king of England and the Scots, and to promote peace instead of being the cause of loss of life and property.

Cambuskenneth: 5 May 1303

Bishop Robert makes known that he has been given back his power as bishop of Glasgow (i.e. administration of his lands and churches) by Edward I.

I, Bishop Robert, announce that my lord, Edward, the king of England, has received an oath of loyalty from me in the proper way. Therefore he has given back to me the administration of Glasgow and control of its lands and properties. I hold these lands of him and his heirs, the kings of England.

I wish to let everyone know that I have received these lands from the hand of my lord the king, and he is my liege lord, and the rightful king, and lord of the whole of the land of Scotland.

As testimony to this, I have attached my seal to this letter.

1304

Bishop Robert asks for Edward I to help him get money and wood so that he can build several new residences.

Robert, bishop of Glasgow, to Edward, king of England: greeting.

I ask you to give me a charter so that I and my clergy may be paid the debts of the income we are owed. These incomes were given to us by your predecessors, the kings of Scotland.

I also ask you to grant me timber in the forests of Mauldslie and Carluke, to make a hall and a chamber or lodge at Carstairs, and to issue your orders for this to the sheriff of Lanark.

I also ask you to issue further orders to your foresters of Jedburgh to give me timber to make a lodge at Ancrum.

26 March 1305

Record of Bishop Robert and the Guardians' decision to hold a parliament to discuss the state of Scotland.

Record of the advice by the bishop of Glasgow, the earl of Carrick and John de Moubray, about arrangements to be made for a parliament to consider the state of Scotland, with King Edward's decisions about the matter.

March 1306

An English spy writes to Edward I telling him that Robert the Bruce has started a rebellion in Galloway (South West Scotland). The spy thinks that Bruce is now trying to make himself king of Scots, and he hears that Bruce is on his way to Scone to be crowned. Bishop Robert has been helping Bruce.

My lord, I write to you with news that the earl of Carrick [Robert the Bruce] has made war in Galloway. The earl of Carrick has been at Glasgow and Rutherglen and has received the fealty of the people wherever he has arrived. The wicked bishop [Robert] remains at Glasgow as his chief adviser. I understand that the earl of Carrick is attempting to seize the realm of Scotland and to be king.

On the day that this letter was written, John of Menteith informed me that the earl of Carrick had crossed the water with 60 men-at-arms. The Saturday before this letter was written, the earl of Carrick came to Glasgow and the bishop [Robert] gave him full forgiveness for his sins, made him swear that he would live under the direction of the clergy of Scotland, and freed him to secure his rightful inheritance [i.e. the Scottish crown].

They had a meal together and the earl left in the direction of Menteith to cross the River Clyde. And when he came to Dumbarton he ordered Alexander Lindsay and Walter Logan to demand the surrender of the castle, and that John of Menteith should go out under truce to talk with them. John would not agree to come out of the castle, but allowed the earl to come under truce so close to the castle that John could hear from inside what he wanted to say. The earl demanded the surrender of the castle and John replied that he held it by the king's commission and he would not surrender it except to the king.

After June 1306

Record of the expenses for putting together a legal case against Bishop Robert Wishart, and delivering these documents to the Pope.

Payment made to Master Thomas for going to Winchester at the king's command to arrange (along with others of the king's council) for the making of legal documents in the court case against the bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow: for his expenses for 292 days, staying at Winchester for 12 days and going from there to the Pope's court in Rome with the legal documents and returning, £48 [about £25,000 today].

August 1306

A record that certain documents are to be read to the Pope as evidence that Bishop Robert has broken his oath to Edward I and is a rebel.

Document to be read before Pope Clement V, against Robert Wishart, bishop of Glasgow, who swore fealty to the King of England six times, setting out his various acts of perjury and rebellion.

August 1306

Bishop Robert pleads with Edward I to allow him to stay in England until the war in Scotland is over.

Robert, bishop of Glasgow, to Edward, King of England: greeting.

I pray you, for the love of God and for the salvation of my soul, to allow me to remain in England, subject to whatever guarantee you demand, until the uprising of the Scots has been entirely put down.

7 August 1306

Personal orders by Edward I to put Bishop Robert in chains.

King Edward to the sheriff of Southampton: greeting.

I order you to put the bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow in irons in the castles of Winchester and Porchester.

August 1306

Record of the cost for transporting Bishop Robert and others as prisoners.

Expenses paid for taking the bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow and the abbot of Scone from Newcastle to Winchester. They were received at Lancaster on 10 August [1306]. The bishops were given 6d. each daily [about £13 today], and the abbot 4d. daily [about £9 today] . A cart and 4 horses were needed for their baggage.

Windsor: 23 July 1308

Edward II tells the Pope that he will not release the bishop of Glasgow.

Edward, king of England, to Pope Clement V: greeting.

In reply to your letter, I refuse to free the bishop of Glasgow [Robert] while the Scottish war lasts. The bishop of St Andrews, however, is no longer considered dangerous and has therefore already been released from my custody.

Arbroath: 26 April 1309

Charter by Robert Bruce giving Bishop Robert all of his churches and properties and money as a reward for supporting him. These things are to be given over to the chancellor and the chamberlain and anyone else nominated by the bishop (Bishop Robert being a prisoner in England at this time).

Robert, king of Scots, to my justiciars, sheriffs, grieves and bailies: greeting.

Since Robert, bishop of Glasgow, has consistently and patiently supported my work as king, I grant him by this charter all of his churches, lands, property, revenues, possessions, and goods.

I command that, from now on, you should all make sure that the churches, lands, property, revenues, possessions, and all of the bishop's goods which are in your jurisdiction, are released to my chancellor and chamberlain, or to the bishop's appointed representatives.

I also forbid you from troubling Bishop Robert. Anyone who goes against my wishes will face a large fine.

Berwick: January 1311

Edward II commands his chancellor to write to the Pope, asking that Bishop Robert should not be allowed to return to Scotland.

Edward, king of England, to Walter, my chancellor: greeting.

I have heard that the bishop of Glasgow [Robert], who has sown such trouble and discord in Scotland, is busy pleading to the Pope for permission to return to his own country. This would be most prejudicial to my business there, and an encouragement to my enemies if he did return.

Therefore, I command you to issue letters under my Great Seal to the Pope and the cardinals named in the enclosed list, urgently opposing Bishop Robert's return to

his country. You should point out Robert's evil conditions, his evil bearing, and his oaths which were repeatedly broken, and anything else to convince the Pope to refuse him return to Scotland.

Berwick: 23 April 1311

Edward II orders his chancellor to write to the Pope, asking for a second time to remove Bishop Robert and to appoint Stephen Seagrave (a loyal follower of Edward) as bishop of Glasgow in his place.

Edward, king of England, to Walter, my chancellor: greeting.

I command you to write special letters to the Holy Father [the Pope], once again requesting that he removes the bishop of Glasgow [Robert] from Scotland, and appoint Master Stephen of Seagrave as bishop instead. I greatly desire that this should be granted, because of my affection for Master Stephen and for the peace, tranquillity and security of the Christians in Scotland.

In your letter you should point out the virtues of Master Stephen as you see best.

2 October 1314

Edward II sends the bishop of Glasgow, together with members of Robert Bruce's immediate family, as prisoners to Carlisle Castle.

I, King Edward, send Robert, bishop of Glasgow, the countess of Carrick, wife of Robert Bruce, with his sister and daughter, and Donald of Mar, to Carlisle castle. They should be taken from there to a place arranged by the earl of Essex and Hereford and the sheriff.