

SPIES

Spies were people who would live among their enemies and then secretly report back to their own side all of their enemy's plans. This was a dangerous person to be because you had to pretend to be fighting for your enemy, and if they found out you were a spy they would kill you.

In the Wars of Independence, spies were used by the English to find out what the Scottish army were planning to do next. This meant the king could decide how best to attack the Scots. The spies did not always report to the king, but sometimes to lords or the king's officers who would then write to the king with the information.

There are some records of court cases where men had been accused of being a spy, sometimes because they were related to the enemy or because they had moved across the border when the war started or because they had been seen keeping a look-out at night.

There are other records which tell us that spies would be paid like any other job by the king's officers. We don't know how much spies were paid, but we can imagine it would be a good amount otherwise people wouldn't do such a dangerous job.

Wark (Northern England): Wednesday 21 March 1296 **The king's lawmen hear the crimes of prisoners at Wark.**

William of Whittingham was accused by John of Wigtown, a knight, and sent to prison because it was said that he was a Scottish spy, and that he withdrew from the country where he held lands [England] in order to avoid serving in the king's army against the Scots.

It was said that he is in the following of John 'Red' Comyn, the enemy of the King of England. William comes to the king's court and says that he is not guilty and submits himself to a jury.

The jurors say on oath that he is a good and loyal man, and is not guilty of the offences with which he is charged. Therefore he is acquitted.

Berwick Wednesday 4 April 1296 **The king's lawmen hear the crimes of a spy at Berwick.**

Walter of Heatherslaw, son of William of Crookham, was summoned to court on suspicions of being a spy and an enemy of the King of England.

Because no one brings charges against him, leaving the matter in the hands of the crown, he is given over to the custody of Sir Walter de Huntercombe on Walter's guarantee. Walter of Heatherslaw says that he is a good and loyal man and he submits himself to a jury.

The jurors say on oath that he is not a spy, but a good and loyal man. Therefore he is acquitted.

Clunie: Thursday 28 June 1296

The king's lawmen hear the crimes of a spy at Clunie.

William of Chester was arrested because he was found keeping watch at night. Charged with being a spy, he says that he is not guilty and submits himself to a jury. The jurors say on their oath that he is a good and loyal man and is not guilty. Therefore he is acquitted.

Roxburgh: 20 August 1299

A man loyal to Edward I reports on events in Scotland that he has been told by a spy, including a heated argument between the Scottish Guardians.

Sire, I write you with news of the recent meeting by the Scots in Selkirk forest.

A meeting happened there of the bishop of St Andrews [William Lamberton], the earl of Carrick [Robert the Bruce], the earl of Buchan, the earl of Menteith, Sir John Comyn 'the son' [John 'the Red' Comyn], and the steward of Scotland. Their intention was to attack Roxburgh Castle.

My spy told me that disagreements began among them as Sir David Graham demanded Sir William Wallace's lands and goods, as Wallace had been going abroad without leave. And his brother Sir Malcolm Wallace's objected to this, and the two knights [Graham and Wallace] drew their knives. Sir John Comyn took the earl of Carrick by the throat, and the earl of Buchan seized the bishop of St Andrews.

They finally agreed that the bishop of St Andrews, the earl of Carrick, and Sir John Comyn should be Guardians of the kingdom, the first having custody of the castles as the principal Guardian.

They all left Peebles that same day: the earl of Carrick and Sir David of Brechin going to Annandale and Galloway, the earl of Buchan and Sir John Comyn north of Forth, the steward and the earl of Menteith to Clydesdale. The bishop of St Andrews is still at Stobo, Sir Ingram de Umfraville has been made sheriff of Roxburgh, and Sir Robert Keith warden of Selkirk forest. He has been left with 100 armoured horses and 1,500 foot-soldiers, plus all the foresters, in order to lead a raid on the English Border. Each lord left part of his men with Umfraville for this reason.

31 July 1299

The keeper of Lochmaben Castle requests an Irishman to be paid for his spying.

Robert de Clifford, keeper of Lochmaben Castle and Annandale, requests Master Richard Abingdon to pay (either in money or goods), the wages of Richard le Bret, an Irish hobbler [light-horseman] retained to spy on the passings and haunts of the enemy by night and day, who has been on duty for six weeks and three days, in case he stops spying because he needs more food.

21 September 1301

One of the king's knights writes to him, telling him that a spy told him where the Scots were and where they are moving to.

William of Durham, knight, to my lord, King Edward: greeting.

This Monday, a spy came to me at Peebles from Nithsdale and told me for certain

that the Scots, who had been in Galloway, are now retreating towards Nithsdale. They were at a place called 'les Kellys' this Sunday and will be at Glencairn on Monday.

21 September 1301

Alexander Balliol tells Edward I that he still has spies among the Scots army and he can use them to warn the soldiers in the borders if the Scots army moves there.

Alexander de Balliol of Cavers to my lord, King Edward: greeting.

I have heard from your letters that Sir John de Soulis has gone towards Galloway with a great company of Scots. I still have my spies among them, and will inform the keepers of the March [the borders] as soon as I hear that the Scots are coming.

You also told me that if I provided spies they should remain under my control, and I will do my best for you in this.

You must not take it wrongly that I have not given you news more quickly, for I would hate to send you anything other than certain news.

As to what you have told me concerning Sir Walter de Burdon, who is staying at Carstairs Castle, I will be ready whenever Sir Walter commands me.

I and my fellow keepers of the March [the Borders] are threatened by a possible Scottish raid to destroy my lands and to seize the forest, so we have arranged to gather next Sunday [24 September] at a place on the March to inspect our forces.

I ask for your orders, my lord, as I am ready to obey.

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.

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 oath of loyalty from the people wherever he has arrived. The wicked bishop [Robert Wishart] 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 [the Firth of Clyde] with 60 men-at-arms. The Saturday before this letter was written, the earl of Carrick came to Glasgow and the bishop 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.

Between 20 February 1306 and 7 July 1307
Receipt of payments made to a spy.

Payments made to John of Pencaitland, who was sent from Berwick to the parts beyond the River Forth to spy concerning the war.

14 July 1312

An English spy writes to Edward II telling him about Robert the Bruce's Parliament at Ayr and plans to attack England and castles.

My lord, since I left you at York, Sir Robert Bruce has held a Parliament at Ayr and intends to send Sir Edward, his brother, with the greater part of his forces, into England, while he himself attacks the castles of Dumfries, Buittle and Caerlaverock, remaining there and sending his light troops to plunder the North for their support.