

BISHOP WILLIAM LAMBERTON

Died 1328

Bishop of St Andrews 1298–1328

Guardian of Scotland 1299–1301

Early career

William Lamberton began his career as one of the staff of priests in Glasgow Cathedral when Robert Wishart was bishop. He was appointed to one of the main offices of the cathedral (the office of chancellor), and attended King John Balliol's first parliament in February 1293. After Edward I's conquest of Scotland in 1296 he was one of more than 1,600 who swore loyalty to Edward.

Wallace's bishop

Throughout his career William Lamberton had particularly close links with France. After the English army was defeated at the Battle of Stirling Bridge on 11 September 1297 he was probably with William Fraser, bishop of St Andrews, in France trying to gain support for Scottish independence. When William Fraser died shortly afterwards, Lamberton was chosen on 3 November to be his successor as bishop of St Andrews. The decision to appoint Lamberton as bishop must have been approved by Wallace. He was consecrated bishop at the papal court in June 1298.

Lamberton as Guardian

After Wallace resigned as Guardian following the Battle of Falkirk on 22 July 1298, John 'the Red' Comyn and Robert Bruce (the future king) became joint Guardians. But they were bitter rivals. In 1299 Lamberton joined them as principal Guardian when Bruce and Comyn fell out. He continued until 1301, when the exiled King John Balliol appointed John Soules as sole Guardian. Lamberton spent much of the following years on diplomatic missions for the independent Scottish government. He could not, though, prevent the king of France from making peace with Edward I in May 1303. This left the Scots to face Edward on their own. On 9 February 1304 most Scottish leaders surrendered to Edward I. Lamberton was still abroad, but was included in the surrender, and returned to Scotland soon afterwards.

Lamberton and the inauguration of Robert Bruce

In 1305 Lamberton was trusted by Edward I to lead Edward's council in Scotland. Lamberton did not, however, think the cause of independence was lost. In June 1304 he had entered into a secret agreement with Robert the Bruce, who was by then head of the Bruce family and had his sights set on taking the throne. When Bruce made his move, Lamberton was ready to perform his role as bishop of St Andrews in Bruce's inauguration as king in March 1306.

The early years of Bruce's reign

Lamberton was captured by the English soon afterwards and was kept in chains for nearly a year, paying a huge sum for his release. Returning to Scotland in 1309, Lamberton's skill as a diplomat allowed him to keep on good terms with both Edward II and Robert Bruce. In early 1312 he finally joined Bruce and abandoned Edward II for good. In 1318 the official opening of St Andrews Cathedral was performed as a celebration of Scotland's liberation. (The cathedral had taken more than 150 years to complete!). This must have been the high point of Lamberton's career.

Lamberton's last years

Lamberton was so closely allied to Bruce that he was targeted along with Robert Bruce when in 1319 the pope, spurred on by Edward II of England, denounced Bruce and his supporters. Edward tried to get the pope to replace Lamberton with an Englishman as bishop of St Andrews. Lamberton defied the pope by repeatedly ignoring orders to come to Rome to answer for his actions. After the pope received the Declaration of Arbroath in 1320 the situation began to improve. Lamberton died on 20 May 1328, just over a fortnight after Scottish independence had finally been recognised when the Treaty of Edinburgh was ratified by the English parliament at Northampton on 4 May 1328.

Berwick: 28 August 1296

William Lamberton, as chancellor of Glasgow Cathedral, swears to be loyal to Edward I after Edward's conquest of Scotland.

Master William of Lamberton, chancellor of the church of Glasgow, having come to the faith and will of his lord, Edward, king of England, promises to serve him well and loyally. And he has performed loyalty to him. And he has sealed this letter with his seal.

Rome: 17 June 1298

Letter of Pope Boniface VIII to the king of Scotland, confirming the election of William Lamberton, chancellor of Glasgow, to the bishopric of St Andrews.

Boniface the bishop, servant of the servants of God, to the illustrious king of the Scots: greeting and apostolic blessing.

The church of St Andrews in Scotland, having been left without a bishop by the death of William Fraser, the priests of that church, my beloved sons asked for an election to happen under John the Prior, John the elder, William the archdeacon of Lothian, Adam the Sub-Prior, John Kayrer, Adam of Laurbeden, and Thomas of Auchtermuchty.

John the Prior, with the approval of the others, elected William, chancellor of Glasgow cathedral, as bishop and pastor of St Andrews. William is a man of great foresight and discretion, and knowledge of letters, and of honest life.

Roxburgh: 20 August 1299

A loyal man of Edward I reports to him on events in Scotland, including news of the bishop of St Andrews.

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.

Edinburgh: June 1300

The keeper of Edinburgh writes to one of Edward I's closest officials, giving news of events in Scotland, and an argument between William Lamberton and John Comyn.

John of Kingston, keeper of Edinburgh Castle, to Ralph of Manton, keeper of the king's personal accounts: greeting.

I write to inform you that the leading men in Scotland held a parliament at Rutherglen on 10 May, and after an argument between the bishop of St Andrews and John Comyn, they all agreed to elect Ingram de Umfraville as one of the Guardians of Scotland in place of the earl of Carrick [Robert the Bruce]. They have adjourned the parliament until 27 December because of the earl of Buchan's absence in Galloway.

Scone: 23 February 1302

The Guardians tell Philip, king of France, that they will respect his truce with the king of England.

John de Soules, Guardian of the realm of Scotland, and the prelates, earls, barons and all the community of the realm to lord Philip, king of France: greetings.

Since the lord William, bishop of St Andrews, has returned from an expedition on our business, we promise to respect the truce between you and the king of England.

Cambuskenneth: 11 June 1304

Agreement between Bishop William and Robert the Bruce, earl of Carrick.

Let it be known to all that, on 11 June 1304, the lord William Lamberton, bishop of St Andrews, and the nobleman Sir Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick and lord of Annandale, came together at Cambuskenneth to talk about future threats and attacks by rivals which they wished as far as possible to avoid. They have therefore undertaken a bond of friendship in the following form:

They will give advice to one another in all their business and affairs at all times. And they will provide aid and power to one another at all times. Neither will attempt any difficult business without consulting the other, and each will warn the other of any danger and try to protect them against it. They have given an oath to observe these terms under a penalty of £10,000 if they break it [about £5 million today].

Scotlandwell (Kinross-shire): 9 June 1306

Bishop William says he had no part in the death of John Comyn.

William Lamberton, bishop of St Andrews, to Sir Aymer de Valence, lieutenant of our lord the king [Edward] in Scotland: greeting.

We deny any part in the murder of Sir John Comyn and Sir Robert, his uncle, nor in the outbreak of the war.

After June 1306

Record of the expenses for taking Bishop William to prison in England.

Payment made to the sheriff of Staffordshire for expenses in taking the bishop of St Andrews from Nottingham to Winchester: for 10 days in August, £8, 18s. 4d. [about £4,500 today].

After June 1306

Record of the expenses for putting together a legal case against Bishop William, 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].

Newcastle: 9 August 1306

Bishop William confirms the contents of some documents that were read out to him.

- 1) He had sworn himself to be loyal to King Edward.**
- 2) He had made an alliance with Robert Bruce in Stirling, 11 June 1304.**
- 3) He had hidden this alliance by saying he didn't remember it.**
- 4) He had travelled to see Bruce after the latter had crowned himself king.**
- 5) He denied handing over the son of James Stewart to Bruce.**
- 6) He admitted to allowing Bruce to join in his mass.**

On 9 August 1306, William, bishop of St Andrews, acknowledged the truth of the following documents exhibited to him by Sirs John of Sandale, Robert of Cottingham, and John de Winchester:

- 1) His oath of loyalty to the king of England, dated at Stirling, 4 May 1304, under his seal in red wax.
- 2) His alliance with Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick, at Cambuskenneth on St Barnabas' Day the same year [11 June 1304], under his seal.
- 3) Being interrogated as to why he concealed this alliance with Robert Bruce when he was questioned by the king's council at Schene near Kingston, in violation of his oath, the bishop replied that he had entirely forgotten that alliance, and therefore he did not mention it.
- 4) Being asked by Sir John of Sandale why he, a trusted councillor of the king of England, had hurried to cross the River Forth to Robert Bruce when he was crowned. He replied that he went to see him on account of grievous threats

against his person and substance, and for no other reason, and now he was heartily sorry, for he saw he had lost all.

- 5) Being asked by Sir Robert of Cottingham why he, who was so trusted by the king [Edward I] as to have charge of the person of Andrew, son and heir of Sir James the steward of Scotland, delivered him to Robert Bruce after the king had commanded his return. The bishop denied this.
- 6) He admitted that he had performed the mass to Robert Bruce after Sir John Comyn's murder.

Westminster: 10 November 1307

Edward II orders the payment of Bishop William's expenses as a prisoner in Winchester castle.

King Edward to my sheriff of Southampton: greeting.

I inform you that William, the bishop of St Andrews, a prisoner from Scotland, is staying in my castle of Winchester, and Robert Wishart, the bishop of Glasgow, likewise a prisoner from Scotland, is staying in Porchester Castle. I therefore command you to see to it that your bailiffs have their pay for the expenses of these prisoners, according to the agreement drawn up on this matter with the lord Edward of famous memory, late king of England, our father, which is in your possession.

I shall make allowance for this in my financial accounts.

Westminster: 23 May 1308

Edward II orders the release of Bishop William from prison.

Edward, king of England, to my sheriff of Southampton: greeting.

I command you to free William, bishop of St Andrews, from Winchester Castle, since John Moubray, Alexander Abernethy, Robert Keith, Adam Gordon, and Henry of Halliburton guarantee his good behaviour on his release, and that he will remain within the boundaries of the county of Northampton.

Windsor: 23 July 1308

Edward II tells the Pope that he will not release the bishop of Glasgow, but he has released Bishop William.

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.

Northampton: 11 August 1308

William Lamberton swears to be faithful to Edward II, who has freed him from prison.

I, William, bishop of St Andrews, make known that I have sworn to be faithful to my lord, Edward, king of England, who recently commanded my freedom from prison. I swear this oath on the Sacraments and a relic of the True Cross, swearing to remain within the bounds of the bishopric of Durham, where the king has permitted me to stay. I attach my seal to this letter.

Berwick-upon-Tweed: 24 July 1311

Edward II commands his chancellor to write to the pope to explain that, because he does not want William Lamberton to leave Scotland, he won't be present at the General Council of the church (a meeting of all the bishops in the western world) called by the Pope.

King Edward to my chancellor: greeting.

I have ordered the bishop of St Andrews not to leave Scotland, because of many important affairs concerning that kingdom, and mainly to avoid the danger of the souls which might be put in danger if he were absent from Scotland. Yet he has been personally summoned to the next General Council. Therefore I command you to write to the Pope to excuse bishop William's absence.