

## **Drummer Major James Spens: Letters from a Common Soldier Abroad, 1617-1632**

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The letters of Drummer Major James Spens were first identified by Mr Archibald Duncan of Pittenweem in 1950 as part of his project to translate the diplomatic correspondence of Sir James Spens of Wormiston.<sup>1</sup> Wormiston served as both the British ambassador to Sweden and a general in the Swedish army. Duncan carefully sifted out 12 letters which had been misidentified as belonging to the ambassador, and compiled his evidence for so doing in a three page memorandum which now sits alongside the corpus in the National Records of Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The memorandum focusses on why the letters cannot be those of Wormiston and Duncan’s interest in them ended there. However, to scholars of early modern Scotland, and particularly of Scottish military service abroad, these letters represent a unique find – a series of letters by a common soldier covering a fifteen-year period of service.

The letters relate to the author’s unspecified role in the garrison of ‘Dewbruch’, which Duncan believed might be Dewsbury in West Yorkshire. However, the true location of the garrison is in Doesburg in Gelderland (The Netherlands).<sup>3</sup> Spens’s first four letters allow us to deduce that there was a Scottish community near Doesburgh which included family friends such as Thomas Aikin, John Wilson and his wife, and at least two of his relatives including his mother’s sister and her husband. It is possible that Spens learned of the opportunity to serve in the garrison either through these individuals or from members of the Scottish or English brigades serving in the Dutch Republic. English forces had served there intermittently since the end of the sixteenth century onwards and, in their correspondence home, officers variously recorded the town name as Dewburgh, Dewburrie, Diuborrow and Diuborro. Evidence for the fact that it is Doesburg and not Dewsbury comes from the letters themselves. Spens notes that the garrison he is stationed in is 100 Scots miles from their landing place.<sup>4</sup> But he notes that this distance was further than one John Fairlie, a friend in Gelderland, said it would be.<sup>5</sup> The town of circa 2000 inhabitants supported a garrison throughout the period of the Dutch Eighty Years’ War (1568-1648).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, we can identify the units of the Scots-Dutch brigade present in Gelderland down to company level. Two companies of 70 men drawn from Colonel William Brog’s regiment served there in 1617 when Spens arrived – those of captains Andrew Donaldson and Philip Mowbury.<sup>7</sup> Spens’s letters only

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan’s translations into English of James Spens of Wormiston’s letters were never published but they can be found in Uppsala University Library, ‘The Diplomatic Correspondence of Sir James Spens of Wormiston’, Manuscript E379d. The letters to the Swedish Chancellor and Regent, Axel Oxenstierna, have been published in their original languages in Arne Jönsson (ed.) *Rikskanslern Axel Oxenstiernas skrifter och brevväxling. Senare avdelning, trettonde bandet: Brev från Letters James Spens och Jan Rutgers* (Stockholm, 2007), pp.23-274.

<sup>2</sup> National Records of Scotland, RH9/2/231-242.

<sup>3</sup> Spens variously spells this place name Dewbruch, Dewbrig and Dewburgh. The letters themselves appear on the catalogue of the National Records of Scotland as being sent from Doesburg. We also thank Marcella Mulder and Dr Griet Vermeesch for their help in confirming the location of the garrison.

<sup>4</sup> One Scots mile is equivalent of 1.13 English miles or 1.81 kilometers. See the conversion chart in V. Enthoven, S. Murdoch and E. Williamson (eds.), *The Navigator: The Log of John Anderson. VOC Pilot-Major, 1640-1643* (Leiden, 2010), p.xvi.

<sup>5</sup> RH9/2/232: James Spens to his sister, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 30 August 1617.

<sup>6</sup> Griet Vermeesch, ‘War and garrison towns in the Dutch Republic: the cases of Gorinchem and Doesburg (c.1570-c.1660)’, *Urban History* 36 (2009), pp.3-23.

<sup>7</sup> J. Ferguson (ed.), *Papers Illustrating the History of the Scots Brigade in the Service of the United Netherlands, 1572–1872*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1899–1901), vol. 1, pp. 229, 72. 3. One John (Jan) Spens later served as chamberlain to the

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enable us to identify one comrade in arms in Dutch service, merely identified as the son of John Waschop (Wauchop).<sup>8</sup> However, this group of letters ends in 1619 and it seems he may have returned to Scotland thereafter. The first four letters do not mention a wife, whereas those from 1628 onwards do. Moreover, in one of his final letters, dated 1632, Spens notes that he had been out of Scotland for eight years. This gives us a window from roughly 1620-1624 during which he was in Scotland, got married and had children, including his son William Spens.

The 1624 date is of interest as it coincides with James Spens of Wormiston’s permission to raise a new levy in Scotland for Sweden.<sup>9</sup> A perusal of the muster-roll of the first contingents who arrived in service that year show that James Spens served as a ‘tambour’ (drummer) not only in the regiment of his namesake, but in the colonel’s own company.<sup>10</sup> The unit, which Spens called the regiment of ‘Crouner Spens’, was wholly Scottish at this juncture.<sup>11</sup> Once again then, Spens served alongside fellow Scots overseas including the colonel’s son, a sergeant also called James Spens. That Spens served in the regiment of his more senior namesakes is probably not coincidence. In recent research on the subject of military motivations, kith and kin relations have proved to be compelling as a primary reason for serving in a particular regiment.<sup>12</sup> Indeed by 1626, Wormiston’s regiment included James Spens (colonel), James Spens (the colonel’s son), James Spens (the drummer) and James Spens (a musketeer). Serving alongside this group was Alexander Spens, who was also a drummer and perhaps drummer Spens’s brother who he noted as having died in Germany in 1631.<sup>13</sup>

This particular corpus of letters is unique in that it is largely devoid of the ‘big cause’ motivations for enlistment into the military. This does not mean that Spens’s other letters did not mention such matters, or that he may not have written about them to a different group of recipients. Nevertheless, such causes are not recorded here. The information we do have shows us that Spens did not feel compelled to serve according to a particular ideology, but rather chose military service as an available occupation. He mentions to his wife several times that if she knew of any work available to him in Scotland he would rather leave service and return to take up such work to be with his family.<sup>14</sup> He does mention ‘God’s Cause’, but not in reference to his soldiering or the Protestant League, rather as a point of honour with regard to a lady he feels he let down by being in her company when she received an offence.<sup>15</sup> While many Scots at officer level mention the cause of Elizabeth Stuart (the Queen of Bohemia and daughter of James VI & I) as a primary motivation for service, Spens is silent on the subject.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Spens says nothing of the pursuit of money in a mercenary sense. In the opinion of Colonel Robert Monro, ‘such Souldiers to command were my

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colonel, The relationship to James Spens has not been established. See Rotterdam City Archives, ONA, ‘Attestatie of verklaring’, 29 July 1636.

<sup>8</sup> RH9/2/232: James Spens to his sister, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 30 August 1617.

<sup>9</sup> For Wormiston’s permission to levy in Scotland and England in 1624 see Alexia Grosjean, *An Unofficial Alliance: Scotland and Sweden, 1569-1654* (Leiden, 2003), pp.58-59.

<sup>10</sup> Krigsarkivet, Stockholm (hereafter KrA)/ 0022/1624/8 (1624), f.264. James Spens’ Regiment, Muster, August 1624.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Crouner’ is a Scots language variant of the word colonel.

<sup>12</sup> For motivational factors to enlist see Steve Murdoch and Alexia Grosjean, *Alexander Leslie and the Scottish Generals of the Thirty Years’ War, 1618-1648* (London, 2014), pp.40-42. For the specifics of kith and kin clustering in specific regiments see *ibidem*. pp.5-6, 37, 82-83, 97, 121 &167.

<sup>13</sup> KrA/0022/1626/3 (1626), ff.150-153. James Spens’ Regiment, Muster, 1626. For the death of his brother in Germany in 1631 see RH9/2/241: James Spens to his father and mother, Amsterdam, 12 November 1631.

<sup>14</sup> See RH9/2/236: James Spens to his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, Riga, 1 October 1628.

<sup>15</sup> RH9/2/239: James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, no date.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Robert Monro’s declaration that ‘I did come at it [the war]; for many reasons, but especially for the libertie of the daughter of our dread Sovereigne, the distressed Queen of Bohemia, and her Princlie Issue; next for the libertie of our distressed brethren in Christ’. R. Monro, *His Expedition with a worthy Scots Regiment called Mac-Keyes* (2 vols., London, 1637), II, pp. 61-2; See also Thomas Kellie, *Pallas Armata or Military Instructions for the Learned, The First Part* (Edinburgh, 1627), p. 3.

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choice, that cared not for gold nor money, but for credit’.<sup>17</sup> When Spens wrote home to his parents after leaving the Swedish army for Dutch East India service (VOC), he wrote of his motivations similarly; that ‘I would not wish for gold’, but rather he talked of ‘the goodness that I find by travelling and visiting foreign countries’.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever drove Spens to enlist in Sweden, he says little about the grander ambitions of Gustav II Adolf, describing the move into Germany as part of the Swedish campaign against the Habsburgs with the single line ‘we ar to remow utin yis cuntrie presentlie to Duchland quhar ye kings majestie is for he hes greit weirs yer’.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it was while ‘the Lion of the North’ was conducting his campaigns that Spens opted to leave Swedish service. This was not due to an objection to the campaign, but as a way of escaping the personal tragedy of the loss of his wife, Elizabeth, during childbirth.<sup>20</sup> Having repeatedly sent her letters badgering her to come and join him in Riga, Spens felt that many would think he had been unkind to her and been responsible for her death. He thus decided on a self-imposed exile to last seven years.<sup>21</sup> After receiving permission to leave the regiment he removed himself to Amsterdam where, with his old friend George Borthwick<sup>22</sup>, he enlisted for a seven-year tour to the East Indies as a soldier in the VOC:

I my selff hes taikin ane Journay in hand that non of my kin  
ever hes tain ye Lyk in hand; quhilk is to the eist ingies quhilk I am taik  
on for sevin zeirs; fyve zeirs in the Land and ane zeir cuming and  
ane zeir going quhilk I hop in Jesus chryst yat it sall be the best Journay  
yat ever I took in hand to ye glorie of god and your comfortis<sup>23</sup>

Archibald Duncan suggested that the rank of ‘drummer major’ did not exist within the Swedish army, but it certainly existed in Scottish regiments of the period.<sup>24</sup> In a muster of the Army of the Solemn League and Covenant in England in 1646, most regiments of foot contained a cohort of drummers, usually two per company.<sup>25</sup> Specifically in Colonel Arthur Erskine’s regiment we find John Henderson recorded as ‘Drummer Major’ for Erskine’s own company, along with two other drummers. In the other companies of the same regiment the muster-roll records another eight ‘drummers’ equalling 11 in total.<sup>26</sup> From this we can confidently infer that ‘drummer-major’ was the senior drummer in a regiment responsible for the collective drum cohort in some regiments. As ‘General of British’ in Swedish service it seems that James Spens of Wormiston continued to employ Scottish ranking structures, including the regimental drummers as senior to ordinary

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<sup>17</sup> Monro, *His Expedition*, vol.1, p. 73. Monro returns to this point several times noting that the best pike-men ‘remain standing firme with their Officers, guarding them and their Colours, as being worthy the glorious name of brave Souldiers, preferring vertue before the love of gold, that vanisheth while virtue remaineth’. Monro, *Expedition*, II, p. 37.

<sup>18</sup> RH9/2/242: James Spens to his father and mother, Guinea Coast, 23 February 1632.

<sup>19</sup> RH9/2/240: James Spens to his father and mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, 1630.

<sup>20</sup> RH9/2/240: James Spens to his father and mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, 1630.

<sup>21</sup> RH9/2/241: James Spens to his father and mother, Amsterdam, 12 November 1631

<sup>22</sup> A George Borthwick served as a musketeer in the same regiment as James Spens. See KrA/0022/1629/22 (1629), f.102.. James Spens’ Regiment, Muster, 1629.

<sup>23</sup> RH9/2/241: James Spens to his father and mother, Amsterdam, 12 November 1631. For the context of Scots serving in the East Indies in this period see Enthoven, Murdoch and Williamson, *The Navigator*, pp.87-117

<sup>24</sup> We thank Dr Björn Asker at The Swedish National Archives for confirming this to be the case.

<sup>25</sup> See various mentions in The National Archives at Kew, SP 41/2, ‘Muster Rolls of the Scots’ Army in England, January 1645/6.

<sup>26</sup> The National Archives at Kew, SP 41/2, ‘Muster Rolls of the Scots’ Army in England’, January 1645/6, ff-3-4

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drummers.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, having enlisted as a ‘tambour’, we find Spens recorded in the Swedish muster-roll of 1626 with the rank clearly listed as Drummer-Major.<sup>28</sup> When the regiment reached full strength (11 companies), there were no less than 25 drummers in the regiment.<sup>29</sup> The role of these men was important; they were often used to indicate the presence of recruiters in a domestic context, and once in the field they could be used as signalers.<sup>30</sup> During the Thirty Years’ War, Scottish drummers perfected the ‘Scots March’, a particular drum beat used by the Scottish regiments to marshal troops and lead them into battle. Colonel Robert Monro recorded an instance when it was even imitated by German regiments to try to frighten their enemy, giving credence to its effectiveness.<sup>31</sup>

Spens’s letters tell us much about the culture of communication for the common Scottish soldier and his correspondence reveals the ways the letters were to be used. They were to be read aloud to family and then given sight of to his friends. Although often addressed to his mother, subsections are included that directly addressed his siblings or father. He took care to add additional recipients in case of the failure of delivery. Moreover, this small parcel of 12 letters is merely the tip of a sadly now lost mountain of mail. Spens informs us of 20 letters sent in a single year to his wife alone,<sup>32</sup> as well as indicating throughout that his other friends were in constant written communication with home. Several of these letters reveal that the soldiers would each act as couriers for bundles of correspondence when the opportunity arose. Spens himself served as a courier for James Hanna, albeit he unfortunately lost the bundle entrusted to him to a thief.<sup>33</sup> Despite the relative paucity of this corpus, the surviving letters illustrate the common soldier’s hopes, fears and even separation anxiety. But, crucially, we learn that even the ordinary ranks were as much in communication with home as their higher status officers serving overseas. After all, Spens’s letters found their way home from as far afield as Doesburg, Riga, Amsterdam and the coast of Africa.

The frequent mention of women in the letters shows Spens’s concern for female kith, kin and friends alike.<sup>34</sup> The most potent of these letters are a series of three in which he berates his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, for not writing to him often enough, or worse, being unjust to him when she did.<sup>35</sup> Despite his obvious fury at Elizabeth’s failure to keep in touch, he consistently protests his love for her and eventually appears to have briefly returned to Scotland before bringing her with him to Riga in 1629. This involved a treacherous journey during which his kinsman, James Spens of Wormiston, supported him for some 15 weeks in Stockholm after they were robbed.<sup>36</sup> This common soldier also wrote to his mother and sister, often providing support in difficult situations in which

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<sup>27</sup> In other cases in Sweden we find senior drummers identified in this way. See for example the regiments of James Ramsay in 1629 and John Meldrum in 1630. KrA/0022/1629/10, f.339 and KrA/0022/1630/23 f.274 respectively.

<sup>28</sup> KrA/0022/1626/3 (1626), f.152.. James Spens’ Regiment, Muster, 1626. There is no ambiguity here as the muster-roll is recorded in Scots not Swedish.

<sup>29</sup> KrA/0022/1629/22 (1629), ff.80-114.. James Spens’ Regiment, Muster, 1629. Interestingly, James Spens does not appear on this muster from October 1629. We can deduce that it was around this period he returned to Scotland to meet with Elizabeth Baillie.

<sup>30</sup> E. Furgol, *A Regimental History of the Covenanting Armies, 1639-1651* (Edinburgh, 1990), p.7.

<sup>31</sup> Monro, *His Expedition*, II, pp.65, 112.

<sup>32</sup> RH9/2/235: James Spens to his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, Riga, 1 October 1628.

<sup>33</sup> RH9/2/238: James Spens & Elizabeth Baillie to Agnes Walker, Riga 29 May [1629 or 1630]. It is possible these letters were destined for Sergeant Robert Hanna who enlisted into the same regiment as Spens in 1624. See KrA/0022/1624/8 (1624), f.264.. James Spens’ Regiment, Muster, 1624.

<sup>34</sup> For more on the role of the female migrant caught up in the military exodus from Scotland in this person see S. Talbott, ‘Scottish Women and the Scandinavian Wars of the Seventeenth Century’ in *Northern Studies*, vol. 40 (2007), pp.102-127.

<sup>35</sup> RH9/2/235-237: James Spens to his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, Riga 1 October to 1 November 1628.

<sup>36</sup> RH9/2/238: James Spens and Elizabeth Baillie to his mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, 29 May (1629 or 1630).

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they found themselves and advising on a number of matters from personal relations to business transactions. For example, he instructed his sister not to trust John Farlie, neither in the buying or selling of land.<sup>37</sup> He consoled his mother when let down in her affairs by both his brother and his father at various times.<sup>38</sup> He never forgot his former servant Janet Richisone whom he mentions in three separate letters. Along with his numerous greetings to his ‘gossop’ (Godfather), William Cuthbertson, he also sent regards to his ‘cumer’ (Godmother) Margaret Douglas.<sup>39</sup> His fictive relationship to the Douglas family is interesting, not least as Spens sent news of his friend Robert Douglas home to Douglas’s wife.<sup>40</sup> In a final mention of women who were not (yet) relations, Spens for all his love of travel and the exotic, stated emphatically after his wife had died that he would not take another spouse of any nationality but his own: ‘for I hop not to marie ane wyff till I get a Scots woman’.<sup>41</sup> This was despite having just embarked on a seven-year journey which he knew may cost him his life.

It is in this condition that we lose sight of James Spens from the historical record. He was emphatic that he would try to return to see his parents again, while observing this might not be God’s plan for either him or them. Although his fate remains uncertain for the moment, it is in his surviving letters that Spens has perhaps played his most significant role by providing a rare glimpse into a common soldier’s most personal concerns as he traversed the globe. In so doing he reminds us that the personal relationships and social networks employed in his age were not simply the preserve of the rich and famous with whom we are more familiar.

## Editorial Practice

We have left the text in its original language, Scots. Where Spens uses a word for which the equivalent in English is not obvious, we have given an English translation in the footnote. All translations are taken from the Dictionary of the Scots Language, available at: <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/>

## Punctuation and capitalisation

The script James Spens uses is sometimes unclear and quite inconsistent, particularly with regard to spelling. Moreover, he eschews the use of punctuation throughout his letters; we have introduced punctuation, most notably adding semi-colons to help the reader get a sense of the intended clauses. Similarly, although we have retained Spens’s own spelling for proper names, we have added capitalization. There are places throughout the text where Spens introduces capital letters for no apparent reason; we have left these visible.

## Spelling

In the word ‘zeires’, the first letter represents the Scottish ‘yogh’. This letter-form is common to Middle Scots and represents a sound somewhere between ‘J’ and ‘Y’ (in Middle English ‘G’ and

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<sup>37</sup> RH9/2/232: James Spens to his sister, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 30 August 1617.

<sup>38</sup> RH9/2/231: James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 30 August 1617 and n.d. 1619. – Should we change all ‘no dates’ to ‘n.d.’ or vice-versa to maintain consistency?

<sup>39</sup> RH9/2/238: James Spens and Elizabeth Baillie to his mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, 29 May (1629 or 1630).

<sup>40</sup> RH9/2/236: James Spens to his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, Riga, 1 October 1628. Robert Douglas appears in the regiment as a musketeer in 1626. See KrA/0022/1626/3 (1626), f.154. James Spens’ Regiment, Muster, 1626.

<sup>41</sup> RH9/2/239: James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, no date.

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‘Y’). By the seventeenth century the use of ‘z’ for the ‘Y’ sound is said to have been obsolete ‘except for fossilized occurrences in a limited number of words such as Cappercaillze ....’.<sup>42</sup> However, Spens uses it correctly both at the start of some words, but also in the middle of others including the surname of his wife, Elizabeth Baillzie. Thus the consistent use of the letter-form here by Spens should be of lexicographical interest to scholars of the Scots language.

In Older Scots the letters ‘*quh*’ are used to describe the equivalent of ‘*wh*’ in English. The reason for the difference comes from the Scottish double-sounded pronunciation – the breathed velar plosive followed by the voiced lip-back fricative. The symbol *qu*, adopted from French spelling in words of Romance origin gradually replaced the Old English *cw* in native words also. It remained in use in formal Scottish documents until the eighteenth century when English began to replace Scots as the language of state.<sup>43</sup>

In the word ‘yat’, the first letter represents the ‘thorn’ (þ) which was used in Old and Middle English as a form of ‘th’. In Middle Scots handwriting it is usually identical to the letter ‘y’. We have retained the ‘y’ to distinguish cases in which the author uses ‘y’ from the times when he uses ‘th’. By so doing we also follow a change in the author’s own usage where in his early letters Spens writes ‘moyer’ (moþer) for mother, though later alters this to the more modern spelling. Similarly, Spens sometimes renders the ‘th’ at the end of a word as an ‘f’ (‘helf’ instead of ‘health’), representing a labialization more often heard in speech than seen written down.

In several places Spens uses the sharp S ‘ß’ to represent a double ‘s’. Where he has used ‘ß’ we have retained it though his use of it is, again, inconsistent. Sometimes Spens includes both a second s and ß. Where ‘sß’ is the case, we have indicated only the intended ‘ß’.

### **Expansions**

There are a number of instances of contractions in this corpus of letters. Where expansions have been made, italics have been used to indicate them; e.g. ‘qlk’ has been expanded to ‘*quhilk*’ (which) and ‘qn’ to ‘*quhan*’ (when) etc.

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<sup>42</sup> M. Robinson (ed.), *The Concise Scots Dictionary* (Aberdeen, 1991), p. 814.

<sup>43</sup> For more see William Grant *et al.* (eds.), *The Scottish National Dictionary*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh, 1931-76), VII, p. 293.

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## The Letters

RH9/2/231: James Spens to his mother and father, Doesburg, 30 August 1617

1. To my loving moyer;<sup>44</sup> efter my most hertlie comandationis I am to
2. let zow to wit *yat* I am [*in*] gude helf praisid be god at yis present and let
3. zow to wit *yat* I haif resavit fra Wm Robertstone<sup>45</sup> sex quarters and ane
4. halif of grin Ingliß cloß; tua pair of pairlie hans and tua pair planis;
5. tua pair of pairlie napcinis and tua pair plane with ane angle of gold
6. with ane pair of plydis; and thanks hertlie for thame; and I wryt to
7. zow for no plydis but to hir broyer scho wald no burdin zow so sair
8. at yis tyme becaus ze have annuch ado at this tyme; bot zit
9. I thank zow hertlie for thame and for *your* liberalite *yat* ze haf
10. schawin to me; I hopin<sup>46</sup> I sall be a gude frend to yame *yat* ze haif send
11. here; I wad wis to god *yat* my broyer wad doe his diligens to zow
12. and to ye thing *yat* he promiseit me<sup>47</sup> befor god to my moyer loving;
13. ze haif done to me abone *your* power is god knawis at yis present
14. and I here nothing but scho is ane onist woman *yat* feir god
15. and uprychtlie; and it wonder me broyer *yat* he maid *zour* promiseit afore
16. god and does it not; and does not *zour* onist dew to hir yerfore for feir
17. god and doe *yat* apertein to ye dewtie of god; my hertlie comandationis
18. to zow and *yours* ~~husband~~; Thomas Aitin mak his hertlie comand
19. -ationis to zow moyer; thank be to god I am in gude helf; praisd
20. be god but sen *your* sister come heir I bein verie seik; I am a litil
21. bettir at yis present; I have resavit ane suord loving moyer; ye blissing
22. of the lord ye Jesus Chryst be with zow nicht and day and loving
23. moyer if ever god mak me ane man I sall remember on zow
24. moyer; my blissing be with zow nicht [*and*] day moyer; comand me to *John* Wiliamsone
25. and his bedfellow; comand me to Androw Brucht and his bedfellow;
26. comand me to Thomas Mairschell and his moyer; so I rest with zow;
27. cometh zow to god frome Dewbruch ye ye penilt of August
28. ye penilt day of August
29. To my loving moyer; yis be delyverit to Agnes Walker
30. the penilt of August
31. James Spens your sone
32. 1617 1617
33. Thomas Aitin maks his hertlie comandationis to zow loving moyer; mak my hertlie comandationis and he is verie weill to all frends in ye Cannongait

(reverse)

To my loving father; this be delyverit in Edinburgh to James Spens

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<sup>44</sup> Initially, as here, Spens uses the thorn (þ) to represent the ‘th’ sound in ‘mother’. In his later letters Spens shifts practice and uses ‘th’.

<sup>45</sup> The identity of this William Robertson and the other people mentioned in this letter are yet to be established.

<sup>46</sup> Spens leaves a gap between after ‘hop’ and ‘in’.

<sup>47</sup> Perhaps crossed through?

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RH9/2/232: James Spens to his sister, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 30 August 1617<sup>48</sup>

1. To my loving sister; my hertlie comandationnis be rembrit to zow *quhilk*;<sup>49</sup> I thoct
2. gude to wryt to hir *quhilk*; *our* wayeg was baif deir and coustlie *quhilk* it not as *John Fairlie*
3. spek it is in Gilderland<sup>50</sup> *quhilk*; it is ane hundreth Scotis mylis fra *our* landing place
4. *quhilk* we war ar<sup>51</sup> we cam to *our* Jurna end; we tent ane mark of everie peis
5. of gold of *our quhyt* silver we lost; silver *quhilk* com to thrie pund of the schanging
6. of *our* money *quhilk*; I have nea freind bot *John Wilsone* and his wyf in yis land
7. tak so greit cair of me and my bedfellow *quhilk*; and plis god at ye
8. spring yey will be *ye* in Scotland *quhilk* I assure zow I pray zow for;
9. ye love of god intertine tyme as thir intertine ws and *your* sone; and pray yat
10. ze speik not *your* mynd to *John Fairlie*; neither<sup>52</sup> of bying or syling of the land;
11. and be not so appin of *your* pirls as ze haif bein befor; trust him no
12. for he hes not sein *your* sone at all *quhilk quhilk*; I requist zow most
13. ernistlie till send me thrie ell of gray for to be ane Jup<sup>53</sup> to ly by ye
14. Gard with in winter; and I sall send zow ane sten of lint or tua with
15. *your* gude sister *quhilk*; I sie nothing in yis companie bot plane hardnes
16. *quhilk*; *your* sister tak moble cair and dolar<sup>54</sup> and think so lang to have
17. word of zow ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~
18. and pray zow to have mynd of Besie Ruyirfurd; my comandat
19. -ionns be Remembrit to zow and *your* sone, and *your* sister make *your* hertlie
20. comandationis to zow and mak my hertlie hertlie commandationns
21. to James Spens induellar in Edinburgh; mak my hertlie comandat
22. -ionis to Androw Bruch and to his bedfellow and to *John Williamso*
23. -ne and his wyf, and to Elspith Gudrie and hir dochter and to
24. *John Sandis* and his wyf, and to Georg Durie and his wyf
25. *quhilk*; Jonne Waschop eldest sone is in ye garischin *quher* we ar no
26. and pray zow to tak of hiz awin to bestow up hiz self *your*<sup>55</sup> comandations;
27. we know yat ze ar tum handit<sup>56</sup> at this tyme no farder bot cometh zow
28. to god be due comandationis; and *your* sister be remembrit and *your sone*
29. sone; comith zow be god frome Dewbrig; Jonne Waschop sone mak his hertlie
30. comandationis to yow ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ [and] pray
31. desere zow to ga to my ladie and tell hir of the thrie pund and get it
32. or let me ladie gaif me thrie ell of gray for it
33. James Spens; mak my hertlie comandations to a gud neibris
34. the penilt of August

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<sup>48</sup> The letter is undated other than “penilt of August”. As with his first letter he signs this one from ‘Dewbrig’ and was probably written at the same time as the one to his parents. He also addresses them in this letter.

<sup>49</sup> In this letter Spens appears to be using *quhilk* (which) as a form of punctuation. Its presence here renders the letter awkward to read as he uses the same work correctly, often on close proximity.

<sup>50</sup> Gelderland in the Netherlands.

<sup>51</sup> The Scots word here is the preposition ‘er/ere/or’ which would be rendered in English as ‘before’.

<sup>52</sup> The final letter is unclear, but must be an ‘r’ in this context.

<sup>53</sup> The Scots word ‘Jup’ usually refers to a woman’s jacket, though it is clear from the context that Spens intends it here for his own use.

<sup>54</sup> Spens here seems to be meaning “movable geir and money”.

<sup>55</sup> Unclear here due to over-written text.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Tum handit’ in English would be with ‘empty handed’ and is an idiom meaning busy.



“At Press” with *Northern Studies*, vol. 47, 2015

PS1: and I pray zow loving moyer to send me ane peis of silver to mr [..blsn?]; and I pray to send me with [...] as I wryt for it; for I have resavit ye peis of gold for thy delyverit the peis of gold to my father sister

PS2: Send no more geir for I sie the luvtenant and his wyf and they ar so gridi of the things that ze send if I misler I<sup>57</sup> sall send and had not ane haill sark till yey come; and pray ~~xxx~~ tak in care for thanks be god we ar in gud helf [...] sie be [...] quher nether your gud broyer your [...] thar sister [...] the warnin

(reverse)

1. Sister I let zow to wit yat I am weill in helth praysid [be God]
2. and deseris ye lyk of zow and prayis zow with the first [occasi]
3. -oin yat ze send word quhow ze doe quhilk; I think to [...]
4. to wit quhilk ze deseryr me tell send zow word qhow...]
5. is quhilk I think he ryt hardier handlid<sup>58</sup> and wad abo...]
6. ye war war not luvtenant Aitin I had not plais...]
7. Luvtenant Aitin had givin me of my awn pay quhilk the g[eir]
8. ze send hes done me litill gud at yis present; I wald l...]
9. ze had bocht me ane dublit your self for I have gotin [...]
10. but tua sarks and ane hat of it; I never said ware and ha[ve]
11. gotin ane dublit of it deserying zow loving moyer yat ze sa...]
12. leter ane peiß of silver quhat pleiß zow if ze may get it in [...]
13. cam tuk ye drum; weill I thank god mak my hertlie hert[lie]
14. comandationns to your moyer and my fayer comith zow to G[od]
15. and I pray yow yat ze doe sell ye land and let not Mr Fa[irlie]
16. begyl zow; and I pray zow moyer yat ze send me nothing [but]
17. ane litil thing to send my self at noboyey wit as I send fr...]
18. and doe not ane nicht the ho...]
19. bot ane and awin w...]
20. [...]

(also reverse)

To heis loving sister Agnes Walker; thes be dellyferit in the *Canongait*

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<sup>57</sup> It is not clear what Spens means in the clause of the sentence “if I misler I sall send”.

<sup>58</sup> Meaning roughly handled. The ‘d’ ending in Scots is often silent rendering ‘hand’ as ‘haun’ etc.

“At Press” with *Northern Studies*, vol. 47, 2015

RH9/2/233; James Spens to his father, James Spens, Doesburg, 1618

1. To my loving ffather; efter my maist hairtlie command
2. -ationis I am to lat zow to wit that I am haill and feir<sup>59</sup>
3. praised be to god at this present; and desering ye
4. lyke of zow; and I am to lat zow to wit your sister
5. is weill in helth praisid be god at yis present
6. tyme; and *your* gud brother maks maks [*sic.*] ye hartlie hairtlie [*sic.*]
7. comandationns to zow and lat zow to wit *yat* they ar weill
8. in helth praisid be to god at yis present tyme;
9. yerfore loving ffather I wald desere [zow] maist
10. ernistlie to send me word of *your* hel[th] an[d] estait
11. and how ze ar and I am glad off *your* weilffeir
12. and yerfore loving ffather I wal[d] [d]esere
13. zow maist ernistlie to mak my hairt[lie] [co]mmandations
14. to my Brother Art[c]hie Spens; loving ffather I wald
15. desere zow to send me over sum money with Bearer
16. ffor it is in a sure hand; and I wald desere zow
17. to send me over ane Clok and sum money;
18. yerfor I am not to truble tua<sup>60</sup> much I will rest;
19. I recommand zow to ye protection of ye
20. Almichtie God; ffrom Dewbruch; yis be
21. delyverit to my loving ffather James Spens
22. servitor to my Lord Privie Seill in *Edinburgh*
23. 1618
24. to my loving father James Spens sevitor to my Lord Privie Seil
25. Edinburgh 1618

(reverse)

To my loving ffather James Spens servitor to my Lord Privi Seill in *Edinburgh*; this be delyverit in Edinburgh

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<sup>59</sup> When used of persons in Scots ‘feir’ means ‘in health and vigour’.

<sup>60</sup> Here Spens hypercorrects ‘too’ to the Scots for ‘two’ and so renders it ‘tua’.

“At Press” with *Northern Studies*, vol. 47, 2015

RH9/2/234; James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 1619

1. Loving moder; efter my maist hairtlie comandationis I am to lat zow to wit
2. *yat* I bein verie seik yis haelf zeir or *yerby*; bot now praised be god I am
3. mending for I have had ye cords sua lang; Bot loving moder I am weill
4. now praised be to godt; be in gude comfort for I thocht verie lang to wryt
5. to zow of my estait and *your* sister is in gude helth praisid be god and hir husband;
6. loving moder I wald requist zow maist hairtlie *with* ye first pasag to
7. wryte to me of *your* estait and if my fayer did his dewtie to zow of any
8. thing or if he help zow anything for loving moder I think lang to heirof *your*
9. estait; as for ye peiß of gold *yat* ze send I have bocht tua sarks with it
10. now loving moder; ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
11. ~~xxxxxxxx~~ for loving moder I am sorie *yat* I have
12. trublit zow soo fair for alles I know *your* estait and loving moder
13. I wald desyr zow maist ernstlie *yat* ze wald speik to my loving fayer to send
14. me soo much as ane cloot of Gray agane winter if he feir God; not desering
15. zow loving moder to trubil *your* self in any things; for is Godt knows
16. ze have doen above power to me sen I was born; for if ever Godt
17. mak me ane man I sall Remember on it for I hoop upoun Godt to be ane man
18. to doe zow gude; wald toe Godt *yat* my fayer wald doe his dewtie to zow
19. as he Aucht to doe Beffoir Godt an man; I will requist zow
20. maist ernstlie to wryte to me with ye first pasag how *yat* ze
21. can he agrie togidder; and as for *your* letters and *your* things sie *yat*
22. ze keip yame weill ffrom his Hands and herri *your* self not moir;
23. my loving and hertlie commandationis to my fayer and til al
24. gude freinds and to my loving moder my hairtlie comandationis
25. no ffarder; Bot Commith zow to ye protectione of almichtie
26. God; ffrom Dewbruch yis Be delyverit 1619
27. Your loving soone James Spens at power
28. I wald requist zow to send it *with* yis Bearer James Carmichil;
29. *your* sister maks hir hertlie comandationis to zow from Dewbruch;
30. loving sister efter my hairtlie comandationis I am to
31. lat zow to wit *yat* I am in gude helf praisid be God
32. at yis present; desering ye lyk of zow nothing; command
33. me till all freinds and till entertein *your* self;
34. and pray zow quhen Serzand Jack comes to wryt *your* estai[t];
35. and pliß god I sall send an teken *with* him to zow
36. for we can get non to send it *with*; and pliß ye Lord
37. it sall be send *with* Serzand Jack in *quhat* place he is
38. in; is was teken *yat* yer was no paper in Edinburgh
39. *yat* ze sent not ane letter; no thing bot comithing zow to god
40. my hartlie comandations [to] zow

(reverse)

To my loving moder Agnes Walker; this be delyverit in the Cannongait

RH9/2/235: James Spens to his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, Riga, 1 October 1628

1. Rrycht loving and weilbelovit spous in cryst Jesus; yis present
2. is to schaw zow yat at ye writing heirof I am in gudd helth
3. wisching from my very hairt ye lyk of zow and zour child and
4. my father and mother and all Ayer gude freinds quhatsumever yat
5. loves us; mervelling my hairt of zow yat discontentment ze
6. have gottin of me yat ze send me here so much as any written
7. to me; and I have written I think above tuentie tymes this zeir
8. quhilk maks me think something aills zow; for gif ze had written
9. to me and it had bein in the farrest pairt of the world I
10. wold have both send zow anser and have comit my selff
11. howbeit it sould have cost me my lyf ye world sould
12. not have holdin me frome zow my hairt; and gif ze sie ane
13. fit occassioun quherby I may live lyk ane honest man with
14. zow I intreit zow to send me word with ye first occa
15. -sioun and I sall com with the haist I tak; and gif ze have
16. no knowledg as zit [...] at any yat loves zow and me
17. quher I can pane and plane to live in better yan ze last
18. I had and I sall obey zour first wrytting to me; for I
19. sie ze will not com to me for I thank god I could h[...]
20. maintaine zow honestlie heir; bot I will not trubill zow
21. sa beand it be zour will not to com from zour friends; and
22. I will not trubill zow bot I refer zow to zour awin discret[ion]
23. for I have heir in ye moneth ten dollar swanis<sup>61</sup> and I thot
24. sindrie tymis to have send zow money bot I durst not
25. haisert to send it to zow for feir ye have never sene it and
26. yat wold have grevit me; I pray zow my hairt hold mee &
27. trust in writing so angrillie to zow for sundrie of zour bred
28. grevit me in yat ze wroit to me so unkyndlie; bot I tak
29. God to witness if I deservit such at zour hand; I have
30. tain this occasioun to wryt yis letter thinking yat my cornell
31. will be home this spring tyme and I look to com my selff
32. if I can get licence at my cornells hands; yerfor I intreat zow
33. to tak ane gude pairt for it greivis me your unkyndnes;
34. desiring zow under god to have ane cair of my sone and
35. to learne I need to know his treatus in the dayis of his youth; desyring
36. zow to excuse me yat I can not get writtin to my father and
37. my mother schowing my wryt yat I wold have send my mother
38. home ane but or elß ane better token; but I durst not pairsue
39. for feir yat it wold not bein delyverit; for sundrie letters ar
40. broken up yat coms here from Scotland witch taiken to yis
41. land; I wrait to zow concerning ane truent wyf quho
42. duells in John Frank land in Cowgait in Colledg Wynd who
43. wold have comit with zow; remember my love to my fayer
44. and mother; and Gilbert Johnstoun and his wyf; and Eliza

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<sup>61</sup> 10 Swedish Rixdaler per month. This would equate to about £2.50 Sterling. For the conversion of Swedish currency in this period see Grosjean, *An Unofficial Alliance*, pp.xi-xii.

“At Press” with *Northern Studies*, vol. 47, 2015

45. -beth Bailzie and hir dochter; and Janet Merschell; to Wm Cuth

46. -bertsone my gossop<sup>62</sup> and his wyf and to *your* selff and my

47. bairne above all; I rest *your* husband to death James Spens drumer maior;

48. from Riga the 1 of October 1628

(reverse)

To my loving spouse Elizabeth Baillzie; in duellar in the Cannongait in *Edinburgh* theeß be  
delyverit in hir hand

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<sup>62</sup> Gossop is a godparent in Scots.

“At Press” with *Northern Studies*, vol. 47, 2015

RH9/2/236: James Spens to his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, Riga, 1 October 1628

1. *Rrycht* loving spous; efter my maist hairtlie commandationis
2. I am to lat yow to wit *yat* I am in gud health praisid be the
3. almichtie god of heavin; and desyris fra my verie heart the lyk of yow
4. and my ffather and mother and all uther gud ffreinds *quhat*sumever; I wrytin
5. to yow sundrie and diverß tymes and mervill mikill *yat* ye never wryt
6. to me againe; it seameth *yat* ze have forzet me or think I am deid; not
7. praisid be god almichtie; I am alyff in gud estait as ever I was in
8. my lyff tyme praisid be the almichtie god of heavin for all hie giffs;
9. for I have lippinit<sup>63</sup> everie day for yow heir and it seameth *yat* ze have
10. not a mynd to cum to me for ze think *your* self over gud Lassie yow;
11. I sall not trubill yow with mair writing; I protest ze sall byd thrie
12. hundreth zeir beffoir I send ane letter for yow agane; I desyre
13. no mair but *yat* ze will wryt to me *your* quholl mynd to me *yat* I may
14. be at rest with my self; for *your* cuming not hes hunderth me<sup>64</sup> ane
15. hunderth pund Scots money *yat* I have not; for ze neid not mak that
16. excusß *yat* ze had not company for Sanderß Trent wyff wald
17. have cumit with yow and *Robert* Dowglas wyff & sundrie uthers; I
18. desyre yow maist earnistlie to wryt to me my Burd giff *yat* ze
19. Knaw any lyff for me in Scotland *quherby* I may leiff onything
20. with yow better than I doe heir; I requist yow wryt to me and
21. be gods grace I sall cum hame to yow at spring tyme; *therfor* with
22. out ze Knaw better doe not wryt for me for I have everie weik
23. to spend ten testins<sup>65</sup>; *yerfor* desyr me not from my better to my werss
24. without ze Knaw better; *yerfor* I requist yow my deir burd to wryt
25. to me quhidder ze will cum to me or I sall cum to yow; for it is not
26. gods will *yat* we suld be so long sundrie as we ar; bot I knaw evill
27. report is the wyt<sup>66</sup> ze wryt to me the last tyme; so evill as ze did
28. bot giff *yat* ze wryt not ane anser to me with the ffirst occasion better
29. then the last tyme I resavit *your* letters *yat* I was such a man as
30. ze wryt; I protest to god I sall be such a man as ze said I sall
31. tak ane uther wyff heir; for it had bein in *your* way fyve hundreth
32. merks *yat* ze had cumit and pairs of cheirs syn to the land *quher* I am;
33. for I thank god cum *quhich* ze will ze sall not want to doe *your* turne;
34. for it greiffs me *yat* ze will not obey my wrytin so aft as I have
35. wrytin; I have wrytin everie perticular to yow at yis tyme concerning
36. everie thing *quhilk* ze may tak up giff *yat* ze pleiß *your* self; for my
37. love is ever towards yow *quhilk* ze may knaw for als I sall answer to god;
38. giff *yat* I had ane sure hand I wald send sum money bot I doe
39. not lippin in thame for breking up my letters; *yherfore* I requist
40. *yat* I be not greiffit mair nor trublit in mynd and I am ferther;

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<sup>63</sup> The Scots word ‘lippen’ means to “To trust, rely or depend on, have confidence in (a person (to do something))”. Here Spens appears to be using the past-tense to mean ‘depended on you coming here’. He uses it later in the letter in the sense of trust.

<sup>64</sup> Here Spens uses ‘hunderth’ twice in proximity, but it looks like an error for hindered or cost me. He is implying that by not coming over, his wife has cost him £100 Scots money, presumably for transportation paid to an agent.

<sup>65</sup> A silver coin, originally French, then minted in Scotland. 4-5 shillings value.

<sup>66</sup> Possibly the Scots ‘wy at’. In this context meaning ‘the way that you wrote to me’.

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41. Lord knows my trew hairt towards yow I will not trubill yow farder
42. bot desyring to remember my commandationis and service to my
43. father and mother with ye blissing of god be with yame both till our
44. meiting; and especiall to my sone Wm Spenß with my blissing be with him;
45. rember [*sic.*] remember my powir to Elspet Baillzie and her dochter and
46. Gilbert Johnstone and his wyff & to Wm Cuthbertsone my gosop & his wyf;
47. & to Jenet Merschell & to Jenet Stevisone & to Robert Dowglaß wyff chawing hir
48. he is weill; to Robert Jemesone the piperrer his sone is *with* me [&] verie weill; to Patrik
49. Aillin; to Manß Hamiltoun; to Jon Kilgowr; to to all freinds in generall respect
50. Riga 1628 the first of October 1 October
51. your loving husband James Spens
52. drummer magor to croner<sup>67</sup> Spens regement

Riga in Leifland 1628  
Riga October 1 first

(reverse)

To my loving spous Elizabeth Baillzie induellar in the Cannongait in *Edinbugrh*; therß be  
delyverit hand these [...]

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<sup>67</sup> Crouner is one Scots variant for Colonel.

RH9/2/237: James Spens to his wife, Elizabeth Baillie, Riga, 1 November 1628

1. Rrycht loving and weilbelovit spouß in Jesus chryst;
2. thir present is to lat yow to understand that I am in gud
3. health at this present and desyris fra my werie heart
4. ye lyk of yow and all gud freinds *quhat*sumever [and] my ffather
5. and mother; lating yow to understand *yat* I have fund the
6. occatione of this bearar to wryt to yow; for so many tymes
7. I have wryten beffoir to yow and can get no anser fra yow
8. *quhilk* I mervill mikill of *your* unkyndnes towards me *your*
9. loyall husband; mervilling mikill *yat* ye tak never the
10. paines ane anßer to wryt to me; for it seameth *yat* ze belive
11. *yat* I am deid; not praisid be almichtie god of heavin for
12. I am verie weill praisid be god; for I have trublit my selff
13. so many tymes in wryting for yow to cum to me and ze wald
14. never cum nor send me ane anser of *your* mynd; always I
15. lat yow to understand my mynd ze mister<sup>68</sup> not to cum; for
16. *quhilk* I wryt for zow to cum ze wald not now ze sall not cum;
17. for be the grace of god giff *yat* I can win away I sall sie
18. yow this summer be gods grace; for I will assur yow I will not
19. stay at home but will bring yow with me; for ze nicht a holdin
20. in my Travill giff *yat* ze pleisit your self; for giff the cornell
21. will not lat me away I most stay still and help my
22. selff the best I can; for as for wryting for yow I feir
23. I will not wryt no mair for yow bot I will wryt always
24. to chaw that I am weill; but the grace of god I will
25. doe my best at the croner hauß to sie giff *yat* he
26. will lat me away to cum to yow; giff he will not
27. I tak god to witneß I can not help it for the lord
28. knawis my mynd towards yow or uthers I had not
29. taiken the cair *yat* I tak of yow; for my mynd is trublit
30. everie nicht for I wad I had givin ane hundreth pundis
31. *yat* I had brucht yow with me; for giff I was in Scotland
32. ze suld not stay *yher* I [w]ryt to yow to me is with Sanders
33. Trent wyff in *Edinburgh* in Scotts Wynd; ze sall be so gud as
34. to wryt to me ye maner of Scotland quhow it is; for I assur
35. yow I will cum giff *yat* ye curnell will giff me leiff for
36. althocht I have not mutcht geir I sall have gud closs; and
37. wryt to me giff *yat* ze have takin under with Wm Foster or not
38. for I will live my *geiff* geir heir till my bak cuming; for I will not
39. stay at home *yerfor*; sie gif it pliß gods *yat* I cum hame *quhat*
40. no mor trubill me; for I rather never cum for gif *yat* ze war
41. with me ze nicht live weill; asht<sup>69</sup> the bearer for I protest to
42. god I lie not; for ze may belive for wald belivit yow mair
43. rests with my blissing to yow and my bairns<sup>70</sup>; and father & mother

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Mister’ in Scots means ‘want, privation, necessity or need’.

<sup>69</sup> In the context his appears to be a variant of ask, though the writing is unclear.



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44. and all freinds with my commandations to all in gennerall; for I am sorie
45. yat the peper is at ane end; rests Riga in Leifland 1628;
46. ye first of November 1628 november;
47. Your loving husbant till death
48. James Spens drummer magor to ye
49. croner Spens regament 1628

(reverse)

To my loving spous Elizabeth Bailzie in dualler in the Cannongait in *Edinburgh*; thes be  
delyverit in hand James Spenss

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<sup>70</sup> The word is unclear, but given that we know he mentions at least one child elsewhere, ‘bairn’ or ‘bairns’ makes sense.

RH9/2/238: James Spens & Elizabeth Baillie to Agnes Walker, Riga 29 May [1629 or 1630]

1. Rrycht loving mother; efter my maist hairtlie command
2. -ationis I am to lat yow to wit yat at this present I am
3. in verie gude health and wish fra my werie heart the
4. lyk of yow; for I thank god almichtie sinc I left yow
5. I have bein in many dangers for the furst day yat I chippit
6. in at Leith the chip and yer cho lay at ane moneth and spendit
7. the best pairt of ye money yat I had; and then efter yat I
8. was nyn weiks upon the sie and then landit at Gottinberie<sup>71</sup>
9. and thair gat horß to travill up in the cuntry to Stokholm
10. bot the first occasioun yat I marcht with [...] Gottinberie the
11. first day I lost all my cloeß for the bouer<sup>72</sup> yat cariet
12. yam upone the wagan stale frum uß away and never
13. sae him agane; for as I sall anßer to god yat quhen I cam
14. to Stokholm I had not so much as my sark to spit<sup>73</sup> upone
15. my bak; nor nothing to live upone war not his Lord of
16. Wormmeston<sup>74</sup> and his sone Lieutenant James Spens<sup>75</sup> [...]
17. gave me money utherwayis I had bein at ane sempill
18. estait quhilk god knows my greif for as I sall anßer to god;
19. I have nothing left me nather cloeß nor nothing; and
20. was fyftein weiks in Stokhollm befor I com to my gudman
21. [...] bot quhich I am praisid be god he maid me verie welcom
22. and war not for ye loß of my geir [...] I gat my self;
23. for I hop in god my worst dayis is past and my best days
24. is coming; I hop in god with ye first occation yat I
25. sall send yow ane taikin of ~~xxx~~ my love; and I hop in god
26. ze sall have it shortlie for my gudman hes had anuch<sup>76</sup> to
27. doe with me; senc I com ye money yat I have he wared
28. it upone cloeß beffor I cumit<sup>77</sup> in the chip [...]
29. or utherways ze suld have had ane [token] of my love;
30. mother I thank yow fra my werie [he]art for the
31. gud commandationis yat scho give yow yat [ze?] war so gud to
32. hir and my bairnes; I hop in god to cum hame and sie
33. yow lyth and mirrie; yerfor be in gud [com]fort rests
34. with my commandationis to Gilbert Jonsto[ne] [vellum torn];
35. my blissing to his bedfellow for hir [...] yat che...]
36. shawin to me many in my mister; and to your dochter [...] and
37. [...] I [...] and to Patrik Hairt and his wyff;

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<sup>71</sup> Gotenberrie is the Scots rendering of Gothenburg.

<sup>72</sup> Bouer here meaning someone of low social class (eg *bauer* in German, *boer* in Dutch and *bonde* in Swedish). The word is used in English (boor) to mean a rude person or one without manners but does not appear in the *Dictionary of the Scots Language*. Spens probably picked up the word from on his continental travels.

<sup>73</sup> There is little doubt that Spens intended to write the Scots variant of ‘put’ here – ‘pit’. In his memorandum, Duncan quotes this sentence and renders it as such. However, the S is clearly visible.

<sup>74</sup> General Sir James Spens of Wormiston .

<sup>75</sup> Lieutenant James Spens was the eldest son of Sir James Spens of Wormiston and his first wife, Agnes Durie.

<sup>76</sup> This is Scots for ‘enough’.

<sup>77</sup> Spens leaves a space after ‘cum’ and before ‘it’, but is using ‘cumit’ (correctly) as the past participle for came.

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38. to Walter Logan and his wyff and bairnes; till *John* Scot his
39. wyff and bairnes; tell John Scot I pray yat he sall be payit
40. wair not my fortouns I had payit him now at yis present tyme; and to
41. maister James Hana I pray yow tell him yat his letters is lost with my
42. guds; and till Elspet Jonstoun; to my servant Robert [..ig] to his wyf Cristian
43. Pairk; to my cumer<sup>78</sup> Margrit Dowglaß; to my nevewe Cristian Moris
44. [...] to Jenet Makilmon; to hir sone Robert Hamilton; to Hendrie Seytre
45. his wyf; to Patrik Elsthintir and his wyf; to Robert Cranstoun his wyf; and
46. to Wm Cudbersone his wyf my gosop; I pray chaw yan my letter and my
47. estait to my loving anti Besie Lindsay;
48. your loving dochter Elspet Baillzie till death and your sone James Spens
49. Riga in Leifland
50. the 29 of Maii

[

Written into the left hand margins:]

PS 1: Mak my hairtlie commendationis to Thomas Crichtoun & to Barbrie his<sup>79</sup> sister & to Jenet Merchell & hir gud man

PS2: Desyring yow loving mother to mak my hairtlie commendationis to Wm Bairner and his wyff & hoping in god to sie him blayth and mirrie; and pay him to Georg Leslie and his wyff and his bairnes and ye nuriß & to Fergiß Couall & his wyff

Reverse

To my loving mother Agnes Walker indweller in the Cannongait [...] theses; yow pray commendations [...] John Haburn [...] dochter for I [...] zet with by blessing

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<sup>78</sup> This is an older Scots term for Godmother.

<sup>79</sup> This reads ‘hir’ but in context must mean ‘his’.

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RH9/2/239: James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, no date.

1. Mother I intret yow to seik for Jenet Richisone my needie<sup>80</sup>; and comend me to hir and tell
2. hir *yat* I was angrie with my wyf becaus scho brocht hir not with
3. hir; and *quhan* I find ane occasionis I will wryt for hir; desyryng yow
4. to remember my love and dewtie to my father; bot I wonder of his
5. unkyndnes towards my wyf *yat* he wald no cum towards hir at hir
6. away cuming *quhilk* was the leist thing in the world to be kind;
7. desyryng him to wryt to me with the first occasionis; I requist
8. yow to commend me to Jenet Merchell & hir gud man; commend me
9. to Manß Hamilton with *John*; Patrik Aillen; John Kilgowr;
10. tell *Robert* Jameson the piferer<sup>81</sup> his sone is verie weill and
11. gets his twed for by<sup>82</sup> the kings meanis; desyryng him to wryt to
12. him; comend me to Jon Pollock<sup>83</sup> my auld commerad drumer
13. and tell him my love towards al gud friends; hoping ze will
14. goe and tell yame everie one; desiring *your* self to tak
15. ane gud heart *your* self for I sall not forzet yow be gods
16. grace; nor my wyff; for hir Love remeneth ever towards
17. yow; lat all there *yat* I have written to sie the letter
18. *yat* I will not forzet yame as they forzet me; with
19. my hairtlie commandationis to Walter Logan and tell
20. him I rest; comending me to all other frends *yat* I
21. have forzet; committing yow to god all; lukiing for *your*
22. anser chortlie; rests at Riga;
23. desiring yow to delyver theeß letters and recommend
24. me *Robert* Dowglas sister and tell hir hir brother is
25. verie weill in gud health; desyryng hir to tell his
26. frends with his hartlie comandations to yow all
27. his gud freinds [...] to sie yow blyth & mirrie;
28. I intreat yow to goe to Jene Haburne
29. for I am sorrie fra my hairt for the schait<sup>84</sup>
30. *yat* scho gat in my company; I intreat hir to
31. wryt to me for gods cauß *quhilk* I hop scho will
32. commend me to hir for gods cauße [...]

(reverse)

To my werie loving [...] Georg Spens [...]

delyver thame to my mother Agnes Walker induallar in the Cannongait [...]

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<sup>80</sup> Spens appears to be usin ‘needie’ as a pet name for his servant. Needie is the Scots word for ‘necessary’.

<sup>81</sup> A Scots variant of ‘piper’.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Forby’ in Scots means ‘in addition to’. Again, Spens here splits a word into two parts. The meaning of the preceding word ‘twed’ is unclear.

<sup>83</sup> John Pollock is mentioned twice in the Spens correspondence, and specifically as being in Aberdeen in his final one from 1632. John Pollock “sometime oure tounes drummer” got himself into bother with the council of Aberdeen in 1638 for committing adultery in the burgh. He was to be banished unless he could be reconciled with the Kirk. See L.B.Taylor (ed.), *Aberdeen Council Letters. Vol. II: 1634-1644* (Aberdeen, 1950), p.85. Aberdeen Council to the Earl of Traquhair, Aberdeen, 20 February 1638.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Scaith’ means ‘hurt received’ in Scots.

RH9/2/240: James Spens to his father and mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, 1630.

1. Rrycht loving ffather and mother my humble love and
2. dewtie Being Remembrit to yow and my mother; lating yow
3. to wit that I am in werie gude health at ye writing heiroff
4. and desyris fra my werie heart to heir the lyk of yow and all
5. gude ffreinds *quhat*sumever; desyring to recommend me to yam all;
6. lating yow to understand *yat* it hes plised god all michtie to tak
7. my loving wyff fra me *quhilk* is ane great greiff to my heart; zit
8. the Lord Jesus comfort me for scho deid in hir Birth in ye pest;
9. allwayis I giff ye lord thanks; desyring to recomend me to all
10. hir ffreinds and myn for and plið god I think not to sie Scot
11. -land this sevin zeirs for hir saik; desyring yow loving mother to
12. tak ane gud comfort to *your* selff for I have lost my comfort
13. under god; for it may be hir ffreinds think *yat* I was evill till
14. hir; I tak god to witneß quho is Richtious Juge quhow
15. weill scho nicht a livit with me giff god had spairit hir dayis
16. with me; now I have no body to wryt to now but my father & yow;
17. ye blissing of god almichtie rest with yow nicht & day forever
18. mair for we ar to remow utin yis cuntrie presentlie to duch
19. -land *quhar* ye kings *majestie* is for he hes greit weirs *yer*; Rycht
20. loving mother I intret for to wryt to me with the ffirst occasioun
21. quhow ze ar or *quhat* estait ze ar in; & gif god call upone yow ze
22. have no body neir yow any thing *yat* ze have liv it with Robert Cranston
23. my ffreind or utherwayis with maister Spens; for giff ze doe not
24. no body will get gud of it; mother I speik not for greid of
25. geir bot doe according to *your* pliser for so lang as I leiff I will
26. not want I will get my living; bot I tell yow for the best for
27. sall never com in Scotland without I have to doe my awin turn;
28. But I sall never forzet yow so long as I leiff *quhilk* is my dewtie
29. for the cair ze have had of me; for I hop not to marie ane wyff
30. till I get ane Scots woman; allwayis recomend my humble
31. service to my ffather and chow him of my welffair; I thank god I
32. have to doe my awin turne for walth I have not *quhilk* the
33. Berer can tell yow; I intreat yow to drink *with* him; I wald
34. have send sum lunk<sup>85</sup> with him bot he can tell yow it alß
35. so deir heir and in Scotland; I have no ffarder to truble
36. yow bot the Blissing of god to remain ever mair with yow als
37. desyring *your* letter schortlie remcomend [*sic.*] me to Wm Foster for
38. give I com in Scotland I sall pay him; recommend me to all my
39. auld commerads to Manß; to Patrik Aillin; to Kilgowr; to
40. Gilbert Jonston his wyff & bairnes; to Elspet Bailze & hir dochter;
41. to Margrit Reid and hir husband; to Wm Cudbersoun & his wyff;
42. & to Robert Cranstoun wyff my gud friend; for I hop to sie yam als
43. blyth & mirrie; & plið gud Recommend I pray to my auld
44. servant Jenet Richisoun ~~desiring~~; rests with ye bliss
45. -ing of ye almichtie to rest with forever mair Riga in

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<sup>85</sup> Lunk is Scots word for a kind of cloth.

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46. Leiffland ye first of October 16 16<sup>86</sup> [*sic.*] 30

47. Your loving sone til

48. death James Spens drumer magor under

49. his *Majesty* in *Sweadin*.

PS: Recommend me to my maister Jon Matheson & his wyff for it may be I can not find occasion to wryt agane so sone

(reverse)

To my werie loving mother Agnes Walker in duallar in Cannongait theeß; in caice of failzier delyver to my ffather James Spens

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<sup>86</sup> I looks as though Spens originally wrote 16 26, then changed the 26 to i6 and followed it with 30.

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RH9/2/241: James Spens to his father and mother, Amsterdam, 12 November 1631

1. Rycht Loving and weilbelovit Father and mother my love being
2. remembrit to yow both; chawing yow *yat* I am in gude health at this present
3. wrytting and desiryng to heir the lyk of yow and all gud freindis *quhat*sumever;
4. lating yow to wnderstand *yat* I taikin my pas from me Lord of Wormistoun
5. and hes left the king of Suadin *servic* and hes travilit into Holland
6. and hes mait with *your* sister and chow is in werrie gud health and hir
7. husbant to; lating yow to wnderstand *yat* *William Robertstone* and his wyff is
8. dead; and I my selff hes taikin ane Journay in hand that non of my kin
9. ever hes tain ye Lyk in hand; *quhilk* is to the eist ingies<sup>87</sup> [*sic.*] *quhilk* I am taik
10. on for sevin zeirs; fyve zeirs in the Land and ane zeir cuming and
11. ane zeir going *quhilk* I hop in Jesus chryst *yat* it sall be the best Journay
12. *yat* ever I took in hand to ye glorie of god and *your* comfortis; for I have
13. bein borne to Travill ye *quhilk* I give god thankis for all; for I have
14. bein in many dangers and the Lord hes preservit me *quhilk* I hop in
15. god *yat* he will preserve me in this Journay to; chawing yow *yat* it hes
16. plisit god Almichtie to call wpone my Brother for he depairit
17. in *Duwchland*<sup>88</sup> abowe tua moneth at the plisour of god Almichtie; chawin
18. yow *yat* I have wryttin tua serverall tymes senc I com heir in Holland
19. to yow desiryng yow maist earnistlie to tak no discomfort for he [...]
20. Jesus chryst to sie yow blyth and mirrie in gude estait to the glorie
21. of god and *your* comfortis; ye the *quhilk* with a sad heart I wrycht theeß letters
22. bot allways to chaw yow *yat* ze sall not think I am dead; Intreating yow
23. both gif *yat* it plis god to call wpone yow *yat* ze remember wpone me
24. quho is *your* only begottin chyld ye *quhilk* ze haif no moir childrin in the
25. world bot I alone; ye *quhilk* giff it plis god to call wpone me I sall
26. livff yow a remembranc of me; bot I hop in Jesus chryst to sie yow
27. both alyff and mirrie at my returne; ze sall wnderstand *yat* I have maid
28. a wow to god almichtie for hir saik *yat* is with god *yat* for sevin zeiris to
29. travill the *quhilk* I will keip my promeis for I have many crosis in yis world;
30. bot *quhen* god [took] my deir wyff fra me *yat* was ye greatist cros *yat* ever I had
31. for I will never forzet hir sua lang as I livff; for scho was my comfort
32. in this world; lating yow to wnderstand *yat* Bessie Kowin sone Georg
33. Borthuik and hes mait at Amsterdam and he and I ar going away
34. togidder as *commeradis*; desyryng yow to chaw his mother and comend
35. me to all freindis especiall to *Robert Cranstoun* and his wyff and to Margret
36. Wood and hir husband; and to *William Cubertstone* my gosop and his wyff
37. and to Manß Hamiltoun and his wyff; and Kilgowr; and to Gilbert *Johnsone*
38. and his wyff; and to Jenet Richisone my auld *servant* and all wyeris
39. quhom I have fozet in gennerall; my hairt is with yow all; remember
40. my *servic* to *William Foster* and tell gif *yat* it plisit god to send me hame
41. I sall pay him; remember my lowff to Georg Spens and his wyff for
42. ye kyndnes *yat* did to my wyff ye *quhilk* scho remembrit wpone hir dead bed;
43. and gif *John Pollok* cum to *Edinburgh* remember my lowff to him; ye tyme is schort
44. I rest with the blissing of god almichtie to be with yow all till meiting for

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<sup>87</sup> East Indies.

<sup>88</sup> Germany.

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45. my hairt is sorrie at yis tyme; restis at Amsterdam ye zeir of 1631
46. ye 12 day of november comend me to *John Mathesone* my maister
47. your Lowing James
48. Spens drumer magor
49. till death yours at command

Reverse:

1. chawin yow it may be we will lay heir
2. ane moneth still before is way going;
3. entreating yow gif *Georg Borthwick* mother
4. wryt heir wryt ye with hir to Amsterdam
5. to *Robert Thomsone* and he will find me
6. for he dwelleth [...]
7. gif yat ze would wrt [...] gif that ze [...] have
8. occationne [*which*] I wiß everie Day.

To my werie loving mother  
Agnes Walker in dweller  
at the Cannongait beside  
ye Croß above [...]  
Therß be deylevrit in hand



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RH9/2/242: James Spens to his father and mother, Guinea Coast, 23 February 1632

1. Rycht Loving and weilbelovit Father and mother; efter my maist hairtlie
2. commandationis being remembrit to *your selffis* lating yow to wnderstand
3. *yat* I am in gude health at this present writing; desyring maist earnest
4. to heir ye lyk of yow and all gud Freindis; chawing yow *yat* we ar at *our* refresing
5. place praisid be god almichtie abowt four thowsand Scotis mylis from
6. Holland; and as zit we have abowe sextein thowsand mylis Scotis to the
7. place *quhair* we ar ordineit to remane ye quhilk is Botavavia<sup>89</sup>; I have
8. not much to truble yow bot wryting to yow thir few lynis ye *quhilk*
9. we ar lying at refresing in ane cuntrie *quhair* the blakamore dwale;
10. for we have saillit for by Spane for by the cost of Barbarie and Geney
11. ye *quhilk* lyis in ye waistingis; and ar comit to the chirlinis<sup>90</sup> ye *quhilk* *yair*
12. is no winter at all bot at tymes hot wedder; for I have travillit be land
13. yis aucht zeiris and moir and now I will travill be sea [lacuna] sail as weil
14. as we can it will be ane zeir to wss; *always* I tak as weil with the
15. sea as *with* ye land and better praisid be god for my heid hes
16. never warkit and we have had deid in *our* chip fourteen; praised
17. be god Georg Borthuik and I ar in gud health and he makis his command
18. -ationis to his Freindis all in gennerall; lating yow to wit *yat* I wad not wis
19. for never so much bot *yat* I had comit yis wayadg for I sie so many sindrie
20. thingis for we ar among wyld people; for we have orangeris and lemonis
21. and suker reidis and noot mugis and many wther thingis for the taiking off
22. ye treis; I wad not wis for gold bot *yat* I had comit yis Journay
23. for I can not wrycht to ye gudnes *yat* I find be traviling and seing of
24. faring cuntries; for it is plisit god *yat* I was borne to travill; *always*
25. I prais god for I have greit contentment be it moir then sum
26. Lairdis of *your* Landis; for I most be fyve zeirs in ye land and a zeir
27. cuming and ane zeir going and plis god to spair me so lang
28. dayis *yat quhen* my fyve zeiris is out I sall cum hame and sie yow;
29. and *yair* efter I have som Freindis I sall tak me to travill so lang
30. as I leiff; I have no Farder to truble yow bot intriting yow
31. to pray for me and giff me *your* blissing; ye lord I may have
32. his blissing and remember wpone me for I hop in Jessus chryst
33. to doe yow and my Father and all Freindis credit and ouer I hop
34. *yat* ye god of heavin will healp me; intretting yow to remember my
35. commandationis to Robert Cranstoun and his wyff; & to my gosop William
36. Cudbertsoun; & to John Brut & his wyff; and to Patrik Aillin;
37. & to Georg Spens and his wyff; & to William Foster and sie how much
38. *yat* I am awin him; for my wyff tauld me *yat* cho maid him
39. ruffis and sindrie wark; *yairfor* ask him bot lat not wit *yat*
40. I wrycht bot recommend me to him; and to Gilbert Johnstoun
41. and his wyff; and to James Aitin ye bailzie; and to Walter
42. Logane ye clark and his wyff with ye blissingis of god remain[...]
43. with yow and yame all; for I can not have occatioun to wrycht ever[ie]
44. tyme; for yis is be fortowne *yat yair* lay ane chip *yat* was going to

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<sup>89</sup> Batavia, modern day Jakarta in Indonesia.

<sup>90</sup> Shorelines.

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45. Holland I thocht *yat* I wad *wrycht* with *yam*; remember my comman
46. -dationis to Georg Borthuik his wyff and mother and bit *yat*
47. they tak in gud comfort for we ar werie weill & wantis nether
48. wyn nor beir & meit thrie tymes a day; ye Lord keip yow
49. and me in his protectioun; *restis restis* [*sic.*] at ye chirlines in
50. Geney ye 23 day of Febrewaris ye zeir of god 1632;
51. intreating yow to remember my kyndnes
52. to John Pollok *yat*
53. is drumer in Aberdein; Your Lowing sone James Spens
54. drumer magor

Reverse:

To my verie loving ffather  
James Spens induallar  
with my Lord of Privie seil  
in *Edinburgh*; failzing him  
to Agnes Walker  
in Duallar in ye Cannongait  
in *Edinburgh*; failzuar to Georg  
Spens. Theß be deliver in hand