

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.¹ Wormiston served as both the British ambassador to Sweden and a general in the Swedish army. Duncan carefully sifted out twelve letters that 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.² The memorandum focuses 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).³ Spens's first four letters allow us to deduce that there was a

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1 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 Jönsson (ed) 2007, 23-274.

2 NRS, RH9/2/231-242.

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

Scottish community near Doesburgh, which comprised 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 and, in their correspondence home, serving 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.⁴ But he notes that this distance was further than one John Fairlie, a friend in Gelderland, said that it would be.⁵ The town of ca.2000 inhabitants supported a garrison throughout the period of the Dutch Eighty Years' War (1568-1648).⁶ Moreover, we can identify the units of the Scots-Dutch brigade present in Gelderland down to company level. Two companies of seventy men drawn from Colonel William Brog's regiment served there in 1617 when Spens arrived – those of captains Andrew Donaldson and Philip Mowbury.⁷ Spens's letters only enable us to identify one comrade in arms in Dutch service, merely described as the son of John Waschop (Wauchop).⁸ 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 because it coincides with James Spens of Wormiston's permission to raise a new levy in Scotland for Sweden.⁹ 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.¹⁰ The unit, which Spens called the regiment of 'Crouner Spens', was wholly Scottish at this juncture.¹¹

4 One Scots mile is the equivalent of 1.13 English miles or 1.81 kilometers. See the conversion chart in Enthoven, Murdoch and Williamson (eds) 2010, xvi.

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

6 Vermeesch 2009, 3-23.

7 Ferguson (ed) 1899-1901, vol. 1, 72-3, 229. One John (Jan) Spens later served as chamberlain to the colonel, although the relationship to James Spens has not been established. See Rotterdam City Archives, ONA, 'Attestatie of verklaring', 29 July 1636.

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

9 For Wormiston's permission to levy in Scotland and England in 1624 see Grosjean 2003, 58-59.

10 KrA/0022/1624/8, f.264. James Spens' Regiment, Muster, August 1624.

11 'Crouner' is a Scots language variant of the word colonel.

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.¹² 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 1631.¹³

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 did not write 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 were she to hear 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ While many Scots at officer level mention the cause of Elizabeth Stuart (the Queen of Bohemia and daughter of James VI and I) as a primary motivation for service, Spens is silent on the subject.¹⁶ 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 choice, that cared not for gold nor money, but for credit'.¹⁷ When Spens wrote home to his parents after leaving the Swedish

12 For motivational factors to enlist see Murdoch and Grosjean 2014, 1-42. For the specifics of kith and kin clustering in specific regiments see *ibid.* 5-6, 37, 82-83, 97, 121 & 167.

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

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

15 NRS, RH9/2/239: James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, n.d.

16 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'. Monro 1637, vol. II, 61-2. See also Kellie 1627, 3.

17 Monro 1637, vol. I, 73. Monro returns to this point several times noting that the best pikemen 'remaine 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 1637, vol. II, 37.

army for service in the Dutch East India Company (VOC), he wrote of his motivations similarly; that he 'would not wish for gold', but rather he talked of 'the goodness that I find by travelling and visiting foreign countries'.¹⁸

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'.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ Having repeatedly sent her letters nudging 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.²¹ After receiving permission to leave the regiment he removed himself to Amsterdam where, with his old friend George Borthwick,²² 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.²³

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.²⁴ 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.²⁵ Specifically in Colonel Arthur Erskine's regiment

18 NRS, RH9/2/242: James Spens to his father and mother, Agnes Walker, Guinea Coast, 23 February 1632.

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

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

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

22 A George Borthwick served as a musketeer in the same regiment as James Spens. See KrA/0022/1629/22, f.102. James Spens' Regiment, Muster, 1629.

23 NRS, RH9/2/241: James Spens to his father and mother, Agnes Walker, Amsterdam, 12 November 1631. For the context of Scots serving in the East Indies in this period see Enthoven, Murdoch and Williamson 2010, 87-117.

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

25 See various mentions in The National Archives at Kew [TNA], SP 41/2, 'Muster Rolls of the Scots' Army in England, January 1645/6.

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 eleven in total.²⁶ 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 drummers.²⁷ 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.²⁸ When the regiment reached full strength (eleven companies), there were no less than twenty-five drummers in the regiment.²⁹ 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.³⁰ 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.³¹

Spens’s letters tell us much about the culture of communication for the common Scottish soldier and this correspondence reveals the ways the letters were intended 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, sub-sections 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 twelve letters is merely the tip of a now sadly lost mountain of mail. Spens informs us of twenty letters sent in a single year to his wife alone,³² 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

26 TNA, SP 41/2, ‘Muster Rolls of the Scots’ Army in England’, January 1645/6, ff.3-4

27 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.

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

29 KrA/0022/1629/22, 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.

30 Furgol 1990, 7.

31 Monro1637, vol. II, 65, 112.

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

opportunity arose. Spens himself served as a courier for James Hanna, albeit he unfortunately lost the bundle entrusted by him to a thief.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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, sustained him for some fifteen weeks in Stockholm after they were robbed.³⁶ This common soldier also wrote to his mother and sister, frequently providing counsel in difficult situations in which 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, either in the buying or selling of land.³⁷ He consoled his mother when let down in her affairs by both his brother and his father at various times.³⁸ 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.³⁹ His fictive relationship to the Douglas family is interesting, not least as Spens sent news

33 NRS, 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, f.264. James Spens' Regiment, Muster, 1624.

34 For more on the role of the female migrant caught up in the military exodus from Scotland see Talbott 2007, 102-127.

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

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

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

38 NRS, RH9/2/231: James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 30 August 1617 and n.d. 1619.

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

of his friend Robert Douglas home to Douglas's wife.⁴⁰ 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'.⁴¹ This was despite having just embarked on a seven-year journey that he knew might 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 that 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 private relationships and social networks employed in his age were not simply the preserve of the rich or 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 gain a sense of the intended clauses. Similarly, although we have retained Spens's own spelling for proper names, we have added capitalisation. 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

40 NRS, 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, f.154. James Spens' Regiment, Muster, 1626.

41 NRS, RH9/2/239: James Spens to his mother, Agnes Walker, Riga, n.d.

between 'J' and 'Y' (in Middle English 'G' and '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...'.⁴² 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 frequent 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.⁴³

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: in his early letters Spens writes 'moyer' (moþer) for mother but, through several stages, he gradually 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 labialisation more often heard in speech than seen written down.

In several places Spens uses the sharp S 'ß' to represent a double 's'. We have retained his use of 'ß' although 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.

42 Robinson (ed) 1991, 814.

43 For more see Grant et al. (eds) 1931-1976, vol. VII, 293.

The Letters

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

1. To my loving moyer;⁴⁴ 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 Robertsons⁴⁵ sex quarters and ane
4. halif of grin Ingliß cloß; tua pair of pairlie hans and tua pair planis;
5. tua pair of pairlie nappinis 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 hopin⁴⁶ 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 me⁴⁷ befor god to my moyer loving;
13. ze haif done to me abone *your* power is god knowis 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; praisid
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 blessing
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 blessing be with zow nicht [*and*] day moyer; comand me to John Williamsone
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

44 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'.

45 The identity of this William Robertson and the other people mentioned in this letter remain to be established.

46 Spens leaves a gap between after 'hop' and 'in'.

47 Perhaps crossed through?

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

RH9/2/232: James Spens to his sister, Agnes Walker, Doesburg, 30 August 1617⁴⁸

1. To my loving sister; my hertlie comandationnis be rembrit to zow *quhilk*;⁴⁹ 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 Gilderland⁵⁰ *quhilk*; it is ane hundreth Scotis mylis fra *our* landing place
4. *quhilk* we war ar⁵¹ 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; neither⁵² 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 request zow most
13. ernistlie till send me thrie ell of gray for to be ane Jup⁵³ 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 dolar⁵⁴ and think so lang to have
17. word of zow xxxxxxxx xxxx xxxx
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

48 The letter is undated other than 'penilt of August'. As with his first letter he signs this one from 'Dewbrig' and it was probably written at the same time as the one to his parents. He also addresses them in this letter.

49 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 word correctly, often in close proximity.

50 Gelderland in the Netherlands.

51 The Scots word here is the preposition 'er/ere/or' which would be rendered in English as 'before'.

52 The final letter is unclear, but must be an 'r' in this context.

53 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.

54 Spens here seems to be mean 'movable geir and money'.

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*⁵⁵ comandations;
27. we knaw *yat* ze ar tum handit⁵⁶ 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 ~~xxxxxxxx~~[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 penil of August

PS1: and I pray zou 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 I⁵⁷ 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*⁵⁸ 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...]

55 Unclear due to over-written text.

56 'Turn handit' is an idiom meaning 'empty handed'.

57 It is not clear what Spens means by 'if I misler I sall send'.

58 Meaning 'roughly handled'. The 'd' ending in Scots is often silent rendering 'hand' as 'haun' etc.

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*

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 feir⁵⁹
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. ernstlie 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 ernstlie 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 tua⁶⁰ 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*

59 When used of persons in Scots 'feir' means 'in health and vigour'.

60 Here Spens hypercorrects 'too' to the Scots for 'two' and so renders it 'tua'.

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; xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
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 eernistlie *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 ernistlie 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 comandationis 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 pliis god I sall send an teken *with* him to zow
36. for we can get non to send it *with*; and pliis 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 heirop 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 occasioun *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 swanis⁶¹ 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

61 10 Swedish Rixdaler per month. This would equate to about £2.50 Sterling. For the conversion of Swedish currency in this period see Grosjean 2003, xi-xii.

37. my mother showing 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
45. -beth *Bailzie* and hir dochter; and Janet *Merschell*; to Wm *Cuth*
46. -bertsone my gossop⁶² and his wyf and to *zour* selff and my
47. bairne above all; I rest *zour* 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

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

1. *Rycht* 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 *quhatsumever*; I wrytin
5. to yow sundrie and diversß 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 lippinit⁶³ 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* quoholl mynd to me *yat* I may
14. be at rest with my self; for *your* cuming not hes hunderth me⁶⁴ ane
15. hunderth punds 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

62 'Gossop' is 'godparent' in Scots.

63 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.

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

19. Know 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 3e Know better doe not wryt for me for I have everie weik
23. to spend ten testins⁶⁵; yerfor desyr me not from my better to my werss
24. without 3e Know better; yerfor I requist yow my deir burd to wryt
25. to me *quhiddel* 3e 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 know evill
27. report is the wyt⁶⁶ 3e wryt to me the last tyme; so evill as 3e did
28. bot giff *yat* 3e 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. 3e wryt; I protest to god I sall be such a man as 3e said I sall
31. tak ane uther wyff heir; for it had bein in *your* way fyve hundreth
32. merks *yat* 3e had cumit and pairs of cheirs syn to the land *quher* I am;
33. for I thank god cum *quhich* 3e will 3e sall not want to doe *your* turne;
34. for it greiffs me *yat* 3e 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* 3e may tak up giff *yat* 3e pleiß *your* self; for my
37. love is ever towards yow *quhilk* 3e may know 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 fether;
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 Spensß 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 husbant James Spens
52. drummer magor to croner⁶⁷ Spens regement

Riga in Leifland 1628

Riga October 1 first

(reverse)

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

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

66 Possibly the Scots 'wy at', which in this context would mean 'the way that you wrote to me'.

67 'Crouner' is one Scots variant for 'Colonel'.

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

1. Rycht 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 believe
11. *yat* I am deid; not praisid be almichtie god of heavin for
12. I am verie weil 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 mister⁶⁸ 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 micht 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 weil; 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 asur
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

68 'Mister' in Scots means 'want, privation, necessity or need'.

41. with me ze nicht live weill; asht⁶⁹ 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 bairns⁷⁰; and father & mother
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

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 Gottenberie⁷¹
9. and thair gat horß to travill up in the cuntry to Stokholm
10. bot the first occasioun yat I marcht with [...] Gottenberie the
11. first day I lost all my cloeß for the bouer⁷² 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 spit⁷³ upone
15. my bak; nor nothing to live upone war not his Lord of

69 In the context 'asht' appears to be a variant of ask, though the writing is unclear.

70 The word is unclear, but given that we know he mentions at least one child elsewhere, 'bairn' or 'bairns' makes sense.

71 'Gotenberrie' is the Scots rendering of 'Gothenburg'.

72 'Bouer' most accurately translates as 'peasant' (eg *bauer*: 'farmer' in German; *boer*: 'farmer' in Dutch; *bonde*: 'peasant' 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 on his continental travels.

73 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.

16. Wormmeston⁷⁴ and his sone Leutenant James Spens⁷⁵ [...]
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 anuch⁷⁶ to
27. doe with me; senc I com ye money *yat* I have he wared
28. it upone cloeß beffor I cumit⁷⁷ 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;
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 cumer⁷⁸ Margrit Dowglaß; to my newewe 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 Linsay;
48. your loving dochter Elspet Baillzie till death and *yowr* sone James Spens
49. Riga in Leiffland
50. the 29 of Maii

74 General Sir James Spens of Wormiston .

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

76 'Anuch' is Scots for 'enough'.

77 Spens leaves a space after 'cum' and before 'it', but is using 'cumit' (correctly) as the past participle for came.

78 'Cumer' is an older Scots term for 'Godmother'.

[Written into the left hand margins:]

PS 1: Mak my hairtlie commandationis to Thomas Crichtoun & to Barbrie his⁷⁹ sister & to Jenet Merchell & hir gud man

PS2: Desyryng yow loving mother to mak my hairtlie commandationis 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

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

1. Mother I intret yow to seik for Jenet Richisone my needie⁸⁰; 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 piferer⁸¹ his sone is verie weill and
11. gets his twed⁸² for by⁸³ the kings meanis; desyryng him to wryt to
12. him; comend me to Jon Pollock⁸⁴ my auld commerad drummer
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* selff 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; lukiug for *your*

79 This reads 'hir' but in context must mean 'his'.

80 Spens appears to be using 'needie' as a pet name for his servant. 'Needie' is the Scots word for 'necessary'.

81 'Piferer' is a Scots variant of 'piper'.

82 'Twed' = 'tweed'. It was common for soldiers to be paid in cloth.

83 'Forby' in Scots means 'in addition to'. Again, Spens here splits a word into two parts.

84 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 trouble 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 Taylor (ed) 1950, 85. Aberdeen Council to the Earl of Traquhair, Aberdeen, 20 February 1638.

22. anser chortlie; rests at Riga;
23. desiring yow to delyver thees 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. friends 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 schai⁸⁵
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* [...]

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

1. *Rycht* 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; desyryng 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; desyryng to recomend me to all
10. hir ffreinds and myn for and pliß god I think not to sie Scot
11. -land this sevin zeirs for hir saik; desyryng 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

85 'Scaith' means 'hurt received' in Scots.

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; allways recomend my humble
31. service to my ffather and chow him of my wellfair; 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 lunk⁸⁶ 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. desyryng *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; & pliß 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
46. Leiffland ye first of October 16 16⁸⁷ [*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

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 desyryng to heir the lyk of yow and all gud freindis *quhatsumever*;
4. lating yow to wnderstand *yat* I taikin my pas from me Lord of Wormistoun

⁸⁶ 'Lunk' is a Scots word for a kind of cloth.

⁸⁷ It appears that Spens originally wrote 16 26, then changed the 26 to i6 and followed it with 30.

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 self hes taikin ane Journay in hand that non of my kin
9. ever hes tain ye Lyk in hand; *quhilk* is to the eist ingies⁸⁸ [*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*⁸⁹ 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 desyryng 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 wov 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 Johnstone*
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 short
44. I rest with the blissing of god almichtie to be with yow all till meiting for
45. my hairt is sorrie at yis tyme; restis at *Amsterdam* ye zeir of 1631

88 East Indies.

89 Germany.

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

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 Botavavia⁹⁰; 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* lysis in ye waistingis; and ar comit to the chirlinis⁹¹ 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] saill 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

90 Batavia, modern-day Jakarta in Indonesia.

91 Shorelines.

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 Jurnay
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; intreting yow to remember my
35. commandationis to Robert Cranstoun and his wyff; & to my gosop William
36. Cudtbertsoun; & 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; *yair*for 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 fortunne *yat yair* lay ane chip *yat* was going to
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

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