

## Sir Thomas de Morham

FIGHTING for Scotland during the Wars of Independence brought great risk to Scottish nobles who refused to bend their knee to King Edward.

These were rich and powerful men who, as masters of vast tracts of the country, held the welfare and livelihood of thousands of Scots in their hands.

But they stood to lose everything - and possibly even their heads - if they opted for the wrong side.

They often held lands on each side of the border and were required to pay homage to both the Scottish and English crowns.

With so much at stake, many found their family loyalties divided between the two camps and tended to switch sides whenever the balance swung.

One who remained defiantly committed to the cause of Scotland was Sir Thomas de Morham, who held the lands of Denny and Dunipace, an area that covered the three districts of Herbertshire, Temple-Denny and Torwood. against the Auld Enemy which led to him being a marked and hunted man.

He was eventually betrayed and captured in Aberdeen, jailed in the dungeons of the castle Berwick on Tweed and in 1297 sent to the Tower of London where he was incarcerated for the next 17 years.

History suggests his eventual release was part of an exchange of prisoners in the aftermath of the Battle of Bannockburn. What is known is that by October 1314, the proud Baron of Dunipace was back home administering the affairs of his estate.

For his efforts and loyalty, he rightly takes his place alongside Wallace, Bruce, Sir James Douglas and Thomas Randolph as one of the great heroes of Scotland.

### Off With His Head

SIR Thomas de Morham's oldest son, Herbert, led an interesting life - before having his head cut off in 1306 on the orders of the English king who had knighted him a few years earlier.

Why he was knighted by Edward in the first place; why, despite being knighted, he was given 'the chop'; and why, despite all that, Sir Herbert is still regarded as a true Scot and a national hero like his father has probably to do with the politically complex struggle he grew up in.

For Scottish nobles the stakes were always high, and it was common for families to split, albeit temporarily, to ensure the lands and the wealth remained within the family whichever side won.

### Kidnapped by Spurned Suitor

SIR Herbert de Morham was a remarkable man and, if this particular legend surrounding him is actually true, rightly so. Having been forfeited by the king. Even if she had fallen for his charms, the countess would have found herself in trouble with the monarch who had forbidden her to remarry without his consent.

The story goes that Herbert took matters into his own hands, and 'arrested' her and her well-armed retinue carrying a large quantity of valuables as it passed through Torwood on their way south.

Johanna was travelling under letters of protection and safe conduct from Edward, so when he heard she had been put under lock and key by Sir Herbert in Gertranky, later to be known as Castle Ranky or Castle Rankine, he was not best pleased.

He ordered the Earl of Dunbar and John de Kyngestone, constable of Edinburgh Castle; to arrest Sir Herbert.

When Kyngestone received his orders, he asked Sir Herbert's brother, Sir Thomas de Morham, where he was.

It has to be imagined how his face looked when given the news that the young knight had quit the English ranks, joined Bruce, and had already surrounded Stirling Castle to organise the surrender of its garrison.

The events of Torwood, if they happened at all, beg a few questions: How was Sir Herbert able to take one of the most powerful nobles in the country prisoner when her escort had to be large and well armed?

Or was the whole episode contrived simply to stick yet another thorn in Edward's flesh?

LITTLE is known of Sir Herbert's brother, the young Sir Thomas. He was member of the English garrison at Edinburgh Castle and his name appears in an entry of the 'Ragman Roll' for 1296 when he is said to be of 'the county of Stirling'.

He was certainly on the wrong but victorious side at the Battle of Falkirk in 1298 - 1322 King Robert Bruce confirmed a charter to Thomas de Morham senior combining the Barony of Dunipace, and those of Duncanlaw and Morham into one lordship.

This was only possible by Sir Thomas Randolph giving up title to lands forfeited by the de Umfraville family as

But he had been captured by the English during the war too and like Sir Herbert, had 'sided' with the English for a short time.

His' actions on his return were beyond reproach and he proved one of the ablest and bravest of the Scottish commanders.

On the death of Bruce it was Earl Thomas Randolph who assumed the office of Guardian of Scotland.

It is difficult not to take from his willingness to resign his interest in Dunipace that he did so in regard, recognition and thanks to the de Morhams for the key role they had played in Scotland's struggle for independent nationhood.

There's no doubt Sir Herbert was following firmly in his father's footsteps when he was captured defending Dunbar Castle from Edward's invading hordes in 1296.

He was imprisoned in Nottingham Castle for a year, a jail term that ended when he, like many others, won his freedom by swearing allegiance to the English king.

By the end of 1297 he was fighting for Edward in Flanders and did so well he was awarded a knighthood.

Still in Edward's service, Sir Herbert was posted to Edinburgh Castle in 1299 - where his brother Thomas was already serving as one of the garrison.

History dictates that it was then he switched back to the Scottish camp where, given he truly was his father's son, his heart had always lain. Part of the armies of Bruce once more, Sir Herbert was sent to surround Stirling Castle and negotiate a truce between the Scots and the garrison.

When a force of English barons sent to relieve the castle managed as far as Berwick, then refused to go any further, Edward ordered the commander of the castle, John Sampson, to surrender. When he did so, it was to Gilbert Malherbe, a kinsman of the de Morhams whose family had once held the feudal tenancy known as the Barony of Dunipace.

It was not until 1301 that Edward once more made an attempt to regain control of Scotland.

After taking Bothwell Castle, he turned his attention to the key of the northern kingdom, Stirling Castle.

He found getting siege engines across the River Carron difficult. Records of the time show waggoners were paid to carry the engines between Bothwell and Dunipace, but made no further.

Clearly frustrated, a truce was arranged and signed at Dunipace. Peace did not last, and in 1303 Edward raised another army and marched on Scotland. This time, Stirling Castle did fall to siege.

It is around this time that Sir Herbert de Morham became a prisoner once more, but exactly how and where remains a frustrating mystery.

What is known is that he had lost his freedom before the Battle of Methven on June 18, 1306, the battle in which Sir Simon Fraser was captured. This, for Sir Herbert, was cruel news as many Scots had believed in Sir Simon's invincibility, so much so that Sir Herbert had wagered that if Sir Simon was defeated or taken he would place his own head on the executioner's block. It was to prove his undoing.

Before the English lopped off Sir Simon's head, they paraded the old warrior in front of Sir Herbert.

After the axeman had done his gory task, Sir Simon's head was placed on a spike on London bridge next to that of Sir William Wallace - the English king could not have known he could have given him no greater accolade.

Shortly after Sir Simon's execution, Sir Herbert, along with his squire, Thomas de Bosco, was beheaded.