

# Medieval Fact Sheet

## Andrew Harclay and the Battle of Boroughbridge



**Medieval depiction of Andrew Harclay defending Carlisle<sup>1</sup>**

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### Introduction

About a mile away from the Cumbrian town of Kirkby Stephen is the village of Hartley. In 1270, it was owned by Sir Michael Harclay, whose wife Joan Fitz John gave birth to a son who they named Andrew Harclay.

Fifty-two years later and sixty miles to the southeast two armies met to the North of Boroughbridge. One was commanded by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, the richest man in England. The other was commanded by Sir Andrew Harclay and was comprised of levies from Cumberland and Westmorland. Sir Andrew Harclay was victorious.

Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, had been in revolt against King Edward II. The grateful King created Andrew Harclay the Earl of Carlisle, yet within a year, Edward had Andrew Harclay executed.

So, who was Andrew Harclay? How and why did he come to win a famous victory in Yorkshire? And why, within a year of his famous victory, was he executed?

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Harclay is depicted with the spear.

### Andrew Harclay's early life

Andrew Harclay is the anglicised form of his name. The English aristocracy at that time were of French descent and usually spoke French. Therefore, his family name is often written as 'De Harcla' – being French for 'of Hartley'. More interesting, however, is the frequency with which his Christian name is spelt 'Andreas' which is, of course, the German version of Andrew.



**Hartley today!**

Thirteenth century England was governed by the feudal system in which society was a rigid hierarchy where everyone owed loyalty to their immediate overlord. Sir Michael Harclay's overlord was Lord Robert Clifford. He was directly responsible to the King. In 1272, King Henry III died to be succeeded by his warlike son, Edward I whose reign was marked by aggressive wars of conquest in Wales and then, in the 1290s, Scotland.

Little is known about the early life of Andrew Harclay. However, as the son of a Knight, he would have been brought up according to the code of chivalry that involved both skills at arms and adherence to codes of behaviour. The Song of Roland, that celebrated chivalry said that a knight should:

- Fear God and maintain his church.
- Serve the liege Lord in valour and faith.
- Obey those placed in authority.
- Live by honour and for glory.
- Despise pecuniary reward.
- Keep faith.
- Never turn the back upon a foe.
- Persevere until the end in any enterprise begun.

So this will have been the moral code that Andrew Harclay was brought up to follow.

Sir Michael Harclay was Sheriff of Cumberland from 1285 to 1296 so Andrew Harclay would have been well aware of the politics and conflicts of the Anglo-Scottish border. In 1292, he is recorded as attending the Westmorland Eyre. An eyre was the name of a circuit travelled by an itinerant justice in medieval England. In 1304 it is recorded that Andrew Harclay was part of the army of Edward I that invaded Scotland and successfully besieged Stirling Castle.

## Edward II and the Anglo-Scottish Wars

Edward I died in 1307 while attempting to cross the Solway in yet another Scottish campaign. He was succeeded by his son, Edward II. Edward II continued with his father's policy of subjugating Scotland but with less success; one reason being that he had inherited debts of £200,000 from his father and could no longer afford the war; a second being that from 1306 the Scots were led by a new and more effective King, Robert the Bruce. Furthermore, Edward's reign saw a breakdown of trust between the King and the leading barons. Edward preferred to rule through 'favourites' rather than through the senior aristocracy. The first of these was Piers Gaveston, a Breton knight who was murdered by the Earl of Warwick. The second of these was Hugh Despenser who abused his position to amass considerable wealth, especially in the Welsh marches. The opposition to the King was led by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, the King's cousin and the wealthiest person in England.

It is believed that Sir Michael Harclay died in or shortly before 1309 and Andrew Harclay would have inherited his estates at that time. In the same year, he received a royal order to assist Lord Robert Clifford in the defence of the Marches against Scotland. His standing in local affairs was further advanced in 1311, when he was appointed sheriff of Cumberland, like his father had been before him. This was followed by his election as Knight of the Shire in 1312, his knighthood being given to him by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster.

As Sheriff of Cumberland, Sir Andrew Harclay was responsible for the defence of the county and in December 1313, he distinguished himself as the leader of the defence against a Scottish invasion. However, in 1314 an English army, led by Edward II that had gone to Scotland to relieve the siege of Stirling was comprehensively defeated by the Scots under King Robert the Bruce. Among the many English dead were Gilbert, Earl of Gloucester and Lord Robert Clifford, Sir Andrew Harclay's overlord who was succeeded by his son Lord Roger Clifford.

The years 1314 to 1316 were unusually wet across the whole of Europe, leading to crop failure and what has been called the 'Great Famine' of 1315 to 1317. It is estimated that 10% of the population died of starvation. This was a bleak period in the north of England, where the frequent Scottish raids added to the misery that was already caused by the famine.

The result of Bannockburn and the onset of the famine led to a significant change in the nature of the Anglo-Scottish war. Robert the Bruce had succeeded in driving the English out of most of Scotland's castles and in defeating their field army led by their King. His focus now shifted onto raids on the North of England that were designed to impoverish the countryside thus weakening the English and reducing their capacity to attack Scotland. As Sheriff of Cumberland, Sir Andrew Harclay had a leading role in defending the Border against frequent Scottish raids and less frequent full scale attacks on English strongholds.



**The Keep at Carlisle Castle**



One such attack came in the summer of 1315, when Robert the Bruce set siege to Carlisle Castle. Sir Andrew Harclay was successful in defending the Castle against the siege. For this he was awarded a gift of 1,000 marks from the King; and was depicted defending the castle wearing plate armour and carrying a spear and a shield (see above).

However, later in 1315 or in 1316, Sir Andrew Harclay was taken captive by the Scots, who demanded 2,000 marks in ransom. His rise over the previous years had made him some enemies, who took the opportunity to spread slanderous rumours about him at court. Despite this, Edward II raised the necessary money to secure Sir Andrew Harclay's freedom, but for the next few years he seems to have been out of royal favour. It was not until 1319 that he once more was appointed sheriff, and at the same time made keeper of Carlisle and Cocker-mouth castles, and Warden of the West Marches. In 1321 he also received a personal summons to parliament.

### **Hugh Despenser, the Marcher Lords and the Great Famine**

Bannockburn also led to a change in the balance of power at court. Prior to 1314, court politics had been dominated by rivalry between two factions, one led by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster and the other by Gilbert, Earl of Gloucester. With Edward's prestige reduced and the Earl of Gloucester dead, the power of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster increased and this emboldened him to press traditional aristocratic claims for privileges and curbs on royal authority.

Edward II granted many of the lands that the late Earl of Gloucester had held in the Welsh marches to Hugh Despenser. The marcher lords (including the Earl of Hereford, the Mortimers, the Cliffords and the Audleys) who had large private armies at their disposal were outraged and joined forces with Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, to demand Hugh Despenser's banishment. In May and June they attacked Despenser's estates in Wales. In July they met with Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, at Pontefract. Following that they besieged London. Faced with such a coalition, Edward II was forced to concede their demands and Hugh Despenser was banished.

But by the autumn, Edward II was ready to strike back at his enemies. First, he sent the Earls of Pembroke and Richmond to besiege Leeds Castle in Kent that was owned by Bartholomew Badlesmere - one of his opponents. The castle fell on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1321, the garrison were executed and Badlesmere's family were imprisoned in London. Edward II then recalled Hugh Despenser and on 8<sup>th</sup> December set off for the Welsh marches where he demanded the submission of the marcher lords. Lord John Hastings of Abergavenny submitted at Cirencester in December where Edward II kept Christmas; and the Mortimers, Maurice Berkeley and Hugh Audley the Elder submitted in Shrewsbury in January. All these were imprisoned. The other marcher lords then fled to join Thomas, Earl of Lancaster at Doncaster, who also appealed to the Scots for assistance, while Edward II moved to Coventry.

The two armies eventually met at the Battle of Burton Bridge on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1322. Here, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster held the north bank of the Trent and barred Edward II's forces from crossing the river that was in flood due to heavy rain for three days. However, Edward II was able to cross the Trent at a ford upstream. After setting fire to Burton-on-Trent, the rebels first advanced on the royal army but then thought better of it and retreated north. Edward II then received the surrender of rebel forces at Derby, Kenilworth and Tutbury.

Meanwhile, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, fell back on his castle at Pontefract in Yorkshire with a royal army led by the Earls of Kent and Surrey in hot pursuit. However, when at Pontefract, the rebels, prompted mainly by Lord Roger Clifford, decided to retreat further north to Dunstanburgh Castle in Northumberland.

## Early Fourteenth Century Warfare

In the fourteenth century it was the principal purpose of the King, the nobility and the knightly class to be warriors. Wars between nations were frequent as were wars within nations between rival noblemen or between disaffected noblemen and the King.



**Cavalry at a medieval re-enactment**

Each nobleman was expected to provide a certain number of soldiers to the King depending on his status. In turn, knights who were tenants of the great lords were expected to provide men for military service. There was therefore a core of professional soldiers who were either of the noble or knightly class or retained by them as soldiers. In addition to this, all ranks of men could be pressed into service by their lords and they were expected to own weapons and armour and to receive some military training.

The least peaceful part of England was the north, not only because of direct conflict with the Scots but also because the Anglo-Scottish wars had produced poverty and disorder that itself led to further local conflicts. The border area had been divided into three marches: the west, middle and east marches. Sir Andrew Harclay had been appointed warden of the western march that meant that he was responsible for defending and keeping order in the counties of Cumberland and Westmorland. He therefore had at his disposal some experienced soldiers, although most of them were the local levies rather than professionals.



**Archers at a medieval re-enactment**

Common soldiers would fight either with polearms or bows. Polearms included spears but also more sophisticated weapons that had been developed from agricultural implements such as the halberd<sup>2</sup> and billhook<sup>3</sup>. They may also carry pikes that were even longer sharpened poles designed to repel cavalry. Archers would use the longbow in a field battle<sup>4</sup>. These bows had a draw weight of about 150lbs so archers had to train from an early age to develop the strong back muscles that were needed. These bows were long distance weapons capable of killing at a few hundred metres. Common soldiers would also carry short swords and small shields that they would use in close combat. Their armour would include a padded jack, often covered with chain mail and a helmet. Sir Andrew Harclay had a large contingent of archers in his army.

High status soldiers wore heavy armour including either chain mail or plate armour. Their weapons of choice were two-handed swords (considered to be knightly weapons) or poleaxes. Some fought on foot as men of arms and others fought on horseback as cavalry.

### The Battle of Boroughbridge

Sir Andrew Harclay had been ordered to muster his forces in the western march and to join the King. He was joined by several English noblemen including Lords Henry Beaumont, Ralph Greystoke, John Hastings and Henry Percy; and also by some Scots including Donald, Earl of Mar. As the contemporary Lanercost Chronicle<sup>5</sup> reports:

*“Now, when that valiant and famous Knight, Sir Andrew de Harcla, Sheriff of Carlisle, heard of their approach, believing that they intended to go to Scotland to ally themselves with the Scots against the King of England, acting under the King’s commission and authority, he summoned, under very heavy penalties, the knights, esquires and other noble men of the two counties, to wit, Cumberland and Westmorland, all who were able to bear arms, to assemble for the King’s aid against the oft mentioned Earl.”*

By early March he was already at Ripon on his way south, intending to rendezvous with the Earls of Kent and Surrey. However, when he received intelligence of the movements of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, he decided to use his initiative and instead took up a position on the banks of the River Ure just north of Boroughbridge where he could prevent the rebel army from crossing the river. As the Lanercost Chronicle reports:

*“But when the said Sir Andrew, on his march towards the King with that somewhat scanty following, had spent the night at Ripon, he learnt from a certain spy that the earl and his army were going to arrive on the morrow at the town of Boroughbridge which is only some four miles distant from the town of Ripon. Pressing forward, therefore at night, he got a start of the Earl, occupying the bridge of Boroughbridge before him.”*

Sir Andrew Harclay’s army was smaller than that of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, but he had chosen his ground well. The bridge was a narrow wooden structure spanning sixty metres of water that could be defended by a small group of men. The main crossing point was a ford at Milby and here, Sir Andrew Harclay was able to post most of his knights and men at arms. Behind the knights and men at arms, the ground rose steeply and Sir Andrew Harclay posted archers on this higher ground who could command the lower flood plains to the south of the river that Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, and his men would have to cross before they attempted to cross the ford.

<sup>2</sup> Halberds are axes mounted on the end of poles in excess of two metres in length.

<sup>3</sup> Billhooks are based on the agricultural billhook again mounted on the end of a pole in excess of two metres in length.

<sup>4</sup> Cross bows were more suitable for siege situations.

<sup>5</sup> This chronicle was written in the fourteenth century by the monks of Lanercost Priory that is located near to Carlisle.



The Lanercost Chronicle reports that:

*“Sending his horses and those of his men to the rear, he posted all his knights and some pikemen on foot at the northern end of the bridge, and other pikemen he stationed in schiltrom, after the Scottish fashion, opposite the ford or passage of the water, to oppose the cavalry wherein the enemy put his trust. Also, he directed his archers to put up a hot and constant discharge upon the enemy as he approached.”*



**The bridge at Boroughbridge today is built at the same place that the medieval bridge stood**

On 16<sup>th</sup> March, Thomas, Earl of Lancaster arrived at Boroughbridge and, only then, learned that Sir Andrew Harclay was on the north bank barring his path; while the Earls of Kent and Surrey were not far behind him to the south. Thomas, Earl of Lancaster was therefore in a difficult position, unable either to advance or to retreat. His initial response was to parley with Sir Andrew Harclay, reminding him of past favours and promising him advancement if he would join forces with the rebels. Sir Andrew Harclay refused to consider this.

The Lanercost Chronicle reports that:

*“The aforesaid earls arrived in force, and perceiving that Sir Andrew had anticipated them by occupying the north end of the bridge, they arranged that the Earl of Hereford and Sir Roger de Clifford should advance with their company and seize the bridge from the pikemen stationed there, while the Earl of Lancaster with the rest of the cavalry should attack the ford and seize the water and the ford from the pikemen, putting them to flight and killing all who resisted.”*

The battle started with an archery duel. This suited Andrew de Harclay best because his archers had the higher ground and could therefore get the better of his opponents while Thomas, Earl of Lancaster had no time to spare – he needed to force a crossing of the river before the arrival of the Earls of Kent and Surrey. Thomas therefore launched an attack on both the bridge and the ford. The attack on the bridge was made by dismounted men at arms led by the Earl of Hereford while the attack on the ford was made by mounted cavalry led by Thomas himself. Neither attack was effective, the narrowness of the bridge and the ford meant that Sir Andrew Harclay only needed a few men at arms to mount a defence while most of Thomas Earl of Lancaster's men were unable to engage and became targets for Harclay's archers while they waited to join the fray. Sir Andrew Harclay's men at the ford formed schiltroms, in the same manner that the Scots had done at Bannockburn. This is where infantry assume a formation where they are surrounded by pikes, spears and / or polearms thus protecting themselves from attack by cavalry.

The Lanercost Chronicle reports that:

*“When the Earl of Hereford (with his standard bearer leading the advance, to wit Sir Ralph de Applinsdene) and Sir Roger de Clifford and some other knights, had entered upon the bridge before the others as bold as lions, charging fiercely upon the enemy, pikes were thrust at the Earl from all sides, he fell immediately and was killed with his standard bearer and the knights aforesaid, to wit, Sir W de Sule and Sir Roger de Berefield; but Sir Roger de Clifford though grievously wounded with pikes and arrows and driven back, escaped with difficulty along with the others.”*

It is also written that a Welsh spearman went under the bridge and killed the Earl by thrusting a spear through a gap in the bridge planks. Some historians have cast doubt on the accuracy of this account because it has so many similarities with the reports of an English spearman killing a Norwegian warrior on the bridge at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. Nonetheless, the Earl of Hereford was killed.



**The River Ure close to where Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, attempted to ford it.**

Rivers in the fourteenth century were not like modern rivers. In the eighteenth century river banks were consolidated making rivers deeper and narrower and flood barriers were raised to prevent rivers from flooding adjacent fields. In the fourteenth century the Ure would have been shallower and wider and the fields to the south of the river that are now dry would have been marshland and land that was prone to flooding. Not ideal ground for cavalry to advance on.



**The extensive meadows to the south of the river that the men of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster had to cross and where they were attacked by Andrew Harclay’s archers.**





**The south bank of the river today showing the earth bank (centre) that protects the fields to the south (right) from flooding from the river to the north (left)**

Further to the east, the assaults of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster on the ford were repulsed. The death of the Earl of Hereford, the injury to Lord Roger Clifford and the retreat of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, caused panic in the rebel ranks and they withdrew in disorder. The Lanercost Chronicle reports that:

*“The Earl’s cavalry, when they endeavoured to cross the water, could not enter it by reason of the number and density of arrows which the archers discharged upon them and their horses. This affair being thus quickly settled, the Earl of Lancaster and his people retired from the water, nor did they dare to approach it again, and so their whole array was thrown into disorder.”*

What followed was another parley in which Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, agreed that he would surrender on the following day. He then withdrew to comfortable lodgings in the town leaving his men camped on meadows near the river and Sir Andrew Harclay and his men still holding the north bank of the river. It is thought by some that this was a chivalric device that would allow Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, to escape the battlefield while Sir Andrew Harclay could still claim the victory. The Lanercost Chronicle reports that:

*“The Earl sent messengers to Sir Andrew, requesting an armistice until the morning, when he would either give him battle or surrender to him. Andrew agreed to the Earl’s proposal, nevertheless he kept his people at the bridge and the river all that day and throughout the night so as to be ready for battle at any moment. But during that night the Earl of Hereford’s men deserted and fled, because their lord had been killed, also many of the Earl of Lancaster’s men and those of my lord de Clifford and others deserted from them.”*

On the following day Sir Simon Ward, the High Sheriff of Yorkshire, arrived with some royalist reinforcements and attacked the town. Sir Andrew Harclay and his forces crossed the river and joined the attack. The rebel forces fled, with noblemen abandoning their own clothes to dress as beggars or priests. Chroniclers noted that Lord Gifford abandoned a coat that was worth £26 – a sizeable sum in 1322. Both the attacking soldiers and local people helped themselves to the valuables that they had abandoned.

Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, realising that all was lost sought sanctuary in the chapel in the Market Square. However, the sanctuary was not respected by Sir Andrew Harclay who took him from the chapel, stripped him of his armour, made him dress in clothes made of striped cloth<sup>6</sup> and took him to York by boat as a prisoner. The injured Lord Roger Clifford was similarly taken to York by boat. Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, was outraged and cursed Sir Andrew Harclay, foretelling that he would die a shameful death within the year.



**The Battlefield Cross that was moved from Boroughbridge to Aldborough in 1852.**

Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, was taken to his own castle at Pontefract (that had surrendered to the King on 19<sup>th</sup> March) and was given a show trial at in the Great Hall where he was condemned to death as a traitor. Chroniclers record that Hugh Despenser used 'malicious and contemptuous words' during the trial. He was then taken to the top of a hill on a mule, made to kneel facing Scotland, and was beheaded with an axe. Many of his principal supporters were also executed and their remains hung in chains in various towns around England. Lord Roger Clifford was executed at York Castle where his remains were displayed at the Keep that is to this day known as 'Clifford's Tower'. Other of his supporters who were not present at Boroughbridge were imprisoned including Lord Roger Mortimer. Edward II reversed all the reforms that the Earl and his supporters had imposed. However, after the Earl's death his tomb at the Priory at Pontefract became a place of pilgrimage.

The grateful King Edward II made Sir Andrew Harclay the Earl of Carlisle and gave him much land in Westmorland that has been confiscated from the disgraced Lord Roger Clifford.

### **The Battle of Byland**

In October 1322, Edward II was making a progress through Yorkshire and on the 14<sup>th</sup> October he was staying at Byland Abbey. Unknown to him, Robert the Bruce was in the area and defeated Edward's force at Byland. The King was taken by surprise and forced to flee, leaving Queen Isabella and much of his treasure, including the crown jewels behind. Following the battle, Robert the Bruce advanced as far south as the East Riding of Yorkshire. The Battle of Byland was therefore a military, personal and financial embarrassment for the King and he wanted to find a scapegoat.

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<sup>6</sup> Being the uniform of a servant.

The Lanercost Chronicle reports that:

*“When the aforesaid Earl of Carlisle heard that the King was at York, he directed his march thither in order to attack the Scots with him and drive them out of the kingdom; but when he found the King all in confusion and no army mustered, he disbanded his own forces, allowing every man to return home.”*

### **The Treaty of Lochmaben**

Andrew Harclay, Earl of Carlisle concluded that the English could no longer win the Anglo-Scottish war and so initiated negotiations with the Scots. Some historians consider that he had been authorised to do this by Edward II as early as February 1322, but others think that he took the initiative himself. On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1323, he signed a peace treaty with Robert the Bruce at Lochmaben Castle in Dumfriesshire. The Lanercost Chronicle reports that:

*“When the said Earl of Carlisle perceived that the King of England neither knew how to rule his realm nor was able to defend it against the Scots, who year on year laid it more and more waste, he feared lest at last he [the king] should lose the entire kingdom; so he chose the less of two evils, and considered how much better it would be for the community of each realm if each king should possess his own kingdom freely and peacefully without any homage, instead of so many homicides and arsons, captivities, plunderings and raidings taking place every year.*

*“Therefore on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January [1323] the said earl went secretly to Robert the Bruce at Lochmaben and, after holding long conference and protracted discussion with him, at length, to his own perdition, came to an agreement with him in the following bond. The earl firmly pledged himself, his heirs and their adherents to advise and assist with all their might in maintaining the said Robert as King of Scotland, his heirs and successors, in the aforesaid independence and to oppose with all their force all those who would not join in nor even consent to the said treaty, as hinderers of the public and common welfare. And the said Robert, King of Scotland, pledged himself upon honour to assist and protect with all his might the said earl and all his heirs and their adherents according to the aforesaid compact, which he was willing should be confirmed by six persons each [kingdom] to be nominated by the aforesaid king and earl.”*

Upon hearing the news, Edward II reacted angrily, saying that the act was without royal sanction, and amounted to treason. Furthermore, it was alleged that Andrew Harclay, Earl of Carlisle, had been in Yorkshire with up to 20,000 men at the time of the Battle of Byland and was accused of holding back from the battle. He was also accused of having a relationship with Robert the Bruce's sister and of intending to marry Robert the Bruce's daughter.

### **The Trial and Death of Andrew Harclay**

The king issued an arrest order for the earl, and on 25<sup>th</sup> February Andrew Harclay was taken into the king's custody. He was arraigned before royal justices at Carlisle on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, denied a hearing, found guilty of treason, and executed at Harraby Hill near Carlisle the same day. He was hanged, drawn and quartered. The four quarters of his body were displayed in Bristol, Carlisle, Dover and Newcastle; with his head being displayed in London. Thus the prophecy of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, was fulfilled. His alleged treason, capture and execution is described in the Lanercost Chronicle that concludes:

*“When this sentence was pronounced the earl made answer: ‘Ye have divided my carcase according to your pleasure and I commend my soul to God’ And so, with most steadfast countenance and bold spirit, as it seemed to the bystanders, he went to suffer all these pains, and, while being drawn through the town, he gazed upon the heavens with hands clasped and held aloft and likewise his eyes directed on high.*



*"Then under the gallows, whole in body, strong and fiery in spirit and powerful in speech, he explained to all men the purpose he had in making the aforesaid convention with the Scots and so yielded himself to undergo the aforesaid punishment."*

Only after five years was his sister, Sarah, allowed to collect the quarters of his body and give him a proper burial. Some historians think he was buried at Hartley Castle, but others think he was buried at Kirkby Stephen parish Church. In the nineteenth century human bones were found during a renovation of the church and these were believed to be those of Andrew Harclay. However, his conviction for treason was never annulled.

### **The fall of Edward II**

Yet Edward II was destined not to reign much longer. His Queen, Isabella, annoyed by his favourites and her abandonment to the Scots at Byland, plotted her revenge. Her opportunity came in 1324 when she was sent to France as an emissary to her brother, King Charles IV. Edward made the mistake of allowing Isabella to take their young son, also called Edward, with her to France. While there she met with English exiles including Roger Mortimer who had escaped from the Tower of London. They became lovers and in September 1326 returned to England with the support of the French and other exiles. They landed in Suffolk and were welcomed by the English aristocracy, notably Henry of Lancaster, Thomas' brother, who captured Hugh Despenser and had him hanged, drawn and quartered at Hereford. Edward II was also taken prisoner, forced to abdicate in favour of his son, and was imprisoned first at Kenilworth and then Berkeley where it is believed he was murdered. Roger Mortimer was then proclaimed Lord Protector, to rule England until Edward III came of age.

Edward's twenty year reign, characterised by conflict and defeat had come to an end.

### **Conclusions**

Sir Andrew Harclay had one of the most interesting careers of the medieval period. Born the son of a country knight, he rose slowly through the ranks of the knightly class to become the sheriff of Cumberland at the age 41 and warden of the western marches at the age of 49. As sheriff, he had distinguished himself by defending Carlisle against the Scots in a siege.

The high point of his career was his stunning victory at Boroughbridge. Acting on good intelligence he used his own initiative to seize the high ground north of the River Ure at Boroughbridge before Thomas, Earl of Lancaster had reached the town and then inflict a crushing defeat on a superior force. His grateful king rewarded him with the Earldom of Carlisle, a remarkable achievement for someone of relatively modest origins.

However, when he used his initiative to negotiate the Treaty of Lochmaben with Robert the Bruce, he found that he had exceeded his authority and within a year of acceding to the Earldom he was executed as a traitor.

Today he is seen by some as a hero and by others as a villain. I don't think he was either. He was a brilliant general and one of the most interesting figures of his age.

*Adrian Waite*

*March 2022*

## About the Fact Sheets

These fact sheets are written by me (Adrian Waite) unless otherwise stated. Their purpose is to provide basic information and some analysis and comment on medieval historical subjects. They therefore do not provide information about events prior to the fifth century unless this is needed to set events in the medieval period in context and do not cover events after the early sixteenth century. The subjects may be historical buildings, events, people; how medieval history is researched, managed or presented today or other subjects. They are published on the 'AW-History' website and are freely available. I hope that people enjoy reading them and that they encourage readers to explore medieval history further. Feedback about the fact sheets is always welcome and should be addressed to me at [adrian.waite@awics.co.uk](mailto:adrian.waite@awics.co.uk).

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## About AW-History

The address of AW-History is [www.aw-history.co.uk](http://www.aw-history.co.uk)

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The website contains:

- Information about medieval history that can be freely downloaded
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We welcome visitors and hope that they enjoy the website. Feedback about the website is always welcome and should be addressed to me at [adrian.waite@awics.co.uk](mailto:adrian.waite@awics.co.uk).

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## Webinar

### Andrew Harclay and the Battle of Boroughbridge 1322

This webinar will be held at 7.00pm on Wednesday 16th March 2022 (the 700th anniversary of the battle) and will last for about an hour. The presenter will be Adrian Waite. There is no charge for attending the webinar.

The Battle of Boroughbridge was fought in Yorkshire on 16th March 1322. Andrew Harclay, a knight from Kirkby Stephen in Cumbria, who was loyal to King Edward II, defeated a rebel army led by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster and Humphry de Bohun, Earl of Hereford. After the battle, Thomas of Lancaster was beheaded and Andrew Harclay was created Earl of Carlisle.

However, Harclay's triumph didn't last long and neither did Edward's reign. In 1323 Edward II had Harclay executed. Then, in 1327, Edward II himself was deposed and murdered.

The webinar will consider the following questions:

- Who was Andrew Harclay?
- Why and how did he find himself fighting a battle in Yorkshire?
- And why did the King whose throne he had saved have him executed a year later?

To register, please [click here](#).

For further information or to view the recording if you miss the live event, please visit: [AW History \(aw-history.co.uk\)](http://AWHistory.aw-history.co.uk)