On 18 December 1448, William, earl of Douglas summoned the lords, freeholders and 'eldest bordouraris' with the best knowledge to a meeting at Lincluden College near Dumfries. Their purpose was to put in writing the regulations which had been developed and applied to the 'merchis' in time of war over the previous 80 years or so. It was a gathering which made clear the special status of the Marches with England in the late medieval Scottish kingdom and the special laws and ordinances which had developed to meet the needs of warfare in this region. The council specified the leading role played in the Borders by the wardens of the March. Earl William was warden of the West March and was exercising the established powers of leadership and regulation in his March. The special significance of the wardens and the Marches was mirrored on the English side of the border. The long state of formal war which existed between the English and Scottish kingdoms from 1333 to 1474, though it was interspersed by frequent truces, made the borderlands of the two realms into regions of special sensitivity. Issues of warfare, the keeping of truces and cross-border justice were problems which went far beyond the immediate area of the borders to exercise a significance in relations between the royal governments. These issues have led to debates about marcher society. It has been argued that the Anglo-Scottish Marches formed a common frontier society, distinguished by their experience of, and attitudes to, questions of divided allegiance, warfare and crime from those parts of the kingdoms removed from the border. An alternative case has been made that the Marches were essentially integrated into their own realms and shaped, primarily, by the development of their own kingdoms.
The office of March warden has a central place in these debates. The March wardenships developed during the fourteenth century as the major institutional product of the Anglo-Scottish conflict. The wardens of the Marches of England towards Scotland have been studied in some detail. The legal, military and political responsibilities of the wardens have all been the subject of detailed analysis, especially in relation to the administrative reach and political interests of the English royal government in the later Middle Ages. These studies have shown that the English office of warden or keeper of the March developed from the early fourteenth century. It was only from the 1380s that, instead of a commission of keepers, a single warden was appointed for each of the two Marches, east and west. In return for a considerable salary, the wardens were required to ensure that truces with Scotland were maintained and that regular meetings were held with the Scottish wardens, known as ‘Days of March’, to settle disputes and crimes across the border. In wartime, the English wardens were expected to retain as many soldiers as were needed to defend their March. Most of the holders of the office came from northern magnate families, especially the houses of Percy and Neville. However, prelates and barons from the region were also appointed on occasion, as were royal nominees from outside the north.3

The copious records of English royal administration which provide the material for these studies are not matched by Scottish evidence. The study of the Scottish March wardens during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries relies on more limited and disparate sources. The office has not been studied in its own right before the sixteenth century and there has not even been a full list of Scottish wardens for the period before the latter part of the fifteenth century. Instead, discussions of the Scottish wardenship have occurred as part of wider considerations of Anglo-Scottish warfare, diplomacy and justice. While these have shed much light on the holders and importance of the office, they do not consider possible variations and shifts in the Scottish wardenships. Some of the best material for the activities and expectations of the wardens comes from English diplomatic evidence. For example, the terms of truces, especially that agreed at Berwick in 1357, laid down mutual mechanisms for keeping the peace in the Marches. These required Scottish wardens to work in conjunction with
