Out of the Dark

This talk will begin at the end of the period that we used to call the Dark Ages. It will focus on the Battle of Carham (1016 or 1018) which established the River Tweed as the de facto border between England and Scotland and the period up to the beginning of the Scottish Wars of Independence in 1268.

Introduction to the series of talks

Good afternoon. Welcome to Segedunum for the first in this series of four talks which I have called "From Carham to Flodden: 500 Years of Border Conflict".

Before we begin I would like to tell you a little about The Battlefields Trust and where I fit into it. There are some BT leaflets available for you to take away and a few sample copies of our quarterly members' magazine for you to look at.

The Battlefields Trust is a non-political registered charity dedicated to the preservation, interpretation and presentation of battlefields as educational and historical resources. We are a national organisation with a network of local groups. We have a wide experience of dealing with, researching and investigating battlefields and we can draw upon a wide range of professional and volunteer expertise. The Trust supports and is supported by English Heritage and is recognised as the pre-eminent battlefield amenity society in the UK. Much more detail is available on our web site and the address is in the leaflet.

For my part I am the chairman of the Trust's North East & Borders Region which stretches from the Tees to the Firth of Forth. That is an area we will hear a little bit more about later on. Within the region we are active in arranging walks and talks at battlefield locations and in running various projects to investigate and promote some of the lesser known battlefields. We are currently running a major community project at Homildon Hill near Wooler and we are just beginning to look at a project around the battle of Carham. Both of those battles will be covered during these talks. My own background is largely in the world of software development but I have a long-standing interest in history and I hold a Master's degree in Medieval History from Durham University.

These four talks will centre on a number of important battles between the kingdoms of England and Scotland during the first half of the last millennium. What I am concerned with here are the national conflicts from the foundation of both nations until the end of the Middle Ages. I have chosen to stop at Flodden which is commemorating its five hundredth anniversary later this year on 9th September. This was not the last battle between the two nations prior to the union of the thrones in 1603 under the Stuart king James but nothing on the same scale was to occur before that date. I intend to focus on the battles fought within Northumberland but others will no doubt come into the story along the way. Further, this is a series about national conflicts so I will not be talking very much about the incessant border raiding between the so-called "Reiver" families or the internal fights between factions in both countries except where they are relevant to the main story. All of these are, of course, an important aspect of border conflict but four talks covering 500 years simply does not give enough time to deal with everything in detail. As it is I will have to skate across the surface of some complex history at times to fit it all in – so please forgive me.

As with all historians I have made use of the works of others. My own specialism is the later medieval period, mainly the 14th century. If this were an academic paper, I would be acknowledging my sources as I go along. In this case however, I will provide a list of further reading at the end of the series.

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Romans to Vikings

In the brief description of this talk that appeared in the publicity material I said that we would start at the end of that period we used to call the Dark Ages. In fact, I would like us to start by looking briefly at the state of this island at the time the Romans left and then run through the period up to the battle of Carham. I believe that events can only really be properly explained by putting them into a broader context. If we can see how both England and Scotland came into being we will be better able to understand the years of conflict that followed.

Consider this map :

The divisions that you see are Roman administrative divisions. There was no England, no Scotland and no Wales at this time. With our modern eyes we see, for example, the green

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section and think "Wales" – but that is anachronistic. Similarly we see Hadrian's Wall (where we sit today) and might think "national border" but that was not the case. The wall that starts (or ends depending on which way you are travelling) outside this building was probably created to mark the extent of the Roman Empire. We have no clear explanation of just what the wall was for but it may well have been a marker of the point beyond which the cost and effort of subduing the native tribes outweighed the benefits to be gained. This point was later extended further north with the construction of the Antonine Wall but the Romans clearly decided that they were right the first time and retreated back to Hadrian's Wall. When the Romans left in the 5th century the walls lost their significance and there was no particular reason why the island should be divided at this point and no suggestion that any such division would emerge in the future. Instead, the island became divided into a number of smaller units under the control of various tribal groupings.

Over the following centuries the picture was complicated by the arrival of various invading forces : the Celtic Scots who came from Ireland and settled in Argyle; the Germanic Angles and Saxons along the south and east coasts. It wasn't until the 6th century that the Angles reached Bamburgh and founded the kingdom of Bernicia.

As you can see on this map the northern extent of Northumbria was the Firth of Forth and the southern extent was the Humber. Northumbria had been formed by the merger of the kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira under the Bernician king Aethelfrith at the start of the 7th

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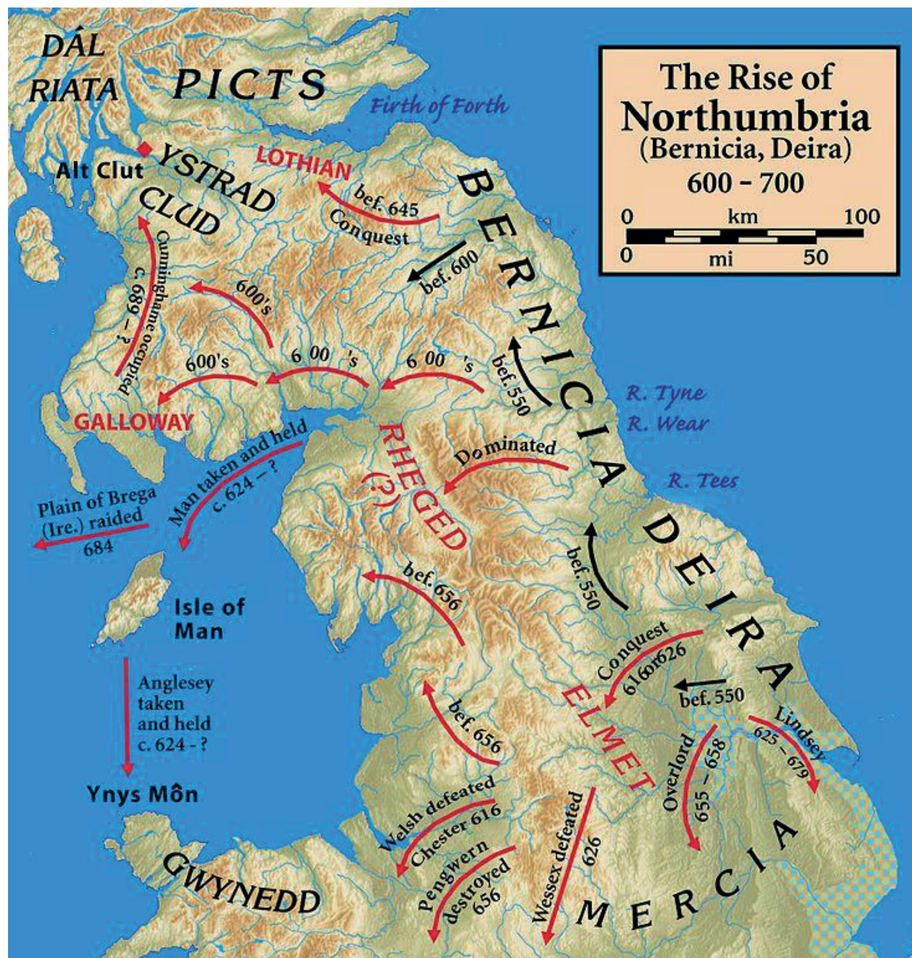
century. In the following years the kings of Northumbria expanded westwards until they ruled all of the territory from Humber – Mersey line to the Firth of Forth.

Here is another map which shows the extent of this growth.



Inevitably, what we know about this period is limited by the available historical sources. I referred earlier to this being that period that we use to call the Dark Ages. Few would use that term today. The phrase has become distorted and is now often taken to mean a period of barbarism. In fact, it merely reflects the fact that there are so few surviving written sources that it is difficult to see exactly what was happening at times. Modern historians usually refer to the period from the departure of the Romans to the coming of the Normans as the Early Middle Ages. Thus, the full extent of Northumbria is a little speculative but the overall impression is probably close enough.

From Vikings to Carham

With the death of king Ecfrith of Northumbria in a battle with the Picts near Forfar in 685 the tide of fortune for his kingdom had turned and expansion ceased. During the 8th century the dominant kingdom within this island was Mercia in the English Midlands. In the 9th century the kingdom of Wessex rose to prominence challenging Mercia while in the far

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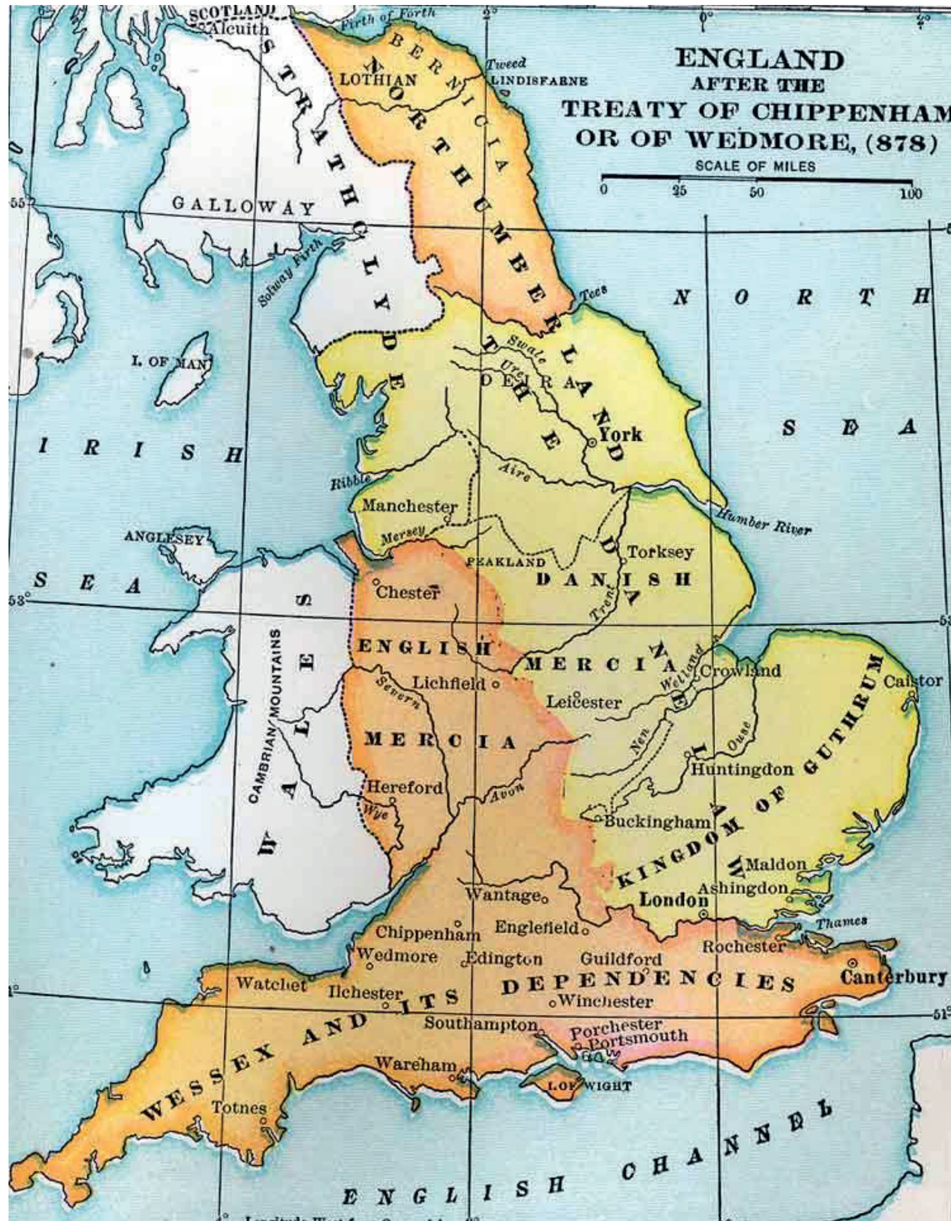
north the Scots and the Picts were united to form the kingdom of Scotia under king Kenneth I. Nations were forming but this process was rudely interrupted by the Vikings!

Following the first attack on Lindisfarne in 793, the second half following century saw a concerted attempt to conquer parts of Britain. Only the kingdom of Wessex remained free of their control. The kingdom of Northumbria was effectively brought to an end. Cumbria and Dumfries were settled by invaders and a new Viking kingdom based on York was created. The only area which did not fall under Viking control was the land on the east coast, north of the Tees and extending to the Forth. The rulers in this area were not kings.



Gradually the Vikings were defeated. Alfred the Great and his son Edward regained control of the Midlands. Edward's son Athelstan defeated the Viking king of York while Constantine II, king of Alba, took control of the kingdom of Strathclyde and the northern part of Bernicia. It is at this point that we can really begin to speak of "Scotland" which gradually replaced the name "Alba". By 950 there was a semblance of stability. The York Vikings were finally overcome in 954 by the West Saxon king Eadred who united Yorkshire and the land north of

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the Tees. This whole area was placed under the control of Osulf as the first Earl of Northumbria who had been the High Reeve of the northern half of Northumbria based at Bamburgh. It was Osulf who had arranged the assassination of the wonderfully named Eric Bloodaxe, the last Viking king of York. With the inclusion of the defunct Viking kingdom of York into Eadred's existing kingdom we finally have a definitive England that we would recognise as such.

At the same time as this, the English crown acknowledged the control of king Indulf of Alba (which I will now begin to call Scotland) over Cumbria (which was now part of the kingdom of Strathclyde) and Lothian - the land between the Forth and the Tweed.

The island was now divided into two kingdoms of unequal size – England and Scotland. It was time for the fighting to begin! From the outset the kings of England were keen to express their seniority and ultimate dominance over the whole island. In 934 king Athelstan had already begun this process when he invaded the kingdom of Scotia and forced king Constantine II to submit. In 937 he had defeated the combined forces of Scotia, Strathclyde and the Norse kingdom of Dublin at the battle of Brunanburgh.

It is worth just pausing here to take a closer look at the battle of Brunanburgh as it illustrates some of the problems that historians have when looking at early history. The fact that a battle actually occurred is attested in a wide range of sources including in verse in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It has been called the greatest Anglo-Saxon battle prior to Hastings. We can also be fairly sure that the outcome was a hard-won victory for Athelstan and confirmed England as a unified kingdom although, as we have seen, it did not yet once and for all include the area controlled by the York Vikings. Such were the losses on all sides however that everyone was weakened and everyone had to accept the division of the island as it then stood. By this time that would have included the area that we now call Wales but that is another story and one that is not yet fully understood by historians. The main issue with Brunanburgh is that we have no idea where it was! Or, to be more accurate, we have too many ideas of where it was and historians cannot agree as to which is the right one. As one writer has put it – "This is where it gets nasty". Historians do like to fight amongst themselves and sometimes it can get very personal!

For some time a site in Northumberland near to Ford was favoured. More recently the case for a site in the Wirral has been promoted in a new book. The TV historian and author, Michael Woods, has written a critical review of the book based largely on the question "If the goal of the Norse-Irish leadership was to re-establish their kingdom in York (*after the earlier defeat by Athelstan mentioned previously*) , what were they doing in the Wirral? And how did a Scottish army end up in Cheshire?" His own view is that a site somewhere south of York makes most sense but ultimately he suggests that the view advanced in 1938 by the historian Alistair Campbell remains true - without new evidence, "all hope of localising Brunanburgh is lost". In addition to the lack of a secure location we know very little about the way that the battle was actually fought. There is a suggestion in one source that the West Saxons deployed cavalry which would have been most unusual at a time when combat was normally hand-to-hand between "shield walls". The figures given for casualties are probably exaggerated for literary effect. This would not be unusual at a time when accuracy was of less importance than dramatic impact for the writers. We should remember that all history is provisional and that all written sources have some sort of bias . No-one can ever know what really happened in the past. The best we can do is to construct a narrative that

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fits with such sources as have survived while recognising that more has probably been lost than has come down to us today. These problems for historians will affect everything that I have to say in all of these talks.

In 973 the English king Edgar was able to force all other kings within Britain, including Kenneth III of Scotland and Malcolm of Strathclyde, to attend him in Chester following his coronation in Bath and to give undertakings as to their friendship. This was a substantial display of his power but clearly there were limits. The English king did not have the resources to impose permanent control over the north of the island. This is a theme that will recur throughout these talks. Even within England he conceded day-to-day rule of Northumbria to a local native earl just as the Scottish king had to tolerate semi-independent rule in Strathclyde.

Before we turn to the battle of Carham we might just stop to consider this question. If peace and stability had been achieved after a long period of essentially tribal conflict over the 500 years since the Romans departed, why did kings seek to expand their realms by further warfare? Today we consider warfare to be a last resort. Something to avoid at all costs. In early medieval Britain and indeed right through to the end of the Middle Ages, warfare was considered to be a quite normal state of affairs. The role of “king” had developed from the position of warlord and the “nobility” derive from the warlord’s closest circle of warriors. The ties of friendship, family and tribe were the strongest bonds and loyalty to these was the paramount virtue. In return for their support it was the duty of the king to reward loyalty with gifts. Treasure and land to distribute as gifts came from conquest. In addition, as the tribe expanded in number it was necessary to acquire greater lands to support them. Thus, expansion into neighbouring territory was an essential duty of the king. It increased his standing with his peers and provided the resources he needed to maintain his position. In these earliest times the position of “king” was not necessarily hereditary in the way we would understand it. There was often a process of election from amongst the ruling elite group. On the other hand, it was not uncommon for one king to be murdered and replaced by a rival. A well-known example would be the Scottish king, Macbeth, who In August 1040, killed the ruling king, Duncan I, in battle near Elgin. If we look forward we can see that those kings who failed as military leaders often did not survive – consider Edward II, Richard II and Henry VI. Further afield when king Wenceslas IV (not the good one) was deposed as king of the Romans (which actually meant king of the Holy Roman Empire) in 1400 one of the charges against him was that he had failed to extend the territory of the Empire. He was also a rather chaotic alcoholic which didn’t help! Of course, human nature doesn’t change much and those with the power to subdue others are usually more than happy to exercise it.

In the century between the reign of king Edgar and the arrival of the Normans in 1066 the question of the location of the border between England and Scotland remained an issue to be resolved finally. This period is still not fully understood due to the lack of sources but it would seem that the Northumbrians regained control over all or part of Lothian at some point towards the end of the 10th century giving them a northern border at the Forth. What happened next was one of those battles of which many people have never heard but which is of pivotal importance in the history of Britain – the battle of Carham.

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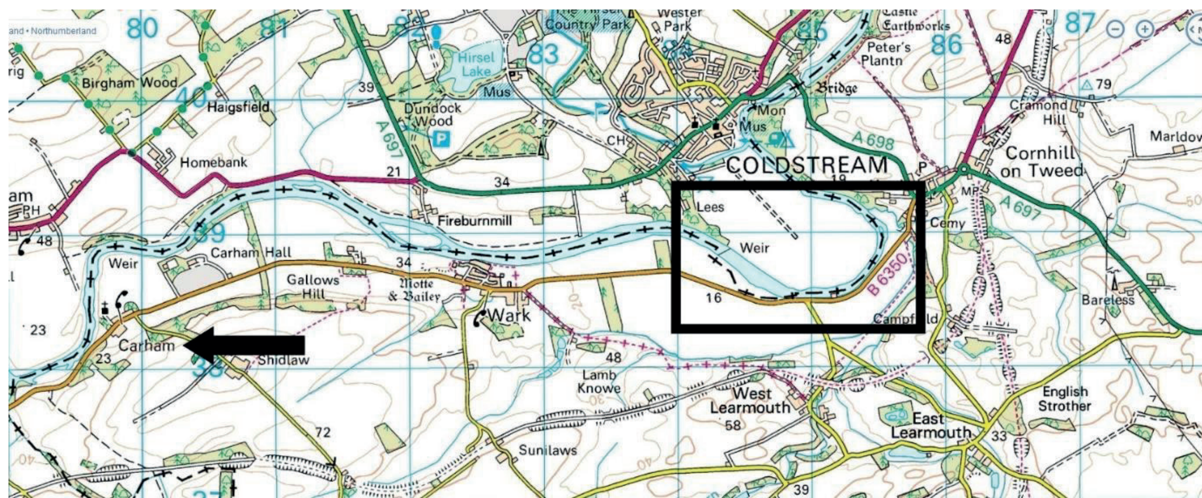

This modern OS map shows the location of Carham and you can see the Anglo-Scottish border marked with the broken line along the course of the Tweed. What is interesting is that the map lacks the usual OS crossed swords symbol that marks a battle. Once again we are back with a familiar problem – we do not know where exactly the battle was fought. On top of that, we do not know exactly when the battle was fought – was it in 1016 or 1019 – we will come back to that in a moment. Finally there are some historians who have questioned whether or not the battle had any real significance as regards the border at all!

Let's start with what we think we do know, at least in the sense that these are the parts about which most historians agree. First, we should just take note that England was now under Danish rule following the invasion lead by the Danish king Canute (he of the incoming tide) in 1015. This persisted until 1042 when the House of Wessex returned from exile in the shape of Edward the Confessor. We can be reasonably sure that a battle did take place and that the main combatants were king Malcom II of Scotland and earl Uhtred the Bold of Northumbria. We are also told that Malcolm was supported by Owain the Bald, king of Strathclyde. From here it gets complicated!

Our source for much of this detail is Symeon of Durham. Symeon was a monk of Durham Priory and the author of a number of chronicles. This is what he has to say. In the 'Historia Regum' (History of the Kings) entry for 1018, he writes:

"A great battle between the Scots and Angles was fought at Carrum [Carham] between Huctred [Uhtred], son of Waldef [Waltheof], earl of the Northumbrians, and Malcolm [Malcolm II], son of Cyneth [Kenneth II], king of the Scots, with whom there was in the battle Eugenius [Owen] the Bald, king of the men of Clyde [Strathclyde]."

In his 'Historia Ecclesiae Dunelmensis' (History of the Church of Durham) he writes :

"In the year of our Lord's incarnation ten hundred and eighteen, while Cnut ruled the kingdom of the Angles, a comet appeared for thirty nights to the people of Northumbria, a terrible presage of the calamity by which that province was about to be desolated. For, shortly afterwards, (that is, after thirty days,) nearly the whole population, from the river Tees to the Tweed, and their borders, were cut off in a conflict in which they were engaged with a countless multitude of Scots at Carrun [Carham]."

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This seems pretty clear. But Symeon was writing some 100 years after the event and there is another source that makes his date seem less certain. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle seems to put Uhtred's death in 1016 - two years before he was apparently defeated at Carham. Possibly the identification of Uhtred as leader of the English forces is mistaken. In 'Anglo-Saxon England', Sir Frank Stenton argues that, "as names are better remembered than dates", it is the placing of the battle in 1018 that is incorrect. On the other hand, in 'Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom', A.A.M. Duncan maintains that Uhtred was indeed defeated in 1018, and that his death, which Cnut ordered, should, therefore, be placed after that. Some historians have attempted to solve the contradiction by suggesting that Uhtred was killed in 1016 and was thus not present at Carham at all! This does not fit well with the idea that Cnut had Uhtred murdered because of his defeat but it remains a possibility. There are historians on all sides of the case for 1016 or 1018 and without further evidence we will never know for certain which is correct. This poses a small problem in that the Trust is considering a project to commemorate the anniversary of the battle – so we will have to make up our mind about when to hold it!

I mentioned earlier that we do not know the exact location of the battle. If you look at the map you will see the dark square. This is the traditional site of the battle, between Wark and Cornhill rather than at Carham itself. Perhaps one day we will be able to test this with some archaeology – this is very much the sort of thing that the Trust does.

The final question hanging over this battle is whether or not it really did mark the point at which Lothian (the land between the Tweed and the Forth) fell definitively into Scottish hands and thus set the national border in the east as being the River Tweed. Scottish historians have tended to support this view while English historians have taken the view that Lothian had been in Scottish hands since 973 and that Carham was of no great importance. Once again, the sources are not entirely clear.

King Edgar is reported (by Roger of Wendover, a monk of St Albans) to have granted Lothian (the land between the rivers Tweed and Forth) to Kenneth II (Malcolm II's father) in 973. Once again we must note however that he was writing long after the event and seems to have based his writing about the past on various existing chronicles that were in the possession the abbey. There is some evidence that the English forces at Carham were drawn from between the Tees and the Tweed and this would seem to support the idea that that Lothian was indeed in the hands of the Scots already. Sir Frank Stenton dismisses the idea that the Scots' victory at Carham had anything to do with their acquisition of Lothian. A.A.M. Duncan suggests that "some or all of Lothian certainly passed from Scottish control" in the years since 973, and that the territory was recovered as a result of their victory at Carham. In 'Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD80-1000', Alfred P. Smyth proposes that quibbles over the date of the battle and Uhtred's presence are "not quite so important as they may seem", and suggests that Carham's outcome "can have had little bearing on the Scottish occupation of Lothian". Professor Smyth argues that the real struggle was for the control of Bernicia, and that, following Carham, Uhtred recognised Malcolm II as his overlord - this disloyalty "must surely be in part at least" responsible for Cnut's disposal of Uhtred.

Whether or not all or part of Lothian was in the hands of the Northumbrians prior to the battle of Carham does not, in my view, change its importance. Had Uhtred prevailed it is probable that Lothian would have fallen to the Northumbrians and his defeat served to

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settle the matter. Or did it? After Carham Malcolm II and his successors continued to raid into England. But this was a pattern that would be repeated again and again, as we will see in later talks. The border itself has never moved north or south again on a permanent basis with the exception of the town of Berwick which moved between the two nations on various occasions. The border was finally recognised in law by the Treaty of York in 1237. But that was not the end of the border story.

Return of the Vikings

In 1066 the Vikings returned and this time they meant it! There is a common perception that William the Conqueror was French. He wasn't. The clue is in the name – Normans – the Men of the North. William was a direct descendant of the Viking raiders who had colonised the area that became Normandy from the 10th century onwards. Of course, by William's time they had "gone native" to a large degree.

For Northumberland the Norman conquest did not really begin until 1080. Before this, William was concerned with consolidating his hold on the more southerly parts of the island. The following fifty years saw a complex whirlwind of changes to control of Northumbria with the leadership changing hands on a regular basis. It is a tale of murder, treason and rebellion with many of the leaders coming to a sticky end. By and large this did not involve the Scots but they did seek to take advantage of the instability with continuing raids and violent responses. In 1092 king William II met with Malcolm III of Scotland and the latter pledged his allegiance and recognised William as his feudal overlord. At the same time William took the opportunity to subdue Cumbria and establish the western border of his lands at the Solway Firth. This provoked Malcolm's last invasion of Northumbria. It has been suggested that William had promised to restore Cumbria to Scotland. Whatever the reason, the outcome was a disaster for the Scots. Malcolm's invasion was anticipated and his army was destroyed at the battle of Alnwick on the banks of the river Aln on November 13th 1093. Malcolm was killed along with his heir. After a brief struggle for the succession the Scottish crown passed to king Edgar who was dependant on the English king's support and the Scottish threat to Northumbria disappeared – for a while. There is a commemorative cross standing in a woodland clearing a few yards to the east of the B6341 as it approaches the hilltop north of Alnwick. This 18th century cross stands next to the remains of the original medieval cross possibly marking the spot where Malcolm fell.

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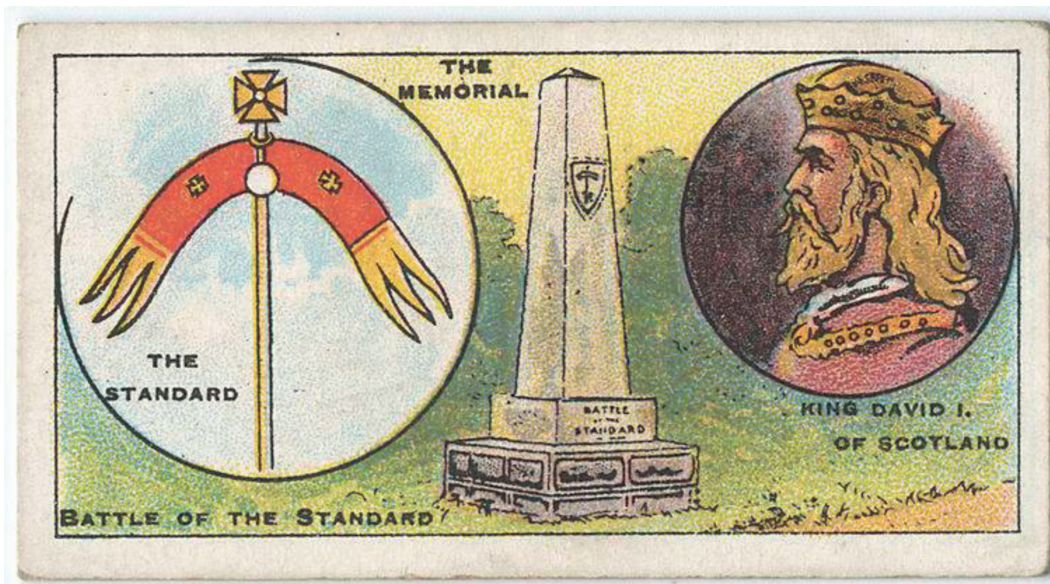
For nearly fifty years the border was not an issue for William II and his successor Henry I. When the latter died England was plunged into a civil war. Those of you who know Ellis Peters' 'Brother Cadfael' stories will be familiar with the long struggle between Stephen of Blois (Henry's nephew) who seized the throne, and Henry's daughter Mathilda. Once again, and not for the last time, the Scots saw this as an opportunity.

The Border Settlement

In 1136 the Scottish king David I invaded England He had long-standing ambitions to detach Northumbria, Westmoreland and Cumberland from England. His sister had been married to Henry I and he had himself lived in England for many years. His wife, Maud, had a claim to the ancient earldom of Northumbria. David occupied Northumbria and Cumberland and secured all of their castles except Bamburgh. He laid siege to Durham. A form of settlement was negotiated with Stephen but this did not meet all of David's ambitions. In 1138 when Stephen's position in the civil war appeared to weaken, David invaded again. This time he was faced in battle by an army mustered by the Archbishop of York which defeated him six miles north of Northallerton in what has come to be known as the Battle of the Standard. The name derives from the fact that the centre of the English position was marked by a ship's mast (mounted upon a cart) bearing a pyx carrying the consecrated host and from which were flown the consecrated banners of the minsters of York, Beverley and Ripon.



I love these old cigarette cards! There are many more of them on the Trust's Facebook site. They date from the early 20th century. I will not dwell on this battle as it was fought outside of Northumberland other than to say that the defeat in battle did not seriously harm David's plans. If you would like to visit the battlefield and learn more about it, the Trust does run a guided walk from time to time in association with the York Archaeological Trust. Details of these events are always posted on our web site.

Stephen realised that he could not fight a war on two fronts and he needed to reach some sort of compromise with the Scots. This was achieved with the Treaty of Durham which

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gave David's son Henry effective control of most of Northumbria. As the conflict in England twisted and turned so the position in the north grew more complicated. By the time that it was settled with Mathilda's son coming to the throne as Henry II of England after Stephen's death in 1154 the reality was that Northumberland had been under the rule of the Scots without actually ever being a part of Scotland. By 1157 Henry felt strong enough to reverse this position and took Northumberland back under his control from the 16 year old Scottish king Malcolm IV in return for a few concessions. Malcolm died in 1165 to be followed by his brother William the Lion. William reigned for almost 49 years and harboured ambitions to regain control of the lands of Northumberland and Cumberland on the basis of his ancient property rights, as he saw them. He tried a variety of means to achieve this culminating in an invasion in 1173 which coincided with the rebellion of Henry's son (also called Henry and later Henry III). Once again this came to grief at Alnwick. William has allowed his army to spread out on looting raids and he was caught by the English forces with a small bodyguard of less than 100 men near Alnwick Castle. William was captured and forced to agree to harsh terms under the terms of the Treaty of Falaise including permanent English garrisons in the castles of Roxburgh, Berwick, Jedburgh, Edinburgh and Stirling. The Treaty of Falaise lasted for fifteen years until Richard the Lionheart effectively sold the castles back to William in order to fund his crusade to the Holy Land.

The final act in this chapter of our story came when king John replaced his brother after Richard's senseless death outside the walls of Chalus-Chabrol. In Scotland William the Lion was succeeded by his son in 1214 on the eve of the baronial revolt in England that would lead to the signing of Magna Carta in 1215. The new Scottish king, Alexander II followed the long tradition of seeking to use instability in England as his chance to regain control of Northumberland, Westmoreland and Cumberland. The rebels offered to cede the counties to him in return for support against John. As the dispute continued after 1215 when John repudiated Magna Carta the barons invited Prince Louis, the heir to the French throne to take the English crown. Alexander agreed to support this claim in return for Northumbria. It was at this time that Alexander did what no Scottish king had done before or has done since – he matched a Scottish army to Dover to support Louis. With John's death in 1216 the need for a French king disappeared. Louis's army was defeated and John's son Henry was gradually accepted as king Henry III. With this, Alexander's claims were in abeyance. At York in 1237 a treaty was signed that saw Alexander finally give up his family's claim to Northumbria.

With the border settled and Northumbria now finally an English county it was time for a new dispute! The Scots may have given up their plans to retake the lands between the Tweed and the Tees but they were still, in English eyes, a subservient nation and this did not sit well in Edinburgh. But that is a story we will pick up next time.

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The Struggle for Independence

This talk will cover the two Wars of Scottish Independence (1268 to 1357). We will look in detail at the battles of Halidon Hill (1333) and Neville's Cross (1346) where the David II, king of Scotland was captured.

Introduction

Good afternoon. Welcome to Segedunum for the second in the series of four talks which I have called "From Carham to Flodden: 500 Years of Border Conflict".

Last time, we looked at how the two nations of England and Scotland came into being and the early years of the conflict between them that had such an impact on Northumberland. We left our story in 1237 with a state of relative peace between the two countries following the Treaty of York. Today we will look at the period of the Scottish Wars of Independence. In the first talk we covered a lot of history. Today we will be focusing more on battles and although I will cover the main points of the historical narrative so that we know where we are and why the battles were fought. The period in question runs from where we left off in 1237 to 1357 – just 120 years.

Most of the battles fought during this period happened in Scotland and I will pass over those quite quickly with a pause to consider the Battle of Stirling Bridge and the Battle of Bannockburn which has its 700th anniversary next year. Only one battle of real significance took place in Northumberland – the Battle of Halidon Hill in 1333. We will look at this in some detail. Slightly further south and slightly later was the Battle of Neville's Cross, near Durham, in 1346. I intend to cover that as well because it had a profound impact on the history of the relationship between England and Scotland and the story of the conflict between them which is at the heart of this series of talks.

The Great Cause

The Treaty of York between Alexander II of Scotland and Henry III of England did not include an unequivocal statement of the sovereignty and equality of both kingdoms. It left the way open for the English kings to claim homage for the kingdom of Scotland in the future. Alexander's son, Alexander III, was married to the sister of Edward I of England and continued the policy of friendship towards England where the king was engaged in a conflict known as the Second Barons War (the first had been against king John.) The revolt was led by Simon de Montford who was eventually killed at the Battle of Evesham in 1264 but who is remembered today as one of the fathers of parliamentary democracy.

When Alexander III died in an accident in 1286 the heir to the throne was his three year-old grand-daughter Margaret whom Edward I planned to marry to his own son, the future Edward II, thus uniting the two thrones some three and a half centuries before it finally happened in 1603. Margaret's death in 1290 left no clear heir and brought Scotland to the brink of civil war as rival the factions struggled for supremacy. Since Alexander's death the country had been ruled by a group of nobles and bishops known as the Guardians of Scotland. In order to seek a resolution to the question of succession they turned to Edward I and asked him to decide between the various claimants. This process has come to be known as The Great Cause.

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The initial thirteen claimants were reduced to three: John Balliol, Robert Bruce and John Hastings, all of whom were descendants of the three daughters of David, Earl of Huntingdon. After a further period for deliberation, Edward I awarded the crown to John Balliol, the descendant of the Earl's eldest daughter. Balliol was enthroned as Scottish king in November 1292 and did homage to Edward on December here in Newcastle.

I have mentioned 'homage' once or twice in these talks so it might be worthwhile just explaining the importance of this ritual. The structure of medieval society was based on a hierarchy of service linked to the holding of land from a greater power and the duties that attached to these holdings. The detail of this is complex and somewhat arcane but, in essence, swearing an oath of homage to another represented an unbreakable obligation to serve him and to accept him as overlord. This was usually associated with a duty to fight for the overlord if required. When this related to the lower orders as when a knight swore homage to a greater lord, it was largely unproblematic. If both parties were great lords or kings it became rather more sensitive! This is best seen during the Hundred Years War between England and France where the English kings held lands in France. No English king would easily swear homage to the French king for these lands. It was much easier for the English king to solve the problem by declaring himself king of France and this was one of the fundamental issues that drove the conflict for so long. Thus, for the Scottish king to swear homage to the English king was an admission that the English king was his overlord.

For Edward and John Balliol this came to a head in 1294 when Edward called upon Balliol and the Scottish barons to fight for him against the French in Gascony. The Scots were far from happy with this and responded by creating an alliance with France in 1295. This was the birth of the 'Auld Alliance' of which we will hear much more as we proceed. For Edward this was no less than treason and he responded accordingly. Berwick, which had been in Scottish hands since Richard I had sold it back to William the Lion in 1216, was well prepared for conflict; defences were strengthened and the garrison was bolstered with troops added from Lothian and Fife. The Scots were able to gather 10,000 men, but it is important to note

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that the majority of them were conscripts. But Scotland did have nobles and trained retainers willing to fight and so the army's morale was high. They invaded England and put the Northumberland to the torch. Edward replied in force. Berwick was attacked and subjected to one of the worst massacres in British history. In his 15th century chronicle known as 'Scotichronicon' Walter Bower wrote

'When the town had been taken in this way and its citizens had submitted, Edward spared no one, whatever the age or sex, and for two days streams of blood flowed from the bodies of the slain, for in his tyrannous rage he ordered 7,500 souls of both sexes to be massacred...So that mills could be turned round by the flow of their blood.'

Edward marched on crushing a Scottish army at the first battle of Dunbar (the second and better known battle of Dunbar was fought and won by Cromwell during the Civil War) before taking all of the major lowland Scottish castles. John Balliol was captured and humiliated publicly.

Balliol abdicated at Stracathro near Montrose on 10 July 1296. Here the arms of Scotland were formally torn from John's surcoat, giving him the abiding name of "Toom Tabard" (empty coat). John was imprisoned in the Tower of London until allowed to go into exile to France in July 1299.

Edward was earning his title as 'Hammer of the Scots' which is engraved on his tombstone but which probably dates from the 16th century. Not content with the removal of the Scottish king he set about stripping Scotland of its lodestones of identity, just as he had

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done to the Welsh in 1282. The Stone of Destiny (also known as the Stone of Scone) , on which the Scottish Kings were inaugurated, the crown, and one of the Scots' holiest relics, the Black Rood of St Margaret (believed to be a piece of the True Cross), were all taken south. His aim was nothing less than the destruction of the Scottish nation and its total incorporation into his kingdom.

King Edward quickly imposed an English administration on Scotland with the Earl of Surrey at its head. Sir Hugh de Cressingham, an efficient administrator with a history of service to the English Crown, was appointed Treasurer of Scotland with Walter Amersham installed as Chancellor. Most of the strategic Royal castles were placed into the keepership of Edward's nobles and English tax-collectors followed in their wake, imposing heavy taxes to fill the king's coffers, and corruptly exploiting the Scots populace to enrich themselves.

Scotland Fights Back

Edward's supremacy did not last long. The Scots response to this affront to their national pride was swift and produced three of that nation's greatest heroes – William Wallace, Andrew Murray and yet another Robert Bruce – this is the one with the spider!

Following a campaign of guerrilla warfare in many parts of Scotland the two nations finally met in battle. On 11 September 1297, an army jointly led by Wallace and Murray won the Battle of Stirling Bridge. Although vastly outnumbered, the Scottish army routed the English army. The Earl of Surrey's professional army of 3,000 cavalry and 8,000 to 10,000 infantry met disaster as they crossed over to the north side of the river. Surrey, who had lead the fight at Dunbar, had a low opinion of the Scots army and considered them little better than a peasant rabble. Certainly they were no match for the great fighting machine of England. The narrowness of the bridge prevented many soldiers from crossing together. Wallace and Murray waited until more than half the English army has crossed the bridge before springing their trap. The Scots spearmen rushed down the causeway. Those on the right flank forced their way along the river bank to the north end of the bridge, cutting off any hope of escape. Trapped in a confined space with the river to their backs the English heavy cavalry was virtually useless.

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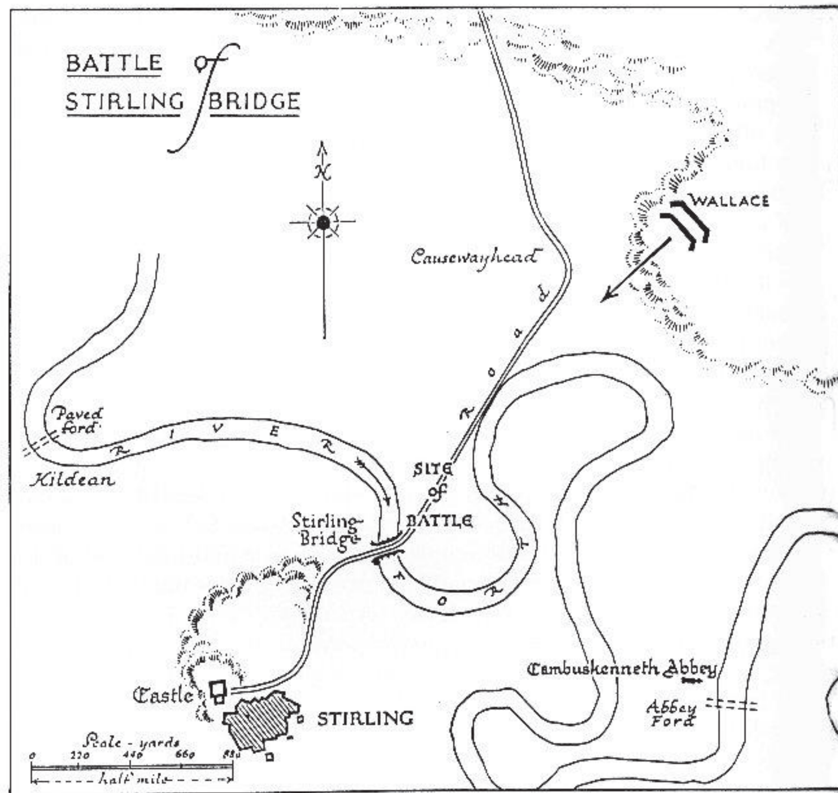
Battle of Stirling Bridge



Over half the English army was left to its fate on the Scots side of the river. Those that could swim did so, the rest were massacred. Many of them were Welsh, but among them was Hugh de Cressingham, Edward's hated tax collector, who had crossed first. It is reputed that his body was subsequently flayed and the skin cut into small pieces as tokens of the victory. The Lanercost Chronicle records that Wallace had "*a broad strip of Cressingham's skin ... taken from the head to the heel, to make therewith a baldrick for his sword*". A baldrick is the belt from which a sword is hung. After the battle, Moray and Wallace assumed the title of Guardians of the Kingdom of Scotland on behalf of King John Balliol. Moray died of wounds suffered on the battlefield sometime in late 1297.

Wallace's victory was short-lived. In the following year he once again faced the English in battle. This time he lost. Edward, who had been In France at the time of the defeat at Stirling, returned and assembled a new army to invade Scotland under his personal leadership. Wallace planned a night time attack on Edward's army just to the north west of Edinburgh, but was betrayed by two Scottish nobles, who resented Wallace's rise to power. Wallace now had little alternative but to face Edward in open battle before he reached Stirling with its strategically important castle. He chose Falkirk as the location. On this occasion Edward made no mistake. His heavy cavalry of armoured knights caused the Scottish cavalry to flee on the second charge. He then used his large contingent of archers to destroy the Scottish infantry which was mopped up by the cavalry. In medieval battles

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most casualties happened during the rout as fleeing soldiers were cut down by their pursuers. Wallace escaped and resigned as Guardian of Scotland.

For Edward Wallace had risen at just the right moment. He was still engaged in dispute with his barons but the defeat at Stirling Bridge had served to bring them to his side, united in their wish to subdue the rebellious Scots. After Falkirk, the Scots nobles reasserted their role as guardians of the kingdom and continued the war with Edward. Many Scots had resolved to fight until the end. Every year for six years Edward led his army north to attack Scottish strongholds in a bitter war that laid waste to the south of Scotland. From Edward's point of view the war was bearing little fruit. Even more worrying was the fact that the Scots appeared to be winning on the diplomatic front. William Wallace was dispatched to the court of Philip IV in France to drum up support. The Scottish Church appealed directly to the papacy and seemed to be getting a sympathetic hearing. By 1302 it seemed that the Scots were on the verge of victory, with the exiled Balliol ready to return to claim the crown.

However, events would soon turn against the Scots. In the politics of the Scottish Guardianship, the Comyns, supporters of Balliol, had side-lined the Bruces, who, faced with Balliol's return, again submitted to Edward I. Eventually Edward prevailed in the diplomatic game with the French and the Pope, who needed the English for his latest Crusade against Islam more than he needed the Scots. By 1304 it looked like Balliol was not to return after all, and, exhausted after seven years of war and diplomatic defeat, the Scots' nobility capitulated and cut a deal. Edward had triumphed.

Edward was relatively magnanimous in victory. He handed out public offices in Scotland to those who submitted to his rule, hoping to secure loyalty in return. Only William Wallace and his followers did not submit. An embarrassment to the Scottish nobles and a hindrance to their ambitions, he was outlawed, betrayed and executed after a show trial at Westminster.

Enter The Bruce

Many of us will recall from school the tale of Robert the Bruce hiding in a cave in Ireland after defeat by the English and watching a spider repeatedly trying to anchor one side of its new web to a rock. After six failures it finally succeeded. Bruce had lost six battles against Edward and took this as his inspiration to go back to Scotland for another attempt. This, of course, is myth rather than history and probably dates to Sir Walther Scott in the 19th century.

After Wallace’s defeat Bruce had become a Guardian but had long been in dispute with the John Comyn, a fellow Guardian and his main rival as claimant to the Scottish throne. In 1306, Bruce quarrelled with Comyn and stabbed him in a church in Dumfries. He was outlawed by Edward and excommunicated by the pope. Bruce now proclaimed his right to the throne and on 27 March was crowned king at Scone. The following year however, Bruce was defeated by Edward's army and forced to flee. His wife and daughters were imprisoned and three of his brothers executed. Robert spent the winter on an island off the coast of Antrim – probably not watching spiders!

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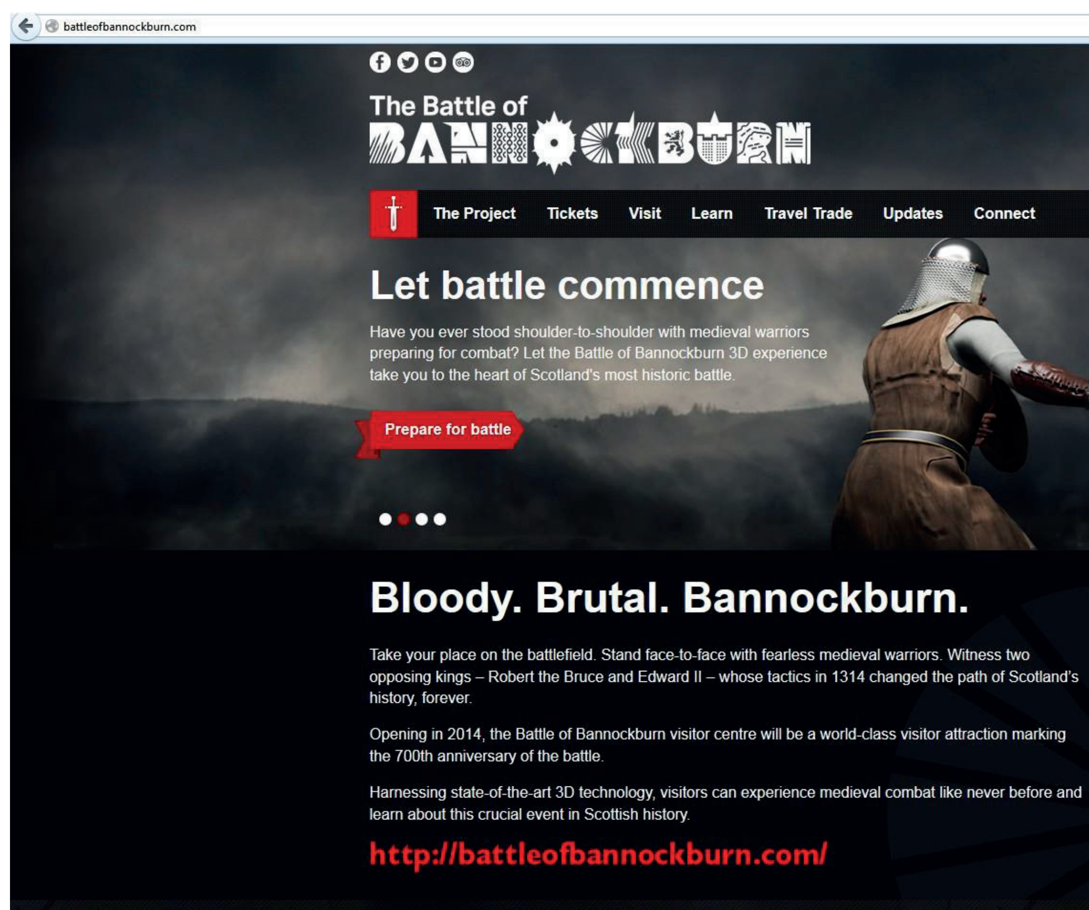
It was then that Bruce changed tactics, and success followed. He turned out to be a natural guerrilla commander, winning small victories at Glen Trool and Loudon Hill. Luck was also on his side. Edward I, furious at Bruce, died in July 1307 within sight of Scotland on a march north to crush the rebels. In 1308 Bruce defeated the Comyn faction at Inverurie ruthlessly crushed all those who opposed him, forcing them into exile. The tide seemed have turned in his favour and many of the common people of Scotland now turned to him as their only hope of salvation from English tyranny.

Edward's successor, his son Edward II, was no warrior king. By 1311 Bruce had largely recaptured all of the major castles in the south of Scotland. The new Edward largely neglected his Scottish inheritance until Bruce threatened the strategically vital fortress at Stirling in 1314. What happened next was a disaster.

Next year sees the 700th anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn. Preparations for the celebrations are well under way. These include renewed archaeological investigations to solve a most embarrassing mystery for Scotland – where exactly was the battlefield?

For those interested there is a web site devoted to the anniversary.



The battle itself was fought over two days. I will not go into great detail but in summary the Scots once again relied on their schiltrons to counter the English cavalry. However, they had now learnt how to move and remain in formation. The first day was something of a preliminary skirmish. The Scots were able to repulse the English cavalry who had no archery support.   On the second day it was more of the same story. Archers were deployed on both

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sides but the Scots schiltrons forced the English into a highly compressed close encounter that made it impossible for their archers to shoot without hitting their own men. Coupled with poor battlefield command from Edward, the English were unable to make their superior numbers count and eventually their resistance broke. Edward fled with his personal bodyguard, ending the remaining order in the army; panic spread and defeat turned into a rout. He arrived eventually at Dunbar Castle, from here he took ship to England. From the carnage of Bannockburn, the rest of the army tried to escape to the safety of the English border, ninety miles to the south. Many were killed by the pursuing Scottish army or by the inhabitants of the countryside that they passed through.

For Northumberland Bruce's ascendancy was a disaster. The north of England was now exposed to Scottish aggression and Northumberland was plundered continuously until peace was finally made in 1328. Bruce was not interested in fighting battles or capturing castles. His sole focus was plunder and cash obtained by blackmailing communities with the threat of raids – a tactic he employed against Durham. These spoils were essential to Bruce as a means of rewarding his supporters. Warfare was big business in the Middle Ages as the French would soon discover following the start of the Hundred Years War in 1337.

Various attempts have been made to ascertain the extent of the damage done to Northumberland in this period. Historians have examined the surviving financial records of certain estates, especially those owned by the monks of Durham Cathedral. These reveal a catastrophic decline in revenues. Even during periods of supposed truce after 1319 and 1323 the revenues were a fraction of what they had been prior to 1314. The local landowning classes lost more than income and tenants killed or carried off into slavery. They were obliged to spend a lot of money on defences and the pay of soldiers. If they fought back they risked capture and the high cost of ransom plus the loss of valuable equipment and horses. Matters were made worse by the activities of unpaid soldiers and even noblemen who plundered their compatriots. The government had abandoned Northumberland which had descended into lawless chaos and it was only brought to an end when a peace agreement was finally signed between England and Scotland.

The 1328 Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton was Bruce's final gift to his country. He had invaded England at the start of 1327 sensing an opportunity when Edward II was deposed by Isabella, his Queen, and her lover Roger Mortimer. The fourteen year old Edward III was crowned but the power was firmly in the hands of his mother and Mortimer. Bruce was an old man by now and suffering from a debilitating disease, probably leprosy. This was his last chance to secure his political objectives. An English army was sent north to repel the invasion but Bruce followed his trusted tactic of avoiding battle. The English government simply ran out of money to pay their soldiers and were forced to agree terms with the Scots.

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The treaty was not lengthy but it gave Bruce what he wanted. The English finally gave up their claim to Scotland and recognised it as an independent nation with Robert Bruce as king Robert I. The border was defined as that which had been in force during the reign of Alexander III thus confirming the important town and port of Berwick as being on the Scottish side and it was agreed that Bruce's son David would marry Edward III's sister Joanna. The marriage took place later that year – David was four years old and Joanna was six! A year later Bruce was dead.

From this point, the fortunes of the two countries reversed. Scotland was now ruled by a child monarch while Edward had assumed his full powers as king and executed Mortimer. Edward declared that the "shameful" Treaty of 1328 had been made in his name but not with his agreement. In Scotland the death of Brue had given rise to an inevitable struggle for power. Edward Balliol, son of the former king John Balliol sought to regain the throne in the company of a group of Scottish nobles known as 'the Disinherited'. These nobles had fought on the wrong side at Bannockburn. Balliol invaded Scotland with English assistance, routed a Scottish army at the Battle of Dupplin Moor in Perthshire on 12 August 1332, and was made King of Scots at Scone on 24 September. His reign was short. Three months later he was forced to flee to Carlisle by dissident Scots. Edward continued to back him and in 1333 he joined Balliol who had laid siege to Berwick. The fighting was about to return to Northumberland.

Sir Archibald Douglas attempted to draw Edward away from Berwick by conducting raids deep into England, but Edward was not to be deflected from his aim. Eventually, the Scottish authorities in Berwick appealed for a truce and after some dispute about what was to constitute a breaking of the siege it was agreed that if, by 19 July, the Scottish had not done one of three things - won a pitched battle, effected a crossing of a stipulated stretch of the River Tweed or inserted 200 men-at-arms into the town, Berwick would surrender.

Agreements of this sort were a standard way of resolving a siege in medieval warfare. Matters would commence with the commander of the besieging force calling upon the garrison to surrender. If they agreed then the garrison could expect to be permitted to match out unmolested and usually with their weapons and equipment. If they refused to surrender then they could expect no mercy if the town or castle fell under assault. In practice there were often further negotiations of the type just mentioned with a final date by which the garrison must surrender if the conditions had not been met. The citizens of Berwick would not have forgotten the massacre of their predecessors by Edward's grandfather some 40 years earlier.

In reality the only option open to Douglas was to fight a battle and hope that, even if the English remained undefeated, at least 200 men-at-arms might be able to force their way into Berwick. To this end, on the last day possible,19 July 1333, he made his move.

From Halidon Hill, the height to the north which dominates Berwick, the English commanded the approaches to the town. Only by occupying the even higher ridge now known as Witches' Knowe a mile further to the north could Douglas hope to secure equally advantageous ground. There was however no route by which Douglas could approach the town unchallenged. Unfortunately, under the terms of the convention governing the relief of Berwick the onus was on him to attack, so he could not remain on the defensive. This fact was to dictate both the form the Battle of Halidon Hill took and its outcome.

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The detail of the battle is reported in numerous chronicles of the period and historians have been able to combine these to reach a reasonable picture of what transpired.

The English received word of the approaching Sots at 9:00 am. Edward, in expectation of the Scots attempting a relief of Berwick on the last day open to them, had already detached 500 men-at-arms, plus archers and foot-soldiers, to maintain the blockade of the town. The remainder of the army was divided into three divisions. Each division had archers at either end – a formation known as 'wings' – with the archers protruding forward from the central force to give an opportunity for crossfire as the enemy attacked. In this formation we see the beginnings of the tactic that the English would later use to such effect against the French at Crecy and Poitiers. As was to become their normal manner of fighting, the English knights in the centre had dismounted to fight on foot.

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The chroniclers are at odds about whether the Scots were drawn up in three or four divisions prior to the battle. Whatever formation was adopted the problem for the Scots remained: they had to attack that day, across a bog and uphill.

The Scots waited until after midday before attacking. The Anonimalle Chronicle puts the Scottish numbers at 80,000. While the *Chronicon de Melsa* inflates the total to 90,000, the majority of sources reckon the Scots at 60,000. Generally, however, these totals have been regarded as gross exaggerations which was not unusual in chronicles. Eventually the Scottish troops marched down to the bog and began to ascend Halidon Hill. They saw that Edward Balliol's division was on the left of the English line so the Scots diverted their course to attack him first. But the Scottish division on that flank, under the Earl of Moray, 'were so grievously wounded in the face and blinded by the host of English archery ... that they were helpless, and quickly began to turn away their faces from the arrow flights and to fall'. Indeed, Balliol's men had broken the first Scottish division 'before the others came into action at all'. In the centre King Edward's division dealt with its immediate opponents in like fashion – once again the archers played a major role against the main body of the Scots.

It was on the right of the English line, nearest the sea, that the heaviest fighting occurred. Here, under Sir Archibald Douglas's own hand, were the men intended to fight their way through to Berwick. The Canon of Bridlington provides the details in his chronicle:

The troop of Scots in which the best soldiers were placed, who were to enter the town, rushed with the ferocity of a lion against the foremost English line. A bloody battle developed there; for the Scots struggled to reach the town, and wanted to fulfil their oath; on the other hand the English resisted manfully. So most of the day was spent, until the English, by Divine favour, finally prevailed, and obtained the victory. In this prolonged struggle there perished 500 of the strongest and the choicest of all the people of Scotland, in the spot called by the local inhabitants "Hevyside".

Defeat was complete. Efforts to stem the rout were fruitless. The bloodletting was rendered the greater because the heavily armoured Scottish knights and men-at-arms were unable to remount their horses which had been left behind at Witches' Knowe. Unfortunately, the grooms had witnessed the full extent of the defeat from an unrivalled vantage point. The testimony of the *Brut* chronicle tells us :

And when the Scottish knaves saw the discomfiture, and the Scots fall fast to the ground, they pricked their masters' horses with the[ir] spurs to keep them[selves] from peril ... And when the Englishmen saw that, they leapt on their horses, and fast pursued the Scots; and all that abided, they quelled right down. There might men see the doughtiness of the noble King Edward and of his men, how manly [sic] they pursued the Scots, that fled for dread. And there might men see many a Scotsman cast down onto the earth dead, and their banners displayed, and hacked into pieces, and many a good halberd of steel bathed in their blood...

The pursuit continued until nightfall a distance of seven leagues. In keeping with the enormous number of men the Scots were believed to have brought to the battle their casualties were calculated to have been correspondingly large. The *Brut* gave them as 35,712; the Anonimalle Chronicle claimed over 40,000 were killed in battle and flight. Geoffrey le Baker settled for 60,000 slaughtered. The English, in contrast, were said to have lost no more than one knight, one esquire and twelve footman; although, as Ranald

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Nicholson observed, 'some chroniclers thought these English casualties excessively large and pruned them to seven footmen'.

In June 1334 Balliol met Edward here in Newcastle. He paid his debt to the English king by acknowledging him as his overlord and by handing over (as he had secretly promised) the counties of Berwick, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Peebles, Dumfries and the three Lothians to be permanently annexed to England.

As we can see from the map, the whole of the south of Scotland, including Edinburgh was now English! It was, however, English only for a few months.

Edward believed the Scots were crushed and he left Balliol to consolidate his hold on the kingdom. When the terms of his agreement with Edward became known there was a general uprising against them in southern Scotland. The child king David and his child queen were sent to safety in France. By the autumn Balliol had fled to England and all of the ceded territory with the exception of Berwick was back in Scottish hands. Edward mounted huge and expensive campaigns into Scotland in 1335 and 1336 but achieved little. In 1337 Edward began his pursuit of his claim to the French throne and his interest in Scotland waned. The Hundred Years War had begun.

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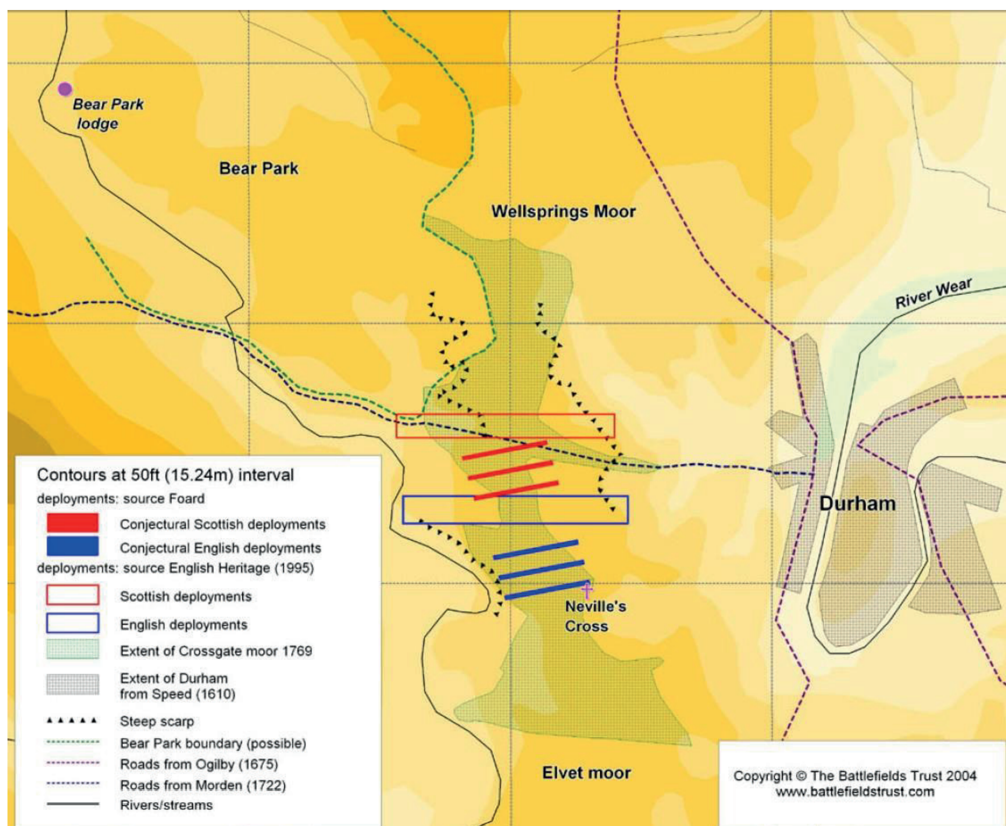
In 1341 David returned to Scotland. Edinburgh was recovered in the same year and other gains followed. Raiding into Northumberland recommenced. In 1342 David plundered as far south as the Tyne. The culmination of this activity came in 1346.

In August of that year Edward inflicted a heavy defeat on the French at Crecy. In the aftermath the French called in their Scottish allies for assistance. They wanted David to invade England and thus draw Edward home. The Scots army crossed the border, devastated Hexham and headed for Durham. They were met by an English army to the west of the city on 17th October at Neville's Cross. Sir William Douglas had advised against raiding so far south but this was dismissed by David. The chronicles report that he replied by saying that they would only be opposed by 'shepherds and imbecile clerics'. This combination of youthful confidence and poor intelligence led the Scots to a position where, once again, they had to fight on ground which was seriously disadvantageous. Edward had, in fact, foreseen just such an eventuality. He had not recruited anyone north of the Trent for his French adventure and had mustered an army to defend the north under the control of the Archbishop of York. It was this army which now faced the Scots.

Again we have a number of surviving chronicle accounts of what happened and these can be combined to give a fair picture. David had camped at Bear Park northwest of Durham on the 16th October with no idea that he was facing battle the next day. On the morning of the 17th a raiding party heading towards Bishop's Auckland under Sir William Douglas encountered the archbishop's advance guard and lost half of his 500 men. He escaped to ride back and warn David. The English army followed and took up a good position on the hills beyond the Wear.



The Scots, in contrast, had to contend with difficult terrain. Historians are divided as to who attacked first but it was probably the Scots. Both armies deployed the normal three

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‘battles’ but there is a suggestion that the Scots’ left wing was slow in arriving. This may simply have been due to the lack of enough space to deploy these troops alongside the centre. On the other side the Scots were hampered by the river Bower and by a steep escarpment which, together, forced their right wing into their centre creating an easy target for the English archers. The main action took place in the centre with lengthy hand-to-hand fighting. The English archers and foot soldiers were driven back twice but rallied with support from their knights and finally gained the upper hand. The Scottish left wing, under the command of Robert the Steward, saw the centre begin to collapse and left the field, having contributed little if anything to the fight. The result was inevitable. David and his household knights were surrounded. Almost all of David’s nobles and royal household were killed and David was taken by Sir John Coupland who lost two teeth in the process! The fleeing Scots suffered the usual heavy casualties, made worse by the fact that Robert the Steward did not remain even to cover a retreat.

This image of the battle appears in a manuscript of the most famous chronicle of the period written by Jean Froissart. It is, of course, highly stylised and reflects Froissart’s obsession with knightly deeds-of-arms rather than the reality of the engagement.

The battle of Neville’s Cross was rapidly followed by the re-conquest of all of those parts of southern Scotland that the Scots had fought hard to regain. David remained in captivity for eleven years against a ransom of 100,000 marks. From this point until Edward’s death in 1377 the region was relatively peaceful. Berwick was briefly taken by the Scots in 1355 but

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Edward took it back in 1356 and punished the scots with a series of savage raids known as Burnt Candlemas.

And this is where we will leave it until the next time.

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An Uneasy Peace

This talk will look at the continuing incursions and counter-incursions that characterised the period following the Treaty of Berwick (1357), which was supposed to bring an end to war between the two nations. This is the age of Harry Hotspur who will be the focus of this talk at the battles of Otterburn (1388) and Homildon Hill (1402). The latter is one of the most important battles in the development of warfare but is largely unknown to the public.

Introduction

Good afternoon. Welcome to Segedunum for the third in the series of four talks which I have called "From Carham to Flodden: 500 Years of Border Conflict".

Today I plan to cover a relatively short period – from 1357 to 1402 – less than fifty years. I will be discussing two of the most important battles fought in Northumberland – one that is well-known and one which is hardly known at all but which is much more significant. I am referring to the Battle of Otterburn, 1388 and the Battle of Homildon Hill, 1402. Both of these battles feature Sir Henry Percy, the eldest son of Henry Percy, 1st Earl of Northumberland. He has, of course, come down to us via Shakespeare as Harry Hotspur.

The battlefields at Otterburn and Homildon Hill are both English Heritage Registered Battlefields. Tie precludes me saying much about the registration scheme and what precisely this means for the preservation of these important sites so I will include something about this in my mailing at the end of these talks.

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Harry Hotspur

I said that Harry Hotspur would play a prominent role. He is, of course, something of a local hero, especially in and around Alnwick. The Hotspur that most people know is the one from Shakespeare's Henry IV Part I where he is portrayed as the same age as the future king Henry V. In fact, he was 23 years older than Henry. In the play he is a literary device whose role is to counterpoint the development of Prince Hal from teenage tearaway to majestic monarch. Hotspur is a man obsessed with chivalric honour and great deeds-of-arms almost to the exclusion of anything else. Yet, by the end of the fourteenth century the old notions of chivalry were already dying. Battles were no longer the great cavalry charge set pieces – unless you were French, of course! The temperamental Hotspur, renowned for his bravery but flawed in his excessive commitment to honour, represents a level of society packed with self-righteous hotheads who would throw the country into chaos in the self-centred pursuit of their lofty ideals. Eventually he will pay the price for his recklessness on the field at Shrewsbury.

What, however, of the real Hotspur? We will come back to that after we have looked at two of his most notable battles.

Capture The Flag

In 1357 England and Scotland had signed the Treaty of Berwick. David II, king of Scotland was released following his capture at Neville's Cross in 1346 that we talked about last time. The treaty guaranteed a ten-year truce between the two countries, which began a period of uneasy peace that lasted, with frequent interruptions, until 1482. During this period, the border region began to develop its own identity and conflict in the area became more localized. National conflicts became much more closely entwined with the perennial feuding of the various border families on both sides which were often fought between supposed allies as much as against national enemies.

When Edward III finally died in 1377 he was succeeded by his grandson, the ten year old Richard II. He was to prove a very different character to both his grandfather and his father,

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the Black Prince who had died in 1376. Since the Treaty of Berwick the two kingdoms had been largely at peace under truce agreements culminating in a 15 year truce signed in 1369. Fighting had, however, continued sporadically and by the time the truce expired in 1384 English control of southern Scotland had been reduced to the castles at Berwick, Jedburgh and Roxburgh plus their surrounding areas. At the start of 1384 the earl of Douglas raided into Northumberland and recaptured Berwick. In 1385 this was followed by a larger raid, reinforced with French soldiers, which took Wark and some smaller castles. Richard responded with a full-scale invasion which achieved almost nothing because the Scots refused to fight, much to the annoyance of their French allies. Once again, an uneasy peace prevailed for a while.

In England Richard II was involved in a desperate political fight with a group of senior nobles, led by his uncle, Thomas of Woodstock. The instability caused by Richard II's political struggle extended to all corners of the Kingdom. In the north of England the Neville family was stripped of its official positions and the rival Percys placed in the ascendant. The Scots were aware of the disunity caused by the power struggle and decided to take advantage. In the summer of 1388 an army estimated at 40,000 by contemporary chroniclers invaded northern England. By far the greater number struck west towards Carlisle under the Earl of Fife; a smaller force around 6,000 strong, commanded by James, earl Douglas headed for Durham.

To counter the threat posed by Douglas's expedition the head of the Percy family, the Earl of Northumberland, sent his sons, Henry (aka Harry Hotspur) and Ralph, to Newcastle. James Douglas was, to some extent, the Scottish mirror of Hotspur – a man greatly concerned with his chivalric honour and reputation. During one of the skirmishes that occurred outside the walls of the City, it is said that Douglas snatched the silk pennon from the end of Hotspur's lance during one-to-one combat. In chivalric terms this was a great dishonour and could not be allowed to pass. Hotspur vowed to recover the pennon and Douglas promised to give him the opportunity to do so. Thus, in the course of their retirement to Scotland, Douglas prevailed on his colleagues to wait for their pursuers at Otterburn, 32 miles northwest of Newcastle.

The tale of the pennon may, of course, just be one of those chivalric flourishes of which some chroniclers, especially Jean Froissart, were so fond. Some historians have dismissed this and suggest that once the Scots had left Newcastle to make their way home, Hotspur had planned to find the army of the earl of Fife but when he discovered that it was far to the west and much larger than his own force, he decided to seize the opportunity to track down and attack Douglas and his much smaller force instead. Whichever was the case, the Scots stopped to make an unsuccessful attempt to capture Otterburn Tower on and having done so they pitched camp for the night. Meanwhile during the course of the day Hotspur had moved his army off to the northwest of Newcastle and they arrived at Otterburn at nightfall.

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Although a good description of the course of the battle of Otterburn has come down to us, none of the accounts is sufficiently precise to enable the battlefield to be unhesitatingly identified. This has meant that in the past a number of alternative locations for the battlefield have been proposed. The consensus that has emerged, however, is that the fighting took place to the west of Otterburn, extending as far as the hillside above Greenchesters. In justification of this view, the location of the battlefield monument, Percy's Cross, is cited. The monument was already ancient when it was moved a short distance in 1777 and the tradition has long been that its siting was associated with an event in the battle, possibly marking the spot where the earl of Douglas was killed. Locating a battlefield in the vicinity of a monument is one method of proceeding when documentary sources fail to provide firm guidance; thereafter all that is possible is to attempt to match what topographical references there are in the written sources to the landscape as it is today. The cross that can be seen today comprises the base and socket of the original monument but the upright is, in fact, the lintel of the old fireplace from Otterburn Hall!

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As I mentioned, there are a number of written sources for the battle of Otterburn. Pre-eminent amongst them is the account of the battle penned by Jean Froissart, probably the best-known of all medieval chroniclers. Froissart may have been a foreigner writing about events at some distance but he understood the culture of the men involved and his telling of the battle possesses authentic touches. Indeed the fame of the battle of Otterburn is largely due to him. His account is probably the best surviving description of fourteenth century chivalric warfare. This in itself is a warning. Froissart was obsessed with chivalric deeds-of-arms and honour. He was also serving a noble and royal audience amongst whom he found his patrons . He was not someone to let accuracy get in the way of a good story!

As the victors at Otterburn, the Scottish accounts of the battle tend to go into greater detail than the English versions. Both the ‘Scotichronicon’ of Walter Bower and the ‘Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland’ by Andrew give full descriptions of the fighting. They are, moreover, in close agreement on the course of events. It is reassuring that some of their detail corroborates references found in Froissart although there are some key details which differ leading to a number of interpretations by historians. We will speak more of this shortly.

The perception of English chroniclers of the battle varies. John Harding, who joined Sir Henry Percy's household as a boy two years after the battle, many years later recorded the version of the battle that he had been told. In Harding's account the English effectively won the battle. In his chronicle Thomas Walsingham acknowledges that the English suffered heavy losses, but the Scots too were so battered that they fled the kingdom and did not dare return. In this way the English defeat is cast in a favourable light. This again tells us

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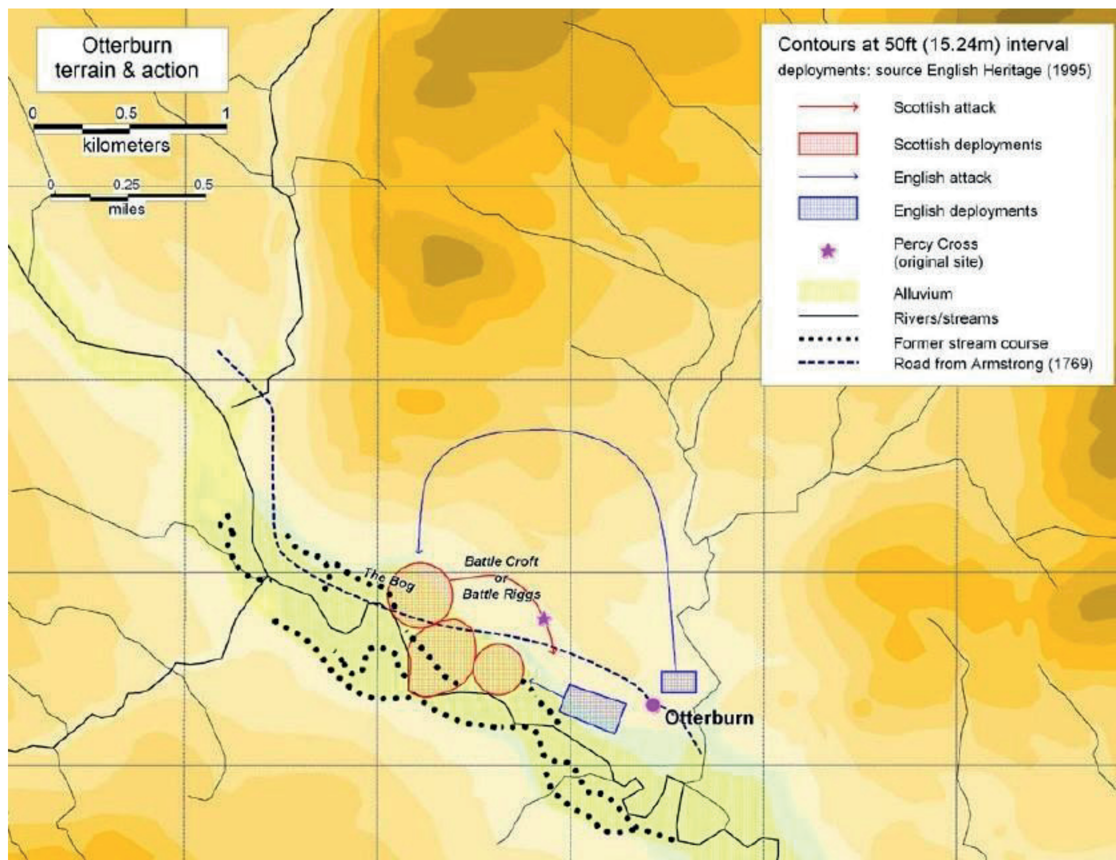
something of the nature of chronicles and why we must always be a little careful in taking them at face value.

The particular feature of this battle is that it was fought in the evening, which was most unusual. Hotspur had set off in pursuit of the Scots from Newcastle on the morning of 19th August. (I should mention here that even the date is not entirely certain. Froissart puts it on the 19th while others set it earlier in the month on the 5th. Given the reference to moonlight in the chronicles, the 19th seems more likely as there was no moon on the 5th.) To be able to reach Otterburn on the same day he would have almost certainly taken only mounted soldiers with him, some of which were however said to be archers and mounted infantry, known as hobelars. The use of mounted archers in the north east during the 14th century is well documented. As the sun began to set at about 07:00 pm the Scots had no intelligence of an approaching force and settled down for the night.

It is at this stage that we begin to run into varying interpretations. Consider the following four schematic maps of the action at Otterburn. I have printed these out for you to make it a bit easier to follow.



Otterburn – The Battlefields Trust for English Heritage - Foard

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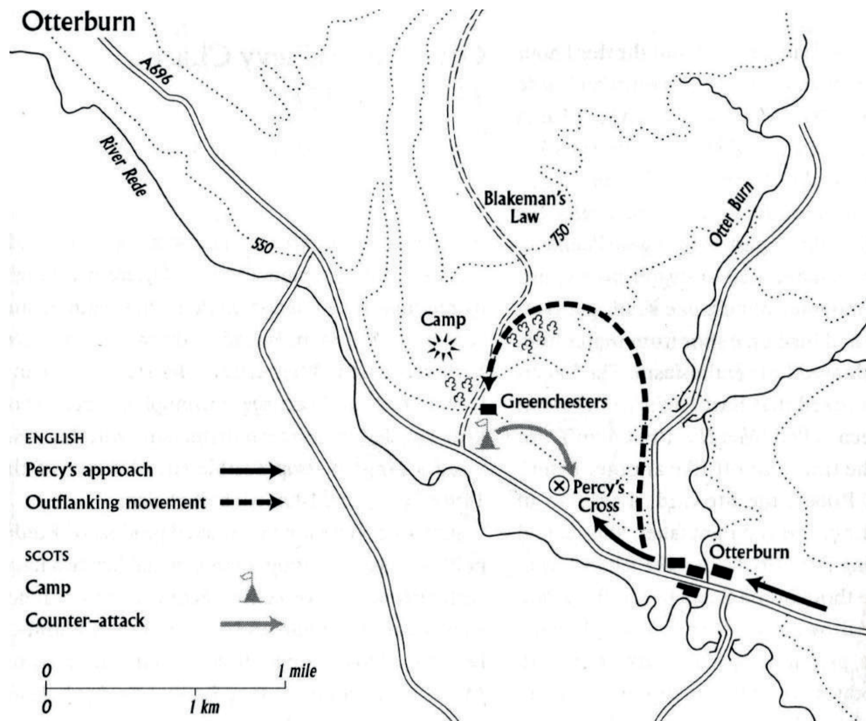
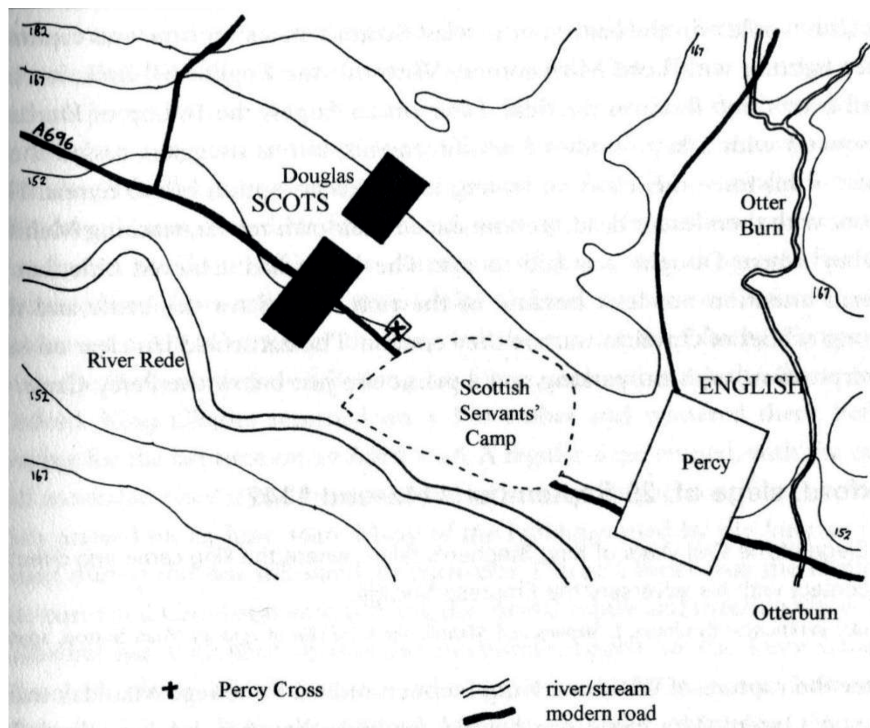


Otterburn – Cassell's Battlefields of Britain and Ireland - Brooks



Otterburn – English Battlefields - Rayner

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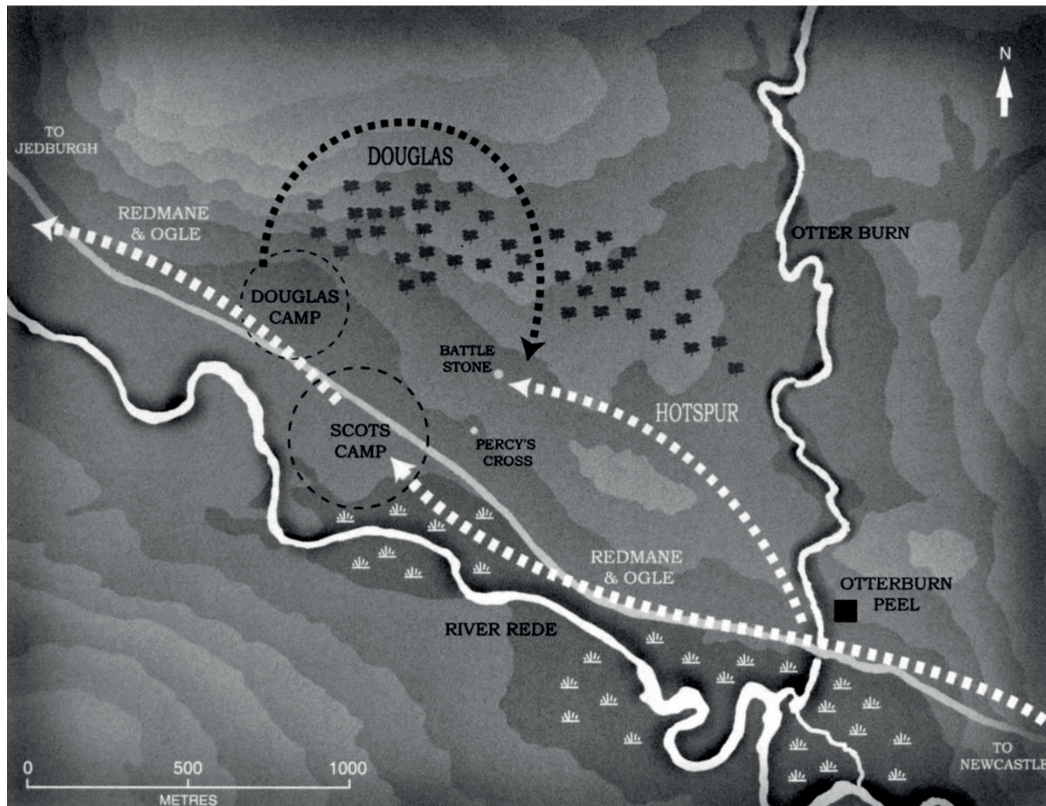

Otterburn – Hotspur - Boardman

Beyond the superficial similarity and general agreement on the site of the battlefield in line with most modern writers, there are two fundamentally different viewpoints of how the battle was fought. Both of these views can lay claim to compliance with some of the various sources.

First, we must consider the position of the Scots. It seems clear that their camp was in two sections – one for the servants and the livestock and one for the knights, men-at-arms and infantry. Froissart was convinced that there were two camps with the second placed on higher ground, overlooking the valley. A number of historians accept this view but most modern writers prefer a single camp at the lower level divided into two sections with the second section possibly spreading up the side of the valley. This disposition of the Scots has implications for what may have happened next.

Second, it is a military convention that a commander should not divide his force in the face of the enemy except in very unusual circumstances. Hotspur did just that. In the first two maps (Battlefields Trust and Cassell's) you can see a looping attack by part of the English army to attack the rear of the Scottish camp or camps. The other two maps (Rayner and Boardman) have none of this.

The idea that the force was divided appears in various sources. Just why Hotspur did this and what it was supposed to achieve is less clear. One view is that there simply was not enough room to form up the soldiers in a conventional manner. The alternative view is that there were two clearly separate Scottish camps and Hotspur divided his forces to attack both at the same time. The leader of this second force is generally taken to have been

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either Sir Mathew Redman or Sir Thomas Umfraville. One view is that they looped around to take the Scots by surprise, leaving Hotspur to engage directly up the valley. This, however, raises two issues. First, there is little mention of these flanking soldiers in the various accounts after they have set off. Second, there is clear agreement in the sources that the Scots mounted their own flanking attack on the same side, again as shown on the first two maps. How then did they not run into each other? This has been explained by reference to the growing darkness, the timing of the movements, the routes taken and the folds of the land. Rayner says that the move probably never happened as there is scant mention of it afterwards. Boardman accepts the split of the forces but suggests that Redman advanced directly into the first part of the Scottish camp while Hotspur was to his right.

If, as some think, there were two entirely separate Scottish camps the flanking attack makes more sense. The English did not know, of course, that the forward camp or part of it contained only servants and livestock. If there was only the one camp it makes less sense.

Whichever was the case, the English engaged the Scots first camp which soon alerted Douglas to the attack. After sending men to reinforce the servants the Scots knights had to dress and arm themselves in a great hurry. It is said that Douglas was not fully armoured and that the earl of Moray was unable to find his helmet in the confusion and fought without it. Douglas was clearly surprised that Hotspur had arrived and attacked but he also had a plan of his own which he had formulated for just such a surprise attack. He took a part of his own force around the left flank of the English and emerged from the trees and bushes in the darkness, much to Hotspur's surprise. It seems that Hotspur had not bothered to wait for all of his soldiers to arrive and hardly took the time to form up the men he had into a proper fighting formation. The main action of the battle was now underway.

In the first clash Douglas paid the price for his lack of armour and was fatally wounded by English spearmen. One source suggests that Hotspur killed him but this is most likely a romantic invention. It is also said that his dying words were that his standard should be raised so that his men would not be disheartened by his death. Again, we have no way of knowing if this is true but certainly his death passed unnoticed until his body was found after the battle.

Initially the greater numbers of the English seem to have driven the Scots back despite the fact that English archers were unable to engage due to the close combat and the darkness. By this time however the English were showing signs of fatigue after their long journey from Newcastle. The Scots rallied. Credit for this is given to various knights by the different chroniclers. Some have George Dunbar, the Scottish earl of March leading the fight, others mention the earl of Moray or John Swinton. In truth they may all have played their part. Hotspur's brother Ralph was wounded and captured by Sir John Maxwell, a household knight of the earl of Moray. How long this part of the fight continued is unclear. Froissart tells us that it went on all night but this seems unlikely. What is uncontested is that Hotspur himself was overcome by Lord Montgomery and was forced to surrender. This effectively ended the battle in the Scots' favour.

The last question is – what happened to the separate force under Redman or Umfraville? Froissart tells us of Redman's flight and capture when he realised that the battle was lost. Another writer tells us that those members of Redman's men who had remained in the

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Scots' camp were overcome and butchered. Others suggest that they left the field in pursuit of fleeing Scots and thought the battle was won. We must remember that there was no effective means of communication on a medieval battlefield and it was probably quite dark by this time.

While the battle was under way a further English force under the command of the Bishop of Durham was on its way to support Hotspur. They were met en route by fleeing English survivors. It is said that this caused a large number of the bishop's men to desert and he turned back to Newcastle.

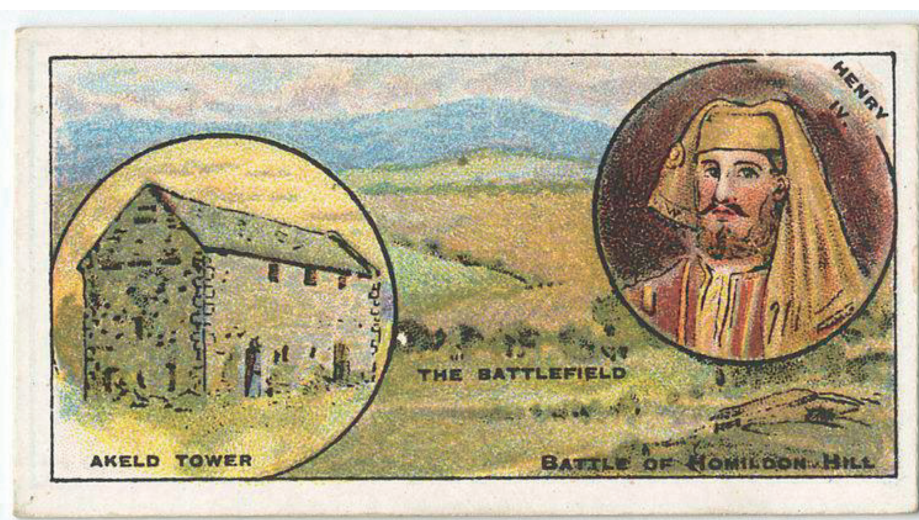
Otterburn gained great fame through the words of Froissart who write, '*Of all the battles that have been described in this history, great and small, that of which I am now speaking was the best fought and the most severe*.' It was the subject of a famous ballad – The Ballad of Chevy Chase. In historical terms however it was insignificant and rather pointless. The military historian AH Burne wrote '*never was battle fought on English soil that had less effect on the fortunes of Old England*'. In truth this was battle that achieved little for either side. The Scots had lost an important military leader and both sons of the earl of Northumberland were taken and held for ransom. In the wider context of Anglo-Scottish conflict it meant almost nothing. As Boardman says, it was ' a contest between two arrogant knights who refused to give in to reason'. To cap it all, the bishop of Durham was blamed by some for not reaching Hotspur more quickly to support his attack!

As to the impact on Hotspur's reputation, we will leave that until we have looked at his next major battle – Homildon Hill.

The original invasion by the Scots under the earl of Fife, of which Otterburn was a side-show, was designed to end English occupation of southern Scotland. In this it failed and in 1389 a truce was agreed that lasted for eleven years. What brought this to an end initially had nothing to do with the English!

The Archers Triumphant

Here is another ancient cigarette card to lead us into the battle of Homildon Hill.



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You may recall George Dunbar, earl of March as one of the Scottish knights who lead the fight at Otterburn. It was he who lead the Scots home after the death of Douglas. His daughter Elizabeth was betrothed by contract to David Stewart son of King Robert III and heir to the throne, but Archibald, 3rd Earl of Douglas (known as 'The Grim)' who had succeeded to that title after Otterburn, protested against the match, and through his influence at court he had the contract annulled, and the prince married his own daughter Marjory, instead. In consequence of this slight upon his family's honour, George renounced his allegiance to Robert III and retired into England, placing himself under the protection of the new English king, Henry IV.

Henry Bolingbroke had deposed his cousin, Richard II, in 1399. Richard was now dead (as was usually the fate of deposed medieval kings) and Henry was keen to stamp his authority on the realm. The Scots and the French had been in correspondence and the possibility of a French invasion, supported by the Scots, was rumoured. The Percys in Northumberland had supported Henry's usurpation but the politics were complex their position was ambivalent at best so they must have been less than happy when he took the opportunity to put on a show of force in the north by invading Scotland. In mid-August 1400, Henry led his army across the border, hoping to subdue Scottish raiding in the Northern Marches and to force the Scots to give homage to him as well as rebuking them for failing to recognise him as king of England. Both Hotspur and George Dunbar were with him. However, after reaching Edinburgh we he returned to England having gained nothing for his efforts except a vague promise that the Scots would consider his demands. Henry's invasion of Scotland had lasted two weeks. He was the last English king to cross the border into Scotland at the head of an invasion force. Within a few weeks things went from bad to worse for Henry. The Welsh began to rise in rebellion lead by one of their most remarkable leaders, Owain Glyndwr.

Back on the Scottish border there was continuous raiding in the absence of a new truce. Archibald, 4th earl of Douglas (they were all called Archibald just to confuse us) had come into the title in 1400 and was determined to establish himself as the Scottish leader against English oppression, especially as George Dunbar, his family's great enemy was now on the English side. In 1402 yet another raid, encouraged by Douglas, came to a sticky end at Nesbit Moor, a few miles from Wooler.

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Some historians would like to have this fight on the other side of the Tweed in southern Scotland. To me this makes little sense and there is anecdotal evidence of artefacts having been found on the Northumberland site in the past. The encounter at Nesbitt was more of a skirmish than a battle with just a few hundred men on each side. It was in retaliation for a raid into Scotland lead by George Dunbar that Sir Patrick Hepburn went south into Northumberland. This raiding party was intercepted by soldiers from the Berwick garrison under the command of Harry Hotspur and Dunbar at Nesbit Moor. Sir Patrick Hepburn was killed and other Scottish knights were killed or captured.

The Earl of Douglas had a substantial force of perhaps 10,000 men under his control at this time and had been menacing the city of Carlisle. In revenge for the death of his friend Hepburn, he now led his force on a raiding trip that reached as far south as Newcastle. He may have been under the impression that the Percys were still fighting with the king in Wales but on his return home he found himself confronted just north of Wooler by a substantial English force commanded by Hotspur as Warden of the East March with Dunbar beside him.

What happened next is one of the seminal battles of late medieval English history and one that has been sadly neglected by historians.

The basic facts of the battle are simple enough and are recorded in the usual chronicle sources. It is a matter of regret that John Harding, who was actually in the fight, omitted to give a detailed description in his own chronicle. Essentially, this is what happened.

1. The Scots became aware that their journey home via Coldstream was blocked by Hotspur's force.
2. Douglas lead his soldiers out of Wooler where they had camped and moved them onto higher ground at Homildon Hill.
3. Hotspur wanted to lead a cavalry charge up the side of the hill in true chivalrous style but was restrained by Dunbar. Instead, the large contingent of archers was sent to attack the Scots as an opening move while the cavalry and men-at-arms prepared for the follow-up.
4. The archers unleased an arrow-storm which largely destroyed the Scottish army. The Scots stood their ground and suffered huge casualties.
5. A number of Scots knights attacked down the slope but were caught by further arrows.
6. The Scots broke and tried to flee to the Tweed. They were pursued and cut down. Of the Scottish nobles who survived, most were captured for ransom.

If only it really were quite that simple! This battle has caused a number of problems of interpretation and we have spent some time looking at these as a part of the community project which is currently under way in Wooler. In addition, the simple facts disguise the real importance of this battle in medieval military history.

There are many books which offer a view of how this battle was fought. Some are history books and some are guide books – often written for walkers. Most of the are just wrong!

The 'classic' interpretation suggests that the Scots were drawn up on top of the hill and that the English archers were detached and sent to take their place on the neighbouring

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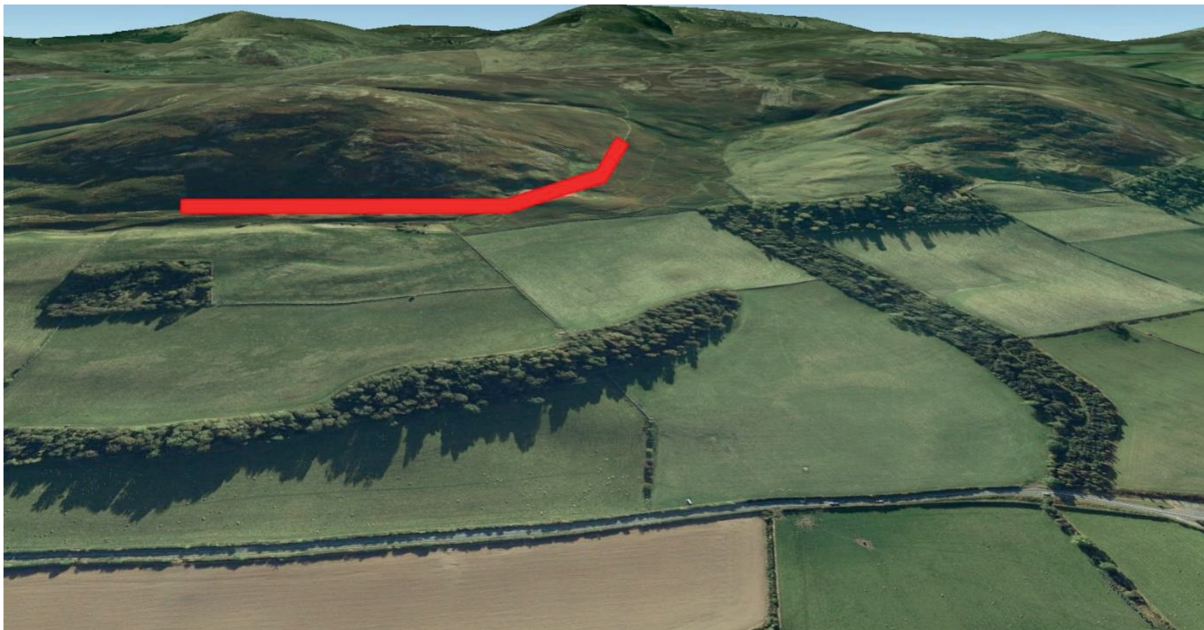
Harehope Hill. The remainder of the English force remained in the valley where the main road now passes. This view poses a few problems.

First, if you have climbed to the top of Homildon Hill, as I have on a few occasions, it is quite steep at the top and there is not a great deal of room on the summit. An army of 10,000 would be rather short of space up there! In addition, it makes no military sense to occupy the hill in this way. Douglas wanted to get home and he knew he had to fight. If he were high up on the hill the English could simply sit and wait for him to come down. In effect they could besiege the hill and the Scots would run out of water very quickly. It is a lack of water that breaks sieges not a lack of food. And, not even Hotspur would be daft enough to think he could charge up to the top of the hill and then fight!

On top of this is the question of where the English deployed their archers. If, as many suggest, they were across the small valley on Harehope Hill then the top of Homildon Hill is well out of range.

If we accept that the Scots were not at the top of the hill then where were they? The most sensible suggestion is that that they were ranged around the hill like this with what is called 'a refused left flank'. Although it is hard to see, the ground rises quite sharply from the road at the bottom of the picture and it should also be noted that the trees are modern. This is a good position for the Scots if, as they expected, they were about to face the English in the normal way of fighting.



Where, then, were the archers? If they are on Harehope Hill to the right they are still out of range. A modern archery group tried this a few years ago and concluded that it was not possible. On top of that, Robert Hardy the well-known actor and (as is perhaps less well-known) one of the world's leading experts on the medieval longbow has stood on the hill and confirmed that it could not be done.

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Robert is a leading supporter of the Battlefields Trust and is shown here with Jim Short who actually owns the battlefield! The picture was taken by Clive Hallam-Baker.

So where were they? As we saw at Neville's Cross, the archers would usually have been on the wings of the 'battles' or blocks of soldiers. The confusion arises from a single sentence in one of the chronicle sources which tells us that the archers were detached from the main force and deployed on 'the hill opposite the Scots'. Most people have read this as being the hill which is opposite the Scots – i.e Harehope Hill. It makes much more sense to read it as being the archers who are opposite the Scots. The original Latin can be taken either way. On that view we end up with something like this. The author of this map has the Scots too far up the hill for my liking but the position of the archers is much better. It also accords with the chronicles that refer to the archers retreating whilst still shooting when the Scots finally charged down the hill.

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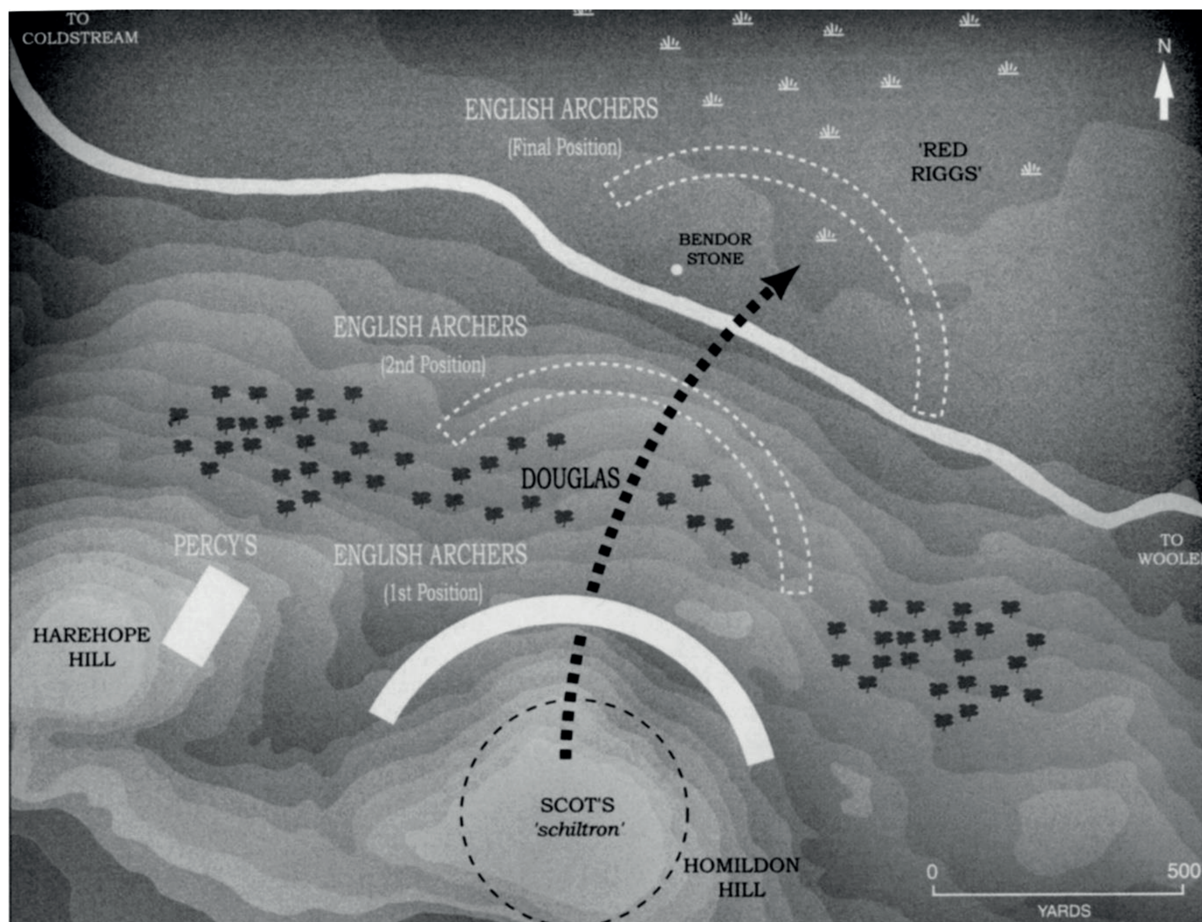

The battle of Homildon Hill, 14 September 1402. *(Author)*

The position of the cavalry is shown here as being on Harehope Hill and this makes some sense. Detaching the archers in this way would have been very dangerous since they would have been very vulnerable to a charge. If, however, the English cavalry was on the other hill it would have been positioned for a flanking attack if the Scots knights charged the archers. Perhaps this explains why Douglas did nothing as the arrows descended. He simply did not know which way to charge. If he charged the archers he was open to a flanking cavalry charge by Hotspur and if he charged Hotspur then his flank was open to more archery and possibly some men-at-arms who may well have been left to protect the archers.

The key to resolving the questions about this battle will be the use of archaeology to see if we can find any evidence of where the Scots were positioned. If this can be established then much of the rest of the story will fall into place.

Before we leave Homildon Hill I would like to go back to my comments about the significance of this engagement. Where was the chivalric warfare that Hotspur and his class considered to be the "proper" manner in which to fight? It was their "right" to take the honour of victory. But this was a battle where victory was wholly in the hands of the common man. The humble archer in his peasant garb and his tin hat. The chivalric classes had contributed almost nothing. This was beyond what had occurred previously at Crecy and Poitiers or what was to occur at Agincourt twelve years later.

In terms of the nature of warfare there is another aspect to consider. For centuries battles had been won or lost in hand-to-hand combat. Face to face. This was something new – a

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battle won entirely by ranged weapons – killing at a distance. Modern warfare was beginning. Warfare that would change completely and finally as the longbow was replaced by the firearm. Today this has reached a new state – the ability to kill the enemy with long range drone-based weapons operated by someone in a trailer several thousand miles away in the Nevada desert. Homildon Hill was the battle that showed the way forward.

Historical change is slow. Rarely do things change overnight as if by the flick of a switch. However, when we consider the sweep of changes in warfare we can see Homildon Hill as marking a major waypoint in the death of chivalric warfare and the rise of the common soldier. Similarly we can see a step change in the understanding of the use of ranged weapons to kill the enemy while minimising casualties on one's own side.

Finally, can we now say something about Hotspur? Otterburn and Homildon Hill were not the only battles in which he fought but they do show the nature of the man. By the end of the fourteenth century the chivalric culture of the knight had changed out of all recognition to what it once had been. It would linger on for a long time to come but it was increasingly a triumph of style over content. Hotspur was a man of this culture. He believed in the myths of chivalry but when it came to the hard reality of battle he was brave enough but never good enough as a battlefield commander. His decision-making at Otterburn was poor. Had he been permitted to have his way at Homildon Hill it would have been a disaster. For once, Shakespeare seems to have got it right in portraying him as the impetuous, brave knight obsessed with the trappings of chivalry to the exclusion of all else.

The aftermath of Homildon Hill was itself a significant point in English history. The captives taken by the Percys included Douglas, who had lost an eye in the final charge, and the flower of Scottish nobility. The Percys expected to be able to derive a huge sum in ransoms but the king intervened and demanded that the prisoners be surrendered to him. This was a substantial cause of the Percys' loss of faith in Henry culminating in their participation in the revolt against him the following year. At Shrewsbury in 1403 Hotspur faced the king on the battlefield. As was the way of these things, his former enemy Douglas was beside him whilst his former ally (and Douglas' great enemy) George Dunbar fought alongside the king. On this occasion Hotspur's luck was out and he was killed in the battle. The Percys fell from favour and never recovered their dominant position in the north again.

Let's leave it there for today. Next week we will look at the final part of this tale – the battle of Flodden.

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The Coming of the Tudors

This talk will summarise the continuation of sporadic fighting during the fifteenth century leading to the Battle of Flodden and the death of James IV of Scotland. This year sees the 500th anniversary of the battle which we will consider in some detail

Introduction

Good afternoon. Welcome to Segedunum for the fourth and last in the series of four talks which I have called "From Carham to Flodden: 500 Years of Border Conflict".

Relative Peace

The century following the Scots' defeat at Homildon Hill saw no great battles between the English and the Scots. There were several reasons for this. On the English side the military effort was primarily engaged in the second phase of the Hundred Years War, followed by the family dispute over the throne which we now call the Wars of the Roses. Today, by the way, is the anniversary of the battle of Bosworth which effectively ended that conflict (although it wasn't the final battle) and which placed the Tudors on the throne of England.

On the Scottish side there were long periods without an effective king. James I was captive in England for several years until 1424. James II and James III were minors for a number of years and James III was positively pro-English. Of the Scottish families, the Dunbars remained in England for a long time and the power of the Douglas family was broken by James II in the 1450s.

This relative peace was, of course, broken from time to time by Scottish raids into England. Before 1450 these raids were generally of a local nature – a part of the normal business of the Borders. After 1450 they became more nationally driven. James II made two unsuccessful attempts to take Berwick in the 1450s. Peace broke out again for the ten years and a treaty was signed in 1474. In the 1480s hostilities began again following a dispute between James III and his brother, the Duke of Albany. Albany fled to England and agreed to cede large parts of southern Scotland to Edward IV of England in return for aid in deposing James. In 1482 Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later king Richard III) took an army into Scotland but found no-one to fight as there had been a coup against James by the time he arrived. Peace followed and this held until 1496, by which time there were new kings in each country.

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James IV of Scotland was no anglophile. He was also keen to prove himself as a warrior and he had an ambition to recover Berwick. When Henry VII took the throne at Bosworth he was, for a while, subject to a number of challenges. One of these came from the pretender, Perkin Warbeck who claimed to be the younger son of Edward IV – one of the 'princes in the tower'. James supported him at first and invaded Northumberland in 1496. He soon withdrew when he heard that an English army was mustering at Newcastle. He tried again in the following year and his raid was countered by a counter-raid led by Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey. The upshot of this was a new peace treaty and the marriage of James to Henry VII's daughter, Margaret. Matter seemed settled until it was time, once again, for the French to interfere.

Flowers of the Forest

In 1511 King Henry VIII, eager to relive England's past glories on the Continent, joined the Holy League against France formed by Ferdinand of Spain, the Pope and Venice. To counter the threat posed by England, the following year Louis XII of France prevailed on King James

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IV of Scotland to renew the two countries' historic alliance. Each undertook to come to the other's aid if attacked. Henry's invasion of France in May 1513 prompted Louis to invoke the terms of his defensive alliance with Scotland. He sent money, arms and experienced captains to help James equip and train a Scottish army. This had the desired effect. On 22 August an army containing an estimated 60,000 Scots crossed the River Tweed into England. Over the next ten days the Border fortresses at Norham, Etal and Ford were reduced. In anticipation of the Scots' intervention in the war, Henry had taken to France troops drawn exclusively from the south of England and the Midlands. This left available to Henry's Lieutenant-General in the North, Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, the levies of the northern shires. Surrey, a 70 year old veteran of Barnet and Bosworth (where he fought for the Yorkists), began advancing from Pontefract as soon as he heard of the Scottish invasion, gathering men as he went. Large contingents arrived from Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire and Durham; lesser ones from Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland. By 4 September around 26,000 men had assembled at Alnwick.

Surrey was concerned that King James, having created the required diversion, would slip back into Scotland without giving battle. He decided therefore to appeal to James' well-known sense of chivalry and challenged the Scots to fight by 9 September at the latest. King James accepted the challenge but, because he detained the English herald, Surrey did not discover until 7 September that the Scots had shifted their position to Flodden Edge, an impregnable feature rising above the Milfield plain to a height of between 500 and 600 feet. A reproachful message from Surrey failed to persuade James to give battle on 'indifferent' ground and so, on 8 September, the English broke camp at Wooler, crossed the River Till and proceeded to march north-eastwards round the Scottish flank. The Scots were unsure whether Surrey was marching to Berwick, intent on invading Scotland, or simply trying to lure them from their stronghold. As a consequence, James' unwillingness to quit his advantageous position left the Scots rooted to the spot as, during the morning of 9 September, Surrey's army re-crossed the Till at Twizel Bridge and Millford, and began to approach the Scottish army from the north. The Scots had two choices: either they could decamp for Scotland before their line of retreat across the Tweed at Coldstream was cut off, or else they could turn about and march the mile that separated them from the northern face of the Flodden massif and await the English on Branxton Hill. King James chose the latter course.

Whilst the Scottish army was redeploying, the English took up position in three divisions on the ridge where Branxton village now stands. Unfortunately for the Scots, there were parts of the landscape which are hidden from their view and they could not see the whole picture. In particular, they did not know the detail of the ground conditions in the dip between the two armies. This became a major factor in the outcome of the battle. Also, despite the huge effort involved in moving their cannon, they proved relatively ineffective compared to the lighter English guns as they had difficulty in finding their range.

The Scots were armed primarily with a weapon that had proved very effective on the continent – the 18 foot pike. This was much longer than the traditional Scottish spear that had been used for centuries by their schiltrons. Unfortunately for them they were under-prepared. The English, on the other hand, used the much shorter billhook, a weapon based on an agricultural implement.

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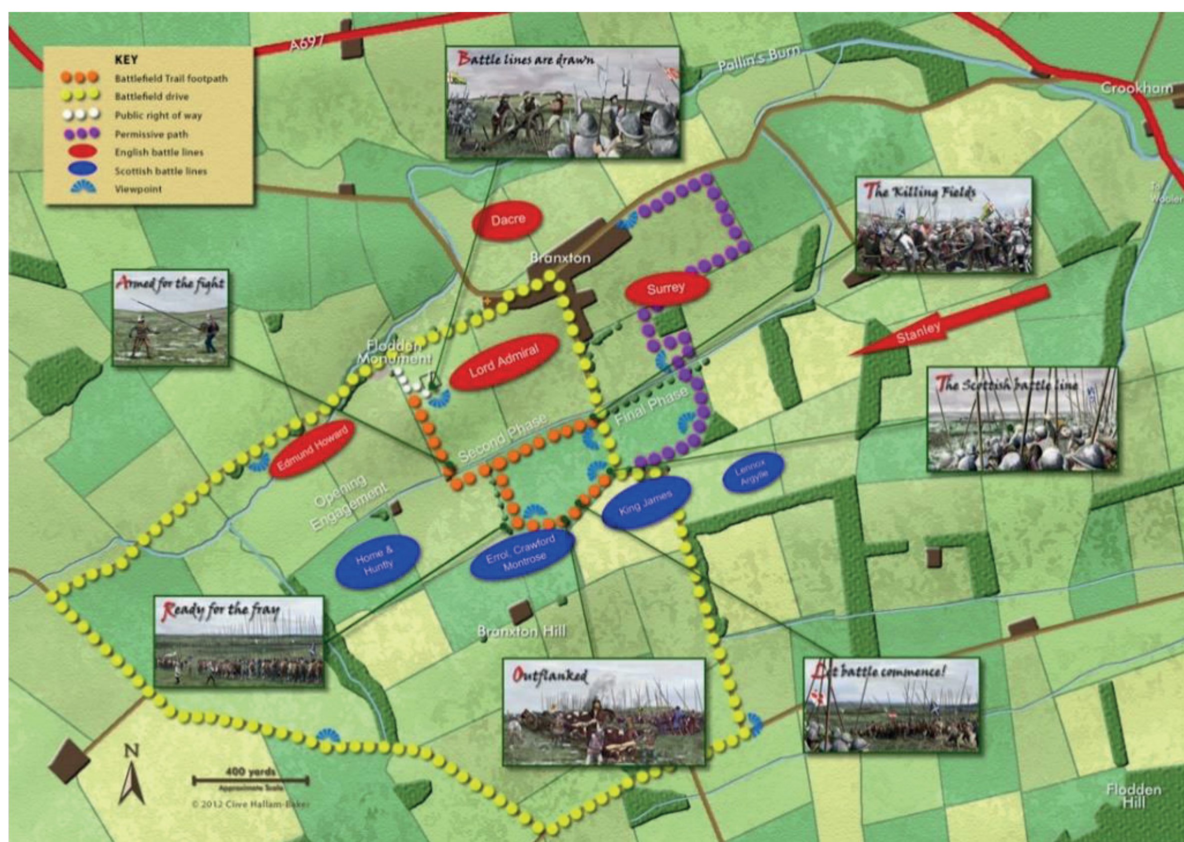
This picture is from Clive Hallam-Baker's web site - http://www.flodden.net/ In addition, both sides had the usual quota of fully-armoured knights.

Here is another image from Clive's site – a detailed map of the battle.



The battle began with an artillery exchange. The lighter English guns had the better of this. After initially attacking the Scottish guns the English master gunner, William Bracknell, turned his attention to the ranks of pike men. Eventually the Scots on the left flank gave up

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waiting for the English to attach uphill and Lord Home and Earl Huntly advanced down the hill towards the English right. The English soldiers in the front ranks who had stood so long in the wind and rain broke and the whole formation began to turn and flee. The English commander on the right, Edmund Howard, sent a call for support and was saved by the arrival of Lord Dacre's mounted Borderers. Home and Huntly pursued the fleeing English and took no further part in the battle. Encouraged by the success on the left the Scottish centre was now ordered forward down the slope of Branxton Hill with their long pikes. By now the English centre was positioned on the facing slope awaiting the onslaught. It was here that two factors combined to undermine the Scots. First, the short period of training that they had received in the use of the 18 foot pike was wholly inadequate and they were simply unable to maintain a good tight formation. Second, and more importantly, they soon found that the ground at the foot of the hill was a thick, muddy bog. As they were brought to a halt the English attacked with their billhooks. With these they were quickly able to lop off the ends of the pikes leaving the Scots with a lot of sticks. Swords were useless against the longer billhooks and the Scots were killed in huge numbers. The death rate was higher the worst of the Somme in WWI.

On the Scottish right, James IV had his hand-picked men who were conventionally armed and armoured. They began to drive back the English left under the earl of Surrey, supported by the Scottish reserve. By this time, the only Scots left on the top of Branxton Hill were the earls of Lennox and Argyll with their Highlanders and Islanders – and they were about to get a nasty surprise.

To Lennox's right was a steep gully and it was along this that the tardy Sir Edward Stanley finally arrived with his brigade. This was the same Stanley whose late intervention at Bosworth had proved so damaging to Richard III. Removing their shoes and climbing the hill on their hands and knees, Stanley's men launched a devastating flank attack against the Highlanders, who fled. Stanley now found himself in command of Branxton Hill, behind the main Scottish lines. From there he charged downhill into the rear of James IV's division. By chance he arrived at about the same time as Lord Dacre who had gathered up the remains of the reserve to charge into James' exposed left flank. With Surrey now holding his line and Howard beginning to press as well, James was surrounded. The outcome was now inevitable. James was killed along with thousands of Scottish nobles and soldiers. Defeat was total – this was nothing short of a massacre. The king, thirteen earls, countless lesser nobles, the Archbishop of St. Andrews, two bishops, two abbots, three Highland chiefs and over ten thousand men-at-arms - the Flowers of the Forest "a wede away". It left around one third of Scotland's nobility below the age of 16.

And there we will stop and look briefly at what we have covered over the past few weeks.

Pulling It All Together

When we began this journey four weeks ago we looked the formation of the two nations of England and Scotland. As we stop on the field at Branxton several centuries later amongst the thousands of dead of both nations, what have we learned?

First and foremost, the lesson is that no-one learned any lessons! The invasion of England by James IV was following a well-trod path to disaster. Too often the Scots had listened to

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their French allies and were persuaded to attack the English as a distraction. It never ended well for the Scots. There were French knights present at Homildon Hill; the defeat at Neville's Cross was the result of French requests for support following the Crecy campaign; the original creation of the alliance in 1296 had led to the massacre of the citizens of Berwick and the Scots defeat the first battle of Dunbar. On the English side, they were unable to understand and accept that the Scots were not just another group of English who happened to live in the north of the island.

Certainly, many of the Border noble families were also lords of English properties and intermarriage between Scots and English families was not uncommon. This had arisen from the Norman invasion which forced many northern English nobles to take refuge in lowland Scotland. But the Scots came from a different tradition with a separate cultural heritage. Their territory had not fallen to the Romans. After the Norman conquest true feudalism never really took root in Scotland. French knights, accustomed to deference, were surprised to find that, when they rode through a field of crops, the impertinent Scottish peasants would demand compensation. Although the Normans greatly influenced architecture and language, they in no sense conquered the country. Instead, they helped create a social division that was to dominate Scotland's history: the Lowlands were controlled by noblemen who spoke the same Norman French and subscribed to the same values as England's ruling class, while the Highlands remained untamed, under the influence of independent-minded Gaelic speakers, and the islands were loyal, more or less, to Norway. The Highland clans, indeed, were virtually independent kingdoms, whose chiefs, under the old patriarchal system, had the power of life and death over their people. Given this background, the Scots were never going to give in and weak Scottish kings who bowed down to the English kings were destined not to last too long!

The second lesson is that neither side could ever win. At best, the Scots could raid into England and cause devastation in Northumberland. There was never any prospect that the Scots could permanently occupy and control the northern counties of England or keep the English from periodic invasions seeking to make the Scottish crown subservient to the English king. Similarly, the English could never hope to capture and hold the southern part of Scotland (south of the Firth of Forth) on a permanent basis. The Scots learned early one that their best tactic was to avoid pitched battles. By operating on a guerrilla basis with hit and run strikes and by using a form of 'scorched earth' policy they knew that the English could not sustain an invasion force for more than a few weeks and that any castles captured by the English could usually be re-taken. Only Berwick with its better defences and its ability to be re-supplied by sea was the exception.

The third lesson is that history is never simple. If it were we would long ago have worked out what happened in the past and all historians would now be redundant! In these talks we have skated across the surface on five hundred years of history. Longer, in fact, as we started with the departure of the Romans. I have been guilty of covering the ground in a very old-fashioned way which might be described as the 'kings and battles' school of history. Modern historians have tried to move away from this as far as the sources permit. In recent years we have seen the rise of many other histories, many of which have been more concerned with the history of minorities and the history of ordinary people. On top of all of this we have the very distinctive local histories of the Border lands which we have barely mentioned. The big picture that we have considered masks so much else that has contributed to the relationship between England and Scotland.

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We are all aware of the almost constant local feuding that has always been a feature of Border history. This has operated both cross-border and within each country. In Scotland we touched on the enmity of the Douglas and Dunbar families. In England we have largely passed over an equivalent struggle between the Nevilles and the Percys. All of these have had an impact of some sort on the periods that we have considered. There is enough here to keep the next generation of historians busy for a while yet.

What else have we learned? We have seen an enormous change in the nature of warfare. Let's just review this briefly.

The Nature of Warfare

When the Romans left Britain they took with them the most disciplined armed force the western world had yet encountered.

Theirs was an army primarily of infantry supported by spearmen, archers, slingshot artillery and some cavalry. For centuries the highly drilled Roman legions had been able to defeat their tribally-based, largely untrained enemies by wearing them down on the battlefield then using their cavalry to mop up the fleeing survivors. Towards the end of the Roman period this system had begun to break down in the face of new challenges from such as the Huns who were skilled horsemen using lances and bows. Face to face and on foot the Roman legions were devastating but they were always vulnerable to flanking attacks. In addition, the Roman's enemies had learnt from them in terms of armour, weaponry and tactics.

The early medieval period saw a widely divergent use of both infantry and cavalry forces based on the many different traditions and structures of European societies. In Anglo-Saxon

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Britain the use of cavalry seems to have all but disappeared. Battles again became primarily face-to-face clashes of infantry.

Initially such battles were probably a rather disorganised melee but by the 7th century this had been superseded by the development of the shield wall at the front line following an exchange of missiles such as javelins, stones and some archery. Regrettably there is little by way of reliable written accounts of this period and scholars continue to debate the extent to which horses played a part in battles other than as a means of transport to the field.

On continental Europe the tradition developed differently and cavalry played a greater role especially in the Frankish armies of the 8th and 9th centuries assisted by the import of technological advances from the east – most importantly the stirrup which made it much easier to fight on horseback. Probably more important in this development was the establishment of effective central control under Pepin and Charlemagne which lead to the development of a military and social elite which was highly mobile and which fought over much greater distances which was not the case with local levies. However, it was not until the 11th and 12th centuries that we first see the common use of cavalry charges with couched lances. The Normans were masters of this technique from the middle of the 12th century. The age of the mounted knight fighting both on and off of his horse had arrived and with it the dawn of what we call “chivalry”.

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“Chivalry” is a difficult term. It has no precise definition and its nature changed over time. Clearly, it derives from the close association of the warrior with his horse. In popular perception it is about knights in shining armour rescuing damsels in distress and undertaking bold quests to find the Holy Grail. This perception derives primarily from the Victorian romanticised literature of such as Sir Walter Scott - Ivanhoe - or Alfred Lord Tennyson – Idylls of the King. In reality it was something more complex and in many ways more practical.

By the high middle ages the role of knighthood had evolved into a socio-military system. Those who lived and fought in this way were the elite in both areas. Chivalry was the code that united them across national boundaries. Within this code there were certainly notions of honourable behaviour towards those who looked to the knightly class for protection. At bottom however was the hard military reality. The essence of chivalry was a set of values governing the conduct of war based on the principle of self-preservation among knights. Mutual respect and a system of ransoms were designed to reduce the likelihood of knights being killed in battle.

Such considerations did not, of course, apply to the common soldier or, indeed to the ordinary citizen or peasant. There are many examples of the brutality that was meted out to the non-knightly classes. The great chevauchees of the 14th century English in France; the massacre of the citizens of Limoges by The Black Prince; the protection rackets operated by the free companies of knights during gaps in The Hundred Years War. Yet on the battlefield, for most the middle ages, the system of chivalry as understood by members of the knightly elite operated as intended. It greatly reduced the chances of being killed. This, of course, was accompanied by the general view that pitched battles were best avoided and much warfare was in the form of raids, skirmishes and sieges of fortified positions.

In terms of military battle tactics, the medieval period was dominated by the cavalry charge into the opposing infantry, followed by a period of hand-to-hand fighting. The knightly

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classes were at the centre of both. They were the ones to whom victory or defeat and the honour or shame accrued. The bulk of the casualties were expected to be amongst the common soldiers. Where knights fell this was supposed to be in close combat with others of their class. Towards the end of the Middle Ages there was a divergence of tactics between the English and the French. English knights often dismounted and fought on foot from the outset. For the French this was "cheating" and outside of the chivalric code.

The Scots had yet another tactic. With a relatively small community of knights they lacked the heavy cavalry of the English. The Scots army was made up of peasants, burgesses and common folk. At Stirling Bridge Wallace and Moray had trained a rag-tag host of farmers and small landowners into an army that had defeated battle-hardened English knights and men-at-arms. The schiltron lay at the heart of the Scots battle strategy.

A schiltron was a 'great circle' - a battle formation with as many as 2,000 men carrying massive 12-foot-long spears. They formed huge circles or rectangles that bristled with spears like a giant lethal hedgehog. The Scots ranks were well drilled and trained to get into formation and to face down mounted knights in armour. The ranks of the schiltron were so tightly packed that they were almost impenetrable.

The answer to the schiltron was the longbow. At Falkirk Edward had used his archers to break down the Scottish schiltron before deploying his cavalry to finish them off. At Homildon Hill as we saw the English archers, shooting uphill into the mass of Scottish soldiery, unleashed a storm of more than 250,000 arrows over a period of probably less than ten minutes. Five thousand arrows in the air at any one time, landing on their targets at a rate of 30,00 per minute. Heavy cloth yard arrows with vicious bodkin heads. These are not the arrows of today's archery sport.

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There is only one surviving example of a medieval war arrow. It was found at Westminster Abbey, lodged in one of the turrets of the Chapter House. The Chapter House Arrow is 77.4 cm (30.5 inches) long. The diameter of the shaft varies from 1.07 centimetres at the war head to a maximum of 1.14 centimetres at a distance of 30.5 centimetres from head. The diameter reduces to 0.756 centimetres at the nock. The total weight is 1.5 ounces. This arrow is a 27 inch shaft (approximately) mounted to a 4 inch or 5 inch socketed war head. The force delivered through the point on impact was sufficient to penetrate all but the best plate armour and the Scottish footmen would have worn nothing of this quality.

The force would be more than enough to knock a man off his feet and the density of the arrow-storm would have ensured that many were killed outright or seriously wounded. As I said last week, the era of modern warfare had arrived. It would be a while before this 'killing at a distance' would completely replace hand-to-hand combat but the tide had turned. Homildon Hill was the only medieval battle won entirely by archers. By the time we reach Flodden the use of battlefield artillery is well established, the longbow is coming to the end of its period of dominance and we have left the medieval period behind us.

Before I close, I would like to bring things right up to date. I have spoken once or twice about Registered Battlefields. Let me explain just what these are.

Registered Battlefields

The English Heritage Register of Battlefields was established in 1995. Subsequently a similar Inventory of Battlefields has been created by Historic Scotland and an equivalent is currently under consideration in Wales. Initially, forty three battlefields were included in the EH Register and this has been increased to forty five with the very recent addition of two

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battlefields near Lostiwthiel in Cornwall. Both of these battles occurred in the English Civil War in 1644.

Currently the Register excludes small scale skirmishes and sieges. To be considered for inclusion a battlefield must be shown to have been of historical significance and a battle's location must be securely identified. The nature of warfare is such that boundaries to an area of conflict are rarely precise. However, for inclusion in the Register the area where the troops drew up, deployed and fought while in battle formation must be capable of definition on the ground, and a reasonable boundary to this area must be defined. In practical terms, inclusion in the Register gives some protection to the site but nothing as good as that afforded to Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012), sets out that registered battlefields are designated heritage assets of the highest significance. They, and their setting, should be protected and enhanced, and permission for developments causing substantial harm should be wholly exceptional. The Trust continues to press for better protection especially against the operations of amateur metal detectorists.

Of the forty five battlefields in the Register there are five in Northumberland : Halidon Hill, Otterburn, Homildon Hill, Flodden and Newburn Ford – the last one is just west of Newcastle and covers the site of a 17th century battle. Of the other battles we have mentioned In these talks, both Neville's Cross and Northallerton (Battle of the Standard) are included.

The Battlefields Trust

The Battlefields Trust played a key role in developing the Register. We undertook the detailed assessments of each site for EH under the direction of Glenn Foard, who is now Reader in Battlefield Archaeology at Huddersfield University. Subsequently the Trust has a representative on EH's Battlefields Panel which is responsible for the maintenance and extension of the Register. Our current representative is Professor Anne Curry of Southampton University. Anne is a medieval historian with an international reputation and is also a trustee of the Trust.

Much of the day-to-day work of the Trust relates to current and potential Registered Battlefields. We operate nationally with a small number of national officers and a regional network led by the Regional Chairman. Everyone is a volunteer. The Trust's only paid employee is Julian Humphrys, our Development Officer, who has the task of growing the membership and coverage of the Trust. Julian's position is funded by English Heritage. At

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the local level I am currently the Chairman and Clive Hallam-Baker is the Treasurer. We run a small committee but, in truth, most of the time it is the two of us who organise things in this area! We are keen to recruit new members – either those who are just interested and are happy to support our work with a small annual subscription and to receive the quarterly magazine but also we need more active members who would like to get involved in what we do. We have an active project running at Homildon Hill (this is based on Wooler) and we will be looking at the 1,000th anniversary of Carham shortly. The Trust is also engaged with Glenn Foard and Huddersfield University to create a major national project looking at the battlefields of the Wars of the Roses. Glenn lead the team which found the true location of the battlefield at Bosworth and we now wish to bring the same level of expertise to bear on a number of other sites. In this area we will be looking at Hexham and Hedgeley Moor where we will try to establish community projects. More hands to the pumps will definitely be needed! If this project goes ahead it will require substantial funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to cover the costs of the archaeology (archaeologists are always expensive) and to support the wider projects. A funding bid is to be submitted later this year.

If you are interested in membership there are some application forms at the back of the room.

Thank you.

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From Carham to Flodden

500 Years of Border Conflict

Suggested Further Reading

These are the main sources that I have used in preparing the four talks.

Books

Author	Title
Richard Lomas:	County of Conflict: Northumberland from Conquest to Civil War
Richard Brooks:	Cassell's Battlefields of Britain & Ireland
Michael Rayner:	English Battlefields
K & D Guest:	British Battles
Alan MacQuarrie	Medieval Scotland
AW Boardman	Hotspur

Web Sites

UK Battlefields Resource Centre

http://www.battlefieldstrust.com/resource-centre/index.asp

English Heritage Register of Battlefields

http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/battlefields/

Historic Scotland Inventory of Battlefields

http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/heritage/battlefields.htm

BBC Scotland History

http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/history/

There is an excellent video by Dr Alex Woolf on the battle of Carham on this site. I would recommend taking a look at this and many of the others in the series.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/history/scotland_united/the_battle_of_carham/

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