**A Visit To Carham**

**Introduction**

There is no conventional ‘battlefield walk’ at Carham – largely because we do not have an exact site for the battle. However, a visit to the area is still very much worthwhile and will add to an understanding of the battle and its context. This note will serve to introduce some of the places to see and things to do when visiting.

Today Carham is a very small hamlet comprising of a farm yard and a few houses and cottages.

But Carham hides its history well.

* The road through the village is ancient, perhaps of Roman origin.
* From the seventh century Carham has been the site of religious establishments.
* Over the years Carham has seen battles and the passing of armies.
* William Wallace camped here on his way to the first battle of Dunbar in 1296.

and, for one thousand years, Carham has held a sometimes precarious place on the border between England and Scotland. After the battle of Carham the Anglo-Scottish border remained at the Tweed on the eastern side of the country. It was finally confirmed by the Treaty of York in 1237.

**Wark Castle**

Close by to Carham is Wark Castle. Some people have suggested that Wark is a more likely site for the battle. We do not subscribe to that view primarily because the course of the Tweed has moved since 1016 which makes it impossible as a site for the battle. The castle is not accessible due to safety concerns but can be seen from the road. Wark is on the B6350 between Cornhill and Carham.



From ‘The Douglas Archives’ (<http://www.douglashistory.co.uk/history/Places/wark.htm>)

*Beside the river Tweed sits a large rock and rubble mound overlooking the present day village of Wark, all that is left of the ancient motte and bailey castle of Wark, or as it was sometimes called the castle of 'Carham' built by Walter Espec with the permission of King Henry I of England (1100-1135) in the early part of the 12th century. The site originally consisted of what appears to be an unusual six sided plan keep which was five storeys high, "in each of which there were five great murder holes, shot with great vaults of stone except one stage which is of timber, so that great bombards can be shot from each of them" (1517 account). A wall encircling this keep curved round and down to link with the bailey courtyard wall. This wall itself was divided into two sections to allow the garrison to progressively retreat if the gatehouse was taken during times of siege. The gatehouse opened close to the Tweed as the river was fordable here and for added defence a trench ran from the river passed the gate house and up around the keep perched on its rock mass. The castle was a very ugly building but it was an extremely functional structure taken its position on the border marches and being under continual threat from the Scots. Though regarded by some as a minor castle when compared to the likes of Norham castle it still had its part to play in the pages of border history.*

*Wark was attacked by King David I of Scots (1124-1153) on three separate occasions in 1126 when it was taken and held by the Scots for a short time. It was then besieged unsuccessfully in 1138 while the Scot burnt down Northumberland. Then in 1139 it was again besieged when the English used it as a base for a retaliatory strike into Scotland. Eventually the garrison agreed to surrender on condition they could leave with their lives and possessions while the castle was slighted and made unserviceable.*

*In 1157 Wark was rebuilt by King Henry II of England (1154-1189). But by 1216 it had again been destroyed by the Scots before being rebuilt again. In 1349 one of the most famous events at Wark took place when King Edward III of England (1327-1377) who was attending a court ball at the castle noticed that Lady Salisbury had dropped her garter. As he bend down to offer the garter back to the embarrassed Lady he saw some of his courtiers whisper and snigger. The King quickly rebuked them saying one day they would count themselves honoured to wear the garter. Hence the order of the Garter was established.*

The tale of the founding of the Order of the Garter may, or may not, be true!

For more information follow the link above.

**St Cuthbert’s Church, Carham**

Carham is a site of great religious significance. The present church was built in 1790 on the site of a much earlier church. A daughter house of Lindisfarne is believed to have been established by St Cuthbert somewhere in the Carham area in the second half of the 7th century, but this was destroyed during a border raid in 1296.

A path with trees on the side of a road

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King Ecgfrid is credited with the grant of Carham to St Cuthbert which he is said to have given, with all that belonged to it, after his victory over Wulfhere, king of Mercia, in or before 674. It is believed that Cuthbert founded a small minster at Carham close to the site of the present church. This would have been no more than a small wooden building inhabited by a few monks. There is a flat, platform-like area behind the present church which may be a candidate for the site and which will require some archaeological investigation in due course. It is shown on this LIDAR image, marked with an arrow. LIDAR is a form of specialized aerial radar used to survey landscape and which reveals many otherwise hidden features. It is possible to walk around the church to look at this feature. Note also the ancient ‘ridge & furrow’ plough marks in the adjoining fields which are remnants of the old field systems.

Also behind the church is an ancient crossing point where the Tweed could be forded. This is till possible today when the water is low in the summer. The track may be seen on the LIDAR image below the words ‘Kirk End’ and its continuation on the Scottish side to Birgham may be seen in the upper left corner. We cannot be certain where the Scots crossed the river but this is a candidate for that location. Many invading armies, both Scottish and English, have crossed here over the centuries and this became a convenient place for conferences of war and of peace and also as a location for the Border Courts.



The dedication of the church to St Cuthbert is the reason why Carham is believed to have been one of the places where Cuthbert’s body was rested on its journey to Chester-le-Street (and much later onwards to Durham) when the monks abandoned Lindisfarne in 875 in the face of continued Viking raids. A writ issued by Queen Maud, when acting as regent for her husband, Henry I, at some date between 1106 and 1116, recognized the right of Durham to the church of Carham and whatsoever belonged to it. Only at a later date possession passed from Durham to the Yorkshire Augustinian priory of Kirkham.

In the 16th century a small Anglican church was built before being replaced by the current church. The West Tower, chancel and vestry were added in c.1864. In 2002-4, major repairs were undertaken to the tower after huge cracks had appeared. The church is a Grade II listed building. It is located near the banks of the River Tweed, just 200 yards from Scotland.

At the entrance to the church there is an interpretation panel with details of the battle. Inside the church is a display with more information and some images from the commemoration event held to mark the 1,000th anniversary of the battle in 2018. The display includes :

* The history of the Church in Carham dating back to the seventh century origins of Saint Cuthbert’s Minster, through the Augustinian Priory to the various versions of the Parish Church.
* A brief history of Saint Cuthbert.
* An explanation of how the ancient Kingdom of Northumbria was attacked from the North, South and West and was reduced in size finally to become the County of Northumberland.
* A map showing an interpretation of the battle of 1018.
* An explanation of weapons and battle tactics.
* The legacy of 1018 and Carham’s place on the Border.

The strong religious importance of Carham is, we believe, the reason that it was a well-known place with an important fordable river crossing and a place worth both attacking and defending. We believe that this was almost certainly the battle site.

**The Visitor Centre**

Opposite the entrance to the church is a redundant red telephone box. This has been converted into a visitor centre – the twin of the similar one in Branxton which commemorates the battle of Flodden (1513).

. A close up of a brick building

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Inside the box is more information about the battle and its context. Space is very limited, but there are several display panels inside, the largest being a map showing the sites of fifty conflicts between England and Scotland. These took place over a period of some five hundred years from Carham in 1018 to the last major battle of Flodden in 1513.

There are other smaller information panels including : the rulers of England and Scotland, dates of events in Carham’s history and the East /West divide of the Cumbric and Old English languages. At the time of the battle this divide was, in many ways, as important as the North / South divide between England and Scotland with which are more familiar with today.



**The Battle for the Border**

The Anglo-Scottish border was a site of conflict for many centuries. An interpretation panel dedicated to this story has been placed behind the church near to the start of the track down to the river.

A wooden bench

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This board tells something of the wider story of the long border conflict between England and Scotland and shows the locations of key sites associated with this. It also shows the many towers that were built to protect people from Reivers who raided in the area several centuries after the date of the battle.

**A Roman Camp?**

It is known that there was a Roman camp in the vicinity of Carham. The modern road which passes through Carham is ancient and quite possibly of prehistoric / Roman origin. It is known that there was a Roman marching camp near Carham and recently a possible candidate has been identified. Archaeological work is planned to investigate this.

June 2019