

## **Border Reivers - Richie Graham of Brackenhill** **Infamous Borderline Raider who Evaded Arrest for Murder and Treason**

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Richie Graham of Brackenhill was reiver, blackmailer, extortionist and counterfeit coiner. He would commit murder and treason but never answer for his life of crime.

In 1584 George Graham, alias Parcivall's Geordie, was murdered by Richie Graham of Brackenhill at Levens Bridge. Today Brackenhill tower still stands near Longtown, north Cumbria as testimony to one of the most infamous of English reivers. Levens Bridge can also be seen but the river that it crosses is no longer called the Leven. Today it is the Lyne.

### **A Border Reiver Murder**

Richie Graham struck Geordie Graham between the shoulder blades with a lance. With that and other wounds inflicted by his accomplice, Geordie Graham died three weeks later in Carlisle. So much for the bonds of clanship! Richie was indicted for this murder, and three others, but he was still around in 1596 when he took part in the rescue of Kinmont Willie.

### **A Reiver Counterfeit Coiner**

Graham was a notorious horse-thief, once stealing eighty horses from the Provost of Falkland in Fife. There was, however, a more lucrative haul from his foray north of the river Forth. He also came away with £5000 worth of gold and silver. This, with similar hauls throughout his life, he used to counterfeit coin of the realm. In the top floor of his tower of Brackenhill he employed a 'koyner' who transformed the gold and silver into untold wealth for the unscrupulous reiver.

### **Reiver Blackmail**

Richie Graham blackmailed the peasant farmers of Gilsland and the lands of the lower Esk, promising them protection from the reivers of the Scottish Border valleys in return for goods or money. The local folk lived in awe of the notorious English reiver but would not always have the means to pay. They were often reminded of their commitment by a list of their names pinned to the door of Arthuret church in present day Longtown, a lovely little market town on the English side of the Border. Many of the folk who attended the services at Arthuret, having this stark reminder of the state of their position in this world, would have their minds on other issues than the saving of their souls.

### **Reiver Conspiracy and Treason**

In April 1596, Richie Graham took part in the rescue of Kinmont Willie Armstrong, the most infamous of the Scottish Border reivers, from Carlisle castle. Although English he welcomed the involvement, seeing it as a means of bringing down English authority in the English West March. The English West March Warden, Thomas Lord Scrope, was a pain in the side of the Graham clan not so much for his ability to prevent their lives of crime but because he often had wind of their contemplated raids with a result that they had to be aborted.

Involvement with the Scottish clans was a case of treason in the eyes of the English, yet Richie Graham conspired with them before the rescue raid and even entered Carlisle castle to contest any defence from his own countrymen.

### **Reiver Held to Account**

Following the successful rescue of Kinmont there were those who were prone to divest the names of the conspirators including that of Richie Graham. Two of these were brought before Thomas Lord Scrope to give evidence about the plot to free Kinmont. They were threatened by Richie Graham. He sent word to Andrew Graham saying that unless he denied what he had previously said in evidence, 'hee nor anye of his shoulde be left alive'.

Richie was hauled before the Privy Council in London on charges going back to the murder of 1584 and his conspiracy and treason over the Kinmont affair. The outcome? He was not punished.

Why? The Grahams as a clan were seen as a potent force in the northern region of Elizabeth I's realm. They were a buffer against the Scots at a time when hostility between the two countries simmered just below the surface of an uneasy peace.

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