

## THE GREAT RAID OF TYNEDALE

### **THE FACT.**

On 6th October 1593 William Elliot of Larriston, The Laird of Mangerton and William Armstrong, called Kynmont, with one thousand horsemen of Liddesdale, Eskdale, Annandale and Ewesdale ran an open day foray in Tynedale and drove off "aine hundred five score and five (1005) head of nolte (cattle) 1000 sheep and goats, 24 horses and mares, burned an onset and a mill and carried off 300 pound sterling of insight (household gear)".

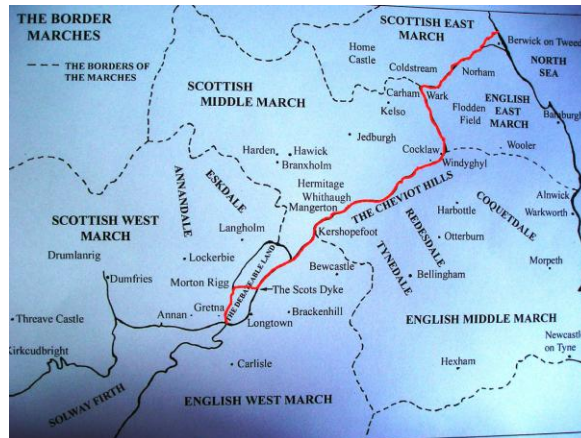
This raid was particularly audacious as it was carried out in the daytime, not the usual time for the Border Reivers' nefarious activities. The deliberate decision to carry out the raid when daylight would take away the element of surprise that was often crucial to success, coupled with a party of a strength in numbers that signified that this was no ordinary raid, but a series of raids taking place over a wide area of Tynedale at the same time, combined to show that the Scottish Reivers were intent on provoking retaliation on a grand scale.

The reasoning?

Surely an attempt to provoke a war between Scotland and England! Should the Scots be successful in their enterprise then it would not be long before raid and counter-raid spread throughout the length and breadth of the Border counties. The English would not be slow to seek retribution.

The result?

A Border people that from east to west would be beyond the control of the three border march authorities, either singly or combined, and two governments that would be quick to blame each other for the resulting chaos.



**The Border Marches showing the Border Line between England and Scotland.**

Would it need the might of national armies to clash once more before peace and order were restored to the Borderlands?

Could the Scottish incursion into Tynedale provoke a war?

The Border Reivers, comprising some of the most notorious of the four main dales of southern Scotland, were fully armed, rode with pennants and flags flying as in times of war, and made no attempt to reach Tynedale unobserved.

Riding in great numbers with flags flying was considered to be a particularly lawless act and showed utter contempt for any authority. It was also against the spirit and rule of the truce which naturally existed when the two countries were not engaged in open war.

Virtually a small army they reached [Tynedale](#) in daylight hours and proceeded to steal and burn at will, openly inviting the locals to retaliate and defend themselves.

The size of the Scottish host however simply resulted in the English inhabitants of the dales of Tyne beating a hasty retreat to the wilderness and fastnesses that was often their wont when danger threatened.

Sir John Forster, [Warden of the English Middle March](#) demanded redress, and even sent his son Nicholas to James VI of Scotland at Jedburgh to apprise him of the facts. The King acknowledged the seriousness of the raid made by his Border subjects and promised justice would be done and good order kept. Facts later recorded in the Border annals prove that his promises had no substance, a singular trait of this

inept, weak and ineffective king. "William Elliot and principals (of the raid) have been before the king, and nothing done yet", moans John Forster.

The Borderers involved in the raid must have felt themselves untouchable but they failed in their main aim which was to stir up trouble between the two nations. The consequences of this "open day foray" could have resulted in the breaking of the fragile relationship between James VI and Elizabeth I of England which over the years had often blown hot then cold. But it didn't.

The "Bill of Tynedale" presented by Nicholas Forster to the King and Council of Scotland demanded immediate action and redress but none was forthcoming. Given the fact that Sir John Forster was a government official, Elizabeth's representative on the English Border, and therefore to be taken seriously, it is surprising that she accepted James's ineffectiveness in dealing with the reivers involved in the raid.

As was often the case in the Border politics of the time, excuse piled on excuse for the lack of positive action. But time, and retaliatory, seemingly unconnected outrages committed by the English, led to a balance and equality in the demands for justice on either side.

The Great Raid of Tynedale was committed to history as just one more of the interminable rades of the Border Reivers.

### **THE FICTION.**

*(The fiction portrayed below is based on the reminiscences of Kinmont Willie Armstrong. Kinmont was not the leader of the 'Great Raid'; that honour fell to William Elliot of Dinlabyre and Larriston. He was, however, instrumental in the planning which resulted in complete success for the Scots. In his later years at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, having still not answered for his crimes against the English, he often thought of the day of the 'Great Raid', its immediate success and its overall failure).*

I remember the Great Raid of Tynedale as if it was yesterday although it was ten years ago now. The memories are vivid and clear. I can still see the look of horror and fear on the faces of the folks of Bellingham as we appeared abreast the ravine to confront their small number with wave after wave of the Annandale, Ewesdale, Eskdale and Liddesdale reivers bent on plunder. The people there were unable to contest our raid and having stolen anything that moved on four legs, not forgetting the insight (household goods) to please the ladies back in the dales, we were soon on our way to the Hole, the Raw and Tarset.



**Meeting of the Reiver Ewes and Esk at Langholm.**

Mind you it was a month in the planning. To assemble such a host from the four valleys was not easy. The distances that had to be travelled were long and often tedious as visit after visit to the same places had to be made to persuade the Border lairds to join in the enterprise. At the root of illogical opposition to what many thought was a necessary, nay essential venture, were the endless cross clan feuds, some petty and mindless, that had raged unrelentingly for generation after generation. They had to be held in abeyance for the common cause of raiding the English with one of the biggest gatherings of our Border clans so far seen in England. It had taken a deal of coaxing, cajoling and insistence before the clan chiefs gathered at Mangerton to iron out the final details.

Our aim was not just theft, plunder and burning, but to create such havoc and mayhem that the English would have no alternative but to retaliate with equal numbers over a wide area. Hopefully, we anticipated that the whole affair would attract such attention internationally that letters of bitter complaint would wing their way from London to Edinburgh from the poisonous pen of Good Queen Bess and vice versa. We knew Jamie's replies would be fawning and obsequious, full of wind and piss, signifying nothing. He was powerless but shit scared of offending Elizabeth and didn't we know it! Our ultimate aim was to effect a breakdown in Anglo-Scottish relationships.

But I move too fast, my thoughts wandering quickly through the events of the day, our hopes of its outcome.

I had been a pain in the side of the English for more than two decades, especially since my raid on Tarsetdale ten years before. On that

day three hundred strong, we had found rich pickings at the Keyme, Redheughe, Black Middens, the Hill House, Waterhead, Starrhead, Bog head and High Feelde. We lifted over four hundred kye and oxen, four hundred sheep and goats, thirty horses and mares and spoil and insight of the houses to the value of two hundred pounds. In the process we killed six of the English bastards, Millburns and Hunters, and wounded another eleven. We also took thirty of their number to ransom at a later date.

This as we all know, was contrary to the virtue of the truce between the two countries and the [Laws of the Marches](#).

And don't I know it. Since that time I have been hounded by the English at every turn. Mind you I have kept one step ahead of them but I am tired of the constant vigilance and watch, and am now determined to take some kind of initiative.

The final straw came in the August of 1593 when returning home to Morton Rigg Tower, careful to remain on the Scottish side of the March Dyke, I was ambushed by the English under the leadership of Scrope. I say ambush but the Carlisle garrison, not famous for their stealth and cunning, simple minded dolts, advertised their presence seconds before they should have and I was able to avoid the main thrust of their attack. By splitting the nose of one with the broad side of my sword and gouging the face of another with spur and boot, I caused such disorganisation and panic in the rest of their ranks that I was able to gallop off, and be gone into a heavily wooded area of the March Dyke near Crawesknowe, before they could gather their horses, which were at some distance from their ambushment. It was ill-chosen and I could not help but chuckle to myself as, from a distance, I heard their Captain cursing and swearing at subordinates who whimpered and whinnied to rival the horses.

But enough was enough! From that day I resolved that the times of looking over my shoulder, watching my back were over. I was determined to take the initiative, give the English something to remember me by!

But it could not just be an isolated incident, foray, raid, one among many taking place along the Marches. It would need to be special. It would need to have a lasting effect.

So what better than a raid of such magnitude that it would be remembered for all time. To humiliate the English who had constantly harassed and provoked me for some twenty years. And better than that, cherish the thought, to incite them into retaliation on the same scale. We would be ready for that, rest assured, and maybe, just maybe, the

episode could result in that kind of embarrassing situation whereby diplomatic relations between Jamie and Elizabeth might end acrimoniously and national feelings run so high that the truce between the two countries might end.

But would the clans be prepared to follow me in this escapade? That it would be filled with danger even to the loss of life on both sides brooked no argument.

Could the peoples of the valleys of the Liddel, Ewes, Esk and Annan really stand against a retaliatory force from the English side? Would the strength of that force, most probably greater than the thousand or so I envisaged would partake in the raid south, make my own and the neighbouring clans think twice about the enterprise?



**Liddesdale.**

And what if full-scale war were to follow? The great punitive raids by the English under Hertford in our grandfathers' time were still remembered with great fear and bitterness in the valleys and still a topic of bitter reminiscence at gatherings and round the fire on a winter's night. The slaughter of our people on those occasions was indiscriminate and wholesale. The valleys became a desolate wilderness. Loved ones, men, women and children died to satiate the bitterness of an English king baulked of his dream of unifying the two crowns through marriage. That had been in the days when, in effect, no monarch ruled in Scotland. Surely, even the hapless James would defend his countrymen now should the raid lead to war?

If he was not prepared to stand up for the border clans then at least we would fight and probably die for what we stood for: a way of life that we were reluctant to give up.

There was only one way to find out. Invite the clan leaders and hedgesmen to a tryst, and what better place than Mangerton tower to discuss and argue the merits or otherwise of such a plan. Mangerton, main stronghold of the Armstrongs of Liddesdale: clan chief, my brother Thomas.

Thinking back I remember vividly the day I set out for Mangerton to meet Thome. A lot would depend on how he viewed my scheme. Without him, his authority and sway, it was highly unlikely that the other clans would contemplate such a scheme. Once started there would be no going back!

My brother Thomas was the most powerful man in Liddesdale even though the Armstrongs were not the force they had been at the beginning of the century. His influence with the Elliots, Crosers and Nixons within the same valley would be needed if the latter were to be persuaded to take up my cause. He also had some influence with the Scotts of Ewesdale and Armstrongs of Eskdale. Although he had often been at feud with the Annandale clans, especially the Johnsons, he had often had their support when the overall good of the clans reduced personal vendetta into insignificance, at least for a time. Funny that when you think about it, but families who had been at loggerheads for generations without respite, could come together and set aside their differences when the cause was common, be it against the English or even some neighbouring family. The feud would still be there but held in check until the foray was achieved or the danger subdued. Then and only then would hostilities between clans who had recently acted in unison resume: often illogical, but often the case.

The fire needs a stir, the embers are lacklustre and damn it that Graham woman has not brought the logs in this night. She'll feel the venom of my tongue the morn's morn. The night is wilder now and the wind is billowing turbulent about the walls. I have been sunk in such a reverie of thought on past times and future plans, my whole body repleat with warmth and comfort, that I have not noticed the change in weather and night sky. Curse the woman. I'll have to go out and fetch the logs if I want to reminisce or plan further. It is getting too cold now to sit without the comfort of a fire. Damn it the rain is beginning to pelt against the shutters. I'll away the now before it gets worse, replenish the fire and sink back into the old friendly chair for another hour or two. My memory is fired with the thoughts of how the raid of Tynedale came about and the journey to Mangerton was only the beginning. I must stir myself, gan oot and fetch the wood the now. No problem, only a minute and I'll be back.

It's coming down in sheets now: the lazy idle bitch of a woman. Just wait until the morn.

When the fire began to sizzle and crack, I sank back in the chair and with my feet on the hearth, dozed again. I remember the journey to Mangerton well. It was a beautiful morning at the end of August. Just a tinge of sadness in the air as summer was rolling to a close. The sky was blue and cloudless, the trees and wild flowers were in full bloom but a stillness in the air, a sun slightly waxing in its power told of the autumn which was not now very far away. A slight mist about the banks of the river Sark revealed that the nights were getting slightly colder. It was a pleasant morn for all that, one that brought the senses alive quickly, thinned the blood yet made me feel good to be on God's earth. The morn was brisk with the promise of bright sun as it wore on, a weakening sun though, harbinger of the shorter days that would soon be upon us. The muscles of my horse trembled and shuddered as it awaited my command to "move on" and I felt eagerness within it to get on and enjoy the exercise. There was the promise of a good day to come.

And so I set off for Mangerton Tower, north and east from Morton, along the March Dyke, up the valley of the Esk, over [Canonbie Lea](#) and into Liddesdale. Mangerton was just short of Copshaw. A ride to bring the senses alive: a country to warm the heart of any man. As I approached Mangerton I could see that the day had long begun for the clansmen of the many cots which surrounded the tower. All the lums were reeking. Women and bairns were raking weeds in the meagre plots of arable ground rescued from the bent and hag. Beasts were grazing nearby. All was peaceful and serene. A snippet of border life at odds with the reive I hoped would soon take place.

As I passed the cots on the approach to the tower I was greeted cordially on every hand. It filled my heart with pride and pleasure to be part of this great family. We had experienced many trials and tribulations down the years yet were still strong, resolute and committed to each other.

The yett of the tower was flung open and there stood Thome, face beaming, eyes hard but full of brotherly love.

"How goes it Will? We didn't expect to see you this beautiful morn." His eyes took in the sky as he spoke, noting the brightness in the east, the sign of a good day although it had been long awakening.

"Thought it time I visited my Lord and brother," I said, a wry grin spreading across my face. Thome might be the Laird but through time and circumstance it was I who wore the mantle in action and deed.

"Away in," he said. There's meat and fruit still on the go. You can give me the crack from Morton. How's that sweet English wife of thine and the lads? It seems an age since I saw you last. Are the larders full or is it time for a bit of sport together?"

"Hold. Hold", I laughed, head beginning to reel from the comment and question spat out without taking a breath. "We have the rest of the morn to talk about our households. Right now I could eat you out of house and home. Move on and in brother."

As we climbed the ladder to the living quarters the succulent aroma of freshly cooked meat invaded my nostrils and I couldn't wait to reach the table. In the hearth the remnants of a great log fire fizzled and spat. Sat in the ingle were two of Thome's daughters. They looked round, one obviously pleased; the other apprehensive to see me as I hurried towards the table. On an instant they both rose and came towards me. The elder of the two at twenty, was tall, graceful and lithe of limb with a fine face and steely grey eyes. Her hair was a cascade of long black ringlets. She had the look of her father when he was in his youth. Her younger sister at eighteen, was shorter, very large breasted, inclined to be plumb but a fair looking wench with an attractiveness which had already turned the heads of many of the lads living on the Mangerton lands. She was all openness, joy and happiness as she fairly bounced across the room towards me. "It is good to see you uncle. How are you? We see so little of you these days. You must tell us all the news from Morton". A radiant smile enhanced her good looks and youth as she hurried to the table to cut bread and meat.

Her sister moved more slowly towards me, smiling brightly enough, but with a reserve in the deliberate movements of her body that signified a wariness at my arrival. I perceived the signs immediately and it crossed my mind that some form of trouble inevitably occurred following my visits to Mangerton. Or it seemed so. I knew she was thinking the same. "Good Day uncle. I hope we find you well this pleasant morning". Friendly and respectful but lacking the warmth of her younger sister.

"I'm well, very well my dear Jane. I'm glad to see that you and sister Liz both look the picture of health. The warmth and dryness of the summer has done you both good".

"Wisht", broke in young Liz. "Take the weight off your feet. Come and eat".

Without more ceremony I sat and eat of the finest beef Redesdale could produce. Thome and I laughed and spluttered as we recounted some of our raids into the heartlands of Northumberland, especially the last raid into Redesdale, the result of which graced the plate in front of me-prime Troughend steak.

"Where is the mistress of the house, "I asked through a mouthful of the sweetest meat I had ever tasted, "where is the finest lass in Liddesdale? I won't rest until I set eyes on her bonny self".

"She is away to Redmoss and not expected back till dusk. The mistress there is unwell and needs a nursing the uncouth lot there are incapable of giving. Feckless lot they are, lazy and idle even now when the beasts should be at the sheilings". This from Jane, said with some acrimony, but not without warrant I suspected.

"Pity, pity; I will be well away before then. These are not the times to be abroad when the light is fading. There are English watches down Kershope and along Liddel, nervous and twitchy at every sound. They act first and ask questions later, be it friend or foe. I pulled my dirk from its sheath and grimaced as I feigned a movement to my throat.

"Wisht again good uncle, "laughed Liz. "Let the meat stop your tongue. The lads will bring her back in safety. They know the byways to avoid the watches." Her eyes glistened, bosom heaved, as she chided me for exaggerating a situation they had always coped with as part of their daily lives.

Thome who had been listening to the banter with animated face, a friendly upturn of the lips in contrast to his normally dour countenance, spoke up. "Enough. Will I take it you have come here for a reason? Daughters, will you kindly leave us. I am sure there are chores to take care of and the day moves on."

Jane moved towards the door without hesitation, obviously glad to be given the opportunity to leave, pleased not to be involved in any ensuing discussion. Liz flustered and flounced, not happy to leave the room without knowing all the gossip from Morton.

When the sound of footsteps faded and the oaken door slowly creaked against its hinges as the two girls left the tower for the fields,

Thome looked at me with an enquiring face. He was not my brother for nothing. He knew I had something of import to discuss.

"Well, Will, what brings you here? I'll warrant it's not to wish me the time of day. Trouble with the English Warden no doubt, if I'm not mistaken?"

"No Thome. No immediate trouble. I've been thinking long and hard about the last twenty years. I'm tired of always watching my back, always wary of the rode that will lift me, always conscious that if I am not one step ahead of Old Scrope, I'll end my days in weary Carlisle at the end of a rope on the Harraby.



**Carlisle Castle.**

"So what's new," Thome interjected before I could say more. "Haven't we all lived with that feeling for many a year? Us, and our fathers before us".

"True, true" I answered. "But I'm sick to the heart of it; have been for some time. What you say is true but you must admit it is me who the English covet the most. Scrope would give his eye teeth and half of his backhanders from the English raids to see me stand the drop of Harraby. It weighs heavy on me Thome and I will have some revenge for the years of constant harassment".

"Fine words, my brother. But exactly how do you intend to remedy this situation. Sounds to me that you should retire to a monastery, take the cloth, see out your days in piety and prayer, away from a world that so obviously troubles you." Thome spoke with fire in his words, incensed by the thought that at last I was running scared of the English authorities and the troubles I had caused them, even to a national level.

"Fie, listen to me first," I raised my voice in passion, prickled at the thought that Thome viewed my comments as an admission that I was finally in fear of the English. "I have no intention of living the life of a recluse. Indeed my very visit to you today is based on an opposite approach to that which you so glibly and hurtfully portray without hearing me out. Listen, brother, and then you may not be of the same opinion. That you might not care for what I have to say is an option you might take. I am mindful of that and will listen to anything you might want to say. I am here because I value your experience and any comment that might ensue. Hear me first".

"Away then! Get on with it". Thome fidgeted and shuffled in his seat, obviously irked by his own petulance and impetuosity. Different now to the feelings of brotherly love experienced not too long ago on my arrival at Mangerton. He always was a tetchy body but I knew he would calm himself eventually and both listen and then counsel.

"Thome, you are my brother and I love you well. I am mindful of all you stand for, for what you have done in your life for our people. I, all of us, appreciate this deeply. You have held the Armstrongs together through a big part of the worst fifty years of our history. True, since the events of Carlenrigg and the execution of Johnny we have been a broken clan. But your leadership has been meaningful and, if we have not all prospered, at least we can hold our heads high, are still a clan of reckoning in the vales and hills of the Border.

"If it were so Will I would be a happy man but I thank you for your kind words, kindly meant. It has been a hard life here in Liddesdale but we hold our heads above water and proudly so. How our sons and daughters will fare is another matter though. I fear the times are changing."Thome spoke with feeling, sincerity yet concern. Now he was calm and rational.

"It is exactly the changing of the times that I wish to discuss with you, Thome. The future worries me also. Let's think about what is happening now and what is about to happen, soon, I warrant".

"I think about it all the time but I'd rather not. It fills me with foreboding."Thome was again irked by my words. It was clear that he was aware of what I was going to say, had thought around the subject many times and had been unable to reach any satisfying conclusions: any conclusion for the good of the clan; for the future.

"As I said Thome, hear me out ". I marvelled at the vagaries of his temper, understandable though now that I knew the future of his children

and the rest of his grayne (sect of clan) weighed heavily on his mind. "I believe our way of life, and that of all the Border clans both English and Scottish, will come to an end when Jamie Stuart ascends the throne of England. It is common knowledge now that that this will happen when Old Elizabeth dies. They, Jamie and Elizabeth, have each other's ears, are like thinking in what is to happen to the throne of England on her death. I fear she will die soon. Think on it, a Scotland ruled from London. Two countries united with no need for a Border to act as a buffer state. No need for a Border to play one against the other, each to cast a wary eye on the other".

Yes, yes I know all this, but where do you lead? Do you not think I have pondered on this often of late? I have, many times, but I do not see how we can use this situation to our advantage. I doubt our very future existence." Again Thome was tetchy and impatient, sore that I should want to discuss such matters when he had no solutions at hand. The conversation hit raw nerves, the fibre of his being. For all his bluster he cared greatly for his people. I was determined though that he must hear me out. He would listen although it was obvious to me now that the topic distressed him.

"Good brother listen on I beg. I think I might have a way of putting paid to Jamie's designs on the English throne. Although the relationship between Jamie and Elizabeth is sound as we speak, it has not always been so, and need not be again. Perhaps we can ensure that the bond between them shrivels and dies, at the same time making good the future of our sons and heirs."

Thome pondered my words for a while, but the darting movements of his eyes, his clasping and unclasping of his knees, told me that he could not see where my words were leading.

Although I could not tell if the time was right to tell him of my plans as he was disturbed and restless, not, I think, receptive to what I was about to unfold, I decided to grasp the nettle and blurted out, "Let's start a war between the nations."

Thome looked at me fixedly and in utter silence for a few seconds. The room was deathly quiet, and but for the laughter which reached us from the holmelands about the river as the women and bairns worked in the fields, I could have felt myself in the presence of a storm which was about to break. Thome leaned forward in his chair, and almost doubled up, put his head between his knees. And then the storm broke in cackle after cackle of raucous laughter. He gave way to unrestrained,

uncontrollable laughter which turned his complexion florid, a vein clearly beating in his forehead. "Oh Will, Will you have done outrageous things in your time, lived life on the edge. I fear your outlandish escapades on the one hand, and constant harassment by the English on the other, have turned your brain. There were tears of merriment flooding from his eyes as he said this. "How can a small band of Armstrongs take on the might of England? Come to your senses man." And then, with a complete reversal of his mood, "I will not jeopardise the future of my bairns in such a hairbrain, futile undertaking."

I sat and let the emotion wane.

When he calmed I spoke again, softly but with authority. "Thome I never thought for one second that the Armstrongs would do this alone. I am thinking on a bigger scale. I am thinking of involving all the Scottish Border clans and, aye, even some of Tynedale and Redesdale who have no allegiance to their queen."

"Why man your head is in the clouds." Tom spat the words with venom. "When have the Border clans ever acted in unison? Why right now, as we speak, the Armstrongs alone are at feud with half a dozen of the other clans. That does not include the Johnsons who wield such power and use it at every call to subdue us. You live in a fool's paradise if you think that we can all sing together."

Thome, Thome. History must agree with you. History clearly shows that the Border clans have never seen eye to eye, acted in mutual respect. Always there have been feuds, ever lasting feuds between us and even our near neighbours. True they will never be resolved, cannot be resolved. Such it is, so it ever will be. In that you speak the truth, the clans will always have some reason to resent and hate each other. But think on it Thome, the union of the two crowns of Scotland and England will change our lives, call to question the need for the buffer state of the Border. Jamie makes no secret of the fact that he would see the Armstrongs perish. He has never been able to completely control us. The Union would give him the power and the means to finally do so. Once in England he will be able to deal us the death blow he has always desired and we will be powerless to stop it, do anything about it. Add to that the questionable loyalty of some of our neighbours, some of the Teviotdales for instance, and I know we are about to suffer as we have never suffered before." I paused thinking on what I had just said, amazed that I had put into words often fleeting thoughts that, until now, had never reached any cohesion in my mind, any conclusion.

Thome looked at me, troubled face; sadness in his eyes. A sadness which included a realization that all I said was true and would come to pass. "True, true my bonny lad," he whispered slowly as he looked reflectively, pensively at a large knot in the wooden floor. Did he think on the end of a Border way of life that had existed for generations? "I begin to understand the conclusions you have reached. You think for the common good, the wellbeing of the clans, that all differences should be forgotten, that such as the Johnsons and ourselves could for once work together for the future. Together the clans of the valleys could deal such a blow against the English that they would be bound to retaliate on a similar scale. Then watch which way the wind blows."

"Exactly, Thome. I think the feuds and differences between the clans pale into insignificance compared to what is about to come. To convince the clans of Annandale, Ewesdale, Eskdale and the rest of Liddesdale will not be easy, but surely they will see the benefit of acting in unison now.

"I believe there will be much argument and discussion on the matter. Feuds will not easily be dismissed or put aside. Again, many might agree in principal but dislike the timing. It might be that Elizabeth will last much longer. Long enough for any great raid or its aftermath to have cooled and thus not have the effect we might desire. I think you will need the eloquence of our Border Bards to convince such as sour-faced Johnson of Annandale. The Irvings of Stakeheugh and Bonshaw would not need much convincing. When did they ever where a fight and resultant spoil were in the offing? But tell me Will, you talked much of your personal position, at odds with the English. How much of what you say and plan is to gratify your own feelings, your own lust for revenge on the English authorities. The clans from here to Dryhope and Caelaverock know of your personal vendetta with the English, consider you a poisoned thorn in their side when it comes to maintaining a low profile with the bastards."



**Bonshaw Tower. One of the Strongholds of the Irvines.**

"True Thome. I have let the bitterness of my thoughts on how I am constantly badgered and hounded by the English often override the bigger picture of events which are certainly to come. But even as I rode to Mangerton this morning, I began to see that I must put aside personal bitterness and act for the good of our people. That's not to say I wouldn't enjoy sinking this into the hearts of a few of the Carlisle or Berwick garrisons when the time comes. "I clenched my fist longingly and resolutely around the hilt of my dirk.

"I note your plans go further than just the outline of an idea brother. You speak of the garrisons of the English. Does that mean you have decided on the places to be raided already?"

"No. That is for debate by those willing to be involved, but I feel whatever is decided it must have real effect .Effect that will set the alarm bells ringing from end to end of the English Border and result in a presence against us that must include the garrisons of the main Border towns. Mind you, much as I would like Carlisle and that bastard Scrope to come out against us, we must stick to the middle ways, the well known raiding routes.That doesn't mean to say we can't raise a storm, even if we raid only Tynedale. If we do it with such numbers and purpose the news of it will set the alarm bells ringing from here to Elizabeth, not just to the domain of the old Scrope and the western marches. Stick to where we know the byways well and can cover our retreat".

"My liking for your proposal grows Will but I see that it will need to be a special rode. You mean it be blatant and universal, known throughout the marches once we are on the hoof. Attract immediate retaliation from a Tynedale host as big as the one we put into the field. But surely this brings its own dangers not least that our return to the fastnesses of the

valleys, Tarass and the Rig, will be slow compared to a party in pursuit with solely offence in mind, the retrieval of their beasts secondary to their main intention." Thome shook his head and sighed as the problems to be encompassed began to weigh heavy on his mind.

"Think on it Thome," I said with some steel in my voice, "the English will be amazed and desperate once word gets round of the size of the raid, the vast numbers of beasts lifted, and the audacity of it, carried out in daylight with no thought of stealth or hesitation. Advertised to the heavens! But again their response would not, could not be immediate. To raise what would amount to a virtual army in retaliation would take a couple of days. I agree we would welcome wholeheartedly a swift response, counter attack against us whilst feelings were still high. Especially as such a counter attack would be heedless of the truce that exists between the two countries. Therein lies the success of our enterprise. We must strike, not just at outlying onsets and isolated towers but at the very heart of authority: Chipchase and Simonburn. We must reive and more. Have the Herons licking their wounds and thirsting for revenge, the Ridleys of Willimoteswick and Charltons of Hesleyside after our blood. Strike such as the Herons, reive their beasts, burn their lands and the word will be in London before we tether the first Tynedale horse on Liddesdale lands. Such are the clans of Tynedale that they will not wait for or heed any directive from Elizabeth. They will be upon us long before she has finished her deliberations, cautious bitch that she is, and thus hopefully we will have lit the fuse of a cracker that will sizzle soundly around the nations and maybe singe a beard or two in high places, even that of the old crone Elizabeth herself in the English capital."



**Simonburn Village Today. (Catherine Cookson Country Now).**

Thome deliberated and fidgeted for minutes on end, turning this way and that in his chair which creaked in unison with the thoughts that

one minute brought a look of steel and determination, the next doubt and hesitation.

I sat there looking at him, observing the changes and saw that alternatively he was for and against the enterprise. Watching him brought it home to me just how important it was that Thome espoused the cause. In his hesitation I saw that my cause, yes mine, was lost before it was begun. In his fleeting looks I saw that he was chief of the clan after all. Without him none of the other clans of the four valleys would countenance such a bold and outrageous scheme; a scheme that would have far-reaching reverberations throughout the valleys whatever the outcome of it.

At last Thome broke the silence. He had made a decision within himself, all doubts eradicated.

His face said it all.

"Well let's away and see the grim-faced Johnson. If we can win him over the rest of the clans of Annandale will follow. I see no problem with the lads of Liddesdale should we put our cause with passion yet objectivity. Once the clans of Eskdale and Ewesdale see our lead they will follow, not need much convincing. If we want to maintain our way of life right across the Border valleys then the enterprise, the raid of Tynedale will take place with the wholehearted support of all. Away, man for Lochwood and the future".

And so the clans of the four valleys of Ewesdale, Eskdale, Annandale and Liddesdale raided both north and south Tynedale. We had one objective in mind-to create havoc and mayhem in the English dales, reive cattle and sheep on a scale never known previously and cause such distress and want among its people that the call for redress from the English Warden would be both vehement and bitter. Such would be the public outcry, so loud and incessant that the English Queen, Elizabeth, would herself demand action from James of Scotland. His eloquent, focused response would signify nothing as usual and Elizabeth would begin to question the choice of James as her successor. If he could not control his own border clans how would he fare with two countries to rule?

Thus on 6th October 1593 we met at the Tourneyholm at Kershopefoot, a vast, open and level meadow well suited for the enormous throng of men and horses from the four valleys. There were Armstrongs, [Elliots](#), Crosers from Liddesdale and Eskdale with a good

turnout from the Irvings of Stakeheugh. The numbers were significantly swelled by the Johnsons and Murrays of Annandale. The Scotts of Ewesdale, magnificent in full battle raiment, added to a force which I estimated to be a thousand strong.



The mood of the men was both light and merry and as I walked slowly round the holm I was greeted on all sides, at every turn, with encouragement and humour. Will Elliot of Dinlabyre, a great organiser and motivator, had agreed to lead the raid and was merciless in his banter as I passed him by. At the moment of meeting he was in serious conversation with Johnson of Lochwood, but turned, grin from ear to ear and said, "Well, Will, surely you are happy now? For a change it will be you harassing the English bastards. Mind you it will be the Ellots who will show you how to do it with style. Stick close to me when we cross the Lamisik ford and I will show you how to skelp the arse of an Englishman so well that he will never ride against the Scots again. You have been too soft with them Will. I'll show you how to live a life of ease free from their cumber." He laughed out loud. Even poker-faced Johnson was affected by the humour. His lips turned upwards and the fleeting sight of some rather blackened uneven teeth were briefly apparent, before the more usual sombre, stern visage re-emerged.

"Well thank you for the concern my friend", I retorted. "Perhaps it is time the Elliot took a lead in showing the lads of Mangerton and Whithaugh how to strike a blow at the English. Mind you it will be the first time in my experience but we Armstrongs are always ready to acknowledge the prowess of such superior beings as yourselves."

Will Elliot and I looked at each other and laughed heartily, both aware that the banter was friendly. Elliots and Armstrongs had lived in unison for generations, supported each other through thick and thin. The

repartee was nothing but a humorous recognition of the trials that I had often experienced in the face of the English and Will Elliot's ability to make light of it. For all the humour it was plain that he knew of my predicament with the English and he would back me to the hilt to remedy that: that and the cause of the continued well-being of the Border way of life and the Border clans.

I looked at him with love and respect but could not resist a final quip, "If you are supposedly in charge of this rabble. Call them to horse and let's move on. The day is in danger of getting old yet you dawdle here like any old wifie discussing the price of bread at Carlisle market. Call us to arms Will. We must away up the Kershope burn to the Lamisik and into Tynedale before the sun is at its highest". Will winked. "Of course, being an Armstrong, you have assessed the situation succinctly. Us lesser mortals have been content to renew old acquaintances, share the latest crack and gossip. We have forgotten why we are here".

With that Will gave three blasts from the horn that always hung at his side during a raid. Immediately the conversations and laughter ceased but a low murmuring of expectation could be heard as group by group the clans turned to Elliot of Dinlabyre as he stood calmly but resolutely at Will of Greena's stone and faced them. His eyes were steely as he looked hard at those close by. Occasionally he looked above the heads of the nearest clansmen, who were sat at his feet or squatting on their haunches, and, with a louder voice, spoke directly to the men some fifty yards further afield.

"My friends we have work to do this day. We are united in our cause. We are united in our aim. This day we strike a blow for the future of the Scottish Border clans. For the future lads! Mind that what we do today is not only for ourselves, not only for our wives and bairns, but for those who will come after us and bear the names that we are proud of. Our way of life, so often used to the advantage of those who reckon to rule over us, is now being questioned, is now an embarrassment to those same rulers. Four centuries of our way of life is threatened. Today we take the first step in protecting our ways, our homelands, our descendents. So come, let's away. We all know the route. Keep to the plans already decided. Once we cross the Lamisik Ford split up and head for the targets already agreed. As some of you have further to go than others and thus a more difficult return to your homes remember to hit hard and quick and leave a few of your lads in ambushment on the roads and byways to cover your retreat. Those of you who head for Lewisburn and Falstone and thus a quick return must head back yet again but only as far as the Lamisik. Leave the beasts stolen between Red Moss and Puddingburn.

Don't tarry, not even for the womenfolk but get back to Lamisik as fast as possible. There you will wait in ambush to cover the rear of those who will return from Bellingham, the Hole and the Raw. Don't forget to leave a few of our best along the Kershope Burn within striking distance of each other. These can head for the Lamisik if need be or cover the retreat of any of our slow moving parties heading for Liddesdale. Enough! The best of luck to you all! We meet again on the Park tomorrow at twilight."

With that horses were mounted. There were many words of encouragement passed from man to man, neighbour to neighbour; many a quiet smile from men eager to be off and moving, keen to see the day's work begin. We all made for the ford across the Liddel and headed east up the Kershope Burn. Neighbour conversed with neighbour as the long train of a thousand mounted clansmen clattered along the stony, narrow path that wound its way up to the Lamisik ford before turning still further east and heading down to Lewisburn. The mood of all was bright merry and optimistic yet there was a focus and seriousness behind the quip and rejoinder. An awareness that the raids carried out this day and the morrow could have far-reaching effects on our future. Even if all went in our favour we could expect nothing else than a massive retaliation from the English clans of Tynedale. Should it go wrong and, perchance the English were ready for our coming, then some of us would not see the Park again. All of us knew it had taken days to finalise our plans, to decide which "toons" should be hit and when. Yet it was uncanny how, on many an occasion, such plans leaked out and were fed to our opponents without our knowing, often, until it was too late. Thus the apprehension was apparent in a look, the trembling of a voice, the involuntary backward glance; and all amid the light-hearted banter.

We parted at the Ford with broad smiles and firm hand-shakes. Some of us even dismounted and embraced; hung on to each other as if this was the last meeting in this world. It would be for some! Even Johnson, who, with the Irvings of Stakeheugh, was to target Bellingham and surrounding areas, was overcome with a semblance of emotion as he looked fixedly at the Laird of Larriston, today his partner in an action which wholly depended on the co-operation of all, tomorrow his enemy in a feud, which would it seems, never be resolved. It had lasted for generations.

Thus we headed for Tynedale. I was with the force which would attack Tarsset, the country of the Hunters and Milburns. In a little valley to the north- east end of the dale were the towers and bastilles of the Redheughe, the Bog Head, the Starr Head, the Water Head, the High Field, Black Middens and the Kyme. I was well aware of the ferocity of the

inmates of these places, their ability to defend themselves, to give as well as they got. They would fight for their land with tooth and claw, no respect for any adversary, whatever the reputation.

The ground was fertile in places but its biggest asset was the rich grass, sheltered from the bitter north winds by the trees which grew in the lee of the hill tops. It was a vast area, capable of sustaining many beasts.

That was its attraction to us. Should we succeed in stealing the kye and sheep of Tarsset we were sure to be subject to reprisal on a grand scale. If that was our design, then we really chancing our arm. A long way from home, no hope of succour from family or friend, the risk of failure in this enterprise was very high.

The Hunters and Milburns did not take prisoners for ransom. Their fury was such, that should they be attacked, they had but one aim. That aim was to kill, maim and kill, any intruder who threatened their land, their livelihood. They were not selective, dwelt not on thoughts of gain from the capture of any notable offender. To threaten the lands of Tarsset was to invite death unless the foray was well orchestrated and had the element of surprise. Thus, in the past, it was always a night-time raid.

To attack openly in daytime, even with considerable numbers, was a gamble which had the nerve ends tingling and the heart thumping.

I had raided Tarsset-dale twice before in the last ten years and knew the ferocity of the tribes there. I was also well aware that following my two forays into the lands of Genkin Hunter and Bartie Milburn there had been massive reprisals into the Liddel country. Mangerton and Whithaugh had, on each occasion, suffered extensively, far worse than the rest of Liddesdale. This was not just because these were in southern parts of the valley. It was a deliberate decision of the Milburns and Hunters to strike at the core of the power of the Armstrongs. Their intention had been to cut out the heart of the clan and leave its extremities, the remaining graynes dotted all over the valleys of Ewes and Liddel, to wither and die.

Although they had never succeeded in their aim, they had left many a wife and bairn of the two valleys bereft of husband and father.

If precedent prevailed, whatever the outcome of today's raid, the houses of Mangerton and Whithaugh could expect to see the clans of this particular part of Tynedale knocking at their doors within the week. It would not be a social call!

We breasted the rise at the Gatehouse to find that the three houses there were empty. Strange I thought as, strategically, Gatehouse was in effect the guardhouse of the valley. There would be no engagement with the people who inhabited the stronghouses here. We looked down towards the Redheughe and ,to our right, in the distance, Black Middens. To the west, nestling in the trees but still unseen as yet were the bastles and towers of the High Field, the Water Head, the Hill Head, the Bog Head, and Kyme.



**Gatehouse Bastle Today.**

Just as I was going to look away from the valley, ensure that there was no sign of life at the Gatehouse now behind us, I saw a movement at the edge of the wall enclosing the meagre vegetable plots. Before I could voice my concern an Elliot of Thorlieshope, who had seen the obvious danger should the man escape and run to the east to warn the inhabitants of Redheughe and Black Middens, dismounted and ran nimbly and silently across to the corner of the wall. In one agile bound he was over it. We heard a muffled scream. Within a couple of seconds Elliot's head appeared above the wall. He smiled at us, before lifting the body on to the top of the wall, springing back over himself, and at the same time pulling the dead weight of what appeared to be a young boy down with him. The whole incident had taken less than a minute. It was highly unlikely that anyone further down the valley would have seen a thing.



**Black Middens Bastle House.**

Elliot dragged the body of the boy towards us. As he did so I could see that the boy was alive; merely concussed. There was blood oozing from the back of his head. He had taken a heavy blow from the hilt of Elliot's sword.

Elliot dropped the boy outside the door of one of the stronghouses and we waited for him to come round.

It was clear that whoever had been at the Gatehouse knew we were coming, but had been given very short notice of our imminent arrival. This boy had hurriedly left his chores in the vegetable plot, obvious from the soil-encrusted hands and forearms, to run east and warn the others of the valley. He had managed to only clear the wall before we reached the yard of the houses and was waiting his opportunity to run for the open slopes of the valley.

His presence begged the question. Were there other people here, now in hiding? Were there others on the outside of the wall?

I gestured to three of the riders to dismount and walk the inner side of the walls, quite easy to see through in places, being dry stone and in need of urgent repair at many points along their line.

There was nobody else lurking on the outside, awaiting the chance to run hard for the valley.

With a few murmurs the boy came round. He was very young and very scared. His hands moved to the back of his head and he winced with pain as he gingerly touched the blood that was even now beginning to congeal both at the wound and on the back of the filthy rag that was

wound around his neck. He moved his hands to cover his face, pulled his knees up to his head in a futile and puerile attempt to conceal himself, and began to sob, slowly at first.

I looked at the boy and could not help but feel some pity for the frail, undernourished urchin. His life would be a hard one, even now, at his tender age. It would get only harder as he grew. Before he reached manhood he would probably lose one or both of his parents as well as brothers and sisters. At present he was a mere waif caught up in a way of life which brought him nothing but misery. With time the grief and disillusion would be superseded by feelings of hatred, enmity for anyone and everyone. Perception of good and evil would become warped and emotions would harden at the same rate as the muscles of his sinewy body; his mind would know only revenge and retribution.

The slim frame of the boy heaved as the sobs increased in intensity and number as body and soul became engulfed with self pity.

I glanced at others of our party who viewed the boy in a different light. From the looks of disdain, abject hatred, this was not a mere boy before them. They saw only an enemy.

My reverie was broken by other, more urgent thoughts that raced to the front of my mind. We had a job to do here. There was no time to think on the absurdity and folly of our way of life.

"Tie him up and lock him in the vault of the house behind us. Make sure to gag him. You," I pointed to one of the Hillhouse Elliots, "Go above the vault and lock the hatch that leads from the vault, if you will. Take your brother and break up any ladders that you come upon."

In the lower part of the valley herds of cattle moved slowly across the flatlands neighbouring the burn, heads down, contentedly taking their fill of the last of the summer grass, whilst on the gentle slopes leading down to the pasture, just below the tree-line, directly north and south of the steadings of the Milburns, small flocks of sheep cropped the shorter grass.

Women and children were working in the cultivated strips of ground, harvesting the last of the summer fruit and root vegetables. Some were turning the ground, ready for next spring.

Further afield a few others could be seen shepherding the flocks or idling their time in purportedly keeping an eye on the herds of cattle.

Smoke escaped from almost every chimney.

The Milburns and Hunters were at home!

Our raiding party was about a hundred and fifty strong. I knew from past experience, having reived in the area on two occasions before, that we easily outnumbered the residents of this part of Tarsetdale. Yet I was hesitant in giving the order to move on. The Milburns and Hunters would fight to the death rather than succumb to any raid against their homes and livelihoods. Not for them to turn and run at any provocation. They would stand and fight to the last. I knew this from the ferocity of their defence on my last visits.

Now that we had arrived I did not relish the confrontation.

"Steady lads," I restrained two of our riders who were about to move off. It was clear to me that they had never been in Tarsetdale before today. "Better that we tarry just a little while longer, I think. We should watch for a few more minutes before we make for the valley. The Redheughe and Black Middens do not present us with a problem should we take them with complete surprise and ensure that no-one escapes to the east and the steadings up on the slope there." I pointed to the trees in the distance which hid the homes of some of the fiercest men I had ever encountered. "Should they be warned of our presence then we will have the devil of a fight on our hands. Do not forget, my friends, the purpose of our visit. We steal their beasts and head for home. We invite them to follow, preferably tomorrow. If we can achieve the theft today, then I am sure that we will not be pursued on our homeward journey as they have not the numbers to trouble us as long as we stay together. They would be fools to try the pursuit."

I looked around the faces of the men who had been my friends throughout my life. Some nodded, past experience making them fully appreciative of the wisdom of my words. Others looked on with expressions of incredulity. They obviously thought that the raid would be easy, that given the number of steadings on view from here at the Gatehouse, it was clear that opposition would be small.

Further explanation was called for.

"Were we to get embroiled in fierce resistance from the indwellers we would become fragmented, and even though outnumbered, they would force us into a combat where our strength would be split into minor

engagements across their lands. Then we would not seem so formidable. It is better that we think how we are best to achieve our aim rather than rush headlong into the fray. We are dealing with a people here who are careless of their personal well-being when it comes to defending home and insight. I tell you truly they are formidable opponents."

I was silent. I allowed my words to sink into the minds of men who knew that I had been here before, who knew I had experienced the might and wrath of the Milburns and Hunters.

Seeing that I had the attention of all and that they looked upon me now with faces animated with a hint of appreciation and more importantly, anticipation of what I should say next, I asked that they should sit and take in the lie of the land that surrounded us.

After a few minutes in which there was almost complete silence I turned to Johnstone and asked if he remembered our last visit to the dale of the Tarsset, especially the gently sloping ground to the east where the bastilles and towers were hidden in the trees.

"I remember well, Will, as if it were yesterday, although it is ten years since I was last here. Beyond the holmelands bordering Black Middens the Tarsset runs through a narrow valley. On the northern slope are the steadings of the Waterhead and others."

"Good. Then you will take fifty of our party and make your way east until you have the steadings behind you. You must do this without attracting any attention at all so I suggest that you take the route north of here for about half a mile and then head east. In that way you will pass the steadings, but at a distance from them that will avoid any sighting. When you are confident that you have by-passed them, turn, travel south and then progress west again until you are within a reasonable distance of the Kyme. There you will wait until you see how the day progresses. Will you do this for me?"

Johnstone readily agreed and looked to the men of his clan for the fifty he would need.

I then addressed the remainder of the men present and asked for fifty who would follow in the wake of Johnstone but cut their journey at a point where they could turn south again and head for the banks of the Tarsset. In this way the most ferocious of the tribesmen of Tarssetdale would be cut off from the west from their brothers lower down the valley at the Redheughe and Black Middens. Should they decide to attack, which was

very probable once they were aware of what was afoot, they would be harried from the east by the party led by Elliot of Dinlabyre who readily agreed to the involvement.

This alone would prove to be an effective deterrent whilst I and the remaining fifty of the Scots rustled the flocks and herds which grazed before us as we looked down upon the valley from the Gatehouse.

"Are you in agreement with what I have in mind, or does anyone see a better way?" I paused as I waited for some response. I could tell from the looks of confidence that these men would put their trust in me. It was as well that they did so. They had not experienced the utter ferocity of the Milburns and Hunters.

Once we left the Gatehouse it was a good mile to the Black Middens over ground where we would be spotted long before we reached our goal. It was decided that our party should split into two groups of which one would head north, the other south, and take advantage of the hills on either side to camouflage our movements. Once both parties were behind Black Middens then we would rejoin and hopefully surprise the inmates of both that place and the Redheughe. In concert we would ride with purpose back to the west, rounding up the cattle and sheep as we went. We would ignore any opposition, concentrate on lifting the beasts. It was unlikely that there would be much as most would flee at our coming, not in fear I was sure of that, but in an attempt to reach the other bastilles, Water Head, Bog Head, High Field and Kyme, where the real opposition to our inroads was located.

"To recap lads: Here is the way of it. Elliot of Hudshouse will take our friends of the Hillhouse and Thorlieshope east of the Kyme and wait there. Should you," I said, looking at my old friend Hudshouse, hear any noise which warns you that the English are moving west, then you harry from the rear. The Armstrongs of Calfhills, with the Ellots of Billhope and Twiselhope will position themselves behind Black Middens ready to cut off the Hunters and Milburns as they try to move in on the rest of us lifting the beasts. Does everyone understand?"

The looks of resolution said it all. These men were ready to pit their wits against the might of Tarsdale.

Again we wished each other luck and the two parties who had the furthest to travel moved off together. We would wait for another half hour before we started on our own part of the undertaking.

I decided that we should spend the time searching the three bastilles of Gatehouse. It troubled me that there was had been no reception party waiting for us on our arrival.

The houses themselves were surely empty with no evidence of a hurried departure. There were barns and outhouses which, normally I would not have thought worthy of inspection, but on this occasion, in this place, I decided that they must be worth investigating.

Three of the five outhouses contained nothing but some hay and a few farm implements, some basic horse tack.

As I turned away from the fourth barn, having carried out only a cursory inspection of its contents I heard the faintest of whimpers from the loft. I banged the door closed. It had seen better days and had dropped on its hinges, thus it was with some effort that I eventually shot home the wooden bolt.

I walked back across the yard to three of the Blackburn Armstrongs who were lying against the outside wall.

"We are not alone," I said quietly. In a low voice I told them of what I had heard and that whoever was in the loft was unaware that I knew of their presence there. I asked one of the Blackburns to warn the others of my concern that the dwellers of this place were in hiding, maybe ready to spring a counter attack on us once we headed away for the valley. I also voiced the thought that I felt there were women and children hiding in the hay loft. The whimper, to my mind, was that of a child.

Within seconds we were joined by another dozen of our party. We walked back to the barn without a word, without a sound.

Again I was confronted by the rickety door, aware that as soon as I began to open it whoever was hiding there would know of my return. Past experience and present intuition told me that the whimper of a child did not mean that only children were behind the door. Where there were children there were parents. Where there were parents there were often men: men who would defend their wives and children to the last.

I shot the wooden bolt. It creaked loudly as it divorced itself from its stay. Whoever was hiding there were aware of my return.

Tentatively I started to swing the door open when all of a sudden it was wrenched from my grasp and accelerated outwards with a violent

shudder. Three men emerged, panic written on their faces but with a resolve in their eyes that said they would defend their own as best they could. From inside the barn the single whimper of just a couple of minutes ago had become a cacophony of screams and wails as women and children awaited the outcome of the confrontation.

The men brandished only sickles and cudgels, clearly not fighting men of the best sort, yet big, burly and powerfully built. Within moments two had hit the ground, pole-axed by deft and strong downward blows from the saddle. They lay there, traumatised by the quickness and severe hurt of the hits.

The third man was a colossus with aggression and fighting prowess to match his build. He sprang at one of the Falnash Elliots and dragged him from the saddle. Even when he was struck on back and shoulders with the flat side of many a sword, he continued to grapple with Falnash, who struggled ineffectively to break the hold of the massive hands: hands that were spanned around his neck.

With a vicious blow to the head from one of the cudgels dropped by one of his unfortunate companions I sent him to oblivion. I heaved, a sharp intake of breath necessary following the strength and heart I had put into the blow. A grunt escaped me as I turned the great body over to face the sky. It was my old adversary, Genkin Hunter. He was the watchman for the valley on this day.

He had not expected such a force from the Scottish side. Not on this day or the night to follow. Not ever.

"Bring out the women and bairns. Treat them with respect, mind, but tie them also. Put all in the vault with the boy. Make sure this great carl is well bound," I pointed to Hunter, " he has the strength of two of us mere mortals and will break the rope with ease should any knot be slack. We must be on our way now."

We had given enough time for our advance parties to be in place. It was now our turn to move off. Half of us headed north, half south as planned, skirted the low hills on either side of the valley and met up again to the east of Black Middens. We arrived without detection, without incident.

The Twislehope and Billhope Elliots with the Armstrongs of Calfhills were already there, concealed in the trees that verged on the slopes of

the valley. I acknowledged their presence with the wave of an arm and spoke quickly to my companions.

"Half of us ride for the hillsides and round up the sheep, the rest down the centre of the valley for the cattle. Make what progress you can. We meet again at Lewisburn. Let's away!"

My party split and without further ado headed straight for the beasts surrounding Black Middens and the Redheughe. Within a minute women and children were running for the safety of the stronghouses, the vault, then ladder to the upper floor which would be pulled up after them, hatch down and bolted. Sanctuary. The men made a futile effort to round up the cattle and lead them to the houses but they were too late. Horses and riders bearing down upon them with speed and purpose they abandoned their fruitless aim and ran after the women and children. Some tried to evade our riders and head for the Water Head but were run down before they had sprinted thirty or forty yards.

One of the English put a horn to his lips and was just able to sound a strident alarm before it was dashed from his lips and he was sent sprawling to the ground, senseless.

At the sound both the Calfhill Armstrong raiders and the Thorlieshope Elliots were alert to what would surely happen next.

The screech of the horn had the Hunters and Milburns of the towers and bastilles of the upper slopes of the valley scurrying for arms, running to the stabling to bring out the horses. They knew that a raid was taking place on their lands but many were puzzled that it should be happening now, in the daytime.

Within a couple of minutes they were away, full pelt down the hillside towards the flatlands and their precious beasts. They numbered about thirty riders, well armed, vicious in their intent. As they broke the tree-line and headed for the holme they suddenly realised that they had run straight into an ambush. There, in front of them, two deep, stretched in a line, were about fifty men. They did not know who these men were, only that they were the enemy.

Initially focused on the ambush party they did not immediately see that further to the west another group were leading their sheep and cattle away. When they did there was no hesitation, with screams of hatred and defiance they bore down on Calfhill and his crew, even though outnumbered almost two to one.

Before they reached Calfhills they were aware of the thundering of hooves to their rear. Shocked, hesitating as to which way to turn, they lost the initiative, and were surrounded by one hundred of the best of the Scottish valleys.

It was useless to resist. The Hunters and Milburns, for once bettered by not only a superior force in numbers, but also a plan of campaign which left them smarting at their own ineptitude and impotency, wheeled round and round on their steaming, nervous horses, as if looking for a way out of a predicament which quite clearly was a source of telling embarrassment.

Calfhills, looking from one to the other of men of Tarsset spoke briefly. His words were to the point, a hint of a threat in the flat monotone. "Go back to your houses and stay there. There is nothing to gain by forcing the issue here, right now with us, or indeed, pursuing us once we have left. You see to the west many other riders. They are of our party. Together we are too strong for any you can muster from this valley. Live to fight another day my friends. You would be wise to do so."

Calfhills signalled to his men to break the circle of riders that surrounded the Tarssets, to give them room to ride back the way they came.

As they left there was defiance and hatred on every face. Bartie Milburn turned to face Calfhills as he left the Scots, "Tell me, sir, who are you? I would like to pay you a return visit on one of these fine nights when you will find that you have bitten off more than you can chew. The Milburns and Hunters will not forget this day with ease of conscience. If it takes until Hell freezes over I will have my revenge for this day's work."

"I think I owe you at least my name but do not be too sure that you will find it easy to raid my lands. Day or night my lands are well marshalled. I do not rely on old wifies and bairns to patrol my ground."

There was a great hoot of laughter from the Scots at this last remark. Milburn snarled and went for the sword at his side.

Calfhills, now more animated, spoke loudly and clearly, "My name is Armstrong of Calfhills in the valley of the Wauchope. You are welcome anytime, my friend. Now be off before I change my mind and gut you on the spot."

The Milburns and Hunters left with one last rejoinder from Bartie, "I know of the place. It is to the west of the valley of the Esk. Not my usual stamping ground, I have not made a single house call in that direction. But be assured that I will call on you soon. Without invitation I might add." He spurred his horse and the rest followed.

The Calfhills and the Elliots reined west and galloped to catch up with the party who were driving the beasts. Not a single person was to be seen in the valley of the Tarsset. No doubt it would be some time before they would show a face. In the stronghouses of the Water Head, the Bog Head, the Hillhouse, the High Feilde, the Starr Head and the Kyme there would be much soul-searching, much self-reproachment and amazement. Why such a raid, such numbers, in the day-time? It beggared belief. Rest assured it would not happen again. From now on the holmelands would be well guarded both day and night.

They would already be planning their revenge.



Remains of a Tarsset Bastle House.

We reached Lewisburn without incident, any challenge. From there to the Bloody Bush and the head of Kershope where we were met by the Armstrongs who had raided Falstone, housed the product of their reive in the secluded valleys of the Puddingburn and returned as some insurance for our safe return. No doubt many eyes watched our progress but were reluctant to pursue, given our numbers.

This was exactly what we wanted. Within the day surely the clans of Tarsset, Bellingham, Simonburn and Chipchase would be after our blood, meeting to thrash out their response to our audacious rode?

Surely Heron of Chipchase, a man with the ear of Border authority, would be baying for our blood before the stolen beasts were settled for the night?

Surely the theft of so many beasts, across such a wide area would sound the alarm bells throughout the border, signifying that law and order were truly out of control on the Scottish side?

Elizabeth would demand justice for the raids, insist that James VI ensured that the Scots answered for their crimes.

As I sit here in the warmth of the fire at Morton Rigg I am still waiting for the response from the Tynedales.

Petitions for justice came thick and fast to Scottish authority and the crown. As is the wont of higher authority there was much discourse, many men who knew exactly how to deal with the situation.

True to form nothing came to pass. Elizabeth was quiet, the relationship with James VI, unaffected.

The scale of the raid did not result in a breakdown of Scottish, English relationship.

The English clans were quiet for a while but in the fullness of time, in many a raid, ostensibly unrelated to the Great Raid of Tynedale, but with the sheer audacity of the raid still in the forefront of their minds, the humiliation still festering in many a breast, they exacted their retribution in the time-honoured way.

The reive.

#### FOOTNOTE.

The raid of Tynedale did take place. The clans of the four valleys met, argued, discussed and argued again the merits or otherwise of the enterprise.

All were agreed on one point however. The way of life which had existed for nigh on three centuries would come to an end sooner than later. All were in accord that although they were less powerful, exerted

less influence in the Borderland than in the time of their grandfathers, they would not give up home and lands without a fight.

Eventually they would agree that their only worthwhile strategy, indeed option, was to endeavour to upset the balance of power. To create a discord between James VI and Elizabeth I: to hopefully ensure that the throne of England did not become the property of the Scottish King. It was a desire which eventually became a common cause to the majority of the Scottish border clans.

In unison they raided Bellingham, Haydon Bridge and Hexham and all steadings and onsets over a vast area of south and north Tynedale. They lifted many beasts and much insight and then waited for retaliation and retribution from the English clans.

It never came as a mass assault on the four valleys. The raid of Tynedale, engineered to ultimately prevent the Union of the Crowns, failed.

Elizabeth I clung to life for another ten years. In that time the relationship between the two monarchs did not blossom, neither did it wither. In that ten years the Scottish English Borders witnessed an unprecedented level of lawlessness on both sides, but the bond between the self-opinionated James and the failing Elizabeth was sufficiently strong to see the day when James eventually crossed the Border to sit on the throne of England.

It would be many years before he entered Scotland again but the pandering aristocracy of Scotland, the Lairds of the Borders, both English and Scottish, who curried favour for both land and title, were only too keen to carry out his irrational, vituperative demands. James VI's intentions were all too clear. His aim was to rid the Scottish Borders of those clans who had relentlessly proved to be an embarrassment to his rule in Scotland and that of his grandfather before him.

He had not forgotten, among other things, the Great Raid of Tynedale. For this, and notably, Ill Week, the Scottish Border tribes would pay dearly, either at the end of a rope, in the bogs of Northern Ireland after transportation or in the garrison towns of Flanders as conscripts to the British army.

The Border valleys would be emptied of the once proud, once indomitable people who had eked a living out of a hostile land for centuries.

But the names still survive in the four valleys of Ewes, Esk, Annan and Liddel. The Border Reivers may be gone but the resilience of their descendents is still there.



**Border Reivers at Gilnockie Tower.**