

DICK THE DEVIL'S BAIRNS

Breaking the Border Mafia



Jon Tait

For Christopher Young

With thanks to Adrian Newman, Wayne Charlton, my wife Sally, son Jack, and Stewart Bonney at *The Northumbrian* magazine, where a version of the introduction first appeared.



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INTRODUCTION: A FRIEND OF OURS

THE OUTLAW Gawen Redhead slept like a badger curled in the hollowed, decaying trunk of an old oak tree surrounded by nocturnal noises in the dark; the steady lapping run of the Coquet shimmered in moonlight, the yelp of a vixen. The swish of long grass in a meadow greyed to a negative and swayed to dance by winds, the rustle of leaves in the canopy of the forest. The bleat of disturbed sheep, wiry wool white under stars, yet safe in that belly bleached as driftwood, of rings and rough bark, the hollow knock. There is no silence in the night.

The rim of Gawen's steel helmet shading his eyes in blackness, his beard now wild as a bramble bush tangled in thorn, as if he himself was growing within the tree. The peaty smell of mulch and mushrooms and the wet squelch of a bog, the lightness of bracken in soft rain, the scent of a man on the run missed by the wet nostrils of a deer twitched in air before bowing down to drink at a burn in the broken golden light of the woods dappled by spores at dawn.

Yet these were once Gawen's hills and his gang rode high and handsome by the grey outcrops of limestone, weathered and cracked in an ice age long gone, past deposits of receding caps scratched over the valleys and gouged to scree slopes, through purple heather and bilberry. They are also the hills I call home.

Gawen Redhead was a raider of some notoriety from Rothbury Forest during the mid-1500s. The remains of old fortified bastle houses are scattered throughout what was once the Forest including Redhead's home at the Crook, near Simonside, between Forestburn Gate and The Lee. Gawen became a fugitive in 'the tenth year of Queen Elizabeth,' giving a date of around 1568, and took to hiding out in the trunk of a hollow tree close by Brinkburn Priory. The land around about was known long after as 'Gawen's Field.'

Redhead was almost certainly part of a crew of Redesdale riders, primarily led by the Halls, who attempted to break some of their friends out of jail at Harbottle Castle in 1565. The

March Warden Sir John Forster also suspected them of setting an ambush to do him over when he made his way there. When Forster held a Warden Court at Morpeth on the 27th January 1566, 13 of the Redesdale men were tried for various offences and six beheaded. Two years later the Warden took some of the Redesdale riders prisoner after they'd been raiding farms around about. The most notorious were put in irons at Harbottle before being transferred to Newcastle and hanged. It's reasonable to assume that these were the men that Gawen Redhead was riding with, and the reason that he had to flee from his farm. The Halls were long in the bastle at nearby Fallowlees and in 1615 Edward Hall, of that place, was pardoned for the manslaughter of William Hall with Arthur Radcliffe of Thropton. Radcliffe had smashed his sword into the back of Hall of Hepple's head, leaving a gash four inches long and half an inch wide that pierced his brain. He died from his injuries later. John Radcliffe of Rothbury and Robert Pott of Morrelhirst were named as accessories.

It's not recorded whether the Law eventually caught up with Gawen or not, but the practice of organised crime figures hiding out to evade capture continues to this day. In 2011 an alleged boss of the Italian *Ndrangheta*, Francesco Maisano, was discovered by the authorities in a secret bunker, the entrance to which was covered by a wooden panel within his own home. And the Redheads were certainly players within the Redesdale branch of the Border Mafia; John Redhead of Rothbury Forest was raided by a West Teviotdale gang who not only took 54 sheep and 48 cattle, but also took him prisoner for ransoming in 1586; a not uncommon event. Robert Redhead of Holling Crook, possibly Gawen's grandson, also continued in the family reiving tradition. He first appears in the records in January 1598, breaking into and burgling the house of Geoffrey Story at Whitehall around midnight with Robert 'The Laird of the Moor' Ellesden of Elsdon. They stole 18 cows, 12 oxen, two horses, three bullocks and furniture from his house. Robert Redhead was indicted again in 1605, during the time of the Border pacification, as he broke into Robert Barber's at Whitton and stole nine ewes and nine pigs. Two years later his brother

Edward Redhead lifted two ewes from John Oliver at Rothbury, and the following year Robert robbed his neighbour Gilbert Brown at the Crook of two cows. In 1609 he was charged again for stealing a black ox from Michael Ogle of Twywell. The complex nature of Border crime saw Thomas Redhead of Rothbury Forest and his friend Anthony Pott of Little Tosson attacked and robbed near Callaly six years later. George Armorer, John Brocket, William Todd and John Chator, all from Callaly, with Daniel Pringle of Davysheil Hope and James Aynsley, of Alwinton, hit them in a highway robbery around ten o'clock at night. Both had their horses stolen while Pott also lost a wool hood and a sword.

The woods of Rothbury forest are long gone. There is a stillness to the fields today and a silence only broken by passing cars, curlews or the winds. While the riders of Tynedale and Liddesdale are more celebrated at places such as Hexham Old Gaol and Tullie House museum in Carlisle, the Redhead's riding tradition is all but forgotten, felled with the trees that were once their home. But there was a time when men such as Gawen were among the most feared and dangerous people in Britain and their organised criminal empire pre-dated the more famous Sicilian gangs by a couple of hundred years.

We've all seen the movies where wise guys in leather jackets, suits and dark glasses sit around smoky social clubs talking business; where they're going to rob, who is getting whacked out, when an illegal shipment is coming in. In the 1970s American Mafia lexicon popularised by these slick and moodily-shot films, when a mobster introduces a fellow member to a 'made' acquaintance, he refers to him as a 'friend of ours,' while someone that isn't connected would be 'a friend of mine.'

Between the 13th and 17th centuries the Anglo-Scottish Border had its own set of '*Goodfellas*' in leather jacks and steel helmets, armed with swords and hagbutts rather than revolvers and machine guns, but the power that they held over the local population was non-the-less potent than that of the gangs of Little Italy and Mulberry Street. And it was their 'friends' that kept them out of the reach of the Law. Nationality didn't matter

when it came to crime on the Border; the reivers on either side of the line regularly looked after each other when they were fleeing from justice. It was common practice to avoid the rope or the axe by joining with men from the opposite nation and leading them on incursions and raids upon their neighbours. They weren't strictly enemies – they were 'friends of ours.'



An East Teviotdale rider, 1603, by Jon Tait.

The Border Mafia were ruthless when it came to matters of retribution, so it was advisable for officials and the local populace to keep both the clans and the gangs of 'broken' men – notorious outlaws such as *Dick the Devil's Bairns* and *Sandy's Bairns* or even solitary and now obscure desperados like Gawen Redhead – maintained in at least some level of friendship.

Take, for example, Andrew Smith and Thomas Tweedy, who had the misfortune of bumping into Ninian Armstrong of Twedden, the Laird of Mangerton's man Andrew Henderson, Archibald 'Fair Archie' Armstrong and Gavin Elliot of Fiddleton one night in March 1606 in Dumfries. Smith was killed and Tweedy 'dismembered of his nose.' Robert Scott of Haining, Sir James Johnstone and Sir Gideon Murray, with others, stood the bond money for them at court.

Such was the power of a surname on the Anglo-Scottish border.

1. JAILBREAK

IT IS much less celebrated and not half as well-known as Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch's famous breakout of the noted reiver Kinmont Willie Armstrong from Carlisle Castle, but Sir Robert Kerr of Cessford's assault on Swinburne Castle in Northumberland might just be equally important in terms of Border history.

On the night of Friday 27 August 1596, just four months after his brother-in-law Buccleuch had caused a sensation by springing Kinmont, Kerr rode on Swinburne with two hundred armed men and released the prisoner James Young of the Cove from his cell.

Cessford and his men had to cover around 42 miles, deep into the lair of the Tynedale and Redesdale clans, down to near Colwell, north of Chollerford, in the heart of hostile Robson country. He did it without spilling any blood, though he did take hostages to ransom. Like the most notorious of modern crime bosses, he was always looking to capitalise whenever the opportunity presented itself and by kidnapping Roger, the brother of Henry Widdrington, the English Middle March warden Ralph Eure's deputy, he probably hoped to cash in handsomely. The Widdringtons were the owners of Swinburne.

James Young had been taken by the Selbys and when Kerr's attempts to have him released diplomatically failed, he felt that he had to 'loose his man' to save face, if nothing else. Kerr even had the nerve to write a letter two days later to his opposite warden, Eure, explaining why he had done it. Pre-empting the gossip of any malicious informers, he claimed, but the tone of the note had swagger and more than a bit of the Devil-may-care about it, reflecting the personality of the man himself.

Cessford seemed involved in a dangerous game of one-upmanship with his brother-in-law; as the Middle March Warden, he was the ranking officer as Scott's Keeper of Liddesdale post did not carry the same prestige or power. Terse

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exchanges in letters between the pair give some idea of the somewhat frosty relationship that they had. Scott signed one ‘your brother in law, Buccleuch,’ and Kerr replied with ‘your brother in your own terms,’ which stung Buccleuch to reply, ‘your brother in no terms.’ The simmering undercurrent of feud between the two powerful factions saw them described by Queen Elizabeth I as a ‘brace of wolves.’

Eure claimed that Kerr was ‘ambitious, proud, bloody in revenge, poor and easily framed to any purpose in court and country’ with Scott ‘a secret Papist...a secret enemy to England, mighty proud, publishing his descent to be from the house of Angus and labouring to be created an Earl, and claiming his blood to be part Royal.’

The English Middle March warden accepted no responsibility for the jailbreak and blamed Widdrington for detaining Young without his knowledge as ‘part of a private quarrel between him and Kerr.’ Sir Robert Carey despised Kerr and complained himself that ‘no justice will be done while this wicked man bares office’ and demanded that he be removed from his wardenry or ‘compelled to keep days of truce which he has not done for three or four years.’ Sir Henry Widdrington quit his deputy warden post in a huff when Eure had forbidden him to pursue the matter further, but when Eure himself gave up and resigned the Middle March Wardenry it opened the door for Robert Carey to take on the important role and bring back Widdrington as his deputy.

In the three months after the jailbreak Cessford was still hunting down Selbys to murder and his crew spent five hours attacking Weetwood tower. When they could not take it they drove off cattle, sheep and household goods and ‘turned a woman newly brought to bed out of the clothes she lay in.’ Eight days later they took axes to the gates at Downham but were fought off so went on to Branxton and lifted 16 cattle and 40 sheep. The people of Mindrum were paying Cessford ‘blackmail’ – protection money – so avoided the terror that continued through nightly raids on the Selbys. William Selby warned his nephew that they intended to burn his own property or that of his mother, his brothers and his friends, saying that

although Cessford pretended the raids were for the murder of 'his cousin' John Dalgliesh, they were in fact for the killing of Ralph 'Shortneck' Burn and the hanging of Geordie Burn, who had been taken by the Selbys in a hot trod – the legal action of taking back stolen stock immediately after a raid. Going to retrieve stock after an event was also legal and known as a cold trod, so either could be used as an excuse for undertaking a raid or revenge murder.

Vendetta was very much part of Robert Kerr's psychological makeup. Sir William Bowes noted in 1596 that Kerr, Sir Walter Scott and the West March Warden the laird of Johnstone, were all still under 30 yet each were personally guilty of no less than twenty murders of both English and Scottish men.

Kerr had a long-standing personal feud with the Storeys after his crew had lifted all the sheep from Wooler belonging to 'the laird Baggott,' who rode a trod to retrieve them. The East Teviotdale mob brutally murdered two men at Wooler and laird Baggott in response, cutting them in pieces, so two of his brothers-in-law, named Storey, murdered Cessford's shepherd and Kerr swore that he would have their lives as retribution. Buccleuch was engaged in a similarly bloody feud with the Tynedale Charltons who refused to hand back his murdered grandfather's sword.

The similarities to the Sicilian *Cosa Nostra*, Neapolitan *System* and Calabrian *Ndrangheta* are more than a little striking; the clans on the Mediterranean island originated out of the gangs of the landowner's enforcers that prevented rustling on their cattle, protected their lemon groves, collected taxes from the small tenant farmers, intimidated local officials and lived by a code of honour and respect in the mid-to-late 1800s. Remove the sunshine and replace the yellow soil with dark mud and green trees and it could be almost the same story a few hundred years removed from the British countryside.

The Camorra in Naples is the older of the Italian mobs and an urban rather than rural organized crime syndicate, but even their history is reputed to have only started around the turn of the beginning of the Nineteenth century, while the *Ndrangheta* is based more on blood ties and is probably the most similar to

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the Anglo-Scottish crews.

The business of the Border mafia was large-scale organised crime in family-based gangs centred on cattle rustling, kidnap and ransom, collecting protection money, counterfeiting, murder, burglary, theft, witness intimidation and corrupting officials. If someone couldn't be bought off, they could be killed off. The raids led to counter-raids and the killings to revenge attacks and feuds that could last generations. And this had been going on in the area since the late Thirteenth century.

The rural crime of reiving was a profitable business; in 1596 the take from the three English Marches alone over a nine-year period was almost £93,000. Those figures broke down into £10,458 in the East, £28,098 in the Middle and £54,422 in the West with Buccleuch's Liddesdale and Cessford's East and West Teviotdale riders accounting for 'near three parts' of that. Driving off and selling cattle and taking sheep for the wool, textile and butchery trades as well as cashing in on sales at markets had been well established over a couple of hundred years, as was the illegal cross-border horse trade. If you could take prisoners on a raid and ransom them back to their families then it was a bonus, as were any cash and goods that could be lifted and carried off. Add in the fact that the powers of both England and Scotland had their own reasons for keeping the people of the Borders active – and providing them with cash to maintain the disruption – then an enterprising Border mobster could line his pockets from many sources. It obviously took a degree of violence and menace to forcibly take the livelihood from other farmers, and that's what the reivers, in the main, were; yeomen and small landowners, lairds and barons with larger estates and even the landed gentry with titles and payments from official positions in the local organisation such as bailiffs and provosts, or jobs in the legal systems for assisting the March Wardens in their duties that the crime families jostled and vied for.

The gangsterism prevalent on the Borders obviously had an effect on the people living there and the men involved in the crews were variously described as idle, disordered and unruly by frustrated officials. Eure wrote that Kerr's mob were 'loose

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persons rooted in wickedness with nothing done to make them laboursome or industrious but idle and villainous' while Rowland Myners complained that the Northumbrians in his charge were 'mutinous and insubordinate to their constables, who are little above their own rank. Being of great clans and surnames, this encourages their obstinacy.'

They didn't want someone that wasn't of a surname themselves telling them what to do and obviously considered people that weren't from a riding family inferior, weak-willed and not belonging there; outsiders at best, meddlesome in affairs that had nothing to do with them at worst. Northumberland long had a saying: 'No prince but a Percy' which means that the only power that matters is that of the local headsmen and barons, not decisions being made far off in Edinburgh or London.

The Border mafia were violent, proud, fiercely self-reliant, independent and governed by a set of laws known as The March Laws of the Border which were unique and separate from those in the rest of the British Isles. Truce Days were held for the hearing of bills (claims from people for the goods that had been stolen from them), to try and reclaim the goods or take cash payments in compensation, and to dole out justice. 12 'reputed' borderers from each country formed the jury. The form and order of a day of Truce from a 1551 document stated that complainers should pass their bills on to their Warden in reasonable time for him to copy those complaints on to his opposite Warden and arrest the offenders contained in them to produce at the day. The assurances of the Truce Day were supposed to be upheld until sunrise the following day, the breaking of which was punishable by death.

If a man from either realm was bound to another for ransom and the other didn't pay up, then the man that had ransomed him was entitled to carry a glove or a picture of the offender on his spear and blow his horn to show the assembled crews that the person was 'untrue and unfaithful' and could fight him in single combat, if he wanted.

The English warden or officers appointed the six men of the Scottish assize and vice versa – murder was punishable by

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execution 'according to the laws of that realm so offended' and violent robbery, the whole business of reiving, was settled by a compensation system with set prices for cows, sheep, hogs and horses while household goods were assessed in value by the jury of the opposite country. The taking of timber or wood from the opposite country was an offence, not appearing to hear charges made you guilty by default, and anyone that had goods stolen was allowed to pursue them with a sleuth hound in a trod. If they came to a house, they could ask the person there to join them, basically as a witness. Anyone hindering a trod could be held responsible for the bill, while if anyone having goods stolen in revenge were to go to 'the parties that spoiled them' they would forfeit the cause or action but would be still held accountable for the goods in a special clause.

There was no compensation for houses that were burnt out, just the goods that were destroyed inside, and anyone being wrongfully taken prisoner during peacetime could demand that his taker's men or the taker himself were delivered as pledges.

The taking of pledges – hostages – was common practice and was used to ensure good behaviour of gangs or to ensure a debt or bill was settled and it didn't come without hazards – a warden could lawfully hang a pledge after 40 days if no offer of satisfaction was made. Truce Days weren't perfect and the officials themselves were wary of the 'thieves and disordered men that lie in wait to perceive if they can by any word displease or make grief between the wardens, their deputies or chief borderers' and they complained that 'justice can never have been had for lack of the obedience of the subjects and in other cases because of the maintenance that gentlemen give miss-doers and the riders of the borderers.'

The six Marches had been created in 1249 by Henry III of England and Alexander III of Scotland and comprised the East, Middle and West Marches of England and of Scotland, each with its own Warden.

The English East March stretched from Berwick down to the countryside north of Alnwick, taking in towns such as Wooler, Belford and Bamburgh. The English Middle March was huge, stretching from Coquetdale to the area around Haltwhistle and

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taking in the troublesome valleys of the Rede, around Otterburn, and the North Tyne, stretching above Hexham to the Border north of Kielder. The English West March was dominated by Carlisle and included the trouble spots at Gilsland and Bewcastle.

Between the English West March and the Scottish West lay a strip of land known as the Debatable Ground which was a no-man's land used for pasturing cattle where building homes was long prohibited, until families started spilling into the fertile farmland by the rivers leading to the Solway Firth and creating a major problem as the officials tried to uphold the rule by burning and destroying the towers that were constructed. The Scottish West March contained towns such as Annan, Dumfries, Canonbie and Langholm while the Middle stretched from Castleton to Yetholm, taking in the likes of Hawick, Jedburgh and Kelso and the great riders from Liddesdale and Teviotdale. The Scottish East March went from around Coldstream to the coast, containing Duns and a number of smaller villages.

Truce days were held at various points along the Border such as Hadden Stank, Redden Burn, and the Lochmaben stone; Cocklaw near Roxburgh and the Redeswire, the Sands at Carlisle, Rockcliffe and Kershopefoot. Norham, Coldstream, Wark-on-Tweed, Ebchester and Berwick-upon-Tweed were all used as meeting spots for days of truce.

The English March Wardens were often brought in from southern England with powerful local families such as the Percys, Forsters, Fenwicks, Dacres and Lowthers all retaining a large influence while the Scots Wardens were selected on a more hereditary line with the East March generally under the jurisdiction of a Hume, the Middle March under either the Cessford or Ferniehurst Kerrs or the Scotts and the West March under either the Maxwells or Johnstones. Liddesdale, Annandale, Redesdale and Tynedale had their own keepers. Often the Wardens, the men who were supposed to maintain order and keep the peace, were as heavily involved in reiving as the wild men that they were meant to keep in check.

There were also deputy wardens, captains, bailiffs and other officials known as water keepers, one for each Warden, who

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were able to enter the marches without licence and carry messages between them. They also acted as border control to stop men without licence entering the other realm.

One of the troubles in dealing with first-hand contemporary accounts of the Border Reivers is that the notes and details were penned by people with an axe to grind and a need to justify their actions and roles within all the villainy that was taking place, so they are littered with lies and embellishments. Take Ralph Eure's extraordinary claims in July 1597 when he wrote to Thomas Burghley that a Scottish gentleman called John Wedderburn had alighted from a Scottish ship that had docked on the Tyne at Newcastle disguised as a modest mariner. Eure claimed that Wedderburn said he was a follower of Lord Bothwell and he was on his way to Scotland under orders to 'use by all means possible to take away the life of Sir Robert Kerr.' The mysterious Wedderburn's assassination plot was simple enough; he planned to either use powder to blow Kerr up in his house at Haliden or 'intercept him on his way to or in some other house.' Wedderburn spoke good French and claimed to have been employed in the French secret service in Spain, where he avoided being hanged alongside two Frenchmen as he was Scots. He had two scars on his forehead, a yellow beard and was square bodied of reasonable stature, as Eure described him in painful detail. Someone, somewhere, was clearly spinning lines and Wedderburn was either a liar, blagging his way out of trouble or just telling the English Middle March Warden what he wanted to hear; on the other hand, he may have been real or even a fabrication of Eure's imagination to justify his own desire to have a go at killing Kerr as he ended his letter by begging Burghley to allow him to 'do one honourable day's service in adventuring the gaining of Buccleuch's head, and if your Lordship like, Sir Robert Kerr's likewise.' He felt that the job could be done by the joint forces of the three English wardens with some help out of the Berwick garrison. Four days later Eure was cranking up his black propaganda a notch or two by claiming that a Scotsman called Robert Anderson had met with Wedderburn in Newcastle and told him that King James VI had told his leaders – especially those in the Borders – to 'have all

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persons between 16 and 60 in readiness of twenty days warning...telling them that the Queen of England intends Royal revenge for late indignities and he intends nothing but War' and was threatening to join forces with the King of Denmark to attack England. Eure presented them to Burghley 'true or not' – his own words – and wanted the Queen to draw up a muster of the Middle March as 'little by little (the Scots) have murdered and taken away the worthiest gentlemen leaders of our country.'

Another problem is presented by the fact that the published records of the time contain just extracts from the documents so many hundreds, if not thousands, of bills of complaint remain hidden away in a dusty archive away from the public domain, while the English records are more thorough than the Scots and a somewhat skewed perception can be received. The English reivers were hitting the Scots, as well as their fellow countrymen, just as hard but the actual documentary evidence is harder to come by and many Scottish records were also burned or destroyed by invasion forces.

It has to be noted that Eure was pressing for the destruction of Sir Robert Kerr and Sir Walter Scott in the aftermath of the jailbreaks from Carlisle and Swinburne which were events so controversial and momentous that infuriated English officials were demanding action to bring them to heel. The event at Carlisle was the more scandalous as it struck right into the heart of English power on the Border and the attempt was assisted in both the masterminding and execution by the English Grahams, which was considered a heinous betrayal.

Kinmont Willie had been captured by the English while leaving a Truce Day and was therefore supposedly still protected by the terms of the meetings. Sir Walter Scott gathered a crew together at Langholm horse races to plan springing Kinmont from his detention at the castle and it was carried out by himself with the likes of Walter Scott of Goldielands, Watt Scott of Harden, Scott of Todriggs, Will Elliot of Gorrenberry, John Elliot of the Riggs and Armstrong's kinsmen the laird of Mangerton and young Whitehaugh with his son, three Calfhills Armstrongs, Sandy Armstrong, Kinmont's sons Jock, Francie, Geordie and Sandy, three of the Twedden Armstrongs, John of

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the Hollows and a brother, Christie of Barngliesh, Robbie of Langholm and the Gingles Armstrongs, with Will 'Redcloak' Bell and two brothers, Walter Bell of Godsby and Willie 'Kang' Irving along with accomplices numbering around eighty. On the wet Sunday night of April 13th, 1596, they rode to Carlisle armed with crowbars, axes and scaling ladders and broke in through the postern gate, killed a couple of the watch, injured one of Kinmont's keepers and spirited him back home over the border.

Many of the main players were related to the Grahams through inter-marriage and it should be pointed out that Kinmont Will's father, Alexander Armstrong, had been a pensioner of King Henry VIII along with eight of his other sons. They were awarded lands in Cumberland known as 'Guilcrookes' for 'good service done' in the Wars with Scotland. That English land was still in the possession of one of his grandsons at the time of the escape. A William Armstrong held some 2s land at 'Ulvisby' in Cumberland by service during the rule of King Edward I before 1307. His son Adam extended that land 'by service of homage and fealty' to Edward II, with Richard Armstrong also holding land at Melmoreby, so the Armstrongs had long been on both sides of the line.

Lord Thomas Scrope, the English West March Warden, was infuriated by the escape and named Buccleuch the 'chief enemy to the quiet of the border' while also blaming the Grahams, claiming that one of them had taken Kinmont's ring to Scott as a token before the attempt, while at least one had been seen in the castle court with him during the action, so he was determined to cause as much trouble for both as he could and threatened to resign his office if the Grahams weren't punished severely. He retaliated by ordering Captain Carvell of Carlisle garrison to burn and raid Liddesdale, driving off 1000 cattle, 2000 sheep and 120 horses, while taking prisoners and binding them together with ropes, naked, to march two-by-two back to Carlisle in one notable attack.

With tit-for-tat murders and reprisal raids occurring, it was clear that another approach would have to be taken for dealing with the troublesome Border mafia if quiet was ever to happen in the countryside.

2. WAR

THE BORDER between England and Scotland is a wild and barren land of scree slopes and moors, purple heather and dead, brown bracken. Winds whistle in down river valleys, the rain falls heavily, and snow often tops the rolling, rounded Cheviot hills. It can be a cold and desolate place at times. Herds of wild goats and horses patrol hillsides and the woodland homes of red squirrels, pine martens, badgers, foxes and deer. The border is a sanctuary for rare native wildlife and a lonely place of curlew cries and birds of prey hovering in skies grey as slate. The engine of a shepherd's quad bike can cut through the silence, with distant shouting as he calls the sheep down from the tops for feeding.

The hardy hill farmers of the Borders have been on their land for generations, with many of the old peels and bastle houses now incorporated into their buildings and out sheds. Heavy artillery guns can often be heard pounding the landscape in the Ministry of Defence Ranges that now take up much of the Redesdale wilderness and a chunk of North Tynedale was flooded to create the huge Kielder water reservoir in the late 1960s. Much of the Northumberland landscape to the Border is now National Park land and Hadrian's Wall is a World Heritage site that runs 73 miles from Wallsend to the Cumbrian coast. Most of the wall is gone now, robbed out by enterprising borderers to build their defensive structures, while some of the stone is even incorporated in Carlisle Cathedral, the grey blocks standing out against the red sandstone that is prevalent among the old buildings in the Great Border City.

It is, however, the number of castles that marks out the bloody history of the area and they stand, beaten by the weather and roofless like the skeletons of dead trees on the landscape, a testament to the violent relations between the Rose and the Thistle that existed for hundreds of years.

Carlisle's red, squat and brooding walls; Hermitage, an unusual tall and square grey stone monument to the troubled

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times in Liddesdale; the great sandstone buildings of Northumberland at Alnwick and Warkworth; Bamburgh, stunning on top of an igneous outcrop by the sea; Dunstanburgh, Norham, Hexham's Old Gaol (the first purpose-built prison in England); Threave, Caerlaverock, the ruins at Berwick where the East Coast main line cuts straight through. Berwick, that changed hands between the countries thirteen times and has been English since 1482, to name just a few. As well as the great fortresses of power, the countryside is littered with the ruined remains of the great clans and crime families that built their own seats with walls metres thick. Weeds and trees now grow from fallen gables, the stone sodden and crumbling and black in a bog, the empty and neglected shells of homes once warmed by fires and laughter. Some have been restored and are now bed and breakfast or holiday accommodation, others remain great country houses and estates and many are still on working farms.

The fractious relationship between England and Scotland had been going, on and off, for around five centuries and it was the people of the borderlands that bore the brunt of the battles. Malcolm's Cross, just north of Alnwick, marks the spot where the Scottish King Malcolm Canmore was killed in 1093 by an English army led by Robert de Mowbray of Bamburgh castle. Malcolm's son Edward also fell on the battlefield and put a stop to their ambitions of adding Cumberland and Northumberland to Scotland following the Norman conquest of England and their besiegement of Durham two years earlier.

There was another battle at Alnwick in 1174 when William the Lion of Scotland was taken prisoner and detained at Falaise in Normandy after a spell in Newcastle castle. William was also attempting to reclaim lands for Scotland and had inherited the title of Earl of Northumberland in 1152. He had attacked Newcastle and Prudhoe a year previously and hit Prudhoe again before retreating back to besiege Alnwick. His army was divided into three columns and one, under Duncan, Earl of Fife, committed an atrocity when they burned the church of St. Lawrence in Warkworth with frightened people gathered inside. A small English retaliation force led by Ranulf de Glanville rode