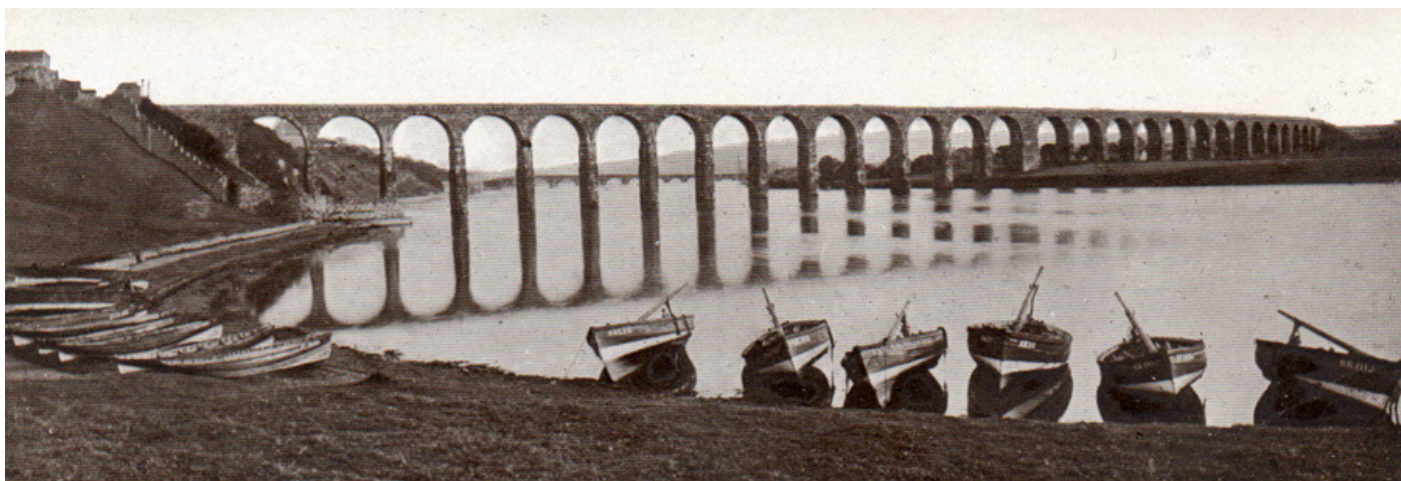


19th century North Northumberland Ramble

The following article, to which early 20th century postcards have been added, written by J.T.C., Canisbay, appeared in the John o'Groats Journal on 8 November 1850.

RAMBLE THROUGH A PART OF THE COUNTY OF NORTHUMBERLAND



The Royal Border Bridge, Berwick-upon-Tweed, with the Castle on the left and Tweedmouth on the right.

Arrived at Berwick-on-Tweed. The town, with its old wall, has an air of great antiquity. It is situated on the north side of the Tweed, and within half a mile of its confluence with the German Ocean. The streets are irregular, but a few such as High Street and Hidehill are tolerably spacious. The southern suburb, called Tweedmouth, is connected to the main town by a bridge of 15 arches. The new bridge for the railway, named by the Queen, on her late visit to Scotland, the Royal Border Bridge, is a magnificent structure of 29 arches. It is 2100 feet in length, 126 feet in height, and 24 feet between the parapets. It was built by the Berwick and Newcastle Railway Company, and cost, it is said, £200,000. Berwick, as is well known, does not properly belong either to Scotland or to England. It was made a free town, independent of both, in 1551, and still remains so, with several rights and privileges peculiar to itself. It is chiefly governed, we believe by English laws. Berwick is a place of much historical interest. It was long a bone of contention between the two rival kingdoms, and more frequently the theatre of intestine war and bloodshed than any other fortress on the Scottish border. In 1314, Edward II, previous to the battle of Bannockburn, assembled at Berwick his army consisting of 100,000 men, of which army 40,000 were cavalry. A part of this immense force was lodged within the town, and the remainder in tents without the walls.



Berwick High Street

After remaining nearly two hours in Berwick, we took out our tickets and started with the first train for Belford. For some miles the appearance of the country on the English side is exceedingly bare and uninteresting, compared with the finely wooded, rich, and fertile county of Berwick, through which we had just passed. Got a glimpse, as we were whisked along, of Lindisfarne or Holy Island, which lies 10 miles



Lindisfarne Castle

south-east of Berwick, and 1½ east of the mainland. It is stated to be about six miles in circumference, and at low water the sand between it and the opposite shore is left nearly dry. The celebrated Saint Cuthbert, of whom so many extraordinary stories are related in the old Popish legends, was Bishop of Lindisfarne. The worthy saint, it is said, had such an antipathy to females, that he would not suffer a cow to come near his sacred residence, observing that, "where there is a cow, there must be a woman, and where there is a woman, there must be mischief!" Farther on to the east of Holy Island lie the Farne islands, on the

largest of which the lighthouse is erected. Here lived Grace Darling, whose heroic fortitude and defiance of danger, as displayed in the case of the shipwreck of the Forfarshire, have immortalised her memory. Nearly opposite the Farne islands is Bamborough Castle, a fortress much celebrated in the history of the Border wars. We were told of one very praiseworthy and benevolent institution connected with it, for the benefit of ship-wrecked sailors. Several apartments in the Castle are fitted up with beds for unfortunate individuals of this description. A constant patrol is kept up every stormy night for about 8 miles along the coast; and whoever brings to the Castle the first notice of any vessel being in distress, receives a premium proportioned to the distance and the darkness of the night.



Bamborough Castle

Having alighted at the Belford station, my friend and I drove in a passenger's cab to the town,



High Street, Belford showing the coaching inn, The Blue Bell, in front of the Church

which is about a mile distant. Belford is 16½ miles south by east from Berwick. It stands on a gradual slope, within two miles of the sea, and is allowed to be one of the most pleasant little towns in the north of England. It consists principally of two wide streets, and has a large and splendid inn, the entire front of which we observed to be covered with jessamine. There did not seem, however, to be much business going on inside. We found only one gentleman in the traveller's room, who was discussing brandy and water. We desired the waiter to bring us two glasses of Scotch whisky, for which we were charged ten-pence. The reason of this high

charge is, that a duty of 4s. 2d., is laid on every gallon of Scotch whisky that is brought across the borders. Left Belford by the mail coach for Wooler, where we arrived in safety, and soon after had the satisfaction of meeting with our kind and ingenious friend, Mr Macmahon of the Inland Revenue, who agreed to conduct us to all the celebrated localities in the neighbourhood. Wooler is finely situated on a gentle eminence, and immediately above a small stream, which runs into the river Till. Besides the Established Church, it contains five Dissenting places of worship, one of which belongs to the Roman Catholics, and another to the Free Church of Scotland. The houses are generally roofed with tile, and not particularly remarkable for external elegance, but the meanest of them have their little gardens and flower plots. We were much pleased with one of these, the property of a chimney-sweep. The spot was not large, but it was tastefully laid out, and in one corner was a hot-house containing a variety of rare exotics and other flowers. The owner, who is the only one of his profession in town, and who enjoys the monopoly of the business as far as Bamborough Castle, is in pretty independent



Wooler High Street

circumstances. He keeps, we were informed, a race horse, has been on the turf, and gained the prize!. Donkeys are numerous about the place, and respectable individuals may be seen frequently riding about on them. They are sleek, well fed, pretty little creatures, very different from the rough-haired, ugly, half-starved animals that we see with tinkers and hawkers in Scotland. The country around Wooler is fine, and affords a variety of beautiful prospects, the grounds rising on both sides, and forming a mixture of rich corn lands and verdant sheep walks. Some of the gentlemen farmers pay as high a rent as £2000. They are merely, however, tenants at will, and if I may hazard a remark, I should say that the land is scarcely so well cultivated as it is in Berwickshire and the Lothians. Lime seems to be extensively used as a manure. The fields are mostly all fenced with hedgerows, and in many places the public highway is for miles skirted with hawthorn, which being regularly clipped and kept trim, has a very pretty appearance. the unfortunate Earl of Derwentwater, who was executed for high treason in 1716, had large estates near Wooler. After

forfeiture, they were transferred to the use of Greenwich hospital, and the revenue then arising from them is said to have been worth £6000 per annum.

Set out the next afternoon to visit Flodden Field. About a mile west from Wooler is a place called Homildown, where there is a stone pillar erected, denoting that it was the scene of a dreadful battle, in which 10,000 Scotchmen under Earl Douglas were overthrown by Henry Lord Percy, on Holyrood day, anno Domini 1402. The conflict was so bloody, that the lands were afterwards called Red Riggs. Douglas, in the engagement, lost an eye, and received five wounds. About 500 Scots were drowned in the river Tweed. The victory was, as usual, owing to the number and skill of the English archers. We at length arrived at the celebrated field of Flodden, distant about seven miles north-west from Wooler. Immediately on your left is Flodden hill, a lofty eminence, detached from the main ridge of the Cheviots, and now covered with a plantation of fir trees.



Humbleton or Homildon Hill near Wooler

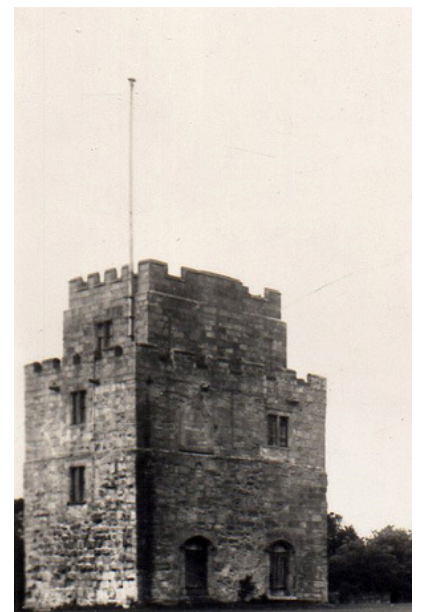
On the summit is a rock called the “king’s chair,” from which King James IV commanded a view of his own and of the English army. Most readers of history are familiar with the account of this battle, which was fought on the 9th September, 1513. Besides their king, the Scottish army lost from eight to ten thousand men, including the very “prime of their nobility, gentry, and even clergy.” The Earl of Caithness also, with 300 followers, fell on this fatal field. Sir Walter Scott, in his splendid poem of “Marmion,” thus describes the disorder and retreat of the surviving Scotch:-

“Tweed’s echoes heard the ceaseless plash,
While many a broken band,
Disorder’d, through her currents dash,
To gain the Scottish land;
To town and tower, to down and dale,
To tell red Flodden’s dismal tale,
And raise the universal wail.
Tradition, legend, tune, and song,
Shall many an age that wail prolong:
Still from the sire the son shall hear
Of the stern strife, and carnage drear,
Of Flodden’s fatal field,
Where shivered was fair Scotland’s spear,
And broken was her shield!”

We observed no pillar or memorial of any kind to commemorate the scene of this disastrous conflict.

Quitting Flodden Field, we crossed the Till, to see Ford Castle, situated on a rising ground on the eastern bank of the river. The approach from the west presents a beautiful scene, in which the most ancient parts of the Castle appear in front, and the contiguous church is seen peeping out amongst venerable and lofty trees. Two old towers are the only remains of the original castle, which was built in 1287. The modern erections were finished in 1764. The castle belongs to the Marquis of Waterford, who occasionally resides in it. Ford Castle was taken by King James’ troops previous to the battle of Flodden. Here the Scottish monarch found the lady of Sir William Heron (then a prisoner in Scotland) with whose siren charms he became so fascinated, that he entirely neglected his army, and gave Surrey, the English general, time to advance with his troops, and make every necessary arrangement for the ensuing battle. Indeed, to this infatuated passion, historians (as Sir Walter Scott remarks) impute the delays which led to the fatal defeat of Flodden.

The following day we set out to visit Hedgely Moor, the scene of another famous battle during the civic war between the houses of York and Lancaster. Northumberland, in truth, may be said to be one entire battle-



Ford Castle Tower



Lilburn Tower

field. On our way, we passed Lilburn Tower, the seat of Henry John William Colingwood, Esquire. It is a neat mansion, with a new observatory built a year or two ago for the accommodation of the proprietor, who devotes his leisure hours to the study of astronomy. The celebrated Admiral Lord Colingwood, we believe, was related to the family. Saw at a little distance, situated on a bold eminence, Roddam Hall, the seat of W. Roddam, Esquire of Roddam. The family is very ancient, and on one of their old pedigrees is written the following curious grant, in Saxon characters:-

“I king Athelstane gives unto thee Pole Roddam,
From me and mine to thee and thine,
Before my wife Maude my daughter Maudline
And my oldest son Henry;
And for a certain truth
I bite this wax with my gang tooth,
So long as muir bears moss, and nout grows hair,
A Roddam of Roddam for evermair.”

On arriving at Hedgely moor, we found it to be a flat barren waste, without a single tree or shrub to enliven the prospect. It lies about eight miles south from Wooler, and is crossed by the public road to Newcastle. The battle was fought 25th April 1464. Sir Ralph Percy, who espoused the cause of Henry VI, encountered here the forces of Edward IV, commanded by Lord Montague, brother of the Earl of Warwick. Percy's troops were routed, and he himself was mortally wounded. Tradition says, that when he was struck with the fatal arrow, he made a sudden convulsive spring forwards. The distance is pointed out by two grey stones sunk in the earth; it measures nearly 22 feet, and goes by the name of “Percy's leap.” It is close by the public road, within an enclosure of some 30 or 40 yards square, protected by a high wall and iron gate, and thickly planted with shrubbery. About a quarter of a mile farther on, where it is said he breathed his last, there is a monument erected to his memory, called “Percy's Cross.” It is a stone pillar, fixed on a pedestal, with the arms of Percy and Lucy rudely cut on it in relief.

On our way back to Wooler, we diverged from the public road, and drove across the country for a few miles to see Chillingham Castle, the seat of the Earl of Tankerville. It is a large square edifice of four storeys in the wings, and three in the centre, situated, like most of the gentlemen's seats in this quarter, on a rising ground, but so thickly embosomed in wood that it is difficult to get a proper view of it. Here were some of the largest trees we ever recollect to have seen, amongst which were some magnificent specimens of the lime, the oak, and the horse chestnut. Even the common willow had attained to an enormous size. In the park are still preserved an uncontaminated breed of wild cattle; they are pure white, with the exception of the ear and muzzle, which are of a brownish colour. Pheasants, like feathered aristocrats, with their gorgeous plumage and long-sweeping tails, were strutting about, seemingly without any fear of the gun. While contemplating this princely residence, we were forcibly reminded of the lines of Mrs Hemans:-

“The stately homes of England,
How beautiful they stand
Amidst their tall ancestral trees
O'er all the pleasant land.”

Returned in the evening, after a pretty long drive of some eighteen or twenty miles. While in Wooler we were shown some beautiful photographic likenesses by an ingenious watchmaker, belonging to the



Chillingham Castle



town, of the name of Maule. Our brief stay prevented us from seeing much of the customs and manners of the people. The dialect of the inhabitants, at least of the lower classes, is neither Scotch nor English, but a mixture of both, with a peculiar accent or intonation of voice termed the "bur." This, however, is fully more perceptible about Berwick than in Northumberland. The present race of Borderers, Scotch and English, are a decent, orderly set of people, but in what is called the good old times they were not very careful of the distinction between MEUM and TUUM. Harying and plundering on both sides were the order of the day. Sir David Lindsay, in his drama of the "Partium," makes one of his heroes, a Border chief, previous to his execution, take leave of his companions in the following terms, certainly a curious enough specimen of a "last speech and dying words:"-

"Adieu, my brother Annan thieves,
That helped me in my mischieves;
Adieu, Crossars, Nicksons, and Bells,
Oft have we fared through the fells;
Adieu, Robsons, Hanslies, and Pyles,
That on our craft have mony wiles;
Littles, Trumbulls, and Armstrongs,
Adieu, all thieves that me belongs;
Taylors, Ewings, and Ewands,
Speedy of foot and light of hands,
With kin correction be fangit,
Believe right sure ye will be hangit."

On the union of the crowns, all predatory excursions between the Borderers ceased, and this of itself was none of the least blessings that flowed from that happy measure.

A stage coach for the accommodation of passengers, &c., runs every Saturday from Wooler to Berwick. We resolved to embrace the opportunity of recrossing the Borders by this conveyance. Accordingly, having bid adieu to our kind friends, we took our seat in the said coach, which started a little after nine o'clock in the forenoon, taking a somewhat different route from that by which we entered by the railway. Passed Doddington, a small village about three miles north-east from Wooler. Near the village is a powerful spring of three jets, which gives motion to a corn mill. A small stone building is erected over it, and the jets issue out from separate apertures in front. On looking back, you have now a splendid view of the Cheviots, which are seen stretching away in irregular grandeur. The principal Cheviot is a huge round top mountain, which rises 2642 feet above the level of the sea. About six miles from Doddington you pass near another small village called Bowsdon, distinguished for a summary instance of Lynch law. Tradition says, that before the union, a Scotchman entered this village one afternoon with a halter in his hand, and being suspected of an intention to help himself to a cow or a horse, he was immediately seized by the inhabitants and hanged in his own halter on a tree at Woodside close by. A few miles farther on the country assumes a barren aspect, with long tracts of brown heath; while the road in some places seems to have been excavated out of the solid rock. Our "diligence" at length arrived at Berwick, in time for the Edinburgh train. We forthwith proceeded to the station, got into a second-class carriage, and in about two hours after we were set down in the "city of palaces."

Canisbay.

J.T.C



Berwick-upon-Tweed Railway Station
BRO 0017 Berwick Record Office



James Traill Calder Statue, Wick
Copyright Wick Society
Johnston Collection

James Traill Calder was born in Caithness in 1794 and educated there. He graduated from Edinburgh University in 1832 and settled at Canisbay where he was a schoolteacher. He was a regular contributor to the John o'Groats Journal, and, after retiring in 1856, he went to live at Dunnet where he wrote 'Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness', published at Wick in 1861. On a visit to his brothers, who lived on Orkney, he was taken ill and died there on 14 January 1864. A statue to him, for which funds were raised by the Glasgow Caithness Literary Society, was erected near the Railway station at Wick, and unveiled in July 1900.