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# Flodden 1513

Scotland's greatest defeat



John Sadler • Illustrated by Stephen Walsh

**JOHN SADLER** was born in north-east England and has had a lifelong passion for all aspects of military history, particularly the Anglo-Scottish Border conflicts. He is involved with the Bell Heritage Centre Bellingham, which houses a number of collections about the history of the border area of North Tyne and Redewater. He has written many books on medieval Scottish history. John lives in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.

**STEPHEN WALSH** studied art at the North East Wales Institute. Since then he has worked mainly for the American historical board-game market, fulfilling a lifelong interest in historical subjects. His American works include the best-selling *Settlers of Catan*. He has also produced many pieces of artwork inspired by J R R Tolkien. He is married with two children and lives in Macclesfield, UK.

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







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XXXXXX 	XXXX 	XXX 	XX 
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Author's Dedication

In memory of my father without whose influence none of this would have been possible.

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Stephen Walsh, 11 Longacre Street, Macclesfield,  
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OPPOSITE Norham Castle from the gateway looking into the outer ward. Norham, the 'Queen of Border Fortresses', was much assailed by the Scots over the centuries of border strife. The setting for Scott's epic poem *Marmion*, it had resisted a leaguer (siege) for two years from 1318–20. Essentially Norman in design, with a massive central keep, it was not built to withstand the battering of artillery and in 1513 the defences proved inadequate. (Author's photograph)

## ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The bloody events that unfolded during the course of a damp afternoon in the high summer of 1513 marked more than simply another phase in the seemingly endless phases of conflict between England and Scotland. The Anglo-Scottish War of 1513 was, in fact, part of a wider conflict that was engulfing Europe as a consequence of the French invasion of Italy in 1494. At the same time it is impossible to understand the combatants' motivations without considering the preceding history of Anglo-Scottish relations.

These were traditionally far from cordial. England had laid claim to overlordship since before the Norman Conquest; the kings of Wessex had certainly numbered Scottish rulers amongst their vassals. Malcolm III, the hero of Shakespeare's *MacBeth*, had bent his knee to William I in 1072; others of his successors had followed suit. When Alexander III died in 1286 and was followed shortly by his infant granddaughter, Scotland was without a king.

Edward I of England, known as 'Longshanks', was called to adjudicate, and finally, after very considerable deliberation, decided in favour of John Balliol, 'Toom Tabard', who did not hesitate to recognize the English king as his feudal superior. Edward's subsequent high-handedness provoked a Scottish reaction and led to the outbreak of war in 1296.

From the outset the series of conflicts which followed were marked by a significant degree of brutality. As Longshanks viewed the Scots as rebels, the niceties of chivalric convention could be easily disposed of; fire, sword and rope became the order of the day. William Wallace and Andrew Murray raised the torch of freedom and struck back at Stirling Bridge, and that flame, though it frequently faltered, was never totally extinguished.

Bruce finally secured a significant victory at Bannockburn in 1314, though Scottish independence was not grudgingly conceded for another 14 years thereafter. The wars on both sides were characterized by casual atrocities; murder, rapine, waste and blackmail flourished. Bruce elevated state-sponsored terrorism to a fine art.

In due course, the north of England, constantly attacked, became increasingly militarized and in October 1346, at Neville's Cross just outside Durham, the northern barons saw off a major Scots invasion and captured their king, David II. By this time Edward III, Longshanks' grandson, had fixed his ambitions on the throne of France. His archers had decimated the Scots at Dupplin Moor and Halidon Hill but even these signal victories had failed to cow the Scots or secure English domination beyond the short term.

David II had, however, launched his ill-fated expedition in support of his ally France, hard pressed since the earlier English triumph at Crécy. The alliance between France and Scotland, born out of a mutual fear of England, was essentially a marriage of convenience and one which the





French were happy to manipulate according to expediency. In spite of this, and because of continuing English aggression, the accord was regularly refreshed.

Even the Anglophile James III recognized the dangers posed by his powerful neighbour, notwithstanding the long and debilitating dissension of the Wars of the Roses. In 1482 Richard of Gloucester, the future Richard III, had wrested Berwick back from the Scots. Prior to this the town, now a frontier bastide, had changed hands fully 14 times. Within three years Gloucester had usurped the English throne, before being himself defeated and killed by another usurper, Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, who took the throne as Henry VII of England.

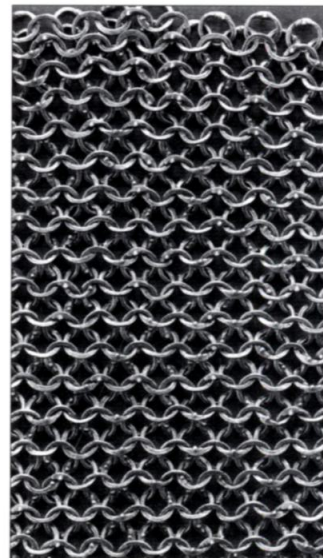
James IV ascended the throne at a young age in 1488 after his father was conveniently murdered following his defeat by disaffected magnates at Sauchieburn. The new king showed his teeth eight years later when, championing the cause of the pretender Perkin Warbeck, he struck at Northumberland, looting and burning in the time-honoured fashion.

The following year he returned, laying siege to Norham, the 'Queen of Border Fortresses', before being seen off by Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, his future nemesis. James did, in fact, propose that possession of Berwick should be settled by a single combat between himself and the earl, a chivalric proposal delivered more for the sake of form than in any realistic expectation that such Homeric means would prevail.

James, like his predecessors, was to be plagued by internal disturbances, fostered by the separatist tendencies of highlanders and Galwegians. Fresh troubles flared up in the south-west and the king agreed to a seven-year truce, which was entered into at Ayton on 30 September 1497.

**The walls of Berwick, looking outwards – the present walls date from the reign of Elizabeth I. (Author's photograph)**

**Fragment of mail, late 15th to early 16th century. (Royal Armouries)**



**Cessford Castle in Teviotdale, seat of Kerr of Cessford. The Kerrs frequently acted as Scottish Middle March wardens – the murder of one of their number by the 'Bastard' Heron after a fracas which broke out on a day of truce was a long-standing grievance. (Author's photograph)**

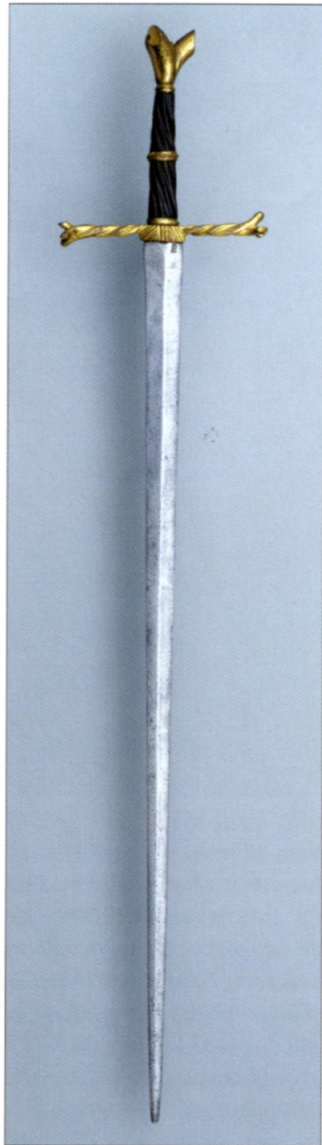
Henry Tudor could see little attraction in prolonged and costly hostilities with Scotland, and his ambassadors strove, successfully, to develop the existing ceasefire into a permanent understanding. The 'Treaty of Perpetual Peace' was sealed in 1502 and consolidated by the marriage of the bachelor King of Scots to Henry's daughter Margaret Tudor. Even the death of James' March warden, Sir Robert Kerr, at the hands of the swashbuckling 'Bastard' Heron of Ford during an ostensible day of truce in 1508, did not shatter the accord.

For as long as Henry VII lived, peace endured, for the first Tudor was both cautious and parsimonious, primarily concerned with securing the future of his dynasty. His son, who 'inherited' the throne on 22 April 1509, was from a very different mould. Henry VIII, a younger son who had been married to Katherine of Aragon, his elder brother's widow, was dynamic, imperious and hungry for the heady scent of glory. Unlike his father, who scooped the crown from a thorn bush at the battle of Bosworth Field, the young king inherited a stable realm and, what was even more rare, a full treasury.

James and his brother-in-law were more than national rulers; they were players on a European stage in an era of ruthless pragmatism where expediency and force drove policy. It was the age of Machiavelli and his influential guide *The Prince*, when military might was the medium of international relations and diplomatic alliances were forged and abandoned with casual cynicism. A king had to be seen to be strong, not just in terms of domestic policy but on the wider stage; weakness was fatal, the cue for enemies both internal and external.

The French intervention in Italy had been the catalyst for an extended conflict and these 'Great Wars' were to drag on for decades.





ABOVE Sword, German, about 1480, a fine example of a hand and a half, or 'bastard', sword. (Royal Armouries)

ABOVE, RIGHT Sallet, German, about 1490. (Royal Armouries)



Despite having been a strong advocate for France, Pope Julius II was alarmed by such rampant aggression and altered his stance, providing an irreproachable figurehead for resistance to French ambitions. In 1510 he instigated a 'Holy League' against Louis XII, which drew in Henry's wily father-in-law Ferdinand of Aragon and the opportunistic Venetians. The French king riposted by setting up a schismatic general council of the Church, an ill-judged move which allowed Pope Julius to preach his war as a crusade against heretics.

The Privy Council in England had advocated continuing caution in international relations in the manner that Henry VII would have followed, but his son was eager for any opportunity to resume the ancient quarrel. Despite a treaty with France negotiated in 1510, by November the following year Henry was receiving overtures from the Pope, who sugar-coated the pill with the prestigious award of the Golden Rose and, perhaps more usefully, gifts of wine and cheese.

Even before committing himself to the Holy League, Henry had been intermeddling in Europe. He had dispatched a brigade of long-bowmen to Flanders, there to assist Emperor Maximilian in his squabble with the duke of Guelders. Minor as this action was, Henry's timely support influenced the emperor in his decision to commit himself to the League in 1513.

Subsequent expeditions to bolster Ferdinand of Aragon's campaigns firstly against the Moors and then as part of an invasion of Aquitaine, the old Plantagenet fiefdom, foundered in the face of the Spaniard's cynical manipulation. Naval actions against France were equally indecisive. A sharp fight with the French Admiral Gaston Pregent de Bidoux' flagship resulted in the death of the Lord Admiral, Sir Edward Howard, who, with his younger brother Thomas, had defeated and killed James' famous privateer Andrew Barton.

Henry's lust for glory could be assuaged only by a successful expedition against France – one which he, in the glorious tradition of his ancestors, proposed to lead himself. The Pope pandered to Henry's vanity, promising to strip Louis XII of titles and crown and bestow these on a victorious Tudor – that is, of course, once Henry had won the war.

James IV was now in a very difficult position. The French were making attractive overtures, but the king was wisely reluctant to break with England. It would not be fair to assert that James was drawn into



Belsay Castle, seat of the Middletons; a typical hall tower of the early to mid-14th century, built, like its contemporary Chipchase, as part of the response to Scottish aggression after Bannockburn in 1314. (Author's photograph)

war in 1513 by French intriguing; he was rather forced towards conflict by the dichotomy that Henry's warmongering had created.

Through diplomatic efforts, James, perceiving that the key lay within the Vatican, attempted to mediate a truce between the French and the League; but these efforts foundered against the rock of Pope Julius' intransigence. Even after Julius' death in March 1513 the new Pope Leo X maintained his predecessor's policies.

After much debate in council James had, in November 1512, renewed the terms of the Auld Alliance which, *inter alia*, provided for French military assistance in the event of an Anglo-Scottish War. Louis was prepared to go further, to underwrite the full cost of victualling the Scottish fleet whilst in French service, as well as providing a substantial cash subsidy of 50,000 francs. With such funds available, James could make war on England free of any drain on his own, more modest treasury.

England, in the meantime, could offer little beyond a contemptuous silence and veiled threats. Still James preferred to prevaricate and make soothing but non-committal noises for the benefit of a frustrated English ambassador. In the end, however, he would be forced to make a stark choice. His treaty obligations with England and France were now totally incompatible.

If he declared for France he would receive a handsome cash inducement and would both project and protect his image of a player on the European stage. If he remained neutral then he would be denied any role in the unfolding events and, in the event of an English victory, would be vulnerable in the face of further English expansionism.

Despite the mounting pressure, some of the older members of his council, most notably William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen, wished to continue with diplomacy and avoid an outright breach with England.



The younger magnates responded with abuse; they were thrilled by the prospect of a war with the ancient enemy. Henry, when making his ambitions against France public in 1512, had revived the parallel claim to the Scottish throne.

Ferdinand of Aragon, an arch cynic, was due to sign the Holy League in St Paul's in April 1513; instead, immediately beforehand, he negotiated a separate truce with Louis. On hearing of this, James wrote again to Henry suggesting that this Franco-Spanish accord was equally binding on both of them as allies of the respective monarchs. He even offered to write off previous losses incurred as a consequence of treaty violations. Henry remained obdurate; he would have his war with France.

In the May of 1513, Anne of Brittany, Louis' queen, made a celebrated chivalric appeal to James, couched in appropriate terms, with the personal gift of a turquoise ring. Louis reiterated his earlier offer to pay for a Scottish fleet and to provide arms and munitions (though he nonetheless declined James' request for an expeditionary force of 2,000 broadswords).

On 30 June, Henry VIII of England arrived at Calais, England's great overseas bastion and the gateway to France, and prepared to wage war. James no longer had any room left for further manoeuvre; war with England was now inevitable.

# CHRONOLOGY

## 1488–1510

- 1488** James IV of Scotland ascends the throne.
- 1494** French armies invade Italy.
- 1496** James supports the pretender Perkin Warbeck.
- 1497** Scots besiege Norham Castle.
- 30 Sept 1497** England and Scotland enter into a 30-year truce at Ayton.
- 8 Aug 1503** The truce, ratified as a 'Treaty of Perpetual Peace' in 1502, is consolidated by the marriage of James IV and Margaret Tudor.
- 1508** Scottish border warden Sir Robert Kerr is killed on a truce day by the 'Bastard' Heron of Ford.
- 22 April 1509** Henry VIII succeeds to the throne of England.
- March 1510** Treaty signed between England and France.

## 1511

- May 1511** English expedition to assist Ferdinand of Aragon.
- Nov 1511** England enters into an accord with Pope Julius II and joins the 'Holy League'.

## 1512

- James renews the 'Auld Alliance' with France.
- 10 Aug** Anglo-French naval engagement off Brest; death of Sir Edward Howard.

## 1513

- Emperor Maximilian joins the Holy League.
- end May** French queen appeals to James to intervene.
  - 24 May** James writes to Henry requiring him to desist from hostilities against France.
  - 30 June** Henry VIII lands at Calais.
  - 12 July** Newcastle is appointed as the muster for the English army.
  - 21 July** Earl of Surrey organizes his personal staff.
  - 21 July** Henry leads the main body of the English army in France towards Théroutanne.
  - 24 July** James orders a general muster on the Burghmuir of Edinburgh.
  - 1 Aug** Surrey establishes a temporary headquarters at Pontefract.
  - 13 Aug** The 'Ill Raid'.
  - 17 Aug** Scots complete their muster on the Burghmuir.
  - 21 Aug** Scots army marches south to the advance muster at Ellam Kirk.
  - 22 Aug** Scots cross the Tweed at Coldstream.
  - 24 Aug** James IV holds his final parliament at Twizelhaugh.
  - 24 Aug** Scots siege of Norham Castle begins.
  - 26 Aug** Surrey advances to York.
  - 29 Aug** Surrey moves north to Durham, and collects the sacred banner of St Cuthbert.
  - 29 Aug** Norham Castle capitulates.
  - 30 Aug** Surrey reaches Newcastle, where the English army is mustering.
  - 1 Sept** Ford Castle surrenders; the Scots establish headquarters there.
  - 1 Sept** English army marches out of Newcastle, north to Bolton near Alnwick.
  - 4 Sept** Surrey marshals the English army at Bolton, where he is joined by his son,

- 5 Sept the Lord Admiral. The English hold a council of war.
- 5 Sept Surrey formally unfurls his banners at Bolton.
- 6 Sept Scots army digs in and deploys on Flodden Edge; the English herald Rouge Croix is sent with a challenge to James.
- 7 Sept English advance from Bolton to Wooler.
- 8 Sept Rouge Croix is released and sent back with a second message.
- 8 Sept English flank march begins. The Scots remain at Flodden.
- 9 Sept (am) English cross the Till and advance towards Branxton.
- 9 Sept (pm) Scots deploy in their second position on Branxton Edge.
- 9 Sept (pm) English cross the Pallinsburn and begin their deployment.
- 9 Sept (pm) Battle of Flodden.
- 14 Sept Surrey disbands his army.
- 24 Sept Tournai surrenders after an eight-day siege.
- 25 Sept News of the victory reaches Henry at Tournai.
- 26 Nov General Council in Scotland invites John, Duke of Albany, to assume the governorship/regency of Scotland.

## 1514

- March Dissolution of the Holy League.
- March Anglo-French truce is negotiated.
- 2 April James IV's flagship *Michael* is sold to France for £18,000 Scots.
- 7 Aug Truce is ratified as a peace treaty; the French cease all assistance to Scotland.

# OPPOSING COMMANDERS

## SCOTTISH COMMANDERS

**James IV of Scotland** has had a rather poor press since his death in battle at Flodden in 1513. He came to the throne at an early age upon the sudden and unlamented assassination of his father James III following the battle of Sauchieburn in 1488.

The Stewart dynasty could claim its descent from Anglicized Norman knights who came north to Scotland in the train of the Anglophile David I, who had spent his early life at the English court.

The first of the Stewart kings to hold the sceptre was Robert II 'The Steward', who ascended the throne in 1371 on the sudden death of the childless David II. His reign was followed by that of the melancholic Robert III. His successors, James I, II and III, all met violent deaths, the first by assassins' knives, the second when one of his great guns exploded at the siege of Roxburgh, and the third murdered following the skirmish at Sauchieburn.

Despite his difficult start, and the fact that Scotland throughout the 15th century had been burdened with a series of minority kingships, James IV achieved much. He absorbed the title of Lord of the Isles, which reverted to the Crown in 1493, finally drawing a line under the long centuries of semi-independence which the MacDonald chieftains had enjoyed. His administrative reforms were comprehensive and it is probably due to the solid foundation which he created that the country was able to function after the disaster at Flodden and the loss of such a high proportion of the nobility.

James was a renaissance figure, active in the lists, addicted to finery and seduced by the lures of war. He had, like his unfortunate grandfather James II, a fascination with artillery. By 1508 his master gunner, Robert Borthwick, was casting guns in Edinburgh. Ordinances seeking to promote practice at the butts in preference to more popular pastimes such as golf or football were enacted, even if, subsequently, they were rarely heeded.

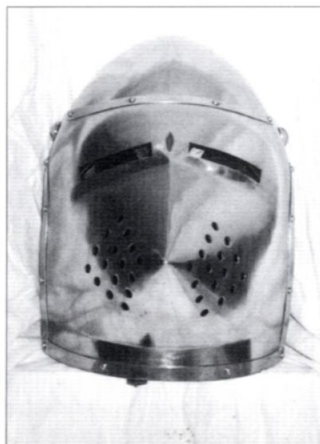
By 1502 he was able to dispatch a contingent of 2,000 spears to fight in Denmark and he invested heavily in the creation of a Scottish navy. The most potent manifestation of this was the king's flagship, the *Great Michael*, launched in 1511, 240ft in length, with a beam of 56ft mounting 36 great guns and 300 lesser pieces, served by 120 gunners. Crewed by 300 mariners and carrying a thousand marines she was one of the most powerful men o' war afloat at the time.

The prevailing truce notwithstanding, James was prepared to connive at the piratical activities of some of his more flamboyant skippers, Andrew Wood of Largs and the Barton clan. Of the latter, Andrew Barton remained one of James' favourites until his death from wounds following an epic sea fight with the English Lord Admiral Edward Howard.

A portrait of James IV of Scotland. This may have been painted from life and shows the king as a relatively young man. (Courtesy of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery)







Facsimile of a bascinet with 'pig face' visor – a late 14th-century survivor, which might still have been worn at Flodden. (Author's collection)

Had James not engaged in battle in September 1513 and lived to die in his bed, history might well have judged his reign as successful; but the weight of his achievements could never balance the loss at Flodden, and his conduct both during the campaign and on the field has been branded as rash and quixotic. The English Tudor chronicler Edward Hall summed up the prevailing view when he wrote:

*O what a noble and triumphant courage was this, for a king to fight in a battle as a mean soldier. But howsoever it happened, God gave the stroke, and he was no more regarded than a poor soldier; for all went one way.<sup>1</sup>*

This view may be unduly pejorative. James' conduct of the battle, though ultimately flawed, was by no means reckless. His management of the campaign had hitherto been entirely consistent with his strategic aims, all of which had largely been achieved. Norham had been reduced, as had the lesser holds of Etal and Ford, and the English had been obliged to divert large forces northward to Northumberland which might otherwise, at least in part, have been deployed against his allies in France.

**Alexander, Third Lord Home**, was the king's principal divisional commander in the coming struggle. Scion of an ancient border line, Lord Alexander occupied the crucial post of Scottish warden of the East March, an office which many of his forbears had held. This was no sinecure. In the rough and tumble of border politics, where diplomacy, open warfare and constant banditry were very much the norm, the Homes had frequently seen their lands around Greenlaw in the Merse wasted by the English. In the course of the riposte following James' championing of the pretender Perkin Warbeck in 1497, the Home stronghold of Ayton had been one of those slighted.

Over a century before, Sir Alexander Home had been one of the many Scottish knights captured in the rout of Humbleton (1402); he had later died fighting for France against the English. The family had benefited from lands confiscated from their powerful neighbours the earls of Dunbar by James I in 1436.

By 1473 the Sir Alexander of the time had attained a peerage and acted as an overseas ambassador to James III. He had, however, subsequently quarrelled with the hedonistic monarch over the transfer of revenues from Coldingham Priory. Home and his border lances had ridden against James at Sauchieburn; the king's grateful son who, at least in name, had led the revolt, on becoming James IV quickly restored the lost source of income. Other rewards followed; the wardenship was reinstated and augmented with the offices of Grand Chamberlain and Keeper of Stirling Castle, both plum appointments.

In the run-up to Flodden, Alexander the Third Earl led a disastrous horseback raid or *chevauchée* into Northumberland in the summer of 1513, the first overt move in the campaign, thereafter known as the 'Ill Raid'. His riders were ambushed and roundly thrashed by English archers under Sir William Bulmer. One of the striking features of the Scottish army was that many of its officers, like their monarch, were relatively inexperienced. Some, like Home, would have taken part in raids and skirmishes – in modern terms, 'low-intensity warfare' – but had never led large bodies of men in open field.



Aydon Castle, near Corbridge in Northumberland; originally a 13th-century hall house, it was refortified and extended after 1296 in response to pressure from the Scots. (Author's photograph)

There is an enduring question regarding the nature of Home's relationship with James IV. The Homes were never easy subjects and were thoroughly steeped in the impenetrable web of cross-border alliances and discreet understandings. Home has been criticized for apparent inactivity after the early success against Edmund Howard's wing of the English army and for failing to come to the aid of the king's division in the crisis of the battle. For a borderer expediency usually, almost invariably, prevailed over the more remote national interest.

Defeat for Scotland inevitably meant that the vengeance of the English would fall heavily on the Marches and a careful warden would do best to husband his resources. It has even been suggested that Home had an arrangement with Lord Dacre, warden of the English West March, that the borderers on both sides would look to themselves. Such an understanding would not have been without precedent.

## ENGLISH COMMANDERS

**Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, Second Duke of Norfolk**, was to be James' nemesis, a man with whom the Scottish king was well acquainted. Despite the weight of his 70 years and being afflicted with gout to the degree that he was frequently obliged to travel by carriage, Thomas Howard remained a powerful figure. His career in arms had begun over 40 years previously when he had fought for the Yorkist King Edward IV in his victory over Warwick, 'the Kingmaker', at Barnet in 1471. He had remained loyal to Edward's usurping brother Richard III and had been





Thomas Howard, Third Duke of Norfolk, in middle age. Howard remained a loyal and favoured subject of Henry VIII and was instrumental in the suppression of the Pilgrimage of Grace in the north following the dissolution of the monasteries. He was, however, lodged in the tower and awaiting execution on the night that Henry died, which earned him a lucky reprieve! (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

present on the fateful field of Bosworth on 22 August 1485, when both the usurper and Howard's own father, the first duke, had perished.

Howard's penalty for supporting the loser had been three and a half years' incarceration in the Tower and the loss of his estates. When questioned, he had summed up his reasons for championing the usurper succinctly: '[because] he was my crowned King and if parliamentary authority set the crown on a stock, I will fight for that stock. And as I fought for him, I will fight for you.'<sup>2</sup>

Having been offered and declined an opportunity to secure freedom by throwing in his lot with Lincoln's rebels in 1487, Howard began his rehabilitation. Released and partially reinstated in 1489, he quickly proved his worth, swiftly suppressing disturbances in the north. Henry VII now appointed him as Lieutenant General of the border with further devolved responsibility for the Middle and East Marches (the young Prince Arthur being the nominal warden).

With his title if not yet all of his estates returned to him, Howard confirmed the king's judgement when he dealt speedily with fresh troubles in 1492. In his prime he was now regarded as England's premier general and a close counsellor to Henry. It was Howard who brokered the truce and royal marriage in 1502 and, in the following year, accompanied Princess Margaret north to Scotland. There he met James and the two men seemed to form an instant bond, to a degree which sparked a jealous complaint from the bride! Within five years all of his family's lands were back in his possession; the old Yorkist had come full circle.

On the accession of Henry VIII in 1509 Howard might have expected to continue in the role of senior adviser but found his position challenged by the parvenu Thomas Wolsey. Although his talents were still useful, and he headed the peace delegation to France in 1510, the earl found himself increasingly sidelined and, peevishly, he flounced out of the court two years later.

It was probably, certainly in Howard's eyes, Wolsey's pernicious influence with the king that denied him a command in the forces being mustered for France. Manning the border against possible Scottish incursion appeared a far drearier prospect with little prospect of spoil or glory. Ironically Wolsey had done his perceived rival a considerable favour, for it was on the despised frontier that the only martial glory of 1513 was to be won. He was clearly the best qualified of the English magnates to hold the northern command; he knew the Marches, he knew the borderers and he knew the man against whom he would have to fight – James IV of Scotland.

In the great trial of arms that was to come, the earl of Surrey would be greatly assisted by his eldest son **Thomas Howard, later Earl of Surrey and Third Duke of Norfolk**. In 1513 Thomas Howard was 40, 'small and of spare stature', dark-haired like his father. His early career had rather been overshadowed by the more swashbuckling persona of his brother Edward. Both were accomplished in the lists, Thomas the more so, but Edward had that swagger that Henry admired. As Lord Admiral he defeated and killed Andrew Barton and went on to blockade the French fleet in Brest on the outbreak of hostilities. It was in the course of a typically buccaneering cutting-out action that he was killed and Thomas succeeded to his high office.

The campaign of Flodden was to be the first test of his leadership skills and he would not be found wanting. In due course he succeeded to his father's dukedom and was active in putting down the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536–37. A staunch recusant, he remained a powerful figure at court, though his plans to marry off the ageing king to his nubile niece Catherine Howard backfired horribly. On the night of Henry's death Howard was in the Tower awaiting the executioner in the morning. Reprieved by fate, he went on to play his part in the reign of Mary Tudor.

<sup>1</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.562  
<sup>2</sup> Campbell, ed., *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, Vol. 2, p.480



# OPPOSING ARMIES

**T**he English and Scots were no strangers to cross-border conflict. They had been intermittently at war for generations, and in the upland dales guerrilla activity based on cattle and sheep raiding had become endemic. The 'riding' names of Tynedale and Redesdale – Charltons, Dodds, Milburns, Robsons, Forsters, Halls and Reeds – sparred with the Armstrongs, Elliots, Bells and Crosers from Liddesdale. Cross-border alliances and the pernicious customs of the vendetta or 'feid' proliferated.

Both sides carried out large-scale cross-border incursions and this state of enmity had existed since Longshanks first made war on, as he perceived, his rebellious Scottish vassals in 1296. Since the development of English longbow tactics the southerners had generally held the advantage on the field; Dupplin Moor, Halidon Hill and Humbleton had all been signal triumphs. To counter this, Scottish commanders had generally sought to avoid full-scale encounters and concentrated on attrition.

## THE SCOTTISH ARMY

After the early victories of Edward III the Scots had, since 1369, clawed back most of the English bastides or 'Pale' in southern Scotland. This was cemented by a victory in the field in the moonlight at Otterburn in 1388; but defeat at Humbleton brought this brief hegemony to an end. James II died besieging Roxburgh, one of the final English bastions, which was subsequently slighted. Gloucester's capture of Berwick in 1482 still rankled and James IV entertained some hope of its recovery.

The king was aware that Scottish armies had fared badly in the past; their spears had proved unequal to the English bills and their lack of quality armour left them horribly vulnerable to the fury of the arrow storm. As early as 1496 James had established a 'harness mill' at Stirling to produce munition-quality armours for the commons whilst his nobles were investing in fine plate from Milan.

In the second half of the 15th century a military revolution had been taking place on the continent. The Swiss had emerged from their mountain fastnesses as a force to be reckoned with; serving as mercenaries they had come to dominate the many battlefields of the Franco-Imperialist conflict raging in northern Italy. These Swiss had largely reinvented the famed Macedonian phalanx of antiquity. Their pike columns, deployed in dense formation, stiffened by ferocious discipline and superb morale, wielded the 18-ft pike, the *sarissa* of Alexander's day.

This unstoppable mass of resolute points could smash through enemy formations like a steamroller, movement, mass and cohesion welded together into a formidable instrument of war. Charles the Bold

**Halberd, German or Swiss, about 1480. The halberd was a polearm fitted with a broad, heavy axe blade, much favoured by the Swiss before the adoption of the pike. (Royal Armouries)**



**Harbottle Castle, the gateway to Coquet Dale – a frequent target for Scottish reivers. (Author's photograph)**



of Burgundy, that rash adventurer, confronted the Swiss in the 1470s and suffered a series of catastrophic defeats, at Grandson, Morat and finally Nancy, where he lost his army and with it his life.

Since then the Swiss had turned war into a trade, selling their genius for wages, which, if not forthcoming, would produce immediate defection; the Swiss fought wars not for glory but as an industry. Machiavelli was certainly impressed:

*The Swiss regiments at present are also based upon the model of the ancient phalanxes and follow their method both in closing up their order of battle and relieving their ranks; when they engage they are placed on each other's flanks, not in a parallel line. They have no method of receiving the first rank, should it be thrown back into the second; in order to relieve each other, they place one regiment in the front and another a little behind on the right, so if the first is hard pressed, the second may advance to its assistance, a third is placed behind both these and also on the right, at the distance of an arquebus shot. They have adopted this disposition so that if the other two are driven back, the third can advance to relieve them, and all have sufficient room either to retreat or advance without falling foul of one another.<sup>3</sup>*

The pike columns, as they deployed for the advance, would, from the right, comprise the van or *Vorhut*; this division was followed by the main body, the *Gewaltschaufen*, and this was in turn supported by the rear or *Nachhut*. The phalanxes were fronted by arquebusiers or crossbowmen to provide covering fire together with picked swordsmen wielding hefty double-handers – their role was to secure the vulnerable flanks of each column.

Momentum was the key; if this could be sustained the rush was unstoppable, but, if halted, the densely packed ranks provided a massed target. It was weight of shot that finally beat the Swiss at the decisive battle of Bicocca in 1522; once stationary, the pikemen were mown down in droves.

As early as 1471 the Scots Parliament had passed an ordinance making the traditional spear redundant in favour of pikes, and in 1513

**Facsimile of a 15th-century archer's sword. Another typical sword type carried by archers as a secondary weapon for close-quarter combat, robust rather than sophisticated. (Author's collection)**







**Poleaxe, possibly English, about 1500. The poleaxe was a gentlemanly staff weapon, intended to 'open up' an opponent's armour; it featured languets to prevent the opponent lopping off the head, a long spike point, broad axe blade and crushing hammer and fluke mounted on the upper or rear edge of the shaft. Properly used it was a devastating weapon and was favoured by armoured knights in judicial duels or foot combat in the lists. (Royal Armouries)**

their French allies were particularly keen to see the Scots adopt these winning tactics. The cadre of French officers that disembarked at Dumbarton either late in July or early the next month comprised some 40 captains under the Sieur d'Aussi, whose role was to instil Swiss tactics into the untried Scots levies.

Theirs was an unenviable task. To convert such raw material into the equivalent of elite Swiss mercenaries was a formidable assignment, for the amount of training required to bring men up to the required standard was very considerable. Moreover, to the Swiss this was their trade – they regarded war as a career. Could the companies of unwilling conscripts be turned, in a matter of weeks, into such a battle-winning instrument?

Furthermore, to succeed, the phalanx needed to be deployed on suitable ground where the momentum of the attack could be sustained. The columns had to comprise men familiar with their weapon, extremely well disciplined, commanded by officers who knew their business, and fired by high morale.

It was common practice for the commanders to attempt to use the ground to delay the rush until the enemy was at hand. An advance over open ground would expose the Swiss to the weight of enemy missile fire and risk a loss of impetus and cohesion. Their ruthless and experienced captains appreciated the weaknesses of the '*puissant*' pike and they had developed their supporting arms accordingly – this had taken a generation, not a mere matter of weeks.

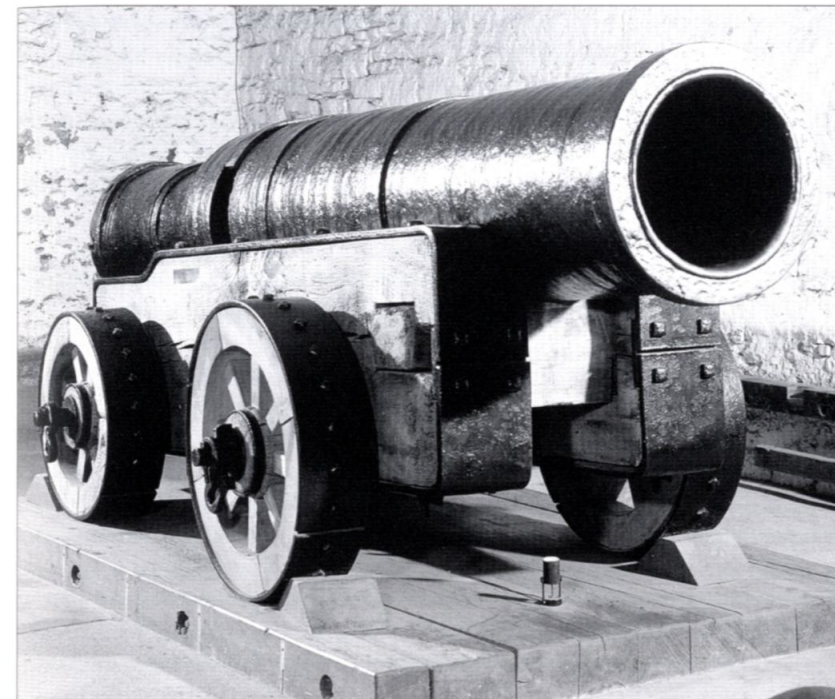
It was a feature of Swiss tactics that once the brigades had been committed to battle there was little the captains or commander-in-chief could do to further influence the outcome of the fight. Tactical flexibility was therefore lacking and it was customary for the officers to charge forward with their men, the matter of sustaining discipline and morale being the prime consideration. James has been excoriated for doing just this at Flodden; however, the decision to lead his division in person should be viewed in the light of the prevailing doctrine and cannot be unduly criticized.

New infantry tactics were not the only innovation. James could dispose a formidable artillery train and, whilst the great guns had played an increasing role in siege warfare for decades, this king could field a greater weight of shot than any of his predecessors.

Guns were now being cast, often in bronze, rather than made up from iron sections banded together (in a process akin to the manufacture of wooden barrels).

These great guns or *bombards* were initially fired from ground level and behind the protection of a hinged timber shutter which afforded some cover to the master gunner, his mate and the swarming crew of matrosses. The majority of pieces loaded at the breech; the removable block was shaped not unlike a large beer mug. By the end of the 15th century wheeled gun carriages were becoming more commonplace although there was, as yet, no attempt to standardize calibres. Elevation was controlled by the use of timber wedges.

To transport these monsters over difficult ground on miry tracks was a major logistical problem. Each of the great guns required teams of horses or oxen, perhaps as many as three dozen, and a company of pioneers preceded to level and fill the roadway ahead. Gunpowder,



**Mons Meg. This great gun with its mighty bore was cast in the Low Countries though a pleasing legend associates its origin with Molise McKim, the hereditary smith of Threave. It was not brought out for the Flodden campaign but did good service for generations thereafter before bursting. Restored, it now resides in Edinburgh Castle. (Courtesy of Historic Scotland Photographic Library)**

milled from a mix of sulphur, saltpetre and charcoal, was inherently unstable and liable to separate out again into its base constituents whilst being transported.

Despite these uncertainties artillery ensured that the tactical advantage in siege warfare had passed from those who built up castles (who had predominated through the earlier centuries) to those who sought to knock them down. Cast in Flanders, around 1460, a notable survivor from this period is the great bombard '*Mons Meg*'. The huge barrel is 13ft 2in long and the bore measures 19½in; it fired a shot weighing some 549lb which is reputed to have carried for a full 2 miles. A tempting if unlikely legend asserts that the gun was cast by Molise McKim, the hereditary smith of Threave, and that the weapon was named after his ferociously tongued wife!<sup>4</sup>

The formidable train which James had amassed comprised five heavy siege pieces, *curtals*, which threw a 60lb shot, two 18-pdr culverins, four 6-pdr *culverins pikmoyenne* or *sakers* and half a dozen *culverins moyenne*, larger versions of the English serpentes. Each of the great guns had its team of gunner, matrosses and drivers, assisted by detachments of pioneers. In charge was Borthwick, the king's proficient master gunner, though a number of his more experienced crews had been detached for service with the fleet and the numbers made up from men of lesser capability.

As the Scots levies began their mass muster on the Burghmuir of Edinburgh from around the middle of August, the magnates and some of the gentry would have been encased in fine plate. Complete harnesses came probably from Flanders or Italy, as contemporary illustrations show these armours as being more popular than the elegantly fluted German style.

The favoured helmet was the *armet* worn with a *wrapper*. An *armet* consisted of a hemispherical skull which was fitted with two hinged flaps

**Facsimile of an infantryman's helmet, of the Swiss style, mid to late 15th century, a rather distinctive and by no means common pattern which appeared in England from the continent during the era of the Wars of the Roses. (Author's collection)**







Field armour, German, in the 'Maximilian' style, about 1520. The final great flowering of the medieval armourer, a quality harness such as this would be worn by the upper ranks of the gentry. (Royal Armouries)

that locked beneath the jaw, with the joint protected by a narrow section of plate and a small visor fitted over the side pieces. Vision was afforded through the narrow slit formed between the rim of the visor and the lower edge of the skull. The front of the helm was reinforced by an additional plate defence called a wrapper.

Arming a knight was a rather complex and by no means speedy affair. An earlier account from around 1450 explains the procedure:

*To arme a man. Ffirste ye must set on sabatones [footwear] and tye hem up on the shoo with smale poyntis that woll not breke. And then griffus [greaves for the calves] and then cuisses [for the thighs] and ye breche of mayle. And the Tonletis [tonlet – fauld]. And the Brest [breastplate] and ye Vambras [lower arm] and ye rerebras [upper arm] and then gloovis [gauntlets]. And then hand his daggere up on his right side. And then his short sworde on his lyfte side in a round rynge all nakid to pull it out lightli. And then put his cote upon his back. And then his basinet [bascinet – helmet] pyind up on two greet staplis before the breste with a dowhill bokil behynde up on the back for to make the basinet sitte just. And then his long swerd in his hande. And then his pensil [pennon] in his hande peynted of St George or of oure ladye to bless him with as he goeth toward the felde and in the felde.<sup>5</sup>*

Those below the front rank of Scottish society might wear imported armours known as *almain rivet*. These were essentially munition-quality harness comprising breast and back, a sallet-type helmet, possibly Italian and tending to feature a rounded or 'bellows face' visor. Articulated tassets covered the thighs, though the lower legs were normally unprotected, save for stout leather boots.

The rank and file might be obliged to rely on the more basic *jakke* or *brigandine*, a flexible doublet of leather or canvas, possibly simply stuffed with rags or tallow or with an inner lining of small metal plates riveted onto the fabric so that only the pattern of rivet heads showed through. Lengths of chain, crudely adequate to deflect a cut, might be sewn onto doublet and hose, while protective headgear might comprise a simple iron pot or skull.

Highlanders would probably go barefoot and barelegged with a long shirt dyed saffron. Over this their gentry would wear a padded *aketon* and perhaps a full-length mail shirt. For the most part, the rank and file, would be armed only with bow and spear. The chronicler John Major has left us with a description of the highland warriors of his day, which, though later in date, could equally apply to the early 16th century:

*From mid leg to the foot they go uncovered; their dress is, for an over-garment, a loose plaid and a shirt, saffron dyed. They are armed with a bow and arrows, a broadsword and small halbert. They always carry in their belt a stout dagger, dingle edged but of the sharpest. In time of war they cover the whole of their body with a coat of mail, made of iron rings and in it they fight. The common folk amongst the Wild Scots [highlanders] go out to battle with the whole body clad in a linen garment sewed together in patchwork, well daubed with wax or with pitch, and with an overcoat of deerskin.<sup>6</sup>*

## Strength of the Scottish army

Of the chroniclers, *The Trewe Encountre* and Edward Hall both claim that the Scottish host numbered 100,000 – this is patently absurd. Thomas Howard, the Lord Admiral, in his official dispatch (*Articles of Battle*), claims 80,000, still far too high and smacking more of politics than of military reality. A contemporary letter written by Brian Tuke to Richard Pace reduces the claim to 60,000, a figure echoed by Polydore Vergil. Writing in the 18th century, George Ridpath states that there were 60,000–100,000 Scots on the field.

Scottish writers of the 16th century, however, are more modest in their assessments. Buchanan writes that the Scots numbered no more than 15,000; Pitscottie gives double that figure; some 20th-century Scottish authorities maintain these much lower numbers.

It is notoriously difficult to give an accurate assessment of numbers when considering the size of medieval armies. Even where we are fortunate and possess surviving muster rolls these may not necessarily reflect the true number of soldiers actually present on the field, their initial strength wasted by sickness and desertion, both rife.

In the case of the Scots army at Flodden the figures quoted on p.28, which estimate a total strength of 42,000, represent the best assessment gleaned from those records which remain and are, in round terms, generally agreed by the present generation of writers.

Regardless of the true figure, there is no doubt that the King of Scots had marshalled an enormous host. On a cautionary note, however, the feudal levy restricted the conscripts to 40 days' service and, during that time, they were expected to provide their own foodstuffs. On campaign, supply inevitably proved problematic.

Once hunger bit, the individual fighters were likely to disperse to forage or simply desert. We are unfortunate in that the Household Accounts from August 1513 to June 1515 are lost so that an exact tally is impossible. To this uncertainty must be added the discrepancy between those who were called out and those who actually fought on the day. Many of these were the personal retainers and affinities of the magnates and as such would be less prone to defection.

The Scots numbers remain problematic. It is very difficult to estimate that portion of the Scots army lost to sickness or desertion before the battle. Some writers put this as high as 25 per cent, which may be a little too high; 10 per cent might be a safer assessment.

## THE ENGLISH ARMY

By contrast to the Scots, the English, although they could field more guns, could not hope to match the weight of shot. Their pieces were lighter sakers and serpentines intended for use in the field rather than the more static continuance of a siege. Nonetheless Surrey's master gunner, William Blackenhall, had a full complement of experienced crews and this greater expertise would tell.

The English army would also have presented a far more traditional image, most of its soldiers resembling their fathers and grandfathers who had fought in the Wars of the Roses and, in many cases, bearing the arms their forbears had handed down.



Brigandine, Italian, about 1470–80. The brigandine was made from twin layers of fabric with an intermediate lining of plates riveted between. (Royal Armouries)

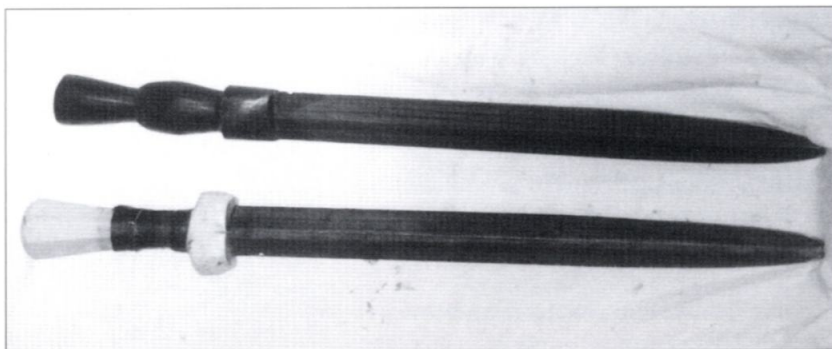
Facsimile of a munition-quality breastplate of the 16th century. (Author's collection)



Facsimile of a 16th-century bill. The redoubtable polearm of the English medieval army – a militarized version of an agricultural implement and, in the hands of disciplined troops, a most formidable weapon. (Author's collection)







The majority of these men were raised by the system of contract or indenture. Originally perfected in the reign of Edward III, this was a means whereby the Crown would contract with leading captains, most often magnates, to supply a certain number of men of specified troop types to serve for an agreed period on negotiated rates of pay. The royal purse also provided 'travelling expenses' at the rate of eight pence for every 20 miles the soldier travelled on his route to campaign.

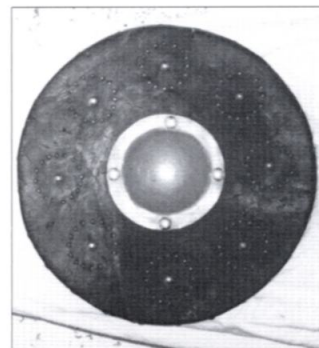
It is probable that something in the region of 80 per cent of the English army was raised by contract. A great number, possibly a third of the whole, served the Stanleys, leading magnates of Lancashire and Cheshire. More were drawn from Yorkshire, perhaps 10,000, and a lesser number, possibly a fifth of that, from Durham. The Lord Admiral was able to contribute a battalion of marines, perhaps 1,200 strong, from the fleet.

In appearance the army would closely resemble that which had marched 30 years earlier for Lancaster and York, ranked in companies of bows and bills, the latter predominating. The magnates would carry full harness in the latest fashion, similar to their Scottish counterparts. Many of the lesser gentry and men-at-arms would be wearing more venerable armours, equipped with the older sallet-style helmet, the wearer's neck protected by a detached section of plate known as the *bevor*. The rank and file would either go unarmoured or rely on perhaps a munition-quality breast and back or brigandine with a kettle hat or simple sallet as essential head protection.

An indentured or liveried archer would retain his own weapon. During the Hundred Years War the Office of Ordnance had begun to issue standard bows to replace losses sustained on campaign. On the eve of its redundancy, the longbow remained a formidable weapon and would still be instrumental in a later English victory against the Scots in the latter part of the 16th century.

Yew was the preferred wood, though ash, elm and wych elm were also employed. The bow stave was usually between 5ft 7in and 6ft 2in long; in section it resembled a rounded 'D' and had a draw weight of somewhere between 80 and 120lb (two or three times that of a modern sporting or competition bow). The arrows were manufactured from a variety of timber but Roger Ascham, the noted 16th-century expert and tutor to the future Elizabeth I, advocated the use of aspen, though ash, elder, alder, birch and hornbeam were also popular.

The shafts were, on average, around 2ft 6in long, the fletching made from grey goose feathers; points might be flat-headed for impact, barbed for wounds or the wickedly thin bodkin for punching through mail and



ABOVE Facsimile of a small leather target, as carried by the highlanders at Flodden. This was intended both for parrying in defence and for the attack, using short beats to punch at the opponent. (Author's collection)

ABOVE, LEFT Facsimiles of two 16th-century daggers; these are long-bladed rondel-type daggers such as would have been carried by gentlemen and commons alike. (Author's collection)

Facsimile of a late 15th-century sallet – a helmet, either open-faced or equipped with a visor that has a tail to protect the neck. Such helmets were worn with or without a visor, and often by all ranks in society. (Author's collection)

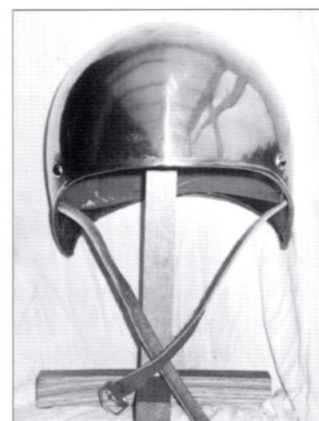


plate. These men of the grey goose feather could shoot 15 aimed arrows a minute, which would wreak frightful carnage amongst lightly armoured and massed opponents. Whilst plate harness was now proof against arrows, the more basic gear of the commons was not.

Descended from an agricultural tool, the English bill was neither crude nor inelegant. Billmen, deployed in companies, had contributed mightily to the string of victories won in France and the bill, on the field, was to prove more than a match for the 'puissant' pike. It was a perfect killing implement with a long head tapering to a point, the cutting blade fixed with a hook and spike to the rear. Well-drilled companies of billmen would move and fight in formation, using the weapon as a spear for thrusting or as a fearful axe for the overhead slash or 'hack'.

The medieval sword had reached the very height of elegant function and balance. Blades were intended for both the cut and the thrust, stiffened to punch through harness or the vulnerable areas under the arm or groin. Hilts were full enough to permit a single or double-handed grip and the tapering blades ground to a hollow diamond section, the sharp point stiffened and weighted.

In the years after the English *débâcle* at Bannockburn, Robert the Bruce achieved a complete military hegemony on the border, harrying and extorting at will from a cowed and impoverished population, seemingly abandoned by their hedonistic king. One who did not submit was the English warden of the West March, Andrew Harcla, who is often credited with copying the Scottish precedent for mobile warfare to create a class of light border horseman, the *hobilar*.

Edward III, angrily frustrated by the failure of mounted chivalry during the abortive Weardale campaign of 1327, recognized the need to suit troop types to the terrain. Hobilars, known later in the reign of Henry VIII as the border horse and later still as the 'steel bonnets', were present in both armies. For these uplanders war was now a way of life.

Mounted on swift, hardy garrons, lightly armoured with mail or *jakke*, favouring the lance and the handy form of crossbow known as a latch, the borderers acted as scouts, 'prickers', and skirmishers for both sides. Their performance on the field was not calculated to win plaudits; local alliances and the lure of loot, regardless of which side they plundered, considerably outweighed any exaggerated notion of patriotic fervour.

### Strength of the English army

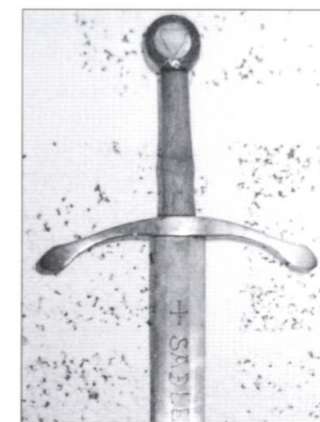
Numbers for the English army are easier to quantify as the muster rolls survived, and most of the 16th-century authors agree on 26,000, though Vergil puts the English numbers at 30,000, and Ridpath concurs with the lower figure. Respected military historians such as Donald Featherstone and Charles Kightly, writing in the last 30 years, plump for 40,000 Scots and 26,000–30,000 English. The matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved, but we may assume that, with the English, most of those who mustered at Bolton near Alnwick fought on the field.

3 Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, p.97

4 Mons Meg remains on show at Edinburgh Castle, a magnificent survivor

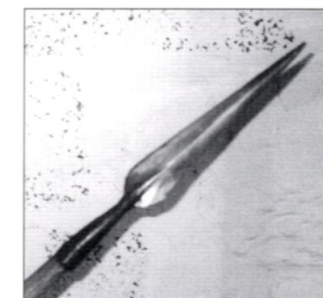
5 Quoted in Oakshott, R. Ewart, *A Knight and his Weapons*, London (1964) p.51

6 Major, *A History of Greater Britain, 1521*, Scottish Historical Society (1892)



Facsimile of a hand and a half sword, of the type deployed at Flodden. The hand and a half, or 'bastard', sword was the epitome of chivalric arms, the final flowering of the medieval swordsmith's art. (Author's collection)

Facsimile of a borderer's lance. This was the weapon of the border horse, as useful in herding lifted beasts as in spitting an opponent. It could be used overarm but was more habitually couched. (Author's collection)





ORDERS OF BATTLE

THE BATTLE OF FLODDEN, 9 SEPTEMBER 1513\*

THE SCOTTISH ARMY

Commanded by James IV, King of Scotland

The left

Commanded by Alexander, Third Earl of Home, and Alexander Gordon, Earl of Huntly

Home's borderers from the Merse and Teviotdale, officered by local 'heidmen' Huntly's Gordons from Aberdeenshire and Inverness, officered by Gordon tacksmen

Perhaps 10,000 strong in total.

The left centre

Commanded by William Hay, Earl of Errol, John Lindsay, Earl of Crawford, and William Graham, Earl of Montrose, with many of the officers drawn from Graham's affinity

The levies of Perthshire, Angus, Forfar, Fife and the north-east Lowlands

Altogether perhaps 7,000.

The centre

Personally commanded and led by King James IV

The members of the king's household  
The combined retainers and affinities of the earls of Cassillis, Morton and Rothes, and of Lords Herries, Maxwell, Innerwick, Borthwick and Sempill  
The town levy from Edinburgh, Ayr, Haddington  
County levies from the south-west and Galloway

In total perhaps as many as 15,000.

The right

Commanded by Archibald Campbell, Earl of Argyll and Matthew Stuart, Earl of Lennox. Their troops were mainly highlanders led by clan chiefs under the banners of the earls, as follows:

Contingents of Mackenzies, Grants and MacDonalds under MacLean of Ardnamurchan; MacLeans of Duart; Campbells from Glenorchy and Loudoun  
Levies from the far north, Caithness, Sutherland and the Orkneys led by William Sinclair, Earl of Caithness  
A stiffening of half a hundred French men-at-arms under D'Aussi

Possibly 5,000 in all.

The reserve

Commanded by Adam Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell

The steady lowland conscripts from the Lothians, the Forest of Ettrick, and the border burghs of Galashiels and Selkirk

5,000 strong.

Total strength of the Scottish army = 42,000.

THE ENGLISH ARMY

THE VANGUARD

Commanded by Thomas Howard, the Lord Admiral

The left

Commanded by Sir Marmaduke Constable, with officers drawn from his family (a brother, three sons, two cousins and a son-in-law)

Family retainers  
1,000 Lancashire men  
The Northumbrian affinity of Sir William Percy

A total of 2,000 men.

The centre

Under the direct control of Thomas Howard

1,000 of the total complement of 1,200 marines drawn from the fleet, each under their normal captains  
2,000 men under the bishop of Durham's banners, drawn from the Palatinate and led by Lord Lumley and Sir William Bulmer  
Most of the rest drawn from the Ridings, including dalesmen under Lord Clifford and the North Riding men under Lord Conyers

9,000 men in total.

The right

Led by Howard's younger brother Edmund

1,000 of the Cheshire men, with Edmund Howard (unhappy at not being brigaded with the Stanleys, their affinity). These included the Macclesfield company and 300 tenants of the Abbey of the Vale Royal  
Half a thousand from Lancashire  
Others from south Yorkshire, including levies from Hull and Doncaster  
A stiffening of the remaining 200 marines under Maurice Berkeley, master of the Mary George

Some 3,000 in all.

Total strength of Vanguard = 14,000.

THE MAIN BATTLE

Commanded by Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey

The left

Commanded by Sir Edward Stanley, with troops drawn almost entirely from his family tenantry and affinity

Lancashire and Cheshire men with Stanley retainers appointed as captains

3,500 strong.

The centre

Commanded by the earl of Surrey

500 personal retainers and headquarters staff  
South Riding men led by George Darcy  
The Swaledale and Wensleydale contingents under Scrope of Bolton  
The York militia  
Tenants of the Abbey of Whitby  
Men of the East Riding, led by the archdeacon  
Companies led by gentry such as Richard Tempest, Sir Christopher Pickering, Sir Ninian Markenfield and Sir Bryan Stapleton

In all some 5,000 men.

The right

Commanded by Lord Dacre, warden of the English West March

Border riders, 'prickers' and light horse, including a troop from Northumberland under the 'Bastard' Heron  
The remainder of the horse from the West March, with some East Marchers from Bamboroughshire and Tynemouth  
On foot, more Lancastrians, tenants and affinity of James Stanley, Bishop of Ely, and commanded in the field by his natural son, John

Total of mounted arm perhaps 1,700–2,000, total of foot perhaps 1,800, giving a possible total of 3,500 in all.

Total strength of Main Battle = 12,000.

Total strength of the English army = 26,000.

\*These numbers are estimates based on a number of inconsistent accounts; moreover sickness, desertion (etc) would have affected the number of men who actually fought on the day, perhaps by 10 per cent or more.

OPPOSING PLANS

SCOTTISH PLANS

James IV of Scotland had achieved a great deal for his country in terms of economic growth, administrative and constitutional reform, the increasing centralization of power, and the development of the navy and the arts. He had, however, never won a victory in the field; to do so would set the seal on his reign, and prove him to be the very model of Machiavelli's renaissance prince. Not only would this be a major coup on the purely domestic front and curb the ever-present separatist tendencies of his magnates but it would mightily impress his allies and secure a place on the greater stage of European politics.

It was not necessary for James to fight in order to secure his strategic aims. His artillery was swiftly able to reduce Norham which had successfully defied him previously and the mere presence of large Scottish forces in Northumberland would be sufficient to draw Surrey northward. All those who served with him would be troops who might otherwise be diverted to swell the English effort in France. The earl's army is said to have numbered 26,000, a very substantial force by the standards of the day. James' intervention denied all of these men to Henry.

It was the long-established custom of the English kings to keep the northern frontier secure when they were embarking upon campaigns in France. Henry would therefore have anticipated a large portion of the available manpower from north of the Trent remaining, probably under arms and under local command, in England. Any large-scale demonstration by James would oblige his brother-in-law to fully levy his northern forces and commit them to a campaign along the frontier.

Should the threat be more apparent than real then Henry could afford, simply, to reinforce the garrison on the Marches, but with a large Scottish army in the field he was bound to counter by deploying more substantial forces. There is no direct evidence that James hoped for tangible gains beyond the capture of Norham, yet, should he prove able to defeat the English in a major engagement, then there was always the possibility of recovering Berwick, a most enticing lure.

Given the scale of the forces deployed across the Channel, James may have considered, as has been suggested, that all that remained were 'millers and mass priests'. It is unlikely that the King of Scots would have so underrated the potential of the northern army or Surrey's capacity for dynamic action, but he would have been justified in thinking that this army was essentially 'second best'. If he could fight on favourable ground where the new tactical doctrines could be properly employed then there was a clear prospect of victory.

James has been heavily criticized for his forward and aggressive leadership. There can be no doubt he craved martial glory, the aim of

Facsimile of a munition-quality plackart (plate reinforcement) of the 16th century. This would have been worn by the commons or men-at-arms as a mid-body defence. (Author's collection)





every renaissance prince; in this he was no different from his brother-in-law. His decision to 'lead from the front' was by no means foolish or reckless in view of the nature of the army he was leading. Scotland was not a unified state; the highlands had long evinced separatist leanings and the borderers had a lengthy history of rugged individualism.

To function, the army needed a figurehead, and none other than the king himself could supply this. James has been compared unfavourably to Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn who retained tactical control throughout. Bruce did, however, possess the inestimable advantage of commanding an army that was tried and tested and he had a number of vastly experienced and reliable subordinates in whom he could trust absolutely.

Whether James deliberately courted battle or whether it was forced upon him must remain a matter of debate. There can be little doubt that his enthusiasm exceeded that of his nobles. However sound the doctrine, the fact remained that James had never commanded in the field, and the Scots still had bad memories from previous encounters.

Nonetheless the lure of battle beckoned. James was neither rash nor reckless but he must have considered that his host was more than a match for any scratch force that Surrey could muster. With the pride of the English chivalry in France, this opposition would be the residue rather than the substance of English might. To win a victory in plain field was a dazzling prospect; nothing else could ensure James' place within the pantheon of Scottish heroes.

In practical terms, victory in battle would expose the whole of northern England, an opportunity not witnessed since the halcyon days of Scottish military hegemony after Bannockburn. Norham would be secured and Berwick threatened. In strategic terms, Surrey's defeat would frustrate the main effort in France and surely force Henry to withdraw. Popular pressure in England would demand that English arms concentrate on a retaliatory strike against the Scots, who would by then have withdrawn over the border.

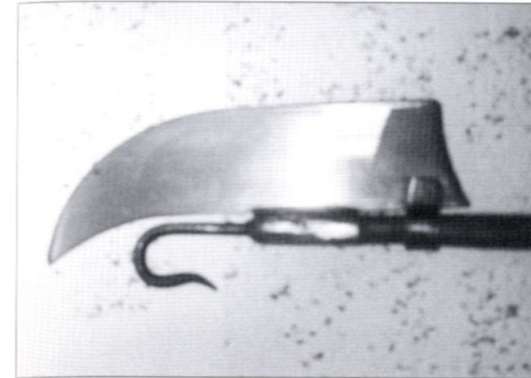
## ENGLISH PLANS

The campaign in the north of England to be initiated by the Scots in 1513 was recognized by both sides as a sideshow, essentially an attempt by the Scots to divert English troops from the main effort across the Channel and directed at their allies the French. It is the supreme irony of Flodden that the sideshow would yield a decisive and bloody denouement whilst the vaunted chevauchée would achieve little beyond a minor English win in the rather overblown Battle of the Spurs or Guingattes fought on 16 August.

Surrey had been dismayed and angered that his role in the coming campaign should be limited to what he initially perceived as a police action on the inhospitable northern frontier whilst the spoils and honours accrued in France. Henry regarded his brother-in-law's likely intervention as no more than an irritation, a distraction from the



**Horseman's axe, early 16th century. Weapons like this were dated by this time but some would still be carried; they were essentially cavalrymen's weapons. (Courtesy of the Heritage Centre, Bellingham)**



**Facsimile of a polearm or borderer's axe. The 'Jeddart staff' was almost certainly in existence by this time, though most surviving examples date from later in the 16th century. (Author's collection)**

decisive results he anticipated in northern France. In the event the Holy League was to prove the flimsiest of alliances and the actual gains were negligible. Most of the dying was done in Northumberland.

The English plans, therefore, were entirely defensive in nature. Surrey simply sought to prevent the Scots from conducting a large-scale raid into northern England with impunity. He would also have been concerned over the security of Norham and, more importantly, Berwick. During the campaign James made no overt move to assail the walls of this, the most important of the eastern border fortresses, but recovery of Berwick would have been bound to

feature in his planning.

James would not intend to fight a second battle; he would undoubtedly prefer the tactics of his predecessors, scorched earth and harrying the flanks. Let the English sweep through the Lothians, as they had done so many times before, until hunger and dysentery compelled their withdrawal.

It was just this eventuality that Surrey had to contain. His task was an arduous one. It would be difficult for him to keep his forces in the field beyond the end of summer, for Northumberland lacked the infrastructure and resources to support so large a host indefinitely. From a logistical viewpoint Surrey had to chastise the Scots as soon as possible; he had, from the outset, to accept the hazard of battle as the only sure means of doing so.

He would be aware how easy it would be for James simply to march his host back over the border – the English had not the means to mount a counter-invasion – and then reappear at the border when the English army had dispersed. A successful engagement was therefore the only means whereby Surrey could ensure the safety of the north; nothing less would remove the threat.



# THE CAMPAIGN OF 1513

## PRELIMINARY MOVES

Contemporary accounts of the battle of Flodden are sparse. The succinct summary provided by *The Articles of the Battaile bitwix the Kynge of Scottes and therle of Surrey in Brankstone felde the 9th day of Septembre* probably originated as a dispatch written by Thomas Howard, the Lord Admiral, very soon after the event. The bishop of Durham, Thomas Ruthal, provides a description in two letters penned just afterwards, whilst *The Trewe Encountre* also appears contemporary. Although published in 1550, the later Tudor chronicler Edward Hall's *The Triumphant Reigne of Kynge Henry VIII* may also be based on eye-witness testimony.

When the accounts fail us we are forced to fall back upon Colonel Burne's theory of 'inherent military probability' – that is to say, what would a sensible commander of troops do in a given situation? This is not entirely satisfactory and tends to be disfavoured by academic authors. Nonetheless the current writers who have focused on the battle, including Charles Lightly (1975), Niall Barr (2001) and Peter Reese (2003), broadly agree. The present writer has read all or most of the previous accounts and has, on many occasions, walked the field.

As a general Scots muster appeared imminent, Surrey, in mid-July, could not afford to be idle. Nor was he. By the 12th, grain was being shipped up to Newcastle, intended to be the base of operations. The great northern city was the natural choice and had been a jumping-off



A general view of the border landscape, the sort of terrain traversed by James' army on the march from Edinburgh, although at that time it would have been considerably more rugged. (Author's photograph)

The cavalry at Flodden would have looked very similar to this depiction from John Skelton's *Ballade of the Scottyshe Kynge*. (Courtesy of the British Library)



point for many previous expeditions from the reign of Edward I onwards. The victorious Yorkists had used the city as a base for their campaigns against the Lancastrian-held border fortresses from 1461–64. It was a major port, so foodstuffs and munitions could be sent ahead by ship rather than dragged over the rutted highways.

Already the citizens of Berwick, in English hands since 1482, were becoming nervous and soliciting for resources to put their much-tried walls in defensible order. Ominously, their Scottish neighbours in the Merse were seen to be moving livestock and valuables, invariably a sure portent of impending conflict.

The earl first summoned his immediate retinue, half a thousand strong and drawn from his own East Anglian estates. The individual companies were officered by captains on 4s (20p) a day, assisted by





**Grim Hermitage in Liddesdale, seat of the Keeper of Liddesdale who had the onerous mission of controlling the 'riding' names. (Author's photograph)**

junior or petty captains. The heavy horse who rode with the colours earned 1s 6d (7½ p); light cavalry, 'demi-lances', were paid 9d (3½ p); the rump of the foot, 446 strong, comprising bows and bills and liveried in the white and green of the Tudors, received 8d (3p) per day.

To assist, Surrey had a headquarters staff of 39. His younger son Edmund was appointed as Marshal of the Host, and the earl would also be joined by his elder surviving son, the Lord Admiral; this was to be very much a Howard-led army! Rouge Croix was to be the English herald and the logistical 'tail' included six trumpeters, joiners and clerks.

Sir Nicholas Appleyard would command the ordnance, which would comprise 22 great guns, 18 of which were 2-pdrs or 'falcons' and the remainder 5-pdr or 6-pdr serpentines. Although the English train could not match the Scots' for weight of shot, these lighter field pieces were, by virtue of their manoeuvrability, far more suited to counter-battery work than the heavy siege guns. Appleyard and his clerk of the ordnance, William Blackenhall, also had a full complement of trained and experienced crews.

James would have been aware that England had not been completely denuded of defenders; it seems unlikely therefore that he would have been tempted to express the measure of contempt attributed to him:

*There's none at home left in the land but jault head monks and bursten freers, or ragged rustics without rules or priests prating for pudding strives or millners madder than their mules, or wanton clerks waking their wives. There's not a lord left in England, but all are gane beyond the sea, both knight and baron with his band with ordnance or artillery.<sup>7</sup>*

Linlithgow Palace, situated in West Lothian, is best known as the birthplace of Mary Queen of Scots. It is said that this is where Margaret (née Tudor) waited anxiously for the return of James IV from the Flodden battlefield. (Courtesy of Historic Scotland Photographic Library)



The king may have sought to boost his army's morale by denigrating the worth of the likely opposition but he and his magnates would be not be so blind. James knew Surrey of old and he would have no illusions about the vigour of the English response.

If he had sought a precedent, the dire consequences of David II's intervention in 1346 should have been sufficient warning. The Scottish king, in support of his French ally, defeated at Crécy, invaded northern England in an autumn raid or chevauchée. He proceeded in the belief that the country was denuded of able-bodied defenders. He was much surprised therefore to be boldly confronted by a northern army, just west of Durham. The Scots were utterly defeated and the king himself captured.

However, James could, with reason, believe his train to be superior and he had confidence in the ability of his lords and their French advisers to instil the new battle-winning tactics into raw Scots levies.

On 24 July the king gave orders for a general muster. The bulk of the conscripts would drill on the Burghmuir of Edinburgh whilst the border contingents assembled nearer their homes. These men were to constitute a feudal host bound to serve for their stipulated time of 40 days and to do so on an unpaid basis. Such a summons would generally be less than popular: 'each man made haste to mend his gear ... some made their battle axes bright ... some from their bills did rub the rust some made long pikes and lances bright.'<sup>8</sup>

The border 'names' or families would be ready for a chance to exercise their lances; cross-border forays were meat and drink to them. The 'riding' or 'reiving' names such as the Kerrs and Scotts of Teviotdale, Armstrongs, Elliots, Bells and Crosers from the wild fastness of Liddesdale together with the Maxwells, Johnstones, Crichtons and Douglasses from the west, could all be counted on. The highlanders of the north and west could always be drawn by the lure of loot. But for the majority of lowlanders the campaign was an unnecessary and





Bamburgh Castle – one of the great coastal fortresses that cover the Scottish invasion route down the east coast. (Author's photograph)

unwelcome chore. Such unwillingness was not the stock from which the disciplined fury of the Swiss had been born.

By 25 July the fleet had weighed anchor to join with the French, the most impressive armada ever assembled in Scottish waters, including the two capital ships *Michael* and *Margaret*. This was the king's play for a seat in the great councils of Europe, a daring and ambitious strategy, one fraught with risk, for the consequences of failure would be severe. It has to be questioned whether the magnates, as a body, shared their sovereign's enthusiasm. Franco-Scottish cooperation had, in the past, as at Neville's Cross, brought nothing but disaster; the Scots fighting in the hard battles of the Hundred Years War, Poitiers, Cravant or Verneuil had shed their blood in torrents and to no avail.

Whether or not the subsequent tales of dire warnings given to the king are apocryphal, these may well reflect the nobles' concern that their monarch might commit to battle at the earliest opportunity. One of the more enduring tells of a seer who approached James whilst at his devotions in the chapel at Linlithgow: 'Thou wilt [he advised the king] not fare well in thy journey nor none that passes with thee ... meddle with no women nor use their counsel, not let them touch they body nor thou theirs, for and thou do it thou wilt be confounded and brought to shame.'<sup>9</sup>

By late July or perhaps early in August a cadre of 40 French captains, under the Sieur D'Aussi, had disembarked at Dumbarton; to them would fall the strenuous task of training the Scots in pike drill. Advisers were not the only the only resources France had to offer:

*To the western seaport of Dunbar the King of France sent to James IV, King of Scots: First 25,000 gold crowns of full weight. Also forty cartloads of powder. Two pieces of great ordnance called cannons. Also a ship laden with 400 arquebuses and 600 hand culverin, with their shot. Also a ship laden with bombards and other engines, including 6,000 spears, 6,000 maces.<sup>10</sup>*

The bulk of these valuable supplies arrived too late to be deployed in the forthcoming campaign; time was the commodity which both James

and his new instructors lacked. To create pikemen as disciplined, hardy and ferocious as the Swiss took months of training, even assuming that the will was present – and no such assumption could be made of the Scottish conscripts.

## THE SCOTS INVASION

From 13–20 August the levies mustered on the Burghmuir whilst the borderers began assembling by Ellam Kirk near Duns. On the 17th, as the musters swelled towards their full complement, the great guns were removed from Edinburgh Castle and placed on their carriages. By the next day some were ready for the journey south, the rest following on the 20th. By then the army had already marshalled for the march, passing through Dalkeith to collect the border contingent, prior to crossing the Tweed, that Rubicon of border conflict.

The Scots with all of their ordnance, baggage and the inevitable tail of camp followers must have presented an unforgettable sight as they marched. The proud panoply of knightly pennons fluttered in the light summer breeze, while the tramp of many thousands of men trailed the 18ft shafts of the 'puissant' pike. The great clouds of dust given off, with scores of tradesmen, pedlars, whores and drovers following in the choking wake, would have added to the picture.

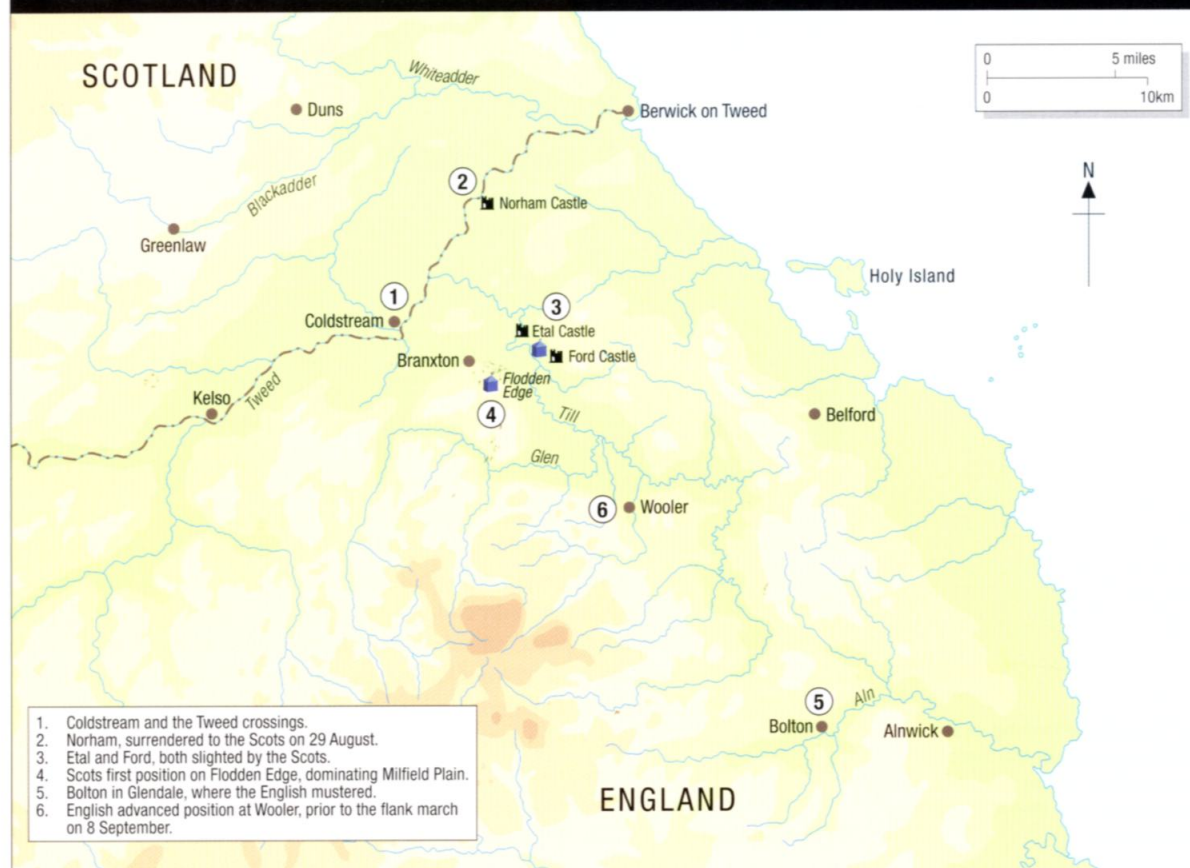
At their head rode the magnificent figure of James IV, King of Scots, dazzling in his surcoat, with its fashionably slashed sleeves and embroidered with the royal arms. Around his neck hung a beautifully wrought gold collar, and on his finger shone the turquoise ring sent by Queen Anne.

Norham Castle looking at the south elevation of the keep (under repair at the time this photograph was taken). (Author's photograph)





## THE SCOTS INVASION ROUTE



This was to be the largest field army the Scots had mustered. It possessed a magnificent artillery train and had been drilled in tactics that could inflict a crushing defeat on an English army, especially one which was comprised purely of northerners. James had placed great faith in his French captains, but their task was a daunting one in view of the fundamental differences between the Swiss and the Scots. However, they were as ready as they could be.

Lyon King at Arms, the Scottish herald, had already, on 11 August, delivered James' final ultimatum to his brother-in-law at the siege of Théroutanne in Picardy. The Scottish king's demands were that Henry should:

*Desist from further invasion and utter destruction of our brother and cousin the Most Christian King to whom ... we are bounden and obliged for mutual defence the one of the other, like as you and your confederates be obliged for mutual invasions certifying you we will take part in defence of our brother and cousin the Most Christian King. And we will do what thing we trust may cause you to desist from pursuit of him.<sup>11</sup>*

Henry treated this threat with typical *sangfroid*, indifferent to the power of the Scots to intervene and trusting, as previous monarchs before him, the northern army to counter any invasion. An attempt by



ABOVE Etal Castle, gatehouse. This is a gentry castle, smaller altogether in scale than the prince bishop's grand fortress at Norham. Nonetheless it was an important bulwark against Scots raiders, but it could not withstand the Scots guns in 1513. The monument is presently in the care of English Heritage who have mounted an impressive exhibition on the story of the campaign and battle of Flodden within the visitor centre. (Author's photograph)

ABOVE, RIGHT Etal Castle gatehouse and keep. The gatehouse is largely 14th century with later alterations – the cannon in the foreground is of much later vintage. (Author's photograph)



the French to relieve the garrison was seen off in a sharp skirmish that became glorified as 'the Battle of the Spurs' – the only laurels to be won that year in France.

On 21 July Surrey had mustered his retinue at Lambeth, and the following day he led them out through Bishopsgate onto the long road north. This was one he had travelled many times and he did so now boiling with resentment against the King of Scots, whose intermeddling, he perceived, had denied him his rightful place by Henry's side in France (though in reality his exclusion probably owed much to Wolsey's politicking).

By 1 August the earl had established temporary headquarters at Pontefract, one of the chief fortresses in the north, destined to feature large in the grim saga of the Pilgrimage of Grace over two decades later. Here he established a council of war and established a network of north-south, trans-Pennine staging posts and relays that were soon carrying his summons to the northern gentry.

Whilst we cannot, from the scanty evidence of the chronicles, establish a clear picture of Surrey's intentions at this stage, we may be confident that he would be ready to offer battle to any Scots army that crossed the border; more than ready, perhaps, for only a decisive victory in the field would compensate for the missed opportunities in France. Despite his age, very considerable for the period, and his numerous ills the earl was both vigorous and determined in his outlook. He was to have two of his sons at his side and, if he could bring on a general engagement against the Scots, the Howard clan might yet win some glory and confound jealous parvenus such as Wolsey!

Early August witnessed the first clash of arms on the border. Lord Home with his hard-riding families from the Merse struck towards Wooler and 'took up' the fertile plain around the Till. Sir William Bulmer of





Ford Castle. This is much restored though traces of the earlier structure still stand. The castle, like its neighbour Etal, was a gentleman's fortified manor. The village and castle were extensively remodelled in the 19th century. In 1513 it was in the ownership of the Heron family. Lady Heron is said to have beguiled the Scottish king, he being susceptible to the charms of attractive women; this is undoubtedly apocryphal as he subsequently slighted the place. The castle is not generally open to the public. (Author's photograph)

Brancepeth, lying in wait with a brigade of longbowmen, ambushed the Scots on 13 August as they headed north past Milfield, burdened with livestock and 'gear', on what would henceforth be known as the 'Ill Raid'. Home was caught completely unawares; scores of Scots were shot from the saddle and more made prisoner. First blood to England.

## THE FALL OF NORHAM CASTLE

On 22 August the main Scots army crossed the Tweed at Coldstream. Estimates of the total numbers vary wildly, as previously discussed, but, allowing for the inevitable casualties, sick list and desertions (the last of these significant) beforehand, it may be that the army which crossed the Tweed numbered over 40,000, a vast array.

The first night was spent encamped by Twizelhaugh, the army's flanks protected by the waters of both Tweed and Till. The Scots' first objective was the reduction of Norham, the 'Queen of Border Fortresses', pride of the prince bishops, whose walls had defied James 16 years earlier. The castellan, John Anislow, believed himself ready and that the garrison could hold out until Surrey arrived with the relief. In this he was to be mistaken.

The Scots batteries were laid at Ladykirk bank on the north side of the Tweed. The weight of shot vastly exceeded that available to the besiegers in 1497. The castle was essentially Norman in design, a great square keep with an inner and outer ward.

The great guns pulverized the western gatehouse and effected a breach in the length of curtain running parallel with the river. The gunners having declared the entry practicable, the main enclosure, or *enceinte*, was subjected to repeated infantry assault. Though the attackers gained the outer ward their attempts on the inner ring were repulsed.

Nonetheless, after five days of intensive bombardment and three major assaults the garrison found themselves critically short of powder and missiles. On 29 August Anislow felt obliged to capitulate whilst his



An engraving of the battle of Flodden. (Courtesy of TopFoto.co.uk)

men could still expect the courtesies of war. This, for the Scots, was a signal success; Norham was a long sought-after prize and its fall exposed the whole eastern flank of north Northumberland. There is a tale, again probably a later invention, which credits an English traitor who, once suborned, advised the Scots where best to lay their ordnance. The king rewarded such duplicity with a rope's end. The fortress was stripped and sacked but not slighted.

Having secured their gains the Scots advanced along the east bank of the Till taking up first the lesser hold of Etal and then Ford, both of which were eventually destroyed. James remained encamped around the latter from 1-5 September and another apocryphal tale attaches to an alleged liaison with the beautiful Lady Heron, whose home the Scots were about to despoil. Her unfortunate husband was a miserable hostage in the grim, sea girt tower of Fast Castle, a surety for the unruly behaviour of his half-brother, the notorious Bastard, whose numerous outrages included the unavenged killing of the Scottish warden.

Although it was now high summer, the weather was damply autumnal, a spur to sickness and desertion: 'for there had been not one fair day, nor scarce one hour of fair weather all the time the Scots army had lain within England but great cold, wind and rain.'<sup>12</sup> Numbers of clansmen and probably more than a few lowland levies, the former having garnered sufficient loot, the latter insufficiently fired by patriotic





The eastern approach to Flodden Edge looking west with the Till behind. This flank was covered by the Scottish guns but even without the weight of artillery remains a formidable obstacle; the approach from the river was through the alluvial marsh and offered scant attraction for the attacker. (Author's photograph)



Flodden Edge, looking north from Milfield Plain. The great natural strength of the position is immediately obvious. An attack from the south would be exposed not only to the fire of the guns but to a classic attack in the Swiss manner. The ground offered an ideal deployment for pike tactics. (Author's photograph)

zeal, were slipping away. Dysentery and plague stalked the army, the almost inevitable companions of armies on campaign.

Prior to the fall of Ford the lady had appealed to Surrey for relief. As the earl was not yet in a position to offer material assistance he wrote to James undertaking to waive ransoms on a number of captive Scottish gentry including Lord Johnston and Alexander Home if Ford was left intact. No compromise was entertained and the castle was torched. The Scottish chronicler Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, a dour Calvinist writing with the austerity of the Reformed Church and no partisan of James, spreads the tale of the king's dalliance with Lady Heron, a bout of 'stinking adultery and fornication'.

To achieve his objective of tying down large numbers of English soldiery did not require James to advance further into England. For the moment he had reduced several key castles and his line of retreat remained clear. The longer he stayed the longer the English must keep

the field, a substantive drain on the treasury. By the time his men's 40-day enlistment was up, the campaigning season would be over; his French allies might yet have cause to be grateful.

## THE ENGLISH TAKE THE FIELD

Surrey, still at Pontefract, received intelligence of the Scottish invasion on 25 August. Having fixed the muster date as 1 September at Newcastle upon Tyne, he dispatched teams of gallopers to raise the country. The next day the earl rode northward to lodge at York, where he requisitioned for his war chest the amount of £10,800 from the funds held by the abbot of St Mary's. By the 29th he was in Durham, where he collected the sacred banner of St Cuthbert, patron of the north and scourge of invaders, whose defiant pennon had flown over previous victories, the Standard in 1138, Falkirk in 1298 and Neville's Cross in 1346.

The northerners were no strangers to the call to arms. Soon the miry lanes and highways of Lancashire, Cheshire and the Dales were filled with the tramp of marching men. Sir Edward Stanley, scion of the leading magnatial family of the north-west, raised some 6,500 men who, having mustered initially at Hornby and Lancaster, marching beneath the banners of St Audrey and the absent earl of Derby, moved to Skipton in Craven where they were joined by 2,000 more under the colours of James Stanley, Bishop of Ely and commanded by his natural son John. A further 1,200 were on the march from south Lancashire and Cheshire.



*All Lancashire, for the most part,  
The lusty Stanley stout did lead,  
A flock of striplings strong of heart,  
Brought up from babes with beef and bread.*<sup>13</sup>

Bowmen and billmen thronged the roads from Wensleydale and Swaledale, mustered by Lord Scrope of Bolton; the North Riding responded to Lord Conyers whilst Lord Clifford mustered the flower of Craven. Old enemies too some of these, Stanley and Scrope had been Yorkists, the Cliffords diehard Lancastrians. John, Lord Clifford, 'the Butcher', had perished with most of an earlier generation from Craven at Dintingdale during the Towton campaign. The northern burgesses sent their quotas, men from Hull and a company of 110 from York, led by the swordbearer and carrying the city's standard of a red cross with five golden lions.

By 30 August Surrey had arrived at Newcastle, and the medieval city with its great frowning keep was soon hopelessly thronged with thousands of troops. Here he was joined by the warden of the West March, Lord Dacre, with his border lances; Sir William Bulmer, the man who had earlier thrashed Home's riders; Sir Marmaduke Constable; and the English artillery train. When the list of appointments was completed the earl's council of war comprised some 18 members, the cream of the northern gentry, none of whom would be likely to show any aversion to crossing swords with the old enemy.

It was soon obvious that Newcastle did not offer the best location to marshal the great host that was swelling daily. The earl therefore issued orders that the army should move north, a distance of some 30-odd miles to Bolton in Glendale just west of the Percy seat of Alnwick. By the morning of 5 September the English were arrived at Bolton; the force that Surrey commanded might have comprised as many as 26,000. Here the captains set to work drilling the men in their companies; and with his great Tudor Dragon banner, resplendent in scarlet, unfurled, the earl formally took the field.

Precise intelligence as to the exact whereabouts of the Scots was lacking. It was thought that James most likely remained at Ford and it was there that the English Herald Rouge Croix was dispatched to bear Surrey's challenge. The latter accused James of having invaded his brother-in-law's realm of England, 'contrary to his oath and league and unnaturally against all reason and conscience, burning, spoiling and destroying ... and cruelly murdering the King of England's subjects.'<sup>14</sup>

At Bolton the contingent of 1,200 marines from the fleet commanded by Thomas Howard joined the army; the resultant father-and-son partnership was to prove highly effective. To goad James, whose fiery temper the Howards knew well, the Lord Admiral dispatched some correspondence of his own reminding the king of Howard's role in the death of Andrew Barton and warning that 'he nor none of his company should take no Scottish nobleman prisoner, nor any other, but they should die if they came into his danger, unless it were the King's own person, for he said that he trusted to no other courtesy at the hands of the Scots.'<sup>15</sup>

Surrey had required James to linger and give battle not later than 9 September. Rouge Croix, however, was disappointed at Ford for the Scots had decamped and moved to a new position on Flodden Edge. It



**The English flank march from Wooler, with Doddington Moor rising to the right. Once past Doddington the English would have been largely lost to sight. It was this movement north and east from Wooler that initially confused the Scots. The intentions of the English would certainly have appeared unclear. At the outset the idea of swinging round to attack the Scots from Branxton would not have been in any way obvious. (Author's photograph)**

was part of the herald's role to glean whatever details he could of the enemy's position and strength of numbers. James, having received Rouge Croix, ordered him to be detained awhile and his formal reply taken by his Scottish counterpart.

Islay Herald rode up to the English outposts where he was, in turn, detained. Next morning Surrey and his officers rode out to hear King James' reply. This was delivered 'bluntly' by the Scot: his king would be pleased to accept battle on or before the 9th. Leaving Islay in temporary custody the earl gave orders for a further advance to Wooler where the army encamped looking northward over the level ground of Milfield Plain.

It was only when the heralds were exchanged that the English were made to appreciate the true strength of the Scots position. Gloomily Rouge Croix described how their forces were deployed along the crest of the low saddle-backed hill, an outlier of the Cheviots that, from a vantage of 500ft, completely dominates the plain below.

At that time treeless, it was ideal defensive ground, over a mile long and protected from the north by Marylaws and Branxton Hills. A possible approach from the east rising above the marshy vale of the Till was covered by the Scottish ordnance, dug into gunpits, 'enclosed in three parts with three great mountains so that there was no passage or entry but one way ... one narrow field to ascend.'<sup>16</sup>

The Scots army, whose camp was marked by the farm named Encampment, was a great sprawl of brightly coloured pavilions, hundreds of horses, wagons, baggage and loot. The bare canvas of the levies, the crude bothies of the highlanders and a shifting mass of servants and camp followers filled the shallow valley on the northern flank, screened by the bulk of the ridge behind and a mire in the hollow to the front. It was an inexpugnable position.

The English, damp and miserable on the plain to the south, could hear the crack and bellow of the great guns as the gunners practised their range. To add to their woes the English marchers had cheerfully



pillaged the food supplies being sent up from Newcastle. The bishop of Durham, writing in the immediate aftermath of the battle and commenting on the general conduct of the dalesmen, undoubtedly summed up the prevailing view when he stated:

*The [English] borderers ... be falsere than Scottes, and have done more harm at this tyme to our folkes than the Scottes dyd ... I wolde all the horsemen in the bordours were in Fraunce with you for there schulde they do moche good where as here they do noone, but mucche harme, for, as I have wretyn byfore, they never lyghted from thayr horses, but when the battaylis joynyd than felle thay to ryfelyng and robbing as welle on our side as of the Scottes, and have taken moche goods besides horses and catelle. And over that thay tooke dyverse prisoners of ours, and delyveryd theym to the Scottes, so that our folks as moche feare the falsued of thaym as they do the Scottes.<sup>17</sup>*

However much James might relish the prospect of a fight, he was not to be tempted from his vantage. If the English meant to attack then their only apparent option was to fight their way up the southern slope in the teeth of the Scottish guns and with the pike formations poised for a decisive blow. The position could not be easily outflanked and the possible access from the east was dominated by cannon. Surrey was in difficulties.

In the careful Scots dispositions we may discern the experienced hands of the French advisers; did these encourage James to fight? In part there was no reason for the Scots to remain; their immediate tactical objectives had been secured, there was no possibility of an attack on Berwick and the end of the campaigning season was in sight. Even if the Scots now quietly slipped away over the border Surrey had not the time, the means or the mandate to mount a counter-invasion. In terms of succouring his allies James had achieved all that could reasonably be hoped for.

Around 5pm on the afternoon of 7 September Rouge Croix was sent on a second mission, bearing further correspondence signed by all 18 members of the English council. The northerners reproached James for firstly agreeing to fight and then retreating into a virtual fortress. They demanded that the king between noon and 3pm of the following day bring his army down onto the plain where an equal trial of arms might properly ensue. The herald was to add a further verbal message from Surrey should James be seen to prevaricate; the earl 'would look for no more of his delays'.

Predictably the king flew into a tantrum on receiving such affronts to his honour. Nonetheless he would not be drawn, replying that the herald (whom he at first refused to see) should 'show to the Earl of Surrey that it beseemeth him not, being an Earl, so largely to attempt a great prince. His grace will take and hold his ground at his own pleasure and not at the assigning of the Earl of Surrey.'<sup>18</sup>

The chivalric gambit had failed; Surrey had somehow to bring the Scots to a decisive encounter by the 9th or James might rightly consider he had come off best in the pursuit of honour. As the English sat, wet and hungry, around their spluttering fires that night they may have been joined by the Bastard Heron and his company of cut-throats. It is he

whom legend asserts planted the idea that the English army could, in a grand flanking movement, come around behind the Scots and ascend Branxton Hill immediately to the north of their present position and separated only by a gentle if very wet decline.

## THE ENGLISH FLANK MARCH

In the grey dawn of 8 September the whole English array began to move. By noon they were crossing the sluggish waters of the Till and marching north-eastward towards Doddington 'in cloggy mire and foule filthy waies'. For some 8 miles the Scots would have been able to keep Surrey's host in sight before they were swallowed up by the empty moorland and screened by the rise of Watch Law.

*The rearward marched in array ever after  
as long as the light day lasted on the ground  
and then the sun full soon shot under the clouds  
and it darkened full dimly and drew toward the night  
every man to his rest full readily him dressed  
beaten fires full fast, and fettleth them to sleep  
besides Barmoor in a bank within a broad wood.<sup>19</sup>*

The Scots were now at a loss as to their intentions. Was Surrey falling back on Berwick from whence he could be re-supplied; did he intend to cut off the Scots line of withdrawal? Home, like the other marchers, must have felt a stirring of alarm; his estates in the Merse were exposed to any attack from Berwick. The Scottish pricklers do not appear to have been overly active, contenting themselves with torching the small hamlet of Fisher's Steads which had stood on the rim of alluvial marsh below the eastern flank of their position.

Guided by locals Surrey pitched tents that afternoon in the lee of Barmoor Wood some 5½ miles east of the Scots position on Flodden Edge. As the light thickened, the Lord Admiral and a party of his officers trekked to the summit of Watch Law to view the enemy's positions from a new vantage. They were greeted with a salvo from the Scottish guns, more symbolic than threatening given the extreme range.

From the rise of Barmoor Hill, which rises 500ft from the plain, Howard could see that the Scots were protected on all sides; the only possible approach was from the north up the steep slope of Branxton Hill. An approach from here and an advance over the intervening dip would place the English almost within bowshot and screened from the Scottish guns.

Some hard marching would be needed on the 9th but the council of war, dominated as it was by Howards and their affinity, was unanimous in the decision to offer battle. The northern lords probably required little persuasion. The Scots were their traditional enemies, now arrogantly holding ground in Northumberland; English longbows and English bills had won hard-fought battles in the past and could do so again.

It was not only the English who held urgent councils that evening; the Scots too were debating their strategy. Though they were as yet unsure as to the intentions of the English, it seemed likely that they



might be seeking to cut off the line of retreat via the Tweed and the fords at Coldstream. Whilst the magnates did not fear a fight they were loath to see the king hazard his person in the mêlée. Pitscottie portrays their chief spokesman as being Lord Lindsay of the Byres, his own grandfather. Lindsay, with smooth eloquence, summed up the case for the king avoiding the field:

*So my lords, ye may understand by this you shall be called the merchant, and your king a 'rose nobill', and England a common hazarder that has nothing to jeopard but a bad halfpenny in comparison of our noble king and an auld crooked earl lying in a chariot.<sup>20</sup>*

This homely analogy pointed to an essential truth; Scotland had far more to lose than England. James, predictably, would have none of it, even threatening to hang Lindsay for his temerity; his whole character and ambition inclined him to the hazard. In 1497 the Spanish ambassador had found that 'he [James] does not think it right to begin any warlike undertaking without being himself the first in danger.'<sup>21</sup> This was not mere impetuosity; James knew the value to his army of his personal leadership, the paladin at the head of his disparate forces, welding them into a cohesive whole by the force and charisma of his example.

In this he was perhaps wiser than his counsellors understood. The renaissance prince was a different type of ruler; his power was becoming more absolute than his medieval predecessors but the burden of policy sat the more heavily. Military triumph, glory and renown won in the field were the hallmarks of his success, the measure of his fitness to be admitted into the wider counsels of his fellow monarchs. Such triumphs and the attended risks could not be delegated or the lustre would vanish.

The meagre rewards doled out to the victorious English peers by a grudging monarch reflected this same consideration. Henry might offer thanksgiving and fulsome praise but in reality he was jealous of Surrey's achievement. A campaign where only the subordinate gained renown was a poor investment for the prince.

7 Child, J.F., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882, reprinted 2002) No. 168 'Flodden'; quoted in Sadler, *Battle For Northumbria*, p.106

8 Child, J.F., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882, reprinted 2002) No. 168 'Flodden'; quoted in Sadler, *Battle For Northumbria*, p.106

9 Lindsay of Pitscottie, *The Historie and Cronicles*, Vol. I, pp.258-59

10 Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, No. 2291

11 Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, No. 4351

12 MacDougall, N., *James IV*, Edinburgh (1997) p.373

13 Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.558

14 Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.558

15 Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.559

16 Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.560

17 Quoted in MacDonald Fraser, G., *The Steel Bonnets*, London (1971) p.21

18 Laing, *Trewe Encountre*, p.146

19 Baird, *Scotish Feilde and Flodden Feilde: Two Flodden Poems*, p.12

20 Lindsay of Pitscottie, *The Historie and Cronicles*, Vol. I, p.269

21 Quoted in Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages*, Vol. 2, p.387

# THE BATTLE OF FLODDEN

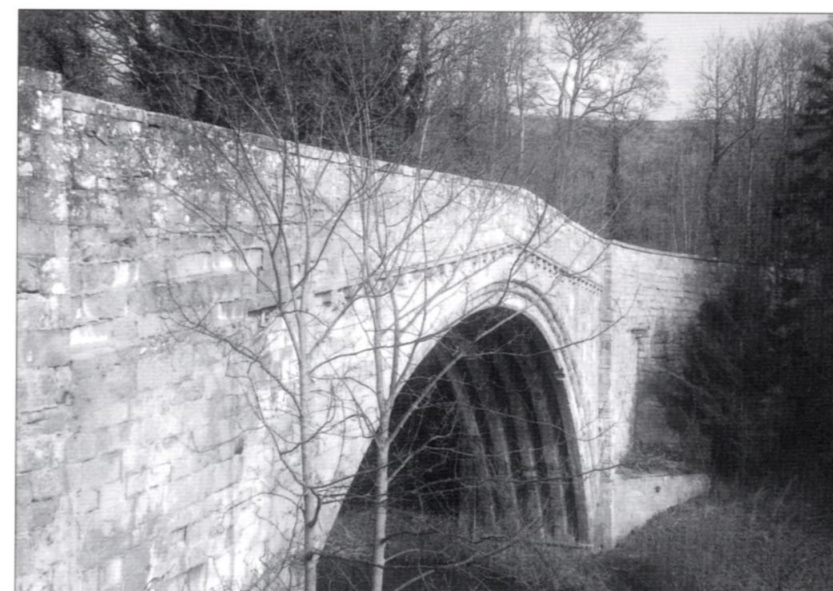
## MORNING OF 9 SEPTEMBER

**R**éveille in the English camp was early, around 4am, before the first filtering of another dank dawn. The army would first need to march the 7 miles west to Twizell, where the bridge crossed the Till. Some brigades were to cross downstream by the fords at Heaton Mill; both crossing points were invisible to the Scots atop Flodden Edge. It was Friday 9 September, and the English carried only their weapons and gear; the rest was left in camp.

The vanguard, led by the Lord Admiral, passed by the ancient ring of stones at Duddo and probably reached the bridge around 11am; it would take at least an hour to fetch the men and drag the great guns over the narrow span. The main body, under Surrey, might have begun splashing through the fords somewhat later, Dacre's marchers employed as a light cavalry screen. For the earl the Till was his Rubicon. Once across there was no going back – the lives and fortunes of his line and his affinity were now in the ring. As the soldiers crossed, Surrey exhorted them to fight 'like Englishmen, this day take my part like men, which part is the King's part.'<sup>22</sup> Wet, cold, hungry and weary, the men responded with élan, shouting 'they would serve the King and him truly that day'.<sup>23</sup>

Now marshalled into their battle formations, the army comprised two large divisions, the van and centre each flanked by a brace of smaller brigades. Edmund Howard led the right wing of the van, perhaps 3,000

Twizell Bridge, taken from the modern replacement. The earlier stone construction undoubtedly resembles that which stood there in 1513 and would have offered a very constricted passage for so great a press of soldiers. (Author's photograph)





strong. This comprised 1,000 or more Cheshire men, including the Macclesfield contingent under Christopher Savage, and 300 tenants from the mesnie (household) lands of the Abbey of Vale Royal led by the abbot and two of his esquires; half a thousand from Lancashire, more from south Yorkshire, Hull and Doncaster and, finally, a stiffening of 200 marines under Maurice Berkeley, master of the *Mary George* (these were detached from the total complement of 1,200 brought by the Lord Admiral). There were rumblings of discontent from some of the Stanley affinity who expected to be brigaded with their fellows.

The central division of the van, led by Thomas Howard, fielded perhaps 9,000 soldiers including the remaining 1,000 of the crack marines. These, wearing the Tudor livery, served under their usual captains, Sir William Sidney of the *Great Barque*, Edward Edyngham of the *Spaniard*, James King of the *Julian of Dartmouth* and a dozen others. In the centre of the van would stand the 2,000 men from the Palatinate clustered beneath the talisman of St Cuthbert and commanded by Bulmer and Lord Lumley. With them was the Northumbrian contingent under Lords Ogle and Gascoigne.

For the rest, these were mainly from the Ridings. Clifford brought 207 bows and 116 bills liveried in the Red Wyvern. Lord Conyers, Lord Scrope of Uppsall, the sheriff, and Sir John Everingham with a score of minor gentry led the rest and, with them, the guns.

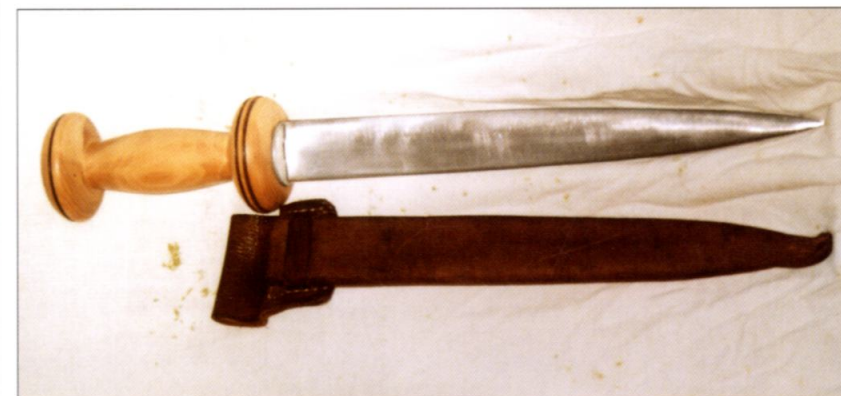
Sir Marmaduke Constable, another septuagenarian, commanded on the other flank. This was very much a family affair, as he was joined by his brother William, three of his sons, two cousins and a son-in-law. Sir William Percy, his retainers and a thousand of the Lancashire men brought this brigade up to strength, perhaps 2,000 men in all.

At Heaton Fords Dacre held the right flank of the rear or main body. His Cumbrian marchers were stiffened by Kendal archers, Heron's rogues and a detached body of riders from Bamboroughshire and Tynemouth – an unhappy pairing as these were both at feud with the warden! It is possible, perhaps even likely, that Dacre was assigned a battalion of 1,800 foot under Bishop Stanley. These men wore the family livery, the eagle's claw surmounted by the three gold crowns of the bishopric, and they would fight beneath the sacred banner of St Audrey. Dacre's brigade numbered some 3,500 in total.

Surrey's personal retinue and staff clustered under the earl's colours in the central division, which stood 5,000 strong in all and mainly from

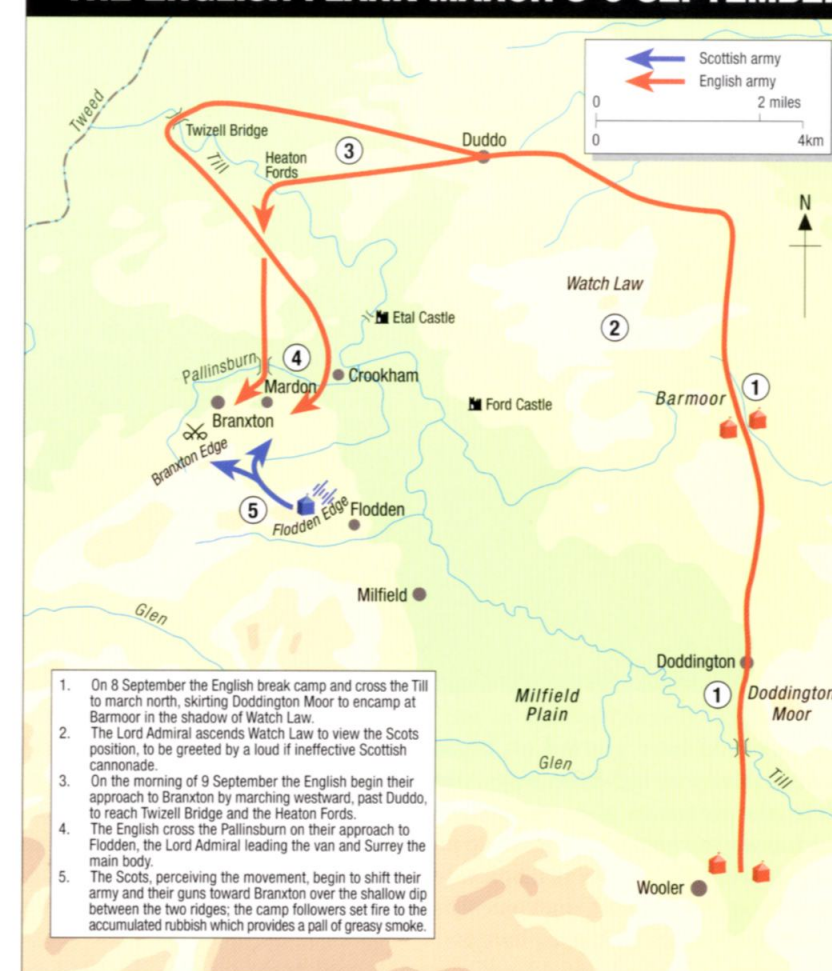


Facsimile of a buckler, a 16th-century small round shield. This was essentially designed for parrying and for punching at an opponent. A gentleman might wear his buckler with his sword and the resulting racket as he swaggered gave rise to the term 'swashbuckler'. (Author's collection)



Facsimile of a rondel dagger of the late 15th century. The ubiquitous dagger of the day, as handy for planting seeds as for dispatching a fallen foe with a swift, decisive thrust through the visor or into the groin. (Author's collection)

## THE ENGLISH FLANK MARCH 8-9 SEPTEMBER



south Yorkshire. Scrope of Bolton was there with the dalesmen, as were the citizen soldiers from York, the tenantry of the Abbey of Whitby under their captain Lionel Perry, and the East Riding men led by the archdeacon. Gentry such as Richard Tempest, Sir Christopher Pickering, Sir Ninian Markenfield and Sir Bryan Stapleton brought their own companies. With the earl was George Darcy, a seasoned soldier destined to become one of the leaders of the Pilgrimage of Grace, an exercise in faith that would cost him his life.

On the extreme left was stationed Sir Edward Stanley, fifth son of the earl of Derby, whose division appears to have rather lost contact with the main body ahead shortly after the crossing and was consequentially late onto the field. Although delayed, Sir Edward's deployment would be both skilful and timely. This was very much a Stanley command, with some 3,500 liveried retainers, officered by Stanley kin and affinity. Sir Edward was a mature and seasoned campaigner; his family, as hereditary Keepers of Man, had clashed with the Scots on numerous occasions.

Despite their soaking and their empty bellies the English army would have provided a fine spectacle, the proud banners floating in the breeze, still laden with drizzle. Such light as filtered through the fat-bellied, grey





clouds would have glinted on burnished harness and the business end of bills. Many would have worn the eagle's claw badge of the Stanleys, while the marines stepped out smartly in their *almain rivet* (mass-produced) harness with the white and green Tudor livery. Surrey and his knights would have been resplendent in full plate, whilst the heaving, sweating gunners and matrosses battled with the wet ground and the monstrous weight of their charges.

The line of march would easily stretch back several miles. In 1914 an infantry brigade comprising four battalions of 1,000 men needed a 3-mile stretch of road. Surrey had at least the equivalent of five full brigades; keeping the host moving was a major logistical exercise and the responsibility of Edmund Howard as marshal, with the sergeants yelling and cursing as the men slipped, slithered and stumbled.

For the ordinary people of the 16th century, as for those in earlier times, the passage of armies was a terrifying event. People, particularly in the upland areas of bleak Northumberland, lived in scattered villages and hamlets. The sheer scale of such an intrusion, with the devilish racket of 26,000 armoured men, their wagons, sheep, goats, cattle and the long unruly tail of camp followers, was alien and unnerving. Newcastle in 1513 might have held 10,000 citizens; Surrey's host was over twice as many. For the rural populace the tramp of soldiers' boots promised little comfort, be they nominally friend or foe; robbery, despoliation and worse could confidently be expected of either.

From the banks of the Till the English faced a 4-mile march to Branxton Ridge. After 3 miles they would descend into the shallow valley of the Pallinsburn, a minor obstacle 'but a man's step over', now swollen by heavy rain and spongy mire around. Branxton Edge swells some 300ft with a reverse slope up towards the lower crest of Piper's Hill (where the

**The dip between Flodden and Branxton Edge. This was the ground the Scots army was obliged to traverse in order to occupy the line of Branxton Edge. In 1513 the lower lying portion was very wet but there was otherwise little to impede the redeployment of troops. We may imagine the great swell of pikes and heavy guns with their sweating matrosses that would have filled this landscape, a great pall of greasy smoke hanging over. (Author's photograph)**

**Branxton Edge looking downhill towards the English position. The strength of this vantage is immediately clear; what is less obvious from this elevation is the magnitude of the obstacle which the brook running through the dip creates, as well as the extent to which the ground, north of the stream, rises to the English position. (Author's photograph)**

present monument stands). Beyond this and to the north the ground declines some 60ft into the dip of the Pallinsburn. The climb to the top of Branxton is quite steep, though nowhere is the gradient more severe than 15:1.

In its flooded state the burn could best be crossed either at the westerly Branx Brig or further east at Sandyford. Here, the ford was obscured by low trees and encroaching bushes but either Heron or one of the local guides pinpointed its location, and the rear would be able to cross. This was a nervous time, for the swell of Piper's Hill spoils the view of Branxton beyond and the English, once in the dip of the Pallinsburn, were effectively marching blind. Whilst the van filed over the bridge the guns had to be left with Surrey's division crossing by the ford, as the planks were felt to be incapable of bearing their great weight.

## AFTERNOON OF 9 SEPTEMBER

And what of the Scots? Certainly until noon James seems to have been unaware of his enemy's intentions. As the English were nowhere to be seen it appeared to the king that the honours might be his; it was now the 9th and Surrey had failed to give battle. By early afternoon, however, scouts were reporting movement west of the Till and, though at first he refused to believe it, James was forced to realize that he was outflanked. Calling for his horse the king rode out to see for himself. There could be no doubt; the English were coming.

The tactical problem which now confronted the Scots was how to best counter the move. To stay where they were was out of the question; their fastness could as easily become a trap, an untenable salient that the

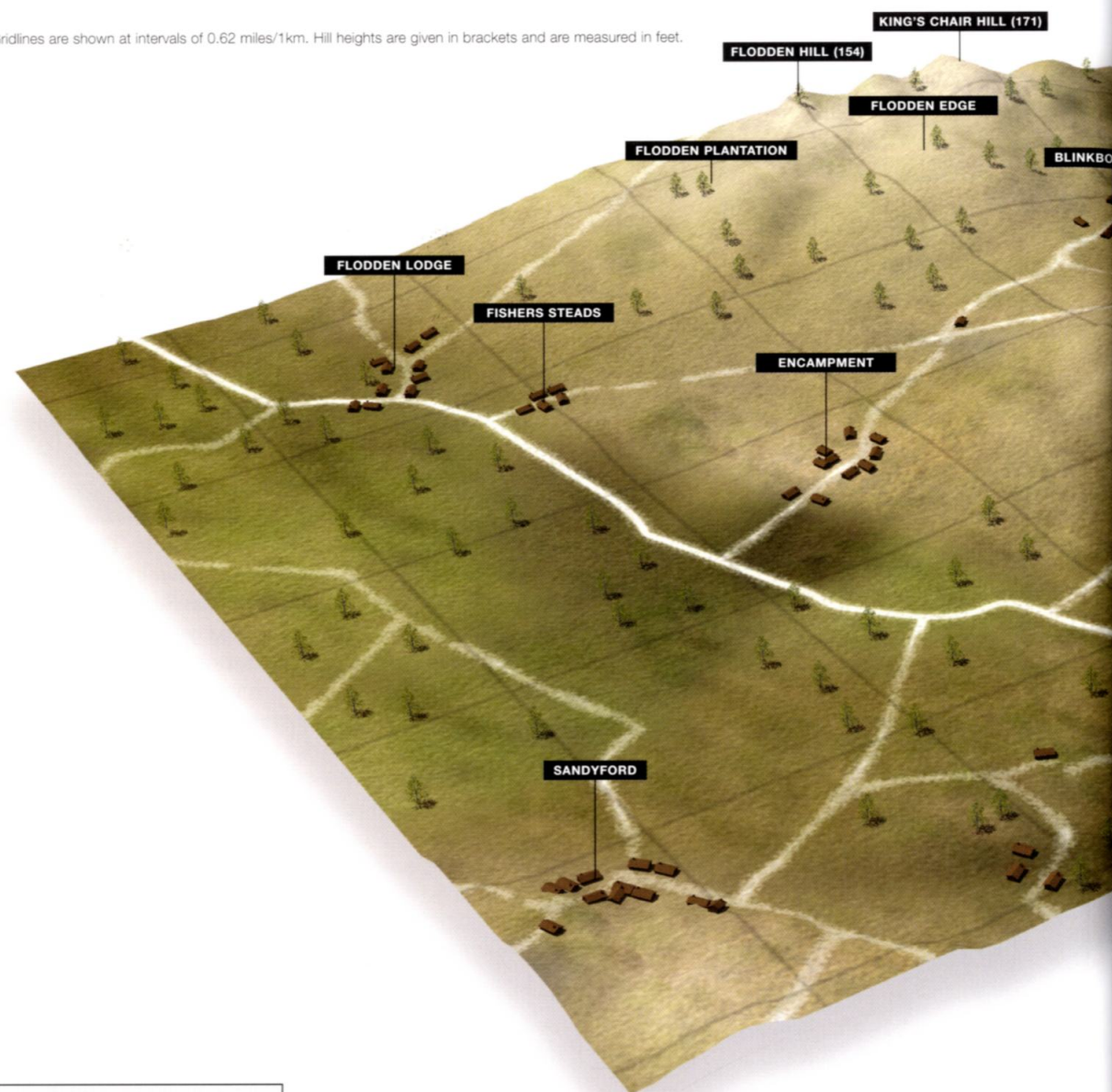




# THE ARMIES DEPLOY FOR BATTLE

The position of both armies at approximately 4pm on 9 September 1513. The Scots are drawn up facing north along the lip of Branxton Ridge, overlooking the English deployed below them.

Gridlines are shown at intervals of 0.62 miles/1km. Hill heights are given in brackets and are measured in feet.

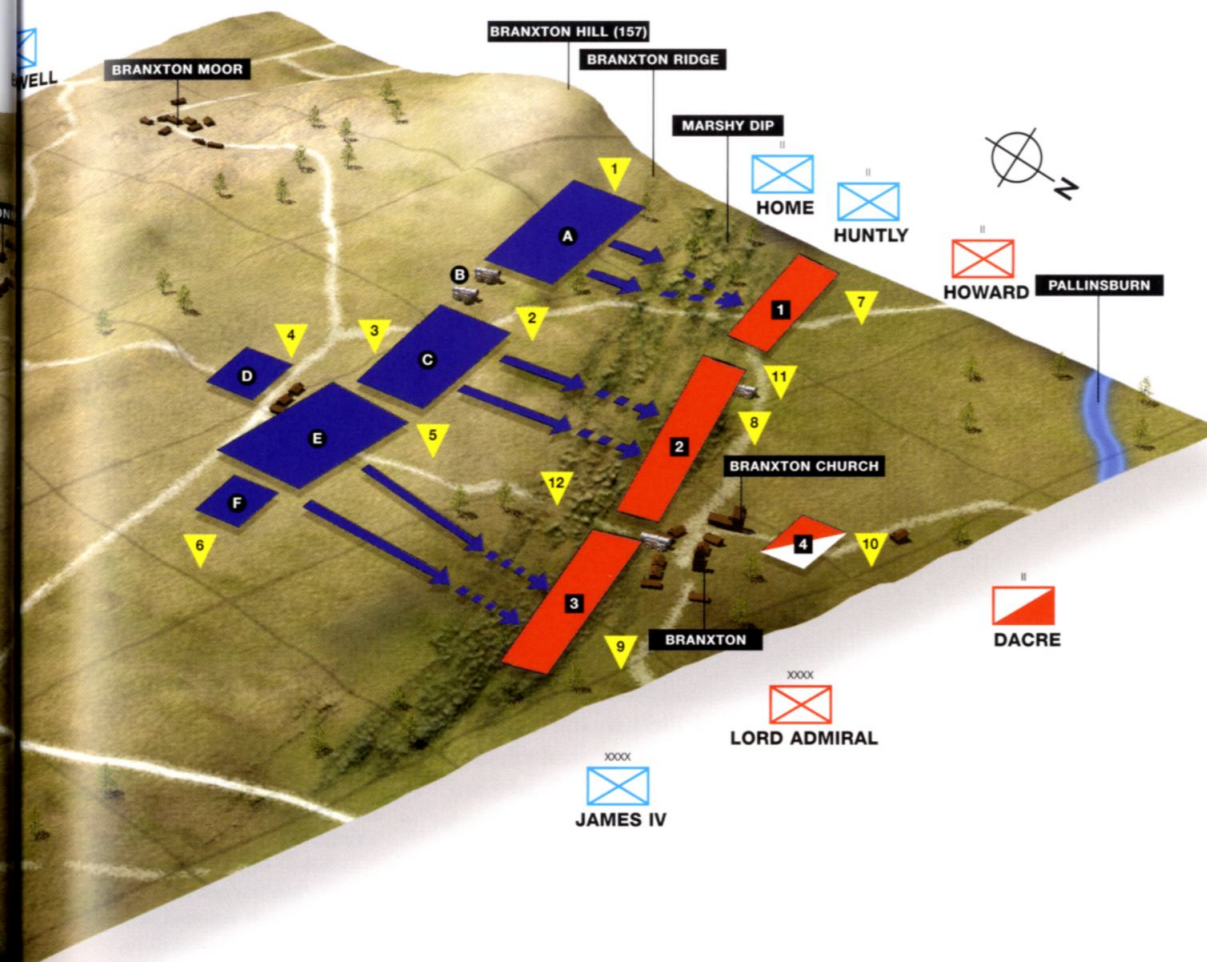


## SCOTTISH

- A Borderers and highlanders under Lord Home and earl of Huntly
- B Scottish ordnance (18 pieces)
- C Scottish division under earls of Errol, Crawford and Montrose
- D Reserve division under earl of Bothwell
- E King James IV's division
- F Highland division under earls of Lennox and Argyll

## ENGLISH

- 1 English right wing under Edmund Howard
- 2 English division under Lord Admiral, Thomas Howard
- 3 Earl of Surrey's division
- 4 English cavalry under Lord Dacre



## EVENTS

1. APPROX. 3.30PM. Scottish left, a mixed force of borderers and highlanders under Lord Home and the earl of Huntly, deploys in dense, column formation with swordsmen on the flanks in Swiss or 'Almayne' manner, some 10,000 strong and with a steady decline to their front providing an unimpeded approach towards the English right.
2. APPROX. 3.30PM. Likely position of the Scottish ordnance; these heavy pieces, 18 in total, have been dragged from their earlier positions by Flodden Edge and placed here. These are all heavy siege guns, not ideal for counter-battery fire in the field, and their crews lack experience.
3. APPROX. 3.30PM. The division (perhaps 7,000 strong) commanded by the earls of Errol, Crawford and Montrose also deploys in column formation. Their force comprises many of their own kin and affinity; yet for many of them the pike is an unfamiliar weapon and the men have had little training in its use.
4. APPROX. 3.30PM. Bothwell's reserve division, mainly lowlanders (probably no more than 5,000 strong), waits to reinforce victory.

5. APPROX. 3.30PM. King's great division, some 15,000 in number, formed from his household knights and a rank and file of lowland levies, again deploys in dense columnar formation. The king's marshals are busy among the host, conforming to the Swiss pattern.
6. APPROX. 3.30PM. On the right of the Scottish army the highland division, under its clan chiefs the earls of Lennox and Argyll, musters some 5,000 men. They fight in companies under their chiefs or tacksmen, retaining traditional arms rather than carrying the pike. Behind them, to their immediate rear, stands the French captain D'Aussi with a stand of 50-100 pikemen.
7. APPROX. 3.30PM. English right wing under Surrey's younger son Edmund Howard (roughly 3,000 strong) deploys in a linear rather than columnar formation. The bulk of the troops are bills with bows on the flanks.
8. APPROX. 3.30PM. Lord Admiral's division (some 9,000 strong) deploys; they are the most potent in the English line including bows, bills and 1,000 of the crack marines Howard has brought from the fleet. Above them flutters the

- defiant banner of St Cuthbert, the northern saint whose standard has inspired previous English victories.
9. 4PM. With 5,000 men the earl of Surrey is, in effect, the English left as Stanley's division has not yet come up. Surrey is surrounded by his household and affinity.
10. APPROX. 4PM. Dacre's mounted reserve, no more than 1,500 mounted border horse (light cavalry), deploys loosely in line and by squadron under a 'heidman' or knight. This contingent includes the less settled troops from the coastal shires and the Bastard Heron's reivers.
11. 4PM. The English guns are drawn up under the master gunner - 22 light field pieces, much less potent in terms of weight of shot than their Scottish opponents but altogether nimbler, faster firing and better served by more experienced gun crews.
12. The marshy dip, a brook that runs from west to east with its wet, reeded banks, swollen by the unseasonal downpours, creates a formidable obstacle for the Scots.



English were about to pinch. To seek another vantage meant swinging the entire army around from its leaguer (camp) and marching to take up position lining Branxton Edge.

Soon the trumpets were sounding, the sergeants hoarse with bellowing as the host began to stream north, over the narrow saddle towards Branxton. The ordnance had to be dragged from their gun pits and man-handled into line. The lie of the land obscured any sight the English might have gained and to the natural topography was soon added a vast pall of greasy smoke. The camp followers burnt the wet straw, bothies and the general accretion of rubbish that 30,000 men will soon accumulate. A handy smoke screen was a tactic previously employed by Scots armies (Mytton in 1319 is an example), though in this case it would appear that the fires owed more to housekeeping than deception.

Hurried councils were again held amongst the magnates, who were concerned that the king would persist in giving battle when it might be best to use the respite to withdraw safely. This cautious advice met with the usual blast from the king who, typically, flew into 'ane furious rage'. The tactical position, though changed, was by no means critical. Provided they could attain the north-facing vantage of Branxton, the Scots remained strongly placed. Surrey would be obliged to mount an attack uphill onto the points of the Scottish pikes. The king had every confidence that his guns, with their weight of shot, could silence the English.

Whilst the cannon were dragged and deployed around what is now Branxtonhill Farm, the army could be marshalled in the dead ground of the dip. The left wing would be led by Home and Alexander Gordon, Earl of Huntly, a muster roll of perhaps 10,000 men in all, less those who were sick or had deserted. The borderers had been drilled in the new pike tactics whilst the highlanders, from Aberdeenshire and Moray, wielding their 'twahanditswerds' (double-handed swords), could act as flankers.

To their right would stand the division jointly commanded by a trio of peers, William Hay, Earl of Errol, John Lindsay, Earl of Crawford and William Graham, Earl of Montrose. Beneath their banners were the levies of Perthshire, Angus, Forfar and Fife, some 7,000 strong.

In the centre the king would lead his own magnificent phalanx, up to 15,000 serried pikes, the defiant banners of St Andrew and St Margaret, Sir Adam Forman carrying the royal standard. With the household were the earls of Cassilis, Morton and Rothes, and Lords Herries, Maxwell, Innermeath, Borthwick and Sempill. The burgesses of Edinburgh, with their provost, and those from Ayr and Haddington were swelled by the wild Galwegians.

On the right James stationed a reserve division, 5,000 highlanders led by Archibald Campbell, Earl of Argyll, and Matthew Stuart, Earl of Lennox. There were Campbells from Glenorchy and Loudon, MacLean of Duart, Mackenzies, Grants and MacDonalds under their chief MacLean of Ardnamurchan, and the levies of Sutherland, Caithness and Orkney, liveried in green, beneath the banner of William Sinclair, Earl of Caithness. As a stiffener James placed the Frenchman D'Aussi and his cadre on this flank; with the highlanders notorious for internecine squabbles, he perhaps hoped the presence of a hard core of continental professionals might facilitate an element of cohesion.

Adam Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, commanded the reserves, a picked body of 5,000 lowlanders, men from the Lothians, the Forest of Ettrick,



Looking uphill from the English position towards the Scots. The view would have been daunting, the vast array of serried pikes crowding the length of the skyline with the defiant Scottish banners floating above. Undoubtedly this impressive array disconcerted some of the Cheshire levies making up Howard's wing on the English right, as they fled even before Home and Huntly's divisions came to contact. (Author's photograph)

Galashiels and Selkirk. The three main attack formations, that of Home and Huntly, that of Errol, Crawford, and Montrose, and lastly the king's division, would thus be placed to deliver an attack in echelon, in the preferred Swiss manner, textbook perfect. The reserves would be on hand to exploit success, highlanders securing the exposed flank.

In the valley of the Pallinsburn the English could not see the mass of their opponents forming along the crest beyond. The Lord Admiral had ascended Piper's Hill to gain a clearer view. The sight can hardly have been comforting; worse, he was uncomfortably aware that a gap had opened up between his division and that of his father.

If the Scots were now to initiate an attack he was horribly exposed. Sending an urgent galloper towards the earl with the message that 'the forward battle alone was not able to encounter the whole battle of the Scots', to reinforce the need for haste Howard threw the rider his medallion featuring the charm of Agnes Dei (Lamb of God); by this Surrey would better understand the urgency of the situation.

Surrey, receiving the message, urged his men forward. The gap between his division and his sons was nearly 1½ miles, and the Scots were considerably closer to the van. It is said to have been at this point that James' master gunner approached the king seeking permission to commence firing; several ranging shots had already dropped harmlessly if alarmingly into the wet ground of the Pallinsburn.

The king is said to have refused his consent on the basis that he wished 'to have them all before me on a plain field, and try what they can all do against me.'<sup>24</sup> This might appear to be nothing more than





chivalric posturing but James, if he wished to fully exploit the Swiss model, actually required his enemies to be concentrated and in line facing him so the great weight of the blow he would deliver might tell to best effect.

The Lord Admiral was not the man to lose his head; as he waited for the rear to catch up he ordered the brigades of his division to echelon to their right along the south-facing slope. There was sufficient ground between Branxton Brig and Branxton Church for them to form up out of sight. It was perhaps now mid-afternoon and it would be nearer 4pm by the time Surrey had made good the gap and the English could fully deploy in line of battle.

Above them the Scots crowded the skyline:

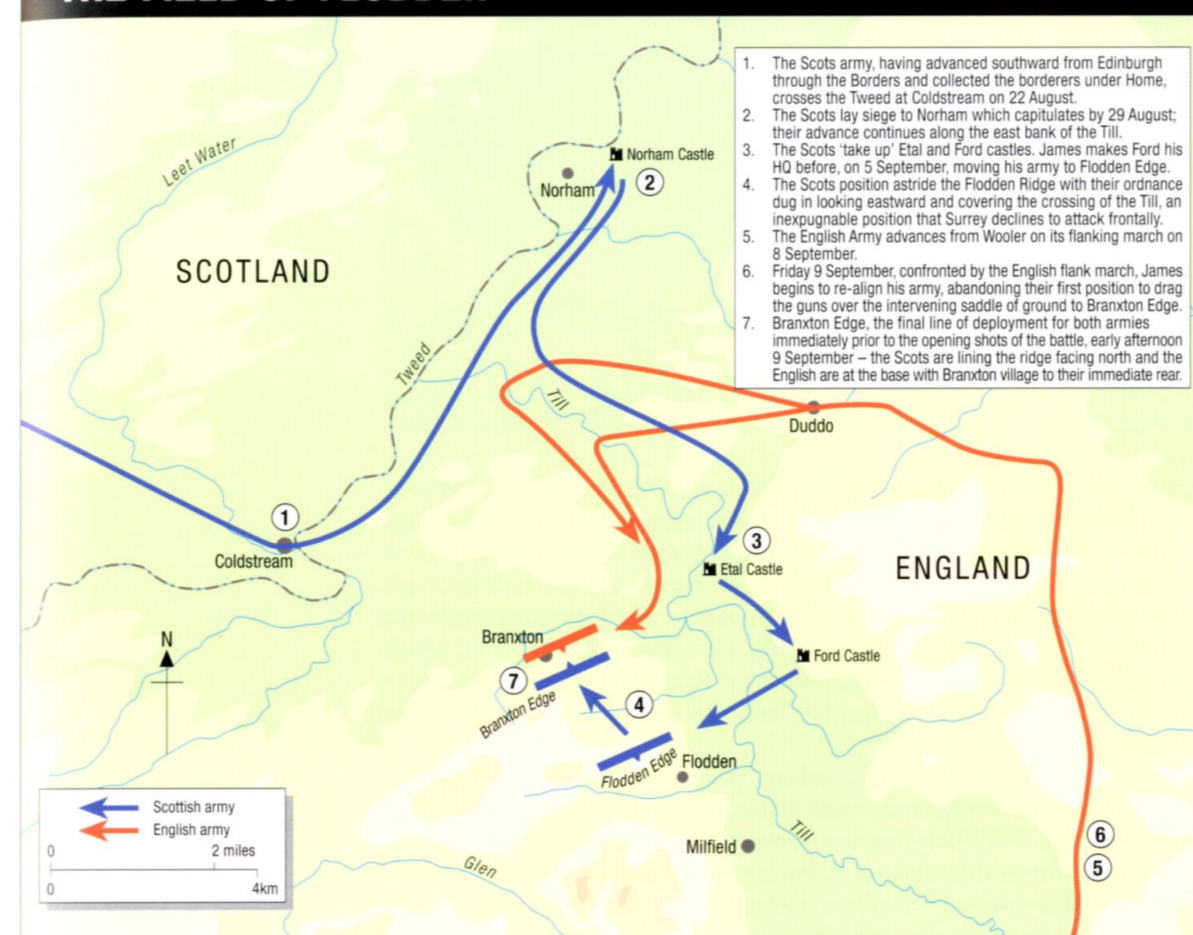
*four great battles all on foot with long spears like Moorish pikes ... The king of Scots army was divided into five battles, and every battle an arrow shot from the other; and all like furnished from the English army in great plumps, part of them quadrant and some pike wise, and were on the top of the hill, being a quarter of a mile from the foot thereof.<sup>25</sup>*

It would be a sanguine man indeed amongst the English who did not find this a daunting sight, with the great array of pikes like a forest of staves, the heavy guns belching smoke and fire, the whistle of roundshot and the knowledge that these could scythe a file of men into bloody, limbless pulp.

Surrey, better to conform with the Scots deployment, adjusted his formations – his six divisions freshly consolidated into three. Dacre, whose

**Looking from King James' position towards the earl of Surrey's banners. The grand division, led by the king, considerably outnumbered Surrey but, like that of Errol, Crawford and Montrose, was to be frustrated and disordered by the nature of the ground, which the Scots, clearly, had not scouted beforehand. This is not surprising for James had never intended, at the outset, to fight here. (Author's photograph)**

## THE FIELD OF FLODDEN



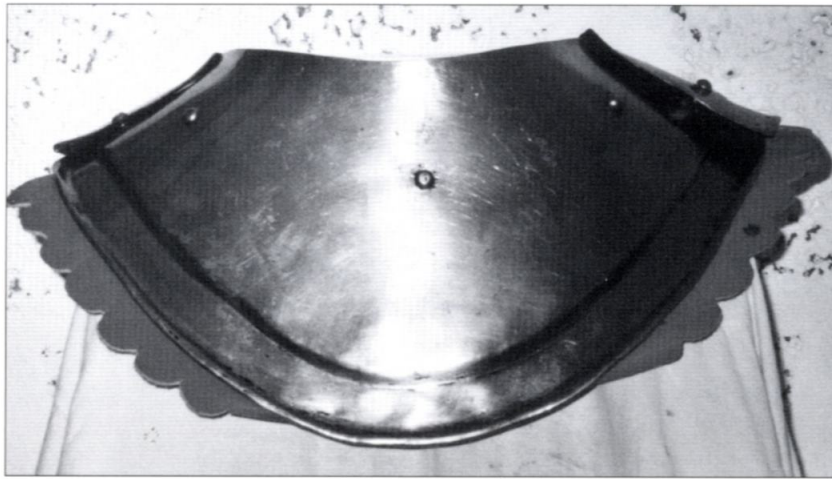
riders 'stood apart by themselves to succour where most need was', maintained the mounted reserve; Edmund Howard now commanded the right; and next to him his brother and his father held the left.

Stanley was still trailing. Surrey, in the heat of the moment, had apparently forgotten to send back guides to bring Stanley's brigade forward, so he was obliged to feel his way by a more circuitous route. He and his Lancashiremen would nonetheless do their part.

It would not be true to say that the Scots were on top of the hill and the English at the base. A small stream, miry, filled the valley bottom, and from there, northward, the ground rose to the line upon which the English centre and left now stood. Should the Scots descend the hill to attack they would be obliged to negotiate both the wet and the slope. From their present vantage these difficulties were by no means obvious. The speed of their redeployment had meant the Scots did not have time to fully acquaint themselves with the ground; this deficiency was to have the most dire consequences.

The fight began with an artillery duel, the first British battle to open in this way, at a range of about 600 yards. It might have been expected that the Scots, having the benefit of the greater weight of shot and of the higher ground, would have the advantage. However, their great guns





Facsimile of a 16th-century gorget – a plate collar covering the neck, top of the chest and shoulders. This would rest on top of the breast and back plate to complete the upper body defences. (Author's collection)

were siege pieces which could fire perhaps at best one round a minute; the English field guns were capable of twice or even three times as many.

As the guns recoiled after each shot they had to be manhandled back into place. In this, the English crews were more experienced, and this quickly began to tell. It has been suggested that the downward angle was too acute for the Scottish gunners and the barrels could not be sufficiently depressed. This is untrue, as the pieces of the period could be wedged sufficiently at the breech to allow for the depression, but the angle would affect the fall of shot.

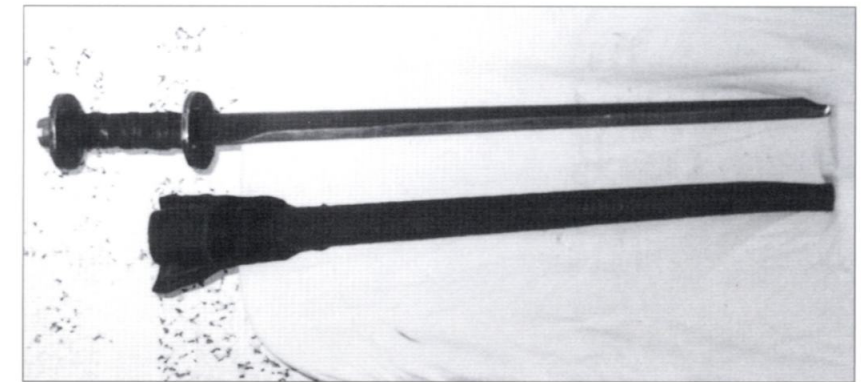
Solid balls, roundshot, are used to bounce on striking the ground, 'grazing' the surface so they then strike the enemy formation, doing fearful damage. It is likely that the Scottish shot smacked harmlessly into the wet ground – 'they did no harm to the English army' – whilst the English rounds took effect, killing men and disabling guns. Already the topography was working for the English.

Whilst Robert Borthwick, the king's master gunner, survived, at least one of the Scottish gun captains was killed and the rest so disheartened that they ran away. 'The English Ordnance ... shot fast and did great skaithe [damage] and slew his principal gunners; but the King's ordnance did small skaithe by reason of the height where they stood they shot over the English army.'<sup>26</sup> Some of the rounds, throwing up fountains of wet clods, smashed into the turf by Dacre's reserve and panicked the east coast riders into rout. The rest held firm and the contagion, so easily infectious, did not spread.

The English had won the first round and Appleyard's gunners could switch their aim to the massed files of the two central divisions. The raw levies, coming from the largely silent, late medieval world, were not prepared for the great roar and bellow of the guns, the earsplitting crack and vast clouds of sulphurous smoke. Still less were they prepared to stand as their comrades were mangled by shot. It could be argued that the damage wrought by the English artillery was mainly psychological, and yet the chroniclers confirm that 'the English artillery shot into the middle of the King's battle and slew many persons'.<sup>27</sup>

These Scots, young men dragged from the plough or the apprentice's bench, had not been taught how to withstand bombardment, the nerve-wrenching terror of flying, random shot that takes off limbs and bowls a

Facsimile of a 16th-century rondel with sheath. The universal weapon and tool of the medieval era. (Author's collection)



file of men like ninepins. Only bitter experience or deep resolve could stiffen men against this horror; they possessed neither.

There was thus no need for the English to attack with their infantry; the guns could do the killing. For the Scots James now had to decide what best to do. In previous encounters the Scots had sought to advance to contact as quickly as possible to close the 'killing gap' between them and the English who, with their longbows, had traditionally had superiority in the missile arm. Now it was the great guns which enjoyed fire superiority, the range still being too long for bows.

For the renaissance prince, practical advice was at hand. Machiavelli was of the view that:

*It is certain that small pieces of cannon ... do more damage than heavy artillery. The best remedy against the latter is making a resolute attack upon it as soon as possible; if you lose some of your men in so doing (which must always be the case), surely a partial loss is not so bad as a total defeat. The Swiss are worthy of imitation in this respect, they never decline an engagement out of fear of artillery, but always give the death penalty to those who would stir from their ranks, or show the least sign of being frightened by it.'*<sup>28</sup>

This was counsel James was inclined to heed; he ordered his left-hand division forward, the pikes and broadswords of Home and Huntly's division glinting in the pallid sun. It had rained earlier, squally showers now followed by calm. Hall relates that 'the King of Scots and his noble men, made the more haste to come to joining, and so all the four battles in manner descended the hill at once.'<sup>29</sup>

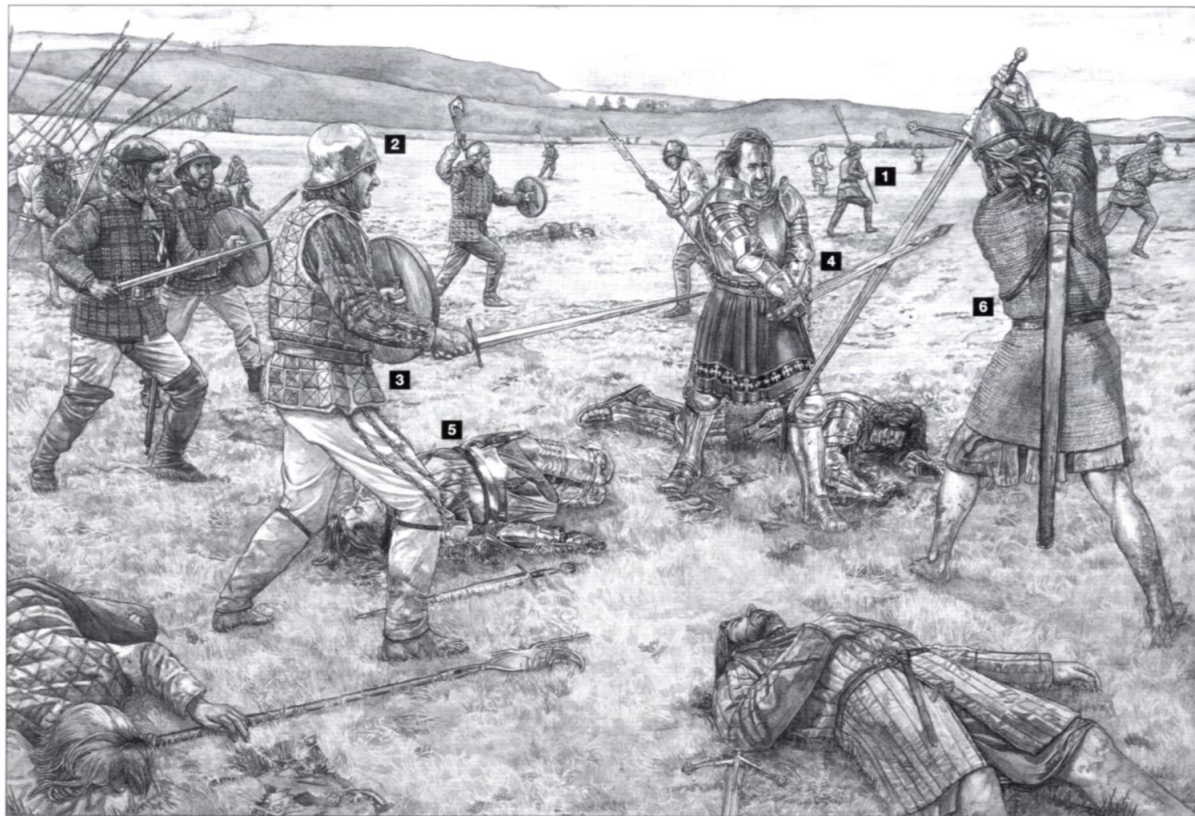
In this he is supported by the words of the *Trewe Encountre*: 'our guns did so break and constrain the Scottish great army that some part of them were enforced to come down toward our army', though this is not quite correct. The Scots plan was to attack in the 'Almayn' or Swiss manner, each division striking in echelon, pulverizing the linear formations of the English with a series of massive blows, the densely packed columns rolling over their adversaries.

These tactics do appear to have confused the English – this was the first time the continental method had been tried out on English soil. Most of the men serving under Surrey related their understanding of battle to the Wars of the Roses: 'All these four battles, in manner fought at one time, and were determined in effect, little in distance of the









**THE SCOTTISH LEFT EARLY IN THE BATTLE; HOME ATTACKS EDMUND HOWARD'S DIVISION** (pages 62–63)

It is late afternoon, approximately 4.30pm, the preliminary artillery duel is over and the English guns have won the first round. With his pike columns flayed by roundshot, James IV has no alternative but to instigate a general attack along the Scottish line, the divisions in accordance with the prevailing Swiss doctrine, advancing in echelon. On the Scottish left where Home's borderers face Edmund Howard's vastly inferior English right, the slope is gentle and the base is unimpeded by the fatal dip that will so affect matters in the centre. As the borderers sweep downhill in perfect formation, their pikes levelled and menacing, their flanks are protected by Home's highlanders, many his own Gordon kin and affinity. These carry the fearsome double handed claymore or 'great sword' and act as flankers or 'doppelsolders' in the Swiss fashion. The Scots breach the wavering English lines like a steel-tipped avalanche. With their momentum and unit cohesion intact the steamroller effect comes into play, bowling over the English bills. Many of the men on this flank, disgruntled at being brigaded with the unknown Howard, when they are more accustomed to fighting under the eagle's claw livery of Stanley, dissolve into precipitate rout (1). For the English this has all the hallmarks of an incipient disaster. If this flank is broken then the Lord

Admiral's right is in the air and he faces the possibility of Home's victorious division smashing into his exposed flank whilst the division commanded by the three Scottish earls attacks his front. Home's borderers (2 & 3) wear basic headgear and padded jacks. One has sewn lengths of chain onto his hose to offer basic protection against a cut, the other wears long horseman's boots and again the leather offers some measure of deflection. Edmund Howard (4), largely deserted by the men under his command, has rallied a hard core of retainers and knights including Sir Bryan Tunstall, who has already fallen (5). Howard, Surrey's younger son, is wearing good-quality harness and fights with a hand and a half or 'bastard' sword – for many the 'King of Swords' that can be hefted in a double- or single-handed grip. He has lost his helmet in the press, having several times been knocked over by Scots eager for ransom. His opponent (6), a Gordon tacksman, wears the traditional long mail shirt of the highland gentleman with a simple and old fashioned conical helmet or bascinet. Beneath the mail he wears a padded aketon or arming doublet over a saffron-dyed shirt, his lower legs are bare, and he has removed his shoes so that his bare feet may gain a better purchase on the wet ground. He carries a double-handed claymore with its distinctive downswept quillons terminating in pierced quatrefoils. The weapon is carried in the scabbard slung over the shoulders. (Stephen Walsh)

The banner of the Macclesfield contingent, many of whom, with their captain Christopher Savage, fell on Edmund Howard's wing. The banner, said to have been brought back by the survivor of the town's company to Selkirk, is preserved in Halliwell's House Museum. (Scottish Borders Council)



beginning and ending of any one of them before the other, saving that of Sir Edward Stanley which was the last that fought.<sup>30</sup>

It was, from the English perspective, unfortunate that the first assault should fall on their weakest division. Home outnumbered his opponent by at least two to one and the ground here favoured the attacker. The marshy dip that was so much to influence matters in the centre petered out and left a level field. Worse, the Lancashire and Cheshire men on the English right were discountenanced at being brigaded with Howard's wing, with an unknown and alien commander when they had expected to fight under Stanley.

There was wavering even before the charge struck home: 'The Cheshire and Lancashire men never abode stroke and few of the gentlemen of Yorkshire abode but fled.' For the Scottish left, under its two captains Home and Huntly, the Swiss tactics brought a dazzling success as Howard's division simply crumbled, 'they proched us with spears and put many over, that the blood ran out burst at their broken harness.'<sup>31</sup>

Not all fled; Sir Bryan Tunstall of Thurland, kneeling to take in a last mouthful of earth as confessional (a form of religious observance), hurled himself upon the Scots, killing Sir Malcolm Mckeen and others before dying himself beneath the Scottish spears. With him fell the Cheshire knights Sir William Handforth, Thomas Venables and Robert Foulehurst; Lancashire lost Sir John Booth and John Lawrence. Robert Warcop and Sir William Fitzwilliam from Yorkshire died, as did Maurice Berkeley and John Bostwick, the latter cut down trying to rally the abbot of Vale Royal's contingent.

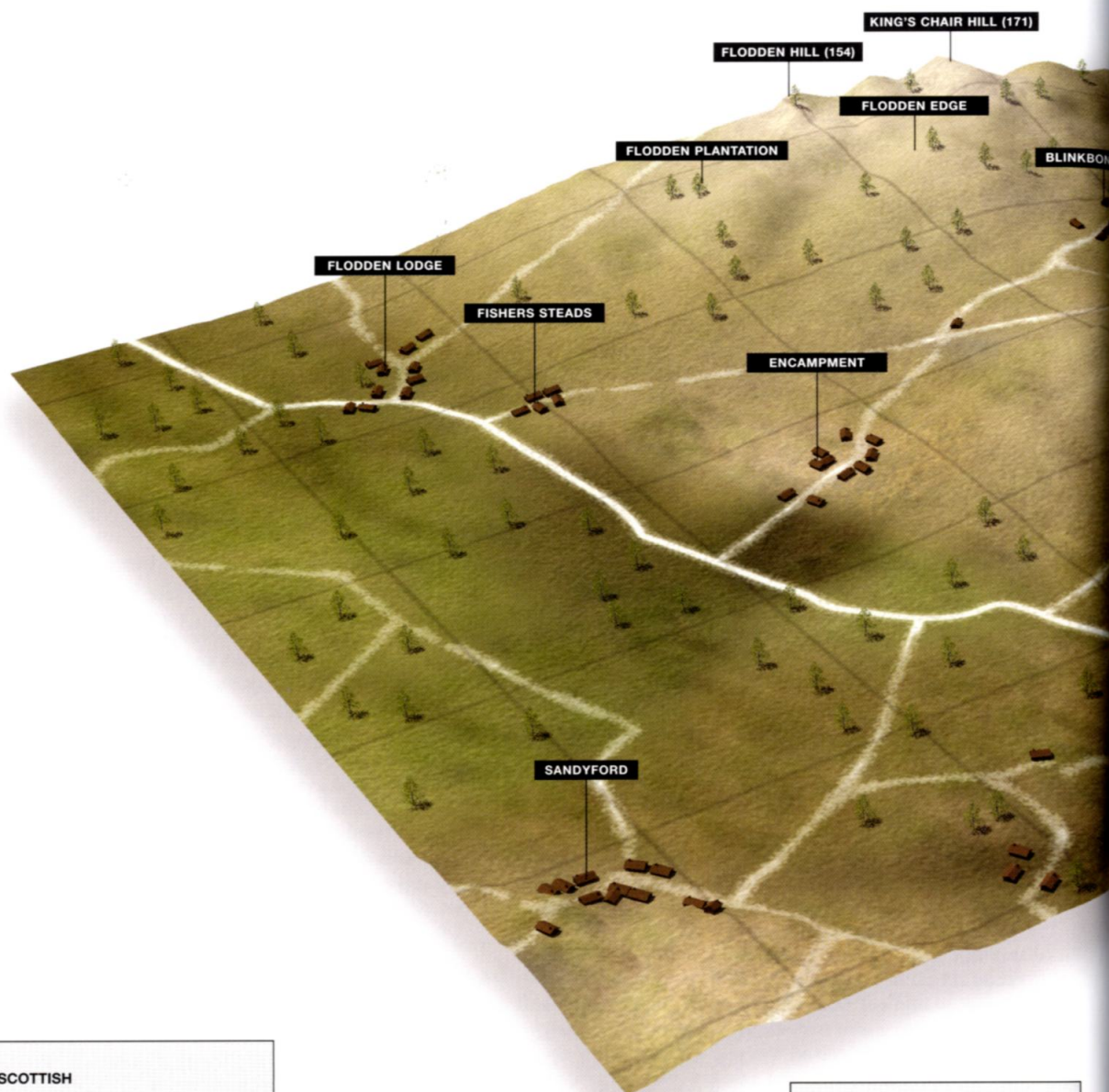
Edmund Howard, with his standard bearer and a core of retainers, made a desperate stand. Most were slain; Howard, fighting with great courage, was three times felled but rose to continue laying about him. All appeared lost. As Pitscottie relates: 'The Earl of Huntly's highland men with their bows and two handed swords fought so manfully that



# ROUT OF ENGLISH LEFT AND SCOTS ADVANCE

The position at approximately 4.30pm as the Scots, having been worsted in the opening exchanges of artillery fire, advance to contact. On the English right a crisis arises and is averted by Dacre's intervention whilst the remaining Scots divisions in the attack run into difficulties.

Gridlines are shown at intervals of 0.62 miles/1km. Hill heights are given in brackets and are measured in feet.

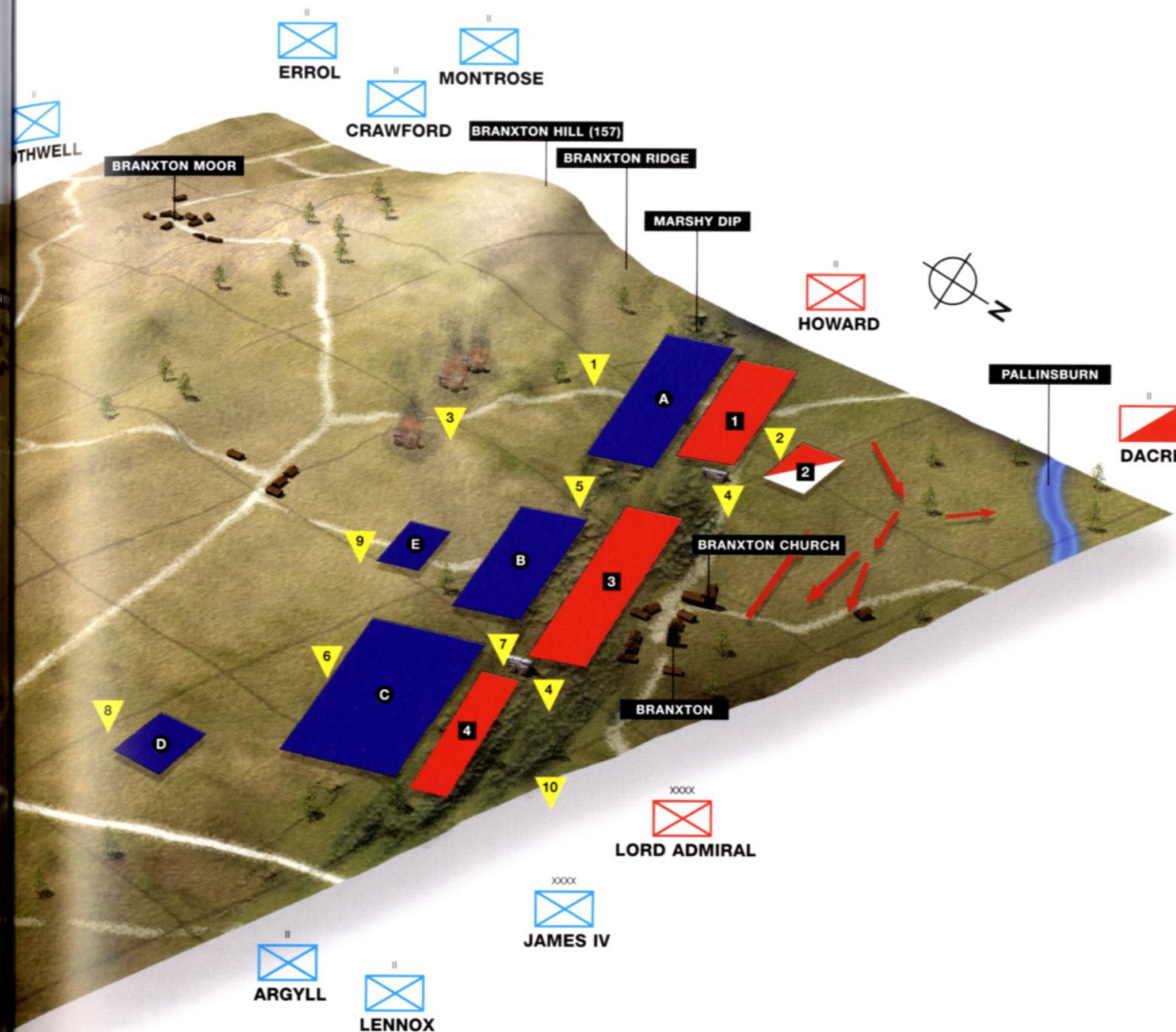


## SCOTTISH

- A Borderers and highlanders under Lord Home and earl of Huntly
- B Scottish division under earls of Errol, Crawford and Montrose
- C King James IV's division
- D Highland division under earls of Lennox and Argyll
- E Reserve division under earl of Bothwell

## ENGLISH

- 1 English right wing under Edmund Howard
- 2 English cavalry under Lord Dacre
- 3 English division under Lord Admiral, Thomas Howard
- 4 English division under earl of Surrey



## EVENTS

1. 4.30PM. Scottish left under Home and Huntly crushes Edmund Howard on the English right; the Cheshire levies flee and leave only Howard and a handful of his retainers on the field.
2. Dacre's horse arrives to stabilize the position on the English left; Home and Huntly can make no further headway, Heron with his troops rescues Howard and the action on this flank ends in a virtual stalemate.
3. The Scottish gun line, most of the gunners dead or in flight, is abandoned.
4. The English guns, having won the artillery duel, now fire on the king's division, causing casualties. The English archers also shoot as the Scots advance down the slope.
5. Errol, Crawford and Montrose's division advances downhill to engage the Lord

Admiral's division but the Scots lose momentum and cohesion when they blunder into the marshy dip. The attack falters and although the earls press on with great gallantry, all three losing their lives, their surviving soldiers, obliged to discard their pikes, begin to lose heart and flee in droves.

6. 4.45PM. The king's great battle moves forward to engage Surrey and whilst the advance has been hampered by the terrain the attack presses further than that led by the three earls. The Scots here largely abandon their cumbersome pikes as the advance is halted and rely on their swords, now considerably outreached by the English bills. The English give ground but this creates a salient whereby the Scots can be assailed on three sides. Some of the troops at the rear begin to flee.

7. The English gunners withdraw their pieces or temporarily abandon them to seek shelter in the ranks.
8. Argyll and Lennox' highland division remains static - the earls are apparently without orders. D'Aussi may have cautioned against an advance to support the flank of the king's division fearing that they too would be taken in the flank.
9. 5.30PM. Bothwell's reserve prepares to move up in support of the king's division but lends its weight to the rear rather than the flanks thus compounding rather than easing the Scots' tactical difficulties.
10. Stanley begins to approach the field though he is still a good hour away. Bereft of guides he has to feel his way forward; his contribution to the final English victory will, however, be considerable.





they defeated the Englishmen.<sup>32</sup> Christopher Savage and the Macclesfield contingent were virtually annihilated.

If Home and Huntly were the *Vorhut*, then Errol, Crawford and Montrose were the *Gewaltschaufen*. They now streamed down the hill to engage the Lord Admiral's division and the king, seizing a pike, prepared, deaf to all entreaty, to lead the main body. Reckless as this might appear, it was consistent with Swiss practice. The phalanx, in James' case the files of pikes 450 strong and the formation 20 ranks deep, once committed could not be recalled. The Swiss did not have alternative strategies; theirs was, though highly effective, very much a blunt instrument. Once the divisions were committed, one following on in echelon behind the other, the die was cast. There was no further scope for generalship.

Had the king hesitated he might have seen that matters on the English right had taken a different course. Dacre's border horse swiftly moved up to plug the gap created by the mass defection of the Lancashire and Cheshire levies and a fierce fight ensued. The pikes and broadswords emptied more than a few saddles; Dacre's losses were around 160, with Philip Dacre, Sir Humphrey Lisle and Harry Gray all taken. Many Scots also fell, spitted on the Cumbrians' lances, including three of Home's cousins, one of whom was Cuddy Home, the paladin of Fast Castle. With them died Crichtons, Cockburns, Douglasses, Kerrs and Bromfields; four Gordon tacksmen were also added to the score.

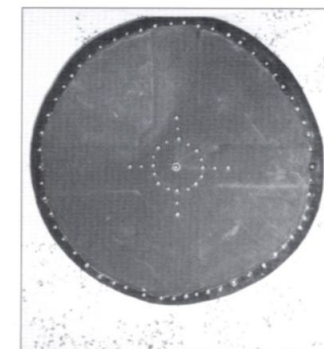
The Bastard Heron cut his way through to rescue Howard, both men soon being wounded: 'came John Heron, Bastard sore hurt, saying there was never a nobleman's son so like to be lost as you be on this day, for

**Looking towards the position of the earls of Errol, Crawford and Montrose from the Lord Admiral's position. The earls' division was confounded by the dip, losing that vital element of cohesion, so essential to the successful use of Swiss pike tactics. Once the fight came to handstrokes the English bill proved itself the far superior weapon, obliging the Scots to abandon their pikes and draw swords. (Author's photograph)**



all my hurts I will here lie and die with you.'<sup>33</sup> They fought their way clear, Howard, despite his wounds, killing Sir Davy Home of Wedderburn, his lordship's brother, in the fury of hand to hand. Both sides now sounded the recall and drew apart: 'convened their men again to their standards'. Dacre kept the field and Home withdrew his men part way back up the slope. Though they had suffered paltry loss neither marchers nor Gordons would play any further part.

It is said that when, later, Home received a summons to bring his division to the relief of the centre, now sorely pressed, he replied 'He does well that does for himself; we have fought our vanguard already and beaten the same, let the rest do their part.' This may or may not be true; equally the rumour that Home and Dacre had an 'understanding' may have a factual basis. Such arrangements were by no means uncommon and the borderers of both sides, who bore the brunt of most offensives, were not noted for putting the national interest above local loyalties. The taint of treachery followed Home to his execution, for treason, in 1516.



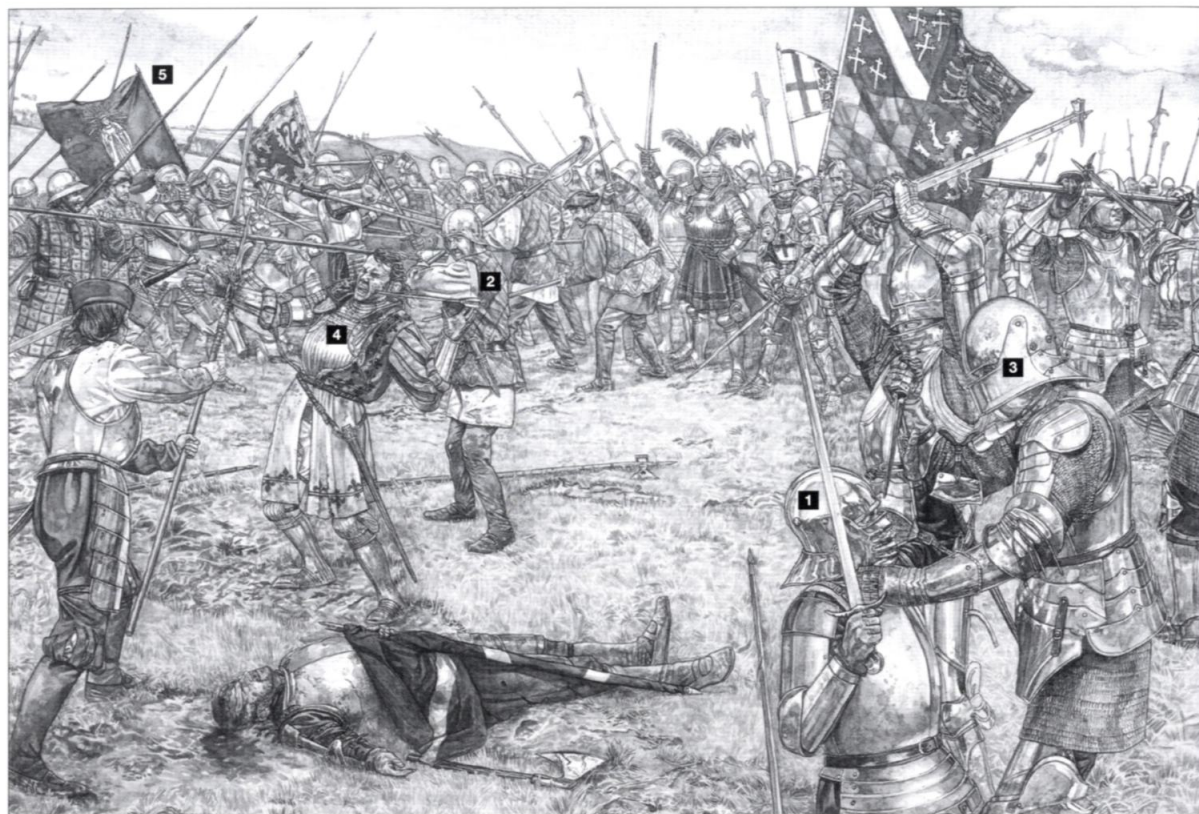
**Facsimile of a round leather-covered shield or target of the 16th century. (Author's collection)**

**LEFT The marshy dip and the stream as it is today looking west towards ground traversed by the three earls' division. Even today this may be perceived as an obstacle. This was even more the case in September 1513 when the ground had not been drained and the brook was surrounded by a reeded mire that utterly disrupted the steady advance of the Scots phalanxes. (Author's photograph)**









#### THE DEATH OF JAMES IV OF SCOTLAND ON FLODDEN FIELD, 9 SEPTEMBER 1513 (pages 70–71)

It is now around 6.30pm and the day's events are reaching their climax. James IV of Scotland, his bold tactics frustrated by the unfavourable ground, his divisions shattered, stationary or fled, makes a final desperate effort to stem the tide of defeat by seeking to kill the English commander, the earl of Surrey. With the survivors of his household around him he launches a final, last-ditch charge toward the earl's defiant banners, which flutter so tantalizingly close. As the late summer afternoon moves into evening and the shadow of approaching dusk begins to fall, King James faces the supreme test of his reign. He has been on the throne for quarter of a century and has led the largest ever Scottish raid into England. With the aid of his French captains he has sought to instil the prevailing tactical doctrine into his raw levies. He now knows that this impressive gambit has, with the exception of Home and Huntly's attack from the Scottish left, failed disastrously. The division of the three earls and his own swollen phalanx have failed to break the English line. Frustrated by the unfavourable ground, the irresistible mass of pike columns has been thrown into impotent confusion, cohesion and discipline lost. In the mêlée which has developed the cumbersome pikes, deprived of momentum, are abandoned and the Scots fall back on their swords. These now prove

inferior to the redoubtable English bills, which wreak frightful havoc amongst the Scots. The Scottish knights (1) are well harnessed in fine plate; surrounded, they fight for their lives against the slashing bills. Inevitably the odds prove too great and the exhausted men are felled by billmen (2) or English men-at-arms. All too often a final dagger thrust through the visor by the English knights (3) sees the end of the life and career of a Scottish gentleman. Realizing that all appears lost, King James (4) is not the man to flee the stricken field so his subjects can heap condemnation on his dreams of glory and failed leadership. If he can rally sufficient survivors from his household, then there is still a chance the Scots can snatch victory from the apparent certainty of defeat. To achieve this the king needs to reach the earl of Surrey's banners (5) and cut down the earl, thus depriving the English of their commander-in-chief. It is a slim hope, for the earl's banners with the great talisman of St Cuthbert are surrounded by a ring of steel. Surrey's own household are ready for the challenge and a savage mêlée ensues over ground already thick with dead. King James IV of Scotland avoids the opprobrium of his people by dying gloriously in the final charge. No quarter is asked or given and the king succumbs, unnoticed, to a barrage of blows – an arrow pierces his jaw, one wrist is virtually severed by a bill stroke, another slashes his throat. His household fall around him. He has failed as a captain but not as a knight. (Stephen Walsh)

Facsimile of a single-handed broadsword of the mid-15th century. Typical of a munition-quality weapon as might be carried by a man-at-arms, with a double-edged, pointed blade intended for both cut and thrust. (Author's collection)



The three earls' division now swept down the hill and was almost immediately in difficulties. Their advance was silent for the prevailing tactical doctrine did not favour the traditional clamour of war cries. Machiavelli again:

*The opinions of ancient authors vary concerning this matter, whether those beginning the battle should rush on with furious shouts and outcries or march up to the attack with silence and composure. The latter is certainly the most proper means of preserving good order, and of hearing commands most distinctly But I do not think a continual shout can be of any service; quite the contrary it will prevent the general's orders from being heard – this must be attended with terrible consequences.<sup>34</sup>*

As the Scots, discarding their shoes so their bare feet might keep a better grip on the slippery turf, descended, it was the turn of the English archers to step forward and loose. James had taken care to pack the front ranks with chosen men, well harnessed and bearing heavy wooden pavises to soak up arrows, 'which were the most assuredly [best] armoured that hath been seen and the tallest and goodliest persons withal'. Whilst these could come on with relative impunity the less well armoured in the rear ranks undoubtedly suffered, 'which sore them annoyed', and the English guns, as one of the Scottish chroniclers admits, were still firing, still causing casualties.

The English longbow had dominated Anglo-Scottish encounters since Falkirk in 1298. It destroyed Scottish armies at Dupplin Moor (1332) and the next year at Halidon Hill. It facilitated the English triumph at Neville's Cross in 1346 and, virtually unaided, trounced a Douglas-led army at Humbleton in 1402. In this, however, the last major battle in which it featured, it did not achieve its customary dominance. The weather, being both wet and windy as the battle began, was undoubtedly a contributory factor but the stout harness of the leading ranks augmented by the heavy wooden shields or pavises clearly performed well.

What the Scots had not anticipated was the dip, the mire and the rise beyond. To succeed the pike phalanx needs to retain impetus, discipline and cohesion; if these are lost so is the unstoppable steamroller effect and the pikes become vulnerable. It was precisely this which now occurred. Stung by arrows, assailed by shot, the Scots stumbled into the



# THE DEFEAT AND ROUT OF THE SCOTTISH ARMY

The battle at approximately between 6.30pm and 7pm. The slaughter has reached its climax with the defeat of the Scottish army and the death of James IV. Stanley's division has, at last, reached the field and has struck decisively at the highlanders on the Scottish right under Lennox and Argyll. The battle is, to all intents and purposes, over.

Gridlines are shown at intervals of 0.62 miles/1km. Hill heights are given in brackets and are measured in feet.

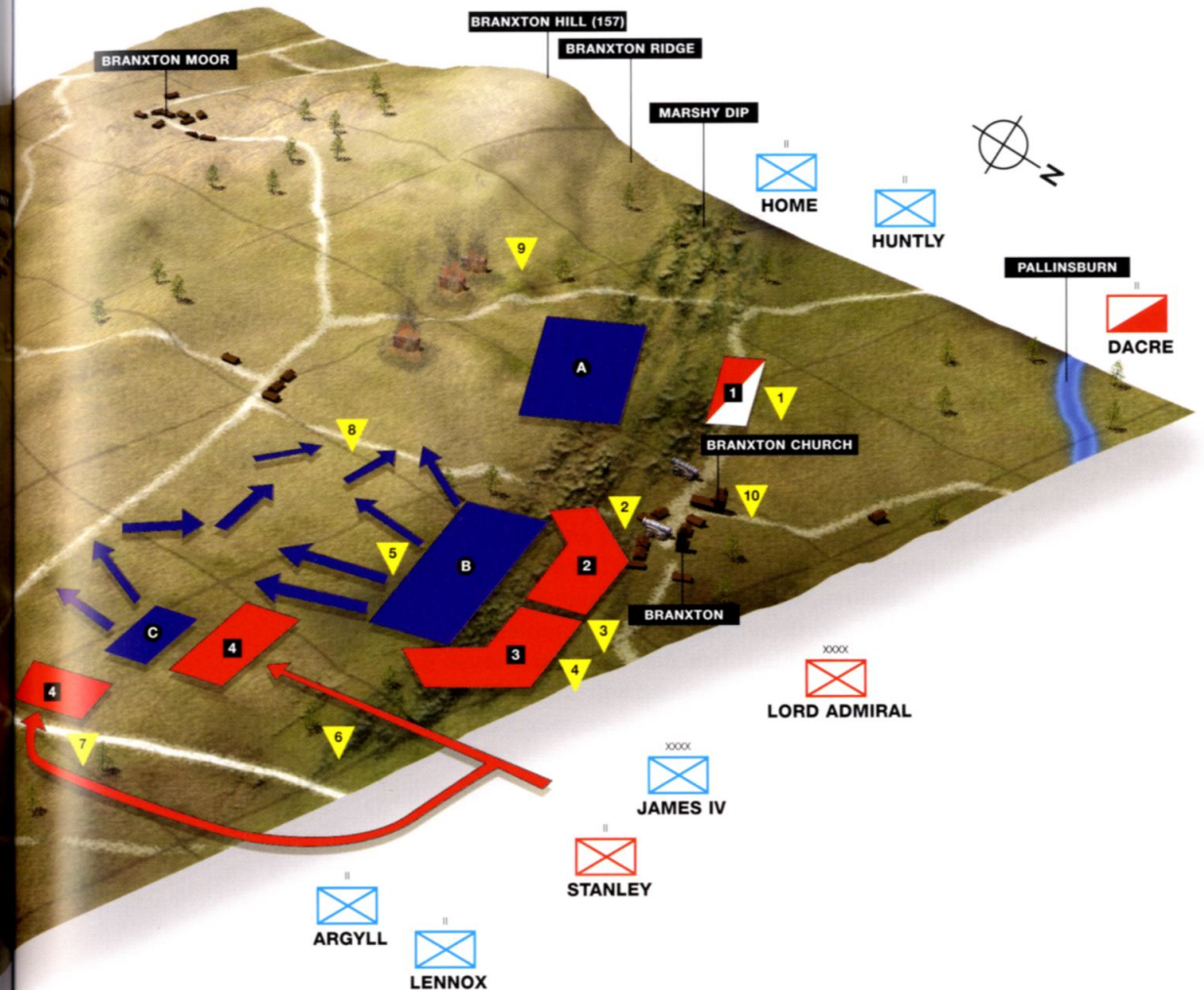


## SCOTTISH

- A Borderers and highlanders under Lord Home and earl of Huntly
- B King James IV's division
- C Highland division under earls of Lennox and Argyll

## ENGLISH

- 1 English cavalry under Lord Dacre
- 2 Lord Admiral with remains of English right
- 3 Earl of Surrey's division
- 4 Sir Edward Stanley's division



## EVENTS

1. 6PM. Dacre's horse remains watching Home and Huntly as the Scots fall back up the hill. The king sends a frantic summons to Home to come up in support of his embattled division but, despite Huntly's urgings, the borderer declines any further involvement. A suspicion of treason will hang over Home until his final execution.
2. 6PM. Survivors of Edmund Howard's division flee or rally to the Lord Admiral's command.
3. Lord Admiral's division, having seen off its opponents, swings around to engage the flanks of King James' division which is opposing Surrey; the archers shoot into the tightly packed Scottish ranks adding to the steadily mounting casualties.
4. 6.30PM. Surrey's division holds fast; the redoubtable English bill does fearsome execution; the heavily armoured Scots nobility are steadily overpowered and hacked down; those of the commons who can, flee.
5. 7PM. King James IV lies dead. Unnoticed in the press of bodies, he led a final, quixotic charge against Surrey's banners and fell, hacked by English bills and surrounded by the nobility and his household. Surviving Scottish nobles sell their lives as dearly as they are able but the outcome of the fight is no longer in any doubt.
6. 6.30-7PM. Stanley leads his own division around the flank of Argyll and Lennox' force.
7. 6.30-7PM. Stanley divides the rest into three brigades, which scale the steep, slippery flank of Pace Hill to take the highlanders completely unawares and put them to rout. Argyll, Lennox and a list of lesser chiefs fall trying to stem the rout.
8. The disordered remnants of the Argyll and Lennox division rout past the remains of the king's battle, passing by the bodies of their king and many of the magnates, without pause. Stanley's men abandon the pursuit to rob the corpses. Few prisoners are taken.
9. 8PM. The Scottish guns stand abandoned, a great prize for the victorious English.
10. Branxton Church is used as a temporary mortuary for the English dead after the battle.





Ballock knife, probably Flemish, late 15th century. The ballock knife, so named because of the rather suggestive hilt formation, was the forerunner of the later dudgeon dagger and the Scottish dirk. (Royal Armouries)

mire and began to lose their formation. As they struggled towards the English their cohesion vanished.

As the Scots lumbered forward, the archers, who would have stepped out from their companies to shoot, could retire behind the billmen, who immediately came into their own. It was now to be a slogging match, a soldiers' battle, pikes against bills. In the *mêlée* the latter was to prove far superior:

*Our bills quit them very well and did more good that day than bows, for they shortly disappointed the Scots of the long spears wherein was their greatest trust, and when they came to handstrokes, though the Scots fought sore and valiantly with their swords, yet they could not resist the bills that lighted so thick and sore upon them.*<sup>35</sup>

The bill, with its 8ft ash stave, was 10ft shorter than the pike; it was thus handier and had the advantage of possessing both point and blade. The spike could be used to parry whilst the axe blade could lop the heads off the attacking pikes and reduce them to firewood. The English had long years of drill and experience behind them; the bill had complemented the bow for the best part of the past two centuries. A Venetian ambassador described the English bill in correspondence and though he was writing nearly three decades later his observations would have applied equally well in 1513:

*[English bills] have a short thick shaft with an iron like a peasant's hedging bill, but much thicker and heavier than what is used in the Venetian territories, with this they strike so heavily as to unhorse cavalry and it is made short because they like close quarters.*<sup>36</sup>

The Lord Admiral's division as well as having the advantage of numbers in this section of the field also included his thousand marines, well versed in bill tactics. Thrusting, and now hacking and slashing, the English billmen gained an early ascendancy. The pike is essentially a 'one shot' weapon; its effectiveness is in the irresistible disciplined rush of a cohesive body, and once that is lost without fracturing the enemy line then the column is both vulnerable and exposed.

Casting aside the now useless pikes, 'you saw so many weapons lowered that it seemed as if a wood were falling down', the Scots drew their swords and fought on. But the sword, though effective against a single bill, is disadvantaged against a line of them, completely outreached by the longer weapon. The Scots were not minded to concede defeat, 'determined to win the field or die'. The battle, with 'many onsets, muckle slaughter, sweating and travail', was fought with ferocity and ruthlessness, neither side asking or giving quarter.



Kettle hat, west European, probably Flemish, about 1480–1500. (Royal Armouries)



RIGHT Close helmet, English or Flemish, about 1510. (Royal Armouries)

Outmatched by the slashing bills, the Scots died hard, the gentry so well harnessed that 'they would not fall when four or five of our bills struck on one of them at once'. Such fighting is terribly exhausting; a heavily armoured man could not maintain the fight at full stretch without respite for more than a few minutes. Many must have toppled with exhaustion only to receive the dagger's thrust, through the eye slits of the visor, beneath the arm or to the groin.

The defiant standard of St Cuthbert, floating boldly above the press, was targeted by the three Scottish earls and their retinues but 'they got no advantage but great loss and damage of their folks; and yet few or none being under the same banner were slain, though many hurt.' The redoubtable bills continued to do their work and all three, with many of their affinity, including no fewer than 87 Hays, were killed. The English, who had enjoyed superior numbers from the outset, were now bolstered by the organized survivors from the right and the rate of attrition, as the frenzied bills hacked down their opponents, worked heavily in their favour.

The French military writer Ardant du Picq, a noted military theorist who himself became a casualty of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870–71, wrote: 'the contagion of fear changes the direction of the human wave; it bends back upon itself and breaks to escape danger.' The rot, therefore, never starts at the front, for those there are too busily engaged in the business of survival; and besides the Scots had placed their best and bravest to the fore. Those behind, less well harnessed, less beleaguered, had more thought for flight. A trickle, swiftly expanded to a river, became a torrent as the survivors broke and ran – 'shortly their backs were turned'.

To the right of the earls the king's vast phalanx fared less badly in the mire and still had sufficient impetus to push Surrey's men back or else, perhaps more likely, the English gave ground in order to draw the Scots into a narrow salient. Deployed in linear as opposed to columnar formation the English could afford more flexible tactics. In part the battle is an instance of line versus column, such as would characterize Wellington's much later battles in the Peninsula. Having lost momentum the column becomes inefficient and unwieldy, and now the Scots were assailed on three sides as the Lord Admiral victorious billmen added their weight to that flank.









**DUSK ON 9 SEPTEMBER 1513 BELOW BRANXTON EDGE**  
(pages 78–79)

It is now dusk on 9 September 1513, between 7pm and 8pm. The battle of Flodden is finally over and the English have the field – there are no Scots formations remaining to oppose. The gathering dusk has brought the slaughter to a final halt; Home and Huntly's division has withdrawn in good order, the rest are dead, wounded or in rout. Few prisoners have been taken – the English are in no mood for clemency. The commons of Stanley's division, fresh from their victory over the highlanders of Argyll and Lennox, pause in their pursuit to strip the dead. The thousands of Scottish casualties, pikemen, knights and magnates, with an unlucky camp follower (1), sprawl in the sacklike equality of violent death. The young woman would have been a water carrier, generally regarded as non-combatant but still at risk in the fury of the *mêlée*. To the left (2) runs the miry dip, the seemingly innocuous burn that has ruined the Scots; it is no more than 3ft or 4ft in width, sluggish with heavily reeded banks. Like the hillside, it is choked with Scottish dead (3), men who have died violent and agonizing deaths, mainly from massive head or intestinal injuries. Those who fell wounded will probably have been dispatched by the swift thrust of a rondel dagger or ballock knife. In the foreground a fallen Scottish knight (4) is being stripped by a trio of Stanley retainers, an archer (5) kneeling on the right and two billmen. All wear the distinctive

eagle's claw badge (6) of the Stanleys and they are fresh from the rout of the highlanders on the Scottish right. One of the billmen drags off the dead man's leather boots – a gentleman's footwear is always worth the effort – and the archer rifles the victim's purse for gold and silver coins, cash the dead Scot may have tried, unsuccessfully, to barter for his life. Life is very cheap indeed today on Flodden field. The English are muddled, splashed with gore, the hot blood already beginning to cool, with exhaustion creeping in. The surviving clansmen pelting westwards (7) have already passed by the corpses of their countrymen – none will have paused to look. King James' once proud army, the largest his country has ever been able to field, has been utterly broken. Only the borderers led by Home with Huntly's Gordons have been able to quit the field in good order. Home has more immediately pressing concerns than the honour of the realm – he knows that the hand of English retribution, mighty with vengeance, is likely to fall most heavily on the Marches. The sun will soon be setting at the end of the bloodiest day in the long history of the border wars. Conflict between England and Scotland raged for nearly 300 years, a pernicious catalogue of violence and destruction which witnessed a score of major fights. This day, 9 September 1513, is the nadir of the border wars; more have died than in many of the previous engagements combined. It is a day for the ballads to mourn – the Flowers of the Forest are no more. (Stephen Walsh)



**Stanley's approach towards the north-eastern flank of Pace Hill. The highland division under Argyll and Lennox was deployed over the crest of Pace Hill just out of sight on the right of the photograph. Stanley, having sent a small contingent to approach from the front, successfully led the bulk of his command up the steep north-eastern flank of the hill to take the Scots by surprise. In the event this proved completely successful.**  
(Author's photograph)

Here the combat was particularly savage. Lords Maxwell and Herries were amongst the first Scottish peers to fall; on the English side were lost Sir John Gower and Sir Richard Harbottle. Again no prisoners were taken as the English 'intending to make all things sure took little regard of prisoners but rid all that came to hand both King, bishops, lords, knights, nobles and others.'<sup>37</sup>

The fight in the centre probably began around 4.30pm and lasted for two long, bloody and exhausting hours. At some point Bothwell committed the reserve division, but ineptly, so that his men crowded the rear of the king's division rather than attacking on the flank where they might have had an effect. Possibly the rearward ranks of the king's division were already beginning to fold and Bothwell was trying to stem the rout.

It is probable that the English archers, with no surviving Scots to trouble them, again stepped forward and massed on each flank of Surrey's division. The tightly packed ranks of the king's column were a perfect and now stationary target. Such had occurred at Dupplin Moor where many of the compressed ranks of Scottish spearmen died of suffocation; on that field the piles of dead were said to rise as high as the length of a spear.<sup>38</sup>

The slaughter was terrible. The English fought with the cold fury of men who began the day thinking themselves under sentence of death; the frenzied bills slashed and gored the lightly armoured and battered the well-harnessed gentry. Immobile and surrounded, individual Scottish knights were picked off one by one. This was no chivalrous contest; one billman would block the Scotsman's weapon whilst another would seek to hook around and drag the victim to the ground, whereupon both or a third would punch their spikes through the vulnerable points in the stricken man's armour.

Full plate, though it afforded great protection and the weight was easily borne by a fit man accustomed to its use, dreadfully restricted the



wearer's vision and the exertion of battle could swiftly produce heat exhaustion and dehydration. The chaos of the mêlée, obscured by the great clouds of steam given off by the press of sweating men, was disorientating in the extreme. Once the initial cohesion of the attack was lost, order and momentum would swiftly disappear.

James, in the thick of the action, fought valiantly – he is reputed to have impaled five opponents on his pike – but mere valour would not be enough. At some point, probably as the shadows lengthened, he must have come to the conclusion that the day was lost. His was not the temperament to withstand so disheartening a realization. Flight was inconceivable; there was only one remedy. Having rallied what remained of his household, James led a last-ditch assault against Surrey's banner; if he could kill the earl then that might yet tip the balance.

And, should that fail, he 'thought there was no other way for him but death to preserve himself from the reproach that was like to follow ... and he rushed into the chiefest press of his enemies and there fighting in a most desperate manner was beaten down and slain.'<sup>39</sup>

In the carnage the king fell unnoticed, no more than a 'spear's length' from the earl's position. Around him lay the bodies of his natural son, the archbishop of St Andrews, and the earls of Bothwell, Cassillis and Morton. When the corpse was identified it was found that the king's left hand had been virtually severed, the lower jaw shot through with an arrow and his throat slashed, presumably by the stroke of a bill.

## EVENING OF 9 SEPTEMBER

The king's was but one of many hundreds of bodies, sprawled and piled on the bloodied turf. The whole hillside from the brook northward was a killing ground, the dead, maimed and horribly injured competing for space, severed limbs and steaming entrails spilling fresh gore. The din would have been terrific, with hoarse shouts and the screams of dying men, the crash of spears, a crescendo rising and swelling like breakers against the shore.

For a while the fact their king was down did not percolate through the depleted ranks of the Scottish remnant but, as the rumours thickened, they were seized by 'such perplexity that they knew not what to do, but looked at one another without stirring to or fro as those that were in despair.'<sup>40</sup> As dusk approached, the surviving Scots broke and fled the field, leaving their comrades stacked in writhing, moaning piles, the grass clogged with blood, the waters of the stream choked with dead and literally running red.

The only force that might have come to the aid of the king's division was the division of highlanders under Argyll and Lennox, with D'Aussi in immediate reserve. Stanley, meanwhile, who had, shorn of guides, detoured through Crookham to descend finally towards the Pallinsburn and cross at Sandyford, now gained the field. His men, though tired after 11 hours on the march, were full of fight. Sir Edward speedily



Cabacette, Spanish or Italian, about 1470. (Royal Armouries)

spotted the possibility of mounting a flank attack on Argyll and Lennox from the north-eastern face of Pace Hill, though the banks were steep and 'his folks could scarcely fast their feet but forced on hands and knees to creep.'<sup>41</sup>

The approach of Stanley's main force was obscured in dead ground, the chiefs diverted by what was happening in the centre. They had no orders and D'Aussi was, rightly, reluctant to engage fearing that they themselves might be taken in flank. Sir Edward sent a commanded party to feint at the highlanders' front whilst he formed the rest into three battalions under Sir William Molyneux, Sir Thomas Gerrard and Sir Henry Kighley.

After their steep scramble up the tussocky slopes the English achieved complete surprise, and the archers immediately let fly the arrow storm breaking over the unprotected backs of the clansmen; 'to avoid the sharp storm the Scots were constrained to break their array and fight one separate from another.' When the billmen laid on, the rout was total. Both the highland earls, Lord Darnley, and the chiefs Campbell of Glenorchy, MacLean of Ardnamurchan and MacIain of Glencoe were cut down 'doing all they could to stay their people from running away'. With his own hand Sir William Molyneux captured two standards and, with their fall, any last hope for the embattled centre vanished.

The fleeing highlanders passed by the dead body of their sovereign and his household, without so much as a backward glance. Stanley's men, who had 'marvellously acquitted themselves', abandoned the hot work of pursuit to pillage the piles of dead; they 'fell a spoiling, and despoiled the King of Scots and many that were slain in his battle but they knew him not.'<sup>42</sup>

By 7pm the bloody work was done, and the English were masters of the stricken field. Few of those Scots who sought mercy survived, as the victors judged they 'had been so vengeable and cruel in their fighting so that when the English had the better of them they would not save them.' Once dispatched the dead 'were no sooner slain, but forthwith despoiled out of their armour and array and left lying naked on the field.'

Here and there an English gentleman, with an eye to ransom, might intervene to spare a prisoner of rank; some of the dead king's household were 'with difficulty saved' by one English knight.

There was no organized pursuit of the dazed survivors, who straggled over the fords at Coldstream, by Wark, or Lennel near Cornhill. Some headed west to the dry Middle Marches and vanished into the hills. Not all were cowed; a party of English, hungry for ransoms, were surprised as the Scots turned to fight and found themselves taken captive. Polydore Vergil paints a depressing picture of the disgraced survivors:

*... and when it [the survivors of the Scots army] reached Scotland, it heard on all sides the unwelcome words, that it had been unreasonable and unpatriotic of them, neither to have avenged the death of the King, nor to have seen to the succour of their perishing countrymen; and thus their country was branded with everlasting disgrace.'*<sup>43</sup>

The English, busy looting the Scots camp, were impressed by the rich store of plunder and, of more immediate sustenance, foodstuffs. They marvelled at how well fed the naked, stiffening corpses of their enemies appeared. Sir Philip Tilney was detailed to keep watch over the rich haul



of captured guns whilst Surrey, as was customary, dubbed 40 new knights on the field, including his wounded son Edmund – no man could have done more to earn his spurs.

When the earl returned to the camp late that September evening he found that the English borderers with fine impartiality had also robbed their own countrymen bare! The Lord Admiral sat down to write a dispatch to Queen Katherine. He had much to disclose – the finest triumph of English arms in several decades, and the highlight of an otherwise desultory and very costly campaign.

Guarding the captured guns that night must have been a grim chore, the men utterly exhausted, numbed by the ebbing of the great adrenaline rush that had kept them alive that afternoon. Around them lay the stricken remnants of a proud army. No silence reigned, but the continual moaning and calling of the hundreds of wounded who suffered, unaided in the cold night air. By dawn, many would have died, some quietly slipping away from shock and loss of blood, others more speedily dispatched by the packs of human predators that would be skulking in the darkness: camp followers and locals who had crept out in search of loot, ferreting amongst the dead and dying – human jackals, the carrion of war.

As for the dead:

*Besides Branxton breathless in a brook they lien,  
Gaping against the moon their spirits were away.*<sup>44</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Laing, *Trewe Encountre*. Unless otherwise attributed, all quotations in this section are taken from this account

<sup>23</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.561

<sup>24</sup> Lindsay of Pitscottie, *The Historie and Cronicles*, Vol. 1, pp.270–71

<sup>25</sup> James, *Account of the Battle of Flodden*, p.2

<sup>26</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.561

<sup>27</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.561

<sup>28</sup> Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, p.97

<sup>29</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, pp.561–62

<sup>30</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, pp.562–63

<sup>31</sup> Baird, *Scottish Feilde and Flodden Feilde: Two Flodden Poems*, p.13

<sup>32</sup> Lindsay of Pitscottie, *The Historie and Cronicles*, Vol. 1, p.270

<sup>33</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, Vol. 1, p.562

<sup>34</sup> Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, p.109

<sup>35</sup> Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, No. 2293

<sup>36</sup> Dillon, H.A., *Arms and Armour at Westminster, the Tower and Greenwich 1547*, *Archaeologia*, Vol. 51 (1888)

<sup>37</sup> James, *Account of the Battle of Flodden*, Bishop Ruthal writing to Wolsey, No. 4461

<sup>38</sup> Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages*, Vol. 2, p.108

<sup>39</sup> Leslie, J., *The Historie of Scotland*, Edinburgh (1895) p.95

<sup>40</sup> Polydore Vergil, *The Anglica Historia AD 1485–1537*, p.1622

<sup>41</sup> Baird, *Scottish Feilde and Flodden Feilde: Two Flodden Poems*, p.48

<sup>42</sup> Hall, *The Triumphant Reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII*, p.562

<sup>43</sup> Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia*, pp.219–20

<sup>44</sup> Baird, *Scottish Feilde and Flodden Feilde: Two Flodden Poems*, p.16

## AFTERMATH

The death of James IV on the field of Flodden did indeed set the seal on his reign and has coloured perceptions ever since. Instead of the signal triumph he had hoped for the king had led his army to the most catastrophic of defeats. Any general who presides over such a débâcle is unlikely to enjoy a good press thereafter, and all of James' many achievements were overshadowed by the spectre of Flodden.

When dawn broke on the grey morning of 10 September the pallid light revealed a scene of dreadful carnage. The crowded field was choked with the mass of dead; blood still flowed liberally, through the miry ditches and over the sodden ground. Many wounded would still be moaning piteously amongst the piles of naked corpses; the ruthless local scavengers would have finished the work begun by the victors.

Sir Philip Tilney, the officer commanding the reserve guard, 'a small company' on the field whose task was to secure the Scottish and English guns, was, in the morning, assailed by a body of border horse, probably commanded by Lord Home, who sought to recover the ordnance. A sharp contest followed till the Scots were panicked by a salvo from the English artillery and scattered, leaving Surrey with his hard-won spoils.

Branxton Church was commandeered as a temporary resting place for the English dead, including Sir Bryan Tunstall and those others who had fallen gallantly on Edmund Howard's wing. Sir Thomas admitted to 400 casualties, though this is probably far too low. Disproportionate as the losses were, the fighting had been much too savage and prolonged for the victors to have escaped so lightly. Of the half a thousand men in

**Branxton Church. This is obviously a much later building but occupies the same ground as the earlier structure. The church was used as a temporary mortuary for the English dead after the battle. (Author's photograph)**







Smailholm tower near Kelso, a Pringle hold – this impossibly romantic tower inspired the young Walter Scott during boyhood visits. (Author's photograph)

his father's retinue only 293 survived, attesting to the fury of the fight around the earl's banner. Edward Hall, who had access to the muster rolls and paymasters' accounts, puts the English loss at nearer 1,500, a far more likely figure.

On the Scottish side, the butcher's bill was vastly greater. Estimates at the time were between 10,000 and 12,000 dead, though again there may have been some exaggeration and the true loss may be somewhere from 5,000–8,000. Amongst these lay the flower of Scottish chivalry, including not just the representatives of the magnat families but many from the higher ranks of the clergy.

The Scottish dead included Alexander Stewart, Archbishop of St Andrews, primate and chancellor, as well as George Hepburn, Bishop of the Isles, two abbots and the dean of Glasgow. They were joined in death by nine of the country's 21 earls, 14 out of 29 lords of parliament and at least 300 lesser gentry. Of those nobles on the field only Home, Huntly and Lord Lindsay escaped, of the gentry Sir Andrew Kerr of Ferniehurst and Ian Mackenzie, chief of his clan. Sir John Forman, Sir William Scott of Blawearie, Sir John Colquhoun and James Logan were taken prisoner.

Amazingly none of the gentry families was completely extinguished, though many fathers and sons perished together including David Pringle of Smailholm whose four eldest sons died with him, leaving only one, an infant, to succeed to the lairdship of Galashiels. The provost of Edinburgh was dead, lying with a slew of the burgesses who, in turn, were joined by many of their contemporaries from Glasgow, Perth and Aberdeen.

It was Lord Dacre who identified the half nude, mangled corpse of the Scottish king. Removed to Edinburgh, the body was eviscerated and then embalmed before being sent down to Newcastle en route to London, sealed in a lead casket. Queen Katherine dispatched the dead monarch's bloody surcoat as a handy souvenir to her husband in France.

On receiving the news of his general's victory on 25 September, Henry ordered a celebratory cannonade and a Te Deum to be sung in the Cathedral of Tournai, this city having just recently surrendered.

On 14 September Surrey deemed it safe, and expedient, to pay off the bulk of his army; some 18,689 men were discharged, including most of the many wounded. The earl felt satisfied that he had saved the exchequer a fortnight's wages but undoubtedly many of the rank and file would have felt cheated of their pay. The rewards would certainly not match the scale of the English effort nor the magnitude of their victory. Surrey regained his family's ducal title, forfeit since Bosworth, and the Lord Admiral succeeded to the earldom. Sir Edward Stanley earned a peerage as Lord Monteagle.

It is easy to conclude that Henry, whilst he might appreciate the scale of the deliverance, remained jealous. His own triumphs in France included the capture of Thérouanne and Tournai, together with the modest success, little more than an extended skirmish, advertised as the Battle of the Spurs. When he later sailed for home Henry crossed the Channel without in any way being inconvenienced by the attentions of the Franco-Scottish fleet. This had suffered from adverse weather and the *Michael*, James' great flagship, had run aground – the Scots had no more luck at sea than on land. The ship was later sold to Louis XII for £12,000 Scots, the banal end to a great dream.

Polydore Vergil recorded that the Scottish survivors from the field ravaged their own country for sustenance as they withdrew, all supplies now lost to the hungry English.

Such of the French cadre as had escaped the slaughter provided ready scapegoats and were hacked to death. The survivors' only reward would be the lasting opprobrium of contemporaries; no man who flees such a sorely stricken field is likely to receive thanks and this was especially so in this case, as most now feared the English would invade. In Edinburgh the surviving burgesses hastily threw an improvised rampart around the capital and expected the worst.

Perhaps an appropriate comment on the reign of James IV is how well his government continued to function despite the loss of the reigning monarch and so many of the magnates. It must be a tribute to the king's administrative reforms that, within three days of the defeat, the Lords of Council met in session at Stirling to consider the steps now necessary to secure the realm and to plan the coronation of the infant James V. The General Council of surviving magnates prepared to see to the nation's defences and invited John, Duke of Albany, to return from France and assume the regency or governorship. Queen Margaret was confirmed as tutrix to her son as the king's will had provided.

The scale of their loss and the magnitude of the disaster notwithstanding, the Scots were thirsting for revenge and had every intention of renewing the conflict. Before the year was out Lord Fleming had been dispatched as an emissary to Louis XII to discuss future joint operations. At home garrisons were provisioned and regular musters, or *wappinschaws*, held.

Hopes of revenge were to be short lived; factionalism, the scourge of Scottish royal minorities, swiftly reared its head in the council. The Queen marginalized herself by, to universal dismay, marrying the Douglas earl of Angus, grandson of Archibald 'Bell the Cat', who had





A Burgkmair woodcut of Flodden Field, with the dead 'rose nobill' in the foreground. (Courtesy of the British Library)

supervised the mass cull of James III's favourites at Lauder in 1482. No strangers to internecine strife, the Douglas affinity were to provoke bitter hostilities during the young king's early years and Angus inclined to seek support from England.

Henry had magnanimously declared that he would refrain from conducting further military operations against his widowed sister and her infant son. Such apparently chivalrous declarations would not prevent the king from continuing to meddle in Scottish affairs for the remainder of his reign. The cost of his continental adventures had already crippled the treasury and consumed the careful legacy amassed by his father.

Scotland was spared, as Henry had fresh plans for France; these were frustrated when the Holy League dissolved in March 1514. An Anglo-French truce was brokered in the same month and, through intense diplomatic effort on Wolsey's part, a permanent peace was signed on 7 August when, as part of the package, Henry's youngest sister Mary was offered in marriage to the ageing Louis XII. Even the old king's death the following year did not sever the accord; Francis I had no immediate wish to revert to enmity.

An inevitable casualty in the fury of cross-Channel diplomacy was the Scottish interest which their French allies, now as often in the past, were apt to overlook as expediency dictated. The Scots were to find that, without their knowledge or consent, they had been included in the treaty to the extent that they were obliged to refrain from the customary border raids that so characterized life on the Marches. No such restriction was imposed on the English.

It is hardly surprising that enthusiasm for their fickle allies waned. Even the Francophile Albany struggled to raise an army in 1522 to support Francis I, now at odds with England, and even when mustered the Scots balked at crossing the Tweed.

The Auld Alliance had very nearly run its final course.



# THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

A part from increased levels of cultivation and the effects of improved land drainage in the 18th and 19th centuries, the field remains remarkably unchanged and all of the principal features may clearly be identified. For the visitor, sheet 74, Kelso, in the OS 1:50,000 scale series and sheet 453, Coldstream, of the pathfinder 1:25,000 range both cover the ground, its immediate environs and elements of the English flank march.

The present line of the B6352 runs westward from its junction with the A697 and skirts the base of Flodden Edge. The strength of the first Scottish position is at once apparent. The rise completely dominates Milfield Plain below and the task facing any attacker would be a daunting one, particularly with the great guns securely dug in and thus largely protected against counter-battery fire.

At West Flodden a right-hand turn leads past the flank of the position and continues over the saddle beyond that leads towards Branxton Edge. The lowest point is traversed by the very minor road running east to west through Branxtonmoor and by Blinkbonny, a pretty farmhouse in restrained estate gothic style. The road then breasts the lip of Branxton Edge and the field opens out before you. The apparently formidable Scottish second position lay astride the ridge.

At this point you stand where the massed pikes of the Errol, Crawford and Montrose division were deployed on 9 September 1513. For many this was to be both their first and their last battle. As the brisk wind plays over the brow of the hill it is not at all difficult to envisage the great phalanx of serried staves, the men shuffling nervous and uncertain, skeins and eddies of smoke rising from the burning rubbish; a rush of stinging, cold rain driven by an east wind, then a tentative sun; men turning to empty bladders, throats dry, odours of stale sweat, human waste, wet wool.

One can easily imagine the captains, perspiring and purple as they shouted commands, then the crash of the guns, earsplitting, terrifying, the loudest noise by far that most had ever heard; English roundshot now finding the range, the balls shearing limbs, splattering brains and intestines, punching over whole files like bloodied mannequins; then the dreaded arrows, for if the magnates and gentry had improved protection, the commons for the most part did not.

To the east would have stood the bulk of the king's great division with Bothwell in reserve. Beneath the ridge would have been positioned the English brigades spreading out beyond the rise of Piper's Hill, the Lord Admiral men deploying just below the present monument, with Edmund Howard's division lining up to the west facing Home and Huntly.

As one descends the hill the line of the burn that was to prove fatal to the sure advance of the Scottish pikes is clearly visible. Now much

Piper's Hill, with the monument in the distance, viewed looking south-west. (Author's photograph)



tamed by ploughman and drainlayer, the nature of the obstacle is still apparent, a marked dip with an uphill struggle to the English line beyond. To the west the dip evens out, and merges into the smoother contours that confronted Home and Huntly; here the topography creates a far more level descent and one can see how, on this wing, the ground so favoured the Scots.

At the base of the ridge the land swells to the left towards the monument on Piper's Hill; beyond that are Windy Law and the drop into the shallow valley of the Pallinsburn, again much drier now than then. Beyond, to the north and east, towards Twizell Bridge, stretches the line of the English approach march.

To follow the line of the English flank march take the B6525 which branches eastward from the main A697 at Wooler; follow this road through Doddington with the links and the Iron Age settlements on the





Piper's Hill, with the monument, looking westward. The monument provides an excellent panorama of the entire field and the information board provides a useful reference. (Author's photograph)

high ground to your right. Barmoor Castle (built much later and now a shell) is on the left, as is Watch Law when you pass over the crossroads just west of Lowick. Bear left at Bowsden towards Duddo; the remains of the 16th-century tower, a lone defiant gable, make a good landmark. From Duddo head due west to the Till, the delightful bridge at Twizell and the Heaton Fords.

There is a good display board by the monument on Piper's Hill which explains the action quite clearly and the vantage provides an Englishman's view of the Scottish line along the crest in front of you. Imagine the ground heaving with the great weight of the Scottish pikes, points glinting in the pallid sun, the crash and roar of the great guns – the prospect is daunting.

In essence the field is unchanged. Step down into the line of the dip, look towards the English line and you can appreciate how so seemingly mundane a feature could lead to so signal a disaster. Visualize the burn, spread with marshes, swelled by the rains and churned by tramping feet, the muddy waters turned red by the effusion of so much blood. Picture a Scottish king who, if he failed as a general, did not fail as a knight; nor did he desert those who followed him, while they, true to their oath, fell around.

At Etal Castle, where the shells of both gatehouse and keep survive, English Heritage has mounted a splendid series of tableaux depicting the events of the battle. Ford Castle also still stands, though it is much modified and is not generally open to the public. Norham, the 'Queen of Border Fortresses', remains, also now in the care of English Heritage. The great, square stone keep is formidable, if denuded, as is the circuit of the walls. Mons Meg, which predates the battle, remains impressively housed in Edinburgh Castle. The Royal Armouries in Leeds contain an array of arms and armour from the period, as does the Wallace Collection in London.

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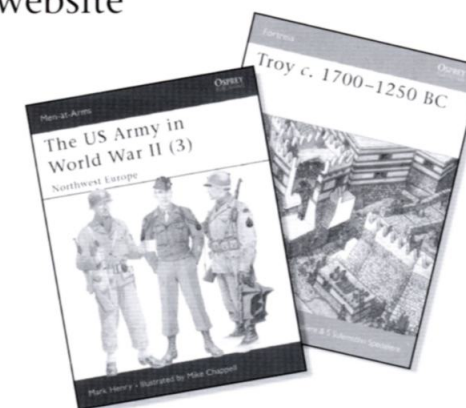
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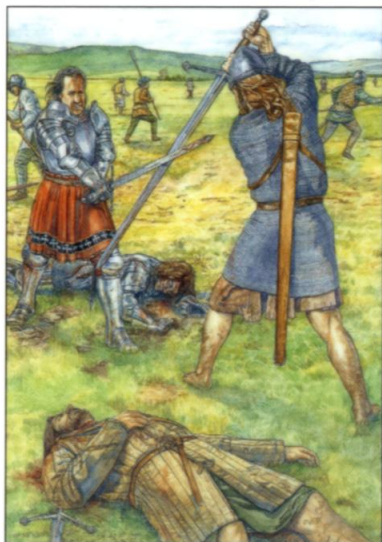
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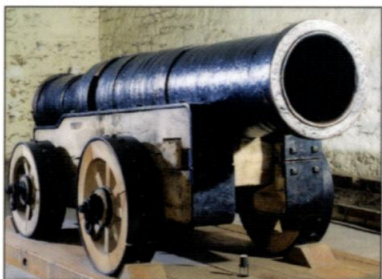
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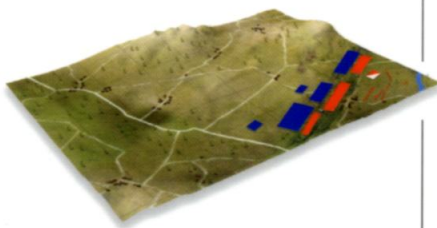
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