

# *Hermitage Castle*

*A Report on its History and Cultural Heritage  
Significance*

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## ***‘A grim relic of treachery and tragedy’<sup>1</sup>***

### **Introduction**

Regarded by Sir Walter Scott as his favourite castle and chosen by him to form the background to his portrait by Sir Henry Raeburn,<sup>2</sup> Hermitage has become fixed in the public consciousness as the symbol *par excellence* of the Border’s long and turbulent history. This present study seeks to provide a detailed overview of the castle historical significance, identifying and explaining its role in the historical development of both Scotland as a kingdom and nation and of the Borders more specifically. It seeks, too, to place the building and its surrounding landscape into their wider tangible and intangible cultural heritage context, discussing the structure and its physical relationship with its setting. The final part of this present report explores the development of the castle’s significance as an icon of global heritage value, from its first presentation in the Gothic and Romantic tales of the early nineteenth century through to its entry onto the global cultural stage in the late twentieth century as an ‘internet superstar’. For many who never have visited the castle or walked over its surrounding landscape, it is a familiar landmark in the literature of Gothic horror, fantasy and the supernatural.

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<sup>1</sup> A Eddington, *Castles and Historic Homes of the Borders: Their Traditions and Romance* (Edinburgh, 1926), 107.

<sup>2</sup> The portrait of Sir Walter Scott by Henry Raeburn is held by the Duke of Buccleuch at Bowhill. It shows the castle as it was before the consolidation of its upper works in the 1830s.

## 1: History

Understanding of the significance of Hermitage Castle as an historic icon can only be achieved from a proper understanding of the historical place of the castle at local, regional and national levels.

Hermitage holds a central place in both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Borders in particular, but it has also gained a powerful symbolism in the wider Scottish cultural consciousness that has grown and evolved in scope and character over the last two hundred years.

### Origins

Of the great lordships created in the western Borders region by King David I (1124-53) for the main figures in the group of Anglo-Norman knights whom he settled in his kingdom, the lordship of Liddesdale is one of the most poorly documented. All that can be said with certainty is that by the 1140s at the latest King David had granted the valley to Ranulf de Sules, founder in Scotland of a family who were to hold an important place in the political life of the kingdom down to 1320 and who held the hereditary office of butler in the royal household. No charter granting Liddesdale to Ranulf survives so there is no record of the terms and conditions upon which he was infefted in it by the king and the only indications of what rights and privileges he enjoyed there survive as incidental references in grants made by the de Sules lords themselves. On the basis of a grant made sometime between 1147 and 1150 when Ranulf gave the canons of Jedburgh priory the right to a teind of all of his venison that was caught in his lands of Liddesdale, one of his privileges appears to have been possession of a baronial hunting forest.<sup>3</sup> That same grant to Jedburgh also conveyed to the canons the church of St Martin of Liddesdale, the original parish church of the valley, over which Ranulf possessed rights of patronage and the presentation of the priest and which he may have founded and built.<sup>4</sup> A dependent settlement – the ‘Castleton’ from which the parish took its name – is on record by 1275.<sup>5</sup>

The present castle of Hermitage is not on the site of the original capital messuage or chief seat of the de Sules lords of Liddesdale; only the earthwork defences of that stronghold, Liddel Castle, survive in the main valley 6km to the SSW of Hermitage and close to the confluence of the Hermitage Water with the Liddel Water (NY509899).<sup>6</sup> Of the history of that older and once more important castle as much remains on record as survives of its structure. It was probably Liddel Castle that in 1207 was the scene of the murder of Ranulf II de Sules *in domo sua* (in his house) by his own servants.<sup>7</sup> This event may form the basis for later legends of the evil wizard Lord Sules of Border legend that have become attached to Hermitage. It was probably Liddel Castle that was visited by King Edward I of England when he stayed at ‘Castleton’ on the night of Friday 27 May 1296 during his triumphant progress through Scotland following his defeat of King John Balliol at Dunbar, and again in August 1298 as he consolidated his hold over southern Scotland following the battle of Falkirk.<sup>8</sup> However, in his account of the castles and towns which surrendered to Edward I after Dunbar in 1296, the Norwich-based monastic chronicler Bartholomew Cotton noted that ‘the castle which is called

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<sup>3</sup> G W S Barrow (ed), *The Charters of David I* (Woodbridge, 1999), no. 167; J Gilbert, *Hunting and Hunting Reserves in Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979), 21.

<sup>4</sup> Barrow (ed), *Charters of David I*, no. 167; <sup>4</sup> RCAHMS, *An Inventory of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Roxburghshire*, vol 1 (Edinburgh, 1956), no. 60.

<sup>5</sup> *Registrum Episcopatus Glasguensis*, vol 1 (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh, 1843), lxxv. The statement in RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 64 that Castleton is recorded in 1220 (*Glasgow Registrum*, vol 1, no. 114) is incorrect.

<sup>6</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 64.

<sup>7</sup> A O Anderson (ed), *Early Sources of Scottish History*, vol 2 (Edinburgh, 1922), 370.

<sup>8</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 64.

Hermitage of Soules' had submitted.<sup>9</sup> The first explicit reference to two castles in Liddesdale survives from October 1300 when Edward I wrote to Simon Lindsay his keeper of the castles of 'Lydel' and 'Eremitage-Soules'.<sup>10</sup> It appears that Liddel was abandoned shortly after that time and Hermitage became the principal seat of the lordship of Liddesdale thereafter.

## Wars of Independence

Although it is first recorded explicitly in c.1296, the stone-built Hermitage Castle may have its origins in the early 1240s when the construction of two un-named castles – one in 'Lothian' and the other in 'Galloway' – was one of several factors that combined in the imagination of King Henry III of England to convince him that the Scots had hostile intentions towards him and his kingdom.<sup>11</sup> This is an extremely shadowy event and there is no hard detail in contemporary accounts to shed any further light on the locations of the buildings involved, but by the late fourteenth century in the *Gesta Annalia* compiled by John of Fordun from various earlier chronicle sources, the castle in Lothian had been identified specifically as Hermitage.<sup>12</sup> While these references are evidently to a castle on the site of the present Hermitage, no part of the upstanding ruin can be dated with confidence to earlier than the fourteenth century.<sup>13</sup> To the west of the adjacent chapel at Hermitage, however, there are the remains of a substantial earthwork enclosure which probably represents the site of an immediate precursor to the great stone castle.<sup>14</sup> It is perhaps that castle which was being referred to in November 1300, when Edward I in his formal indenture which set out the conditions by which Simon Lindsay was to hold the keepership of Hermitage and the motte at Liddel on the English side of the valley, stipulated that Simon was to spend £20 on repairs to the walls, houses and other buildings at Hermitage.<sup>15</sup> Old Liddel Castle simply disappears from the record around this time, leaving Hermitage in the Scottish lordship and the motte of Liddel – or Liddel Strength as it was referred to – in the English barony. Both lordships were to be held jointly by the English family of Wake, the de Sules lords having been forfeited by Edward I for their leading role in the resistance to the English conquest of Scotland.

De Sules possession was briefly restored in the 1310s when King Robert I finally expelled the last English garrisons from southern Scotland, but at the start of the next decade the family was effectively eliminated as a political and land-holding force in Scotland through the disgrace and downfall of its then head. The forfeiture of William de Sules in 1320 for involvement in a conspiracy against the Bruce regime saw the speedy distribution of his lands to members of the close circle of family and supporters around King Robert. Sometime in 1321, the king granted Liddesdale to his illegitimate son, also called Robert.<sup>16</sup> The charter conveying the property to Robert Bruce contains the first explicit reference to the possession of rights of free forest in Liddesdale nearly two centuries after Ranulf de Sules had begun to exercise that right for himself. Robert's possession of Liddesdale, however, quickly became subject to dispute since following the ratification of the Treaty of Edinburgh in 1328 which saw formal English recognition of the kingship of Robert I and ended the first phase of

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<sup>9</sup> *Bartholomæi de Cotton, monachi norwicensis, Historia anglicana (A.D. 449-1298): necnon ejusdem Liber de archiepiscopis et episcopis Angliæ*, ed H R Luard, Rolls Series (London, 1859), 311-2.

<sup>10</sup> J Bain (ed), *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland*, ii (Edinburgh, 1884), no. 1165. [Hereafter CDS]

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, iv, 380.

<sup>12</sup> *John of Fordun's Chronicle of the The Scottish Nation*, ed W F Skene, vol 2 (Edinburgh 1872), 287.

<sup>13</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 63, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 62, p. 75. This site is discussed below in the context of 'The Forest of Liddesdale and the Park of Hermitage'.

<sup>15</sup> CDS, ii, no. 1173.

<sup>16</sup> RMS, i, app. i, no. 53; G W S Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Edinburgh, 1988), 282-3; M A Penman, 'A fell coniuiracioun agayn Robert the douchty king: the Soules Conspiracy of 1318-20', *The Innes Review*, 50.1 (Spring 1999), 25-57.

the Wars of Independence, it had been agreed that certain English nobles would be restored to their heritage in Scotland.<sup>17</sup> One of the leading figures amongst the limited group of so-called 'Disinherited' lords who was to be reinstated was Thomas Wake, lord of Liddel. King Robert issued letters patent promising Wake possession of Liddesdale but no progress towards that had been made before the time of the king's death in June 1329. The regency government for the young Scottish king David II had no interest in pursuing the restoration of the Disinherited and in 1330 Edward III of England was forced to make repeated demands that the Scots honour their agreement under the treaty.<sup>18</sup> As late as April 1332, Wake was still pushing for his restoration to his family's lost Scottish heritage.<sup>19</sup> Wake and his leading Disinherited associates, headed by Edward Balliol son of King John, were prepared to make more aggressive moves to regain what they believed was rightfully theirs, and on 6 August 1332 they and a small invasion force made landfall at Kinghorn in Fife seeking a military solution to their unaddressed claims.

On 12 August 1332 the Disinherited defeated the army led by David II's regent Donald, earl of Mar, at the battle of Dupplin in Strathearn south-west of Perth. Victory was, in the eyes of many, vindication of their claims. For Thomas Wake this may have seemed especially true for amongst the Scottish dead was his rival for possession of Liddesdale, Robert Bruce.<sup>20</sup> Despite a recovery in the Scottish position over the winter of 1332-3 which saw Edward Balliol and his allies expelled from Scotland and the brief seizure of possession of Liddesdale by the Scottish guardian Sir Archibald Douglas<sup>21</sup>, the entry of Edward III into the war in 1333 and his crushing victory over the Scots at Halidon Hill outside Berwick on 19 July 1333 soon brought all of southern Scotland firmly within control of the Disinherited and in 1334 Edward Balliol made over to the English king possession of all of the Border counties. Hermitage was now an 'English' castle; Wake, however, was not confirmed as lord of Liddesdale. At the time of his death in June 1349, Thomas Wake was described only as lord of Liddel – the English barony – and it was noted in the inquest post mortem that the site of the castle and manor there was destroyed, having been burned by the Scots in 1346.<sup>22</sup>

Possession of Liddesdale had gone to other destinations. The accounts of the sheriff of Roxburgh in October 1336 delivered to Edward III of England, in whose hands Roxburghshire then lay, noted that of the late William de Sules' lands in Liddesdale half were in the custody of Ralph Neville, who had been awarded them until the heir of the late John Keith came to adulthood. Keith, it was reported, had been husband of one of de Sules' sisters and had received tenure by gift of 'the King of Scots', who in this context appears to have been Edward Balliol rather than Robert I or David II. The other half of the lordship had been given by 'the King of Scots' to William de Warenne.<sup>23</sup> Within a year, however, English occupation of Hermitage was ended when it was captured by Sir William Douglas, who then used it as a base from which to harass the other English garrisons in the Borders.<sup>24</sup> Douglas had ambitions to develop his personal powerbase in the Borders and to that end secured possession of the lordship of Liddesdale as it had been held by William Sules on 16 February 1342 by grant of King

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<sup>17</sup> S Cameron and A Ross, 'The Treaty of Edinburgh and the Disinherited (1328-1332)', *History*, 84 (1999), 237-56.

<sup>18</sup> *CDS*, iii, nos 1013, 1050, 1051.

<sup>19</sup> Cameron and Ross, 'Treaty of Edinburgh and the Disinherited', 254-5.

<sup>20</sup> M A Penman, *David II 1329-71* (East Linton, 2004), 48.

<sup>21</sup> M Brown, *The Black Douglases: War and Lordship in Late Medieval Scotland 1300-1455* (East Linton, 1998), 34.

<sup>22</sup> *CDS*, iii, no. 1542; *Chron. Bower*, vii, 253.

<sup>23</sup> *CDS*, iii, 320.

<sup>24</sup> *Chron. Bower*, vii, 139.

David II.<sup>25</sup> Douglas had no ‘right’ to the lordship, no ancestral claim, and the king had been unwilling to confirm possession based on straightforward military occupation, but he was outmanoeuvred by a man whose political and military support he needed in the continuation of the recovery of southern Scotland from English occupation.<sup>26</sup> Hermitage became the key base from which English possession of Teviotdale to the east and Annandale to the west was to be challenged, but it also provided William Douglas with the nail upon which his growing political power and personal authority based on his war leadership was to be fixed.<sup>27</sup>

Four months later the castle was the setting for one of the events which helped to establish its reputation as a place of grimness and treachery. William’s principal rival on the Scottish side was Sir Alexander Ramsay of Dalhousie, who had recaptured Roxburgh Castle from the English and whom David II had made keeper of the castle and sheriff of Teviotdale. Rivalry for political influence and territorial power between the two men who had once been close associates came to a head on 20 June 1342 when Ramsay was holding his sheriff court in the church of St Mary at Hawick, provocatively close to William’s powerbase in Liddesdale; Ramsay was clearly issuing a challenge to Douglas right on his own doorstep. Douglas and his men rode over the hills from Hermitage, burst into the court and, after a bloody fight, seized and carried off the wounded Ramsay. Rumour at the time reported that he was held in chains in a storeroom for seventeen days, sustained only by a few grains which fell through the wooden floor from a granary in the level above, until he eventually died from his wounds and from starvation about 6 July.<sup>28</sup> This historically attested event has long fired local imagination but has acquired much more detail and goriness in the telling. The most persistent tradition is that ‘many years ago’ a mason employed on work near the castle broke into a sealed vault and found there ‘a quantity of human bones, a saddle, a bridle and a sword. In the dungeon also was a great quantity of the husks of oats’.<sup>29</sup> These relics, it was reasoned, were the remains of Ramsay, though why Douglas left his prisoner with a sword and why the body was left to decompose in what was a residential castle and after the dying man had received last rites from a priest has never been explained. It is simply myth.

David II was infuriated but powerless to bring William Douglas to boot for this assault on a man who was the crown’s representative in the Borders. The king may have wished to avenge Ramsay’s death but, with the removal of Ramsay from the scene he now more than ever depended on Douglas for the defence of the Border. For the next four years, Douglas was unassailable in possession of Hermitage, the lordship of Liddesdale and the domination of the central Borders region, a position which seemed likely to be strengthened even further in autumn 1346 when the Scottish army marched into northern England, capturing and razing Liddel Strength on route. Within days, however, that whole edifice of power faced utter collapse when William was captured along with the king in the disastrous defeat of the Scottish army at Neville’s Cross outside Durham.<sup>30</sup>

William Douglas of Liddesdale well understood the threat to his power and influence in the Borders that his imprisonment in England meant and also well understood how his standing in Scotland was being undermined by his ambitious young kinsman William, lord of Douglas.<sup>31</sup> Over the next six

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<sup>25</sup> B Webster (ed), *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, vi, *The Acts of David II* (Edinburgh, 1976), no. 45; Brown, *Black Douglases*, 37.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *Black Douglases*, 40-1.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, *Black Douglases*, 38-9.

<sup>28</sup> *Chron. Bower*, vii, 153.

<sup>29</sup> H Drummond Gauld, *Brave Borderland* (London and Edinburgh, 1935), 236; OSA, xvi, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, *Black Douglases*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Black Douglases*, 43-4.

years, William was allowed to return to Scotland by his English captors to act as a negotiator in the various attempts to secure David II's release and to reach a secure peace settlement. Whilst on these visits and continuing from his places of confinement in England, he worked tirelessly to salvage the regional dominance which he had built up in the decade before Neville's Cross, all the time seeking to exclude his young kinsman from developing an alternative powerbase in the region. When these negotiations came to early in 1352, William was forced to resort to more overtly self-interested solutions.<sup>32</sup> Looking to protect his own interests, on 17 July 1352 the Knight of Liddesdale entered into an indenture with Edward III of England, promising him his service in Edward's wars, except against the Scots unless it pleased William to do so.<sup>33</sup> In return, Edward confirmed him in possession of Hermitage and Liddesdale, plus other lands in Annandale and Moffatdale. A week later Edward III ordered Ralph Neville, who had the keepership of Hermitage, to deliver it to William 'late his prisoner'.<sup>34</sup> Neville was to be compensated for giving up possession, receiving in return promise of a payment of £120, but in 1364 Neville was still pursuing the money.<sup>35</sup> In June 1377, Neville's heir John was still seeking satisfaction for the promised compensation.<sup>36</sup> This long and confused struggle for control of Hermitage is highly revealing, illustrating not only the castle's strategic significance but also its wider economic and political importance to the various men who were contending for possession.

William Douglas, however, did not gain control of his kinsman's castle and lordship. Indeed, the Knight of Liddesdale's widow, Elizabeth, placed herself in the protection of Edward III and entered an indenture with him that guaranteed her possession for life of the castle but at the price of accepting an English husband arranged for her by the king.<sup>37</sup> On 1 July 1355, the English king granted to 'Elizabeth, widow of William Douglas, and Hugh Dacre her new husband' the castle of Hermitage and the valley of the Liddel in feu and heritage, with Hugh promising to defend the castle and lands against all Scots and others in rebellion against King Edward.<sup>38</sup> Hugh Dacre and his wife, however, seem to have been hard put to retain possession. In July 1356 Edward III required William Dacre, Hugh's elder brother, to present himself before council at Westminster to explain his loss of Hermitage to the Scots,<sup>39</sup> and in July 1358 Edward III was pushing for restoration to Hugh Dacre and Elizabeth of the castle which had been seized by William, lord Douglas, and 'other Scots his adversaries' during time of truce.<sup>40</sup> The Dacres were unable to make good their claim, but from this time on they were to push their rights as heirs of Hugh's step-daughter, Mary Douglas, a claim that was to lead them into prolonged cross-border feuding with the various branches of the Douglas family who held Hermitage and Liddesdale through the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>41</sup> In October 1380 this issue of illegal occupation of land by the Scots during times of truce re-emerged with a complaint from the English government conveyed to the Scottish king and his council that various lands including all of Liddesdale had been taken by force from their English holders since the truce of

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<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> CDS, iii, no. 1562.

<sup>34</sup> CDS, iii, no. 1565.

<sup>35</sup> CDS, iv, no. 102.

<sup>36</sup> CDS, iv, no. 240.

<sup>37</sup> *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 772a.

<sup>38</sup> *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 778b.

<sup>39</sup> CDS, iii, no. 1616.

<sup>40</sup> *Rotuli Scotiae*, i, 826a.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 207.

1369.<sup>42</sup> The man who was in full possession of Liddesdale was Sir James Douglas, son of William 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Douglas; the Douglasses had won their prize.

### **Douglas Lordship of Liddesdale**

Despite the complaints of the English government, Hermitage and Liddesdale remained firmly in the hands of the Douglasses. Earl William had placed his son in possession of the castle and lordship in the early 1380s but it became incorporated fully into the earldom of Douglas when James succeeded his father as 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Douglas in 1384. Four years later Earl James was killed at the battle of Otterburn and, lacking a legitimate direct male heir the Douglas inheritance was claimed by his cousin Archibald ‘the Grim’ lord of Galloway. His succession did not go unchallenged, with various kinsmen of William Douglas of Liddesdale and of William 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Douglas advancing rival claims to all or portions of the Douglas heritage; Liddesdale was one key component that was in dispute.<sup>43</sup> In April 1389, the decision was taken to give custody of Liddesdale and its satellite lordships of Staplegordon and Westerkirk to James Douglas of Dalkeith, but he was very firmly Archibald the Grim’s man; one Douglas lordship had been dismantled but a new one was in the process of being built on its ruins.

Archibald’s apparent success in 1389 did not resolve the bickering over the inheritance and in 1397 a challenge to the original settlement emerged in the person of George Douglas, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Angus, the bastard son of William 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Douglas, founder of what is known as the Red Douglas line of the family. George had gradually been acquiring the claims of various other individuals to the lordship of Liddesdale, by 1397 concentrating all rival titles in his own hands and presenting himself as the alternative lord of Liddesdale.<sup>44</sup> Early in 1399 George openly voiced his aim ‘to recover from James Douglas all mails and rents from Liddesdale which he wrongfully occupies’.<sup>45</sup> The contest for this key lordship and its increasingly powerful castle was again hotting up. By 1400, however, the conflict had been resolved by a political settlement rather than open feud; Earl Archibald negotiated a deal with George which gave his young rival Liddesdale and compensated James for the losses which he had suffered in the course of the struggle over the inheritance. Hermitage was now under the new ownership of the family who were to become most intimately associated with its later medieval history, the Red Douglas earls of Angus.

On 11 April 1481, as tension with England began to slide towards war, parliament passed legislation ordering the repair and garrisoning of key Border strengths – Dunbar, Lochmaben and Hermitage ‘which is most in danger’.<sup>46</sup> The following March, parliament again passed legislation as Scotland prepared for war with Edward IV of England, instructing the placing of a garrison of 100 men into Hermitage ‘who shall be ready to support both the Middle and the West borders in time of need’.

<sup>47</sup>Significantly, amongst the terms upon which Edward IV offered to help Alexander, duke of Albany, to depose his brother James III in 1482, was the requirement that Hermitage Castle and the lordship of Liddesdale be made over to him, along with the neighbouring lordships of Eskdale, Ewesdale, Annandale and the castle of Lochmaben.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> S Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings: Robert II and Robert III 1371-1406* (East Linton, 1996), 115.

<sup>43</sup> Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 82.

<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 89.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *Black Douglasses*, 90.

<sup>46</sup> RPS 1481/4/9. Accessed 4 February 2012.

<sup>47</sup> RPS 1482/3/44. Date accessed 4 February 2012.

<sup>48</sup> N Macdougall, *James III* (Edinburgh, 1982), 153.

In the aftermath of the coup which overthrew King James III and established his elder son as King James IV, on 31 January 1489 the young king and his council confirmed George, son and heir of Archibald earl of Angus, in his rights to the Angus heritage including Liddesdale and its components lands and rights.<sup>49</sup> Even at that point, however, Angus's star was in the decline for his pro-English inclinations ran contrary to the king's own pro-French policies; in the same year that he had been confirmed in possession of Hermitage he had been stripped of his March wardenships on account of his unauthorised visit to the court of Henry VII of England.<sup>50</sup> James and his advisors rightly suspected Angus of treasonable dealings, ultimately revealed in an indenture of November 1491 between Henry VII of England and Earl Archibald which set out proposals whereby Angus would attempt to shift the Scottish king from his pro-French stance and, if unsuccessful, to attack the lands of those nobles around James who had opposed an English treaty. The indenture also provided for the surrender of Hermitage and Liddesdale into the English king's hands, the Douglasses being compensated with lands of equivalent value in England.<sup>51</sup> Word of Angus's dealings with the English king had clearly leaked out before November, for in October 1491 the king began a siege of the earl's great castle of Tantallon in East Lothian. The resolution, however, came by negotiation rather than battle; Angus's possession of Liddesdale was ended in December 1491 when King James IV required Archibald Douglas earl of Angus to surrender the lordship and its lands, including the castle, into his hands in exchange initially for the lordship, lands and castle of Kilmarnock but ultimately for the castle and lordship of Bothwell on the Clyde.<sup>52</sup> On 6 March following, the king granted Liddesdale and the castle of Hermitage to the new strong-man in the Border region, Patrick Hepburn earl of Bothwell, Angus's greatest rival and the architect of the French treaty.<sup>53</sup>

### **Hermitage and the Hepburns**

Although the Hepburn possession had initially been intended only as a lifetime tenure, in 1508 Earl Patrick's heir Adam was confirmed in possession of the lands, castle, fortalice and manor of Hermitage.<sup>54</sup> Five years later Earl Adam was dead in the carnage of Flodden and his heir was his year-old son, Patrick. In the turbulent political scene of the post-Flodden years, the Scottish government had more to concern itself with than the good management of the lordship of Liddesdale; the result was a slide into regional disorder. Upheavals in respect of lordship in Liddesdale appear already to have been causing problems in respect of law and order and the enforcement of the king's peace in the years before Flodden. Indeed, as early as 1489 parliamentary legislation implies that the rule of law in the central areas of the Borders was not being enforced with the rigour that the king might wish,<sup>55</sup> although that may simply have been one of the excuses being advanced to support the actions against the Earl of Angus which culminated in his loss of Hermitage in 1491. In May 1510, James IV issued letters under the privy seal commanding all tenants and inhabitants of the lordship to come to Edinburgh to make provision for the future good rule of the district and giving them his protection against any pursuit for their past criminal actions.<sup>56</sup> On 27 November at Jedburgh during a tour of the Borders region to enforce royal justice, James IV issued Adam 2<sup>nd</sup> earl of Bothwell with letters authorising him to act against law-breakers and outlaws in his lordship of Liddesdale and to

<sup>49</sup> RMS, ii, no. 1827; GD224/894/2 (sasine was given in July 1489 – not 1499 as the notes in the document suggest).

<sup>50</sup> N Macdougall, *James IV* (East Linton, 1997), 88.

<sup>51</sup> CDS, iv, appendix, no. 32.

<sup>52</sup> RMS, ii, nos 2072, 2073, 2074.

<sup>53</sup> RMS, ii, no. 2092; GD224/918/24.

<sup>54</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, i, 84.

<sup>55</sup> RPS 1485/5/10. Accessed 5 February 2012.

<sup>56</sup> *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, ed M Livingstone, i (Edinburgh, 1908), no. 2073.

have the escheat of their goods as a reward.<sup>57</sup> There is a growing sense from these acts that the valley was well on the way to acquiring that reputation for wild lawlessness that was to fix its place in the annals of Border reiving in the sixteenth century and secure its later romanticised reputation as the haunt of moss-troopers in popular tradition down to the present.

Following the defeat at Flodden the problem of enforcement of firm rule in the Borders escalated and Liddesdale rapidly acquired a reputation as a particular centre of disobedience. With Earl Patrick a child, it would be two decades before Liddesdale's titular lord would be in any position to offer strong local leadership. The consequences of the removal of the firm hand of Earl Adam were not slow to be seen. In May 1517, the government of the Regent Albany issued letters of respite to members of the Armstrong and Tailor families 'and utheris dependand on thaim of the clannis of Liddisdale, now duelland in the debatable land and woddis', if they should agree to come under 'gude reuling'.<sup>58</sup> By 1524, parliamentary acts 'for the staunching of theft throughout all the realm and especially in Liddesdale and upon the borders' were becoming regular occurrences.<sup>59</sup> The regular refrain of action needed to restore good and strong lordship, however, was also being used as a political device which allowed the Hepburns' and their representatives to tighten their grip in an area which still had strong residual attachment to the Douglases.<sup>60</sup> Once the Douglases were in power through their control of the young James V, similar statements gave them the opportunity to involve themselves once again in the affairs of an area which they wished to restore to their possession. Other leading members of the Hepburn family, however, attempted to provide strong leadership locally during the young earl's minority, but it was only as he entered his late teens that efforts began to be made to give effective lordship over the local families. In 1531, however, the eighteen-year-old 3<sup>rd</sup> earl was found to have entered into secret correspondence with Henry VIII of England and was ordered to ward himself in Edinburgh.

Shortly after the discovery of Earl Patrick's dealings with Henry VIII he was required by the king to surrender Hermitage and the lordship of Liddesdale to the crown. The keepership of the castle was entrusted to crown nominees rather than the pro-Hepburn Scotts of Buccleuch who had held it continuously since the days of Red Douglas lordship. In 1539, for example, the Dumfriesshire noble Lord Maxwell received payments for keeping the castle.<sup>61</sup> James V, saw the castle as a vital stronghold not only for his policy of 'daunting' the western Borders to his will but also for strengthening his defences towards England as tensions with his uncle, Henry VIII increased. He was prepared to spend money on the castle to suitably strengthen it and in February 1540 Maxwell received a payment of £100 for 'beting and mending of the Heremytage'.<sup>62</sup> In December 1540, parliament confirmed through an act of annexation crown possession of various lands belonging to forfeited 'rebels' against James V. Included amongst them was possession of the lordship of Liddesdale and the castle of Hermitage.<sup>63</sup> As that formal annexation was made, Bothwell found himself banished from the kingdom.

When war broke out between James V and his uncle Henry VIII of Scotland in late summer 1542, James sent his gunners James Law and John Byris to the newly-strengthened Hermitage to prepare for

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<sup>57</sup> RSS, i, no. 2165.

<sup>58</sup> RSS, i, no. 2904.

<sup>59</sup> RPS 1524/11/15. Accessed 5 February 2012.

<sup>60</sup> RPS 1525/2/13, RPS 1526/11/41. Accessed 5 February 2012.

<sup>61</sup> *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, ed J Balfour Paul, vii (Edinburgh, 1907), 204, 275, 281.

[Hereafter TA]

<sup>62</sup> TA, vii, 289.

<sup>63</sup> RPS 1540/12/26. Accessed 4 February 2012.

its defence against English attack, payment being made to a carter who dragged some of the king's artillery there from Edinburgh.<sup>64</sup> Despite the main action of the war occurring just over the English border to the south west at Solway Moss (24 November 1542), Hermitage escaped direct assault; it was, however, soon to come under assault through legal action. Following the death of James V on 14 December 1542, the exiled Bothwell returned to Scotland from Denmark and in March 1543 started proceedings for the restoration of Hermitage to his possession.<sup>65</sup> Although back in Scotland and restored to possession of Hermitage, Bothwell was heavily indebted and continued to intrigue with the English as a means of finding some financial relief.<sup>66</sup> Despite extravagant promises made to the English, who saw his great castle at Hermitage as the key that would open the central part of the Scottish Border region to them, he quickly broke away from his association with them, allegedly seduced by the promise of marriage to the Queen-Mother and the access to French money which that would bring him. If Bothwell would not deliver Hermitage, however, others also understood its immense strategic significance; in March 1544 the earls of Lennox and Glencairn promised Henry VIII that they would deliver the castle into his hands.<sup>67</sup> Bothwell's dalliance with the pro-French alliance proved short-lived and in 1547 it was reported to the Duke of Somerset by one of the pro-English Borderers in his pay that material found in St Andrews Castle, which had been held by a group of Fife Protestants who had murdered Archbishop Beaton there but which had just been forced to surrender by a besieging French force, revealed that Bothwell had been seeking to marry the rich English Duchess of Suffolk, in return for which he would surrender Hermitage into Edward VI of England's hands.<sup>68</sup> On 30 September 1547 this same news was conveyed to Somerset by the Earl of Warwick from Berwick, confirming that in return for an English wife Bothwell would hand over the rich prize that was Hermitage.<sup>69</sup> Although he renounced his allegiance to the child Queen Mary and was taken under the protection of Edward VI in 1549, Hermitage remained firmly in Scottish hands.

Patrick Hepburn died in England in 1556. His son James, who had not followed his father into English exile and who had remained in Scotland, succeeded formally as 4<sup>th</sup> earl of Bothwell. He was determined to restore his family's fortunes at home and had been a loyal adherent of the Queen-Mother Marie de Guise, who had been regent of Scotland for her daughter Queen Mary since 1554.<sup>70</sup> By 1558 he was one of the chief figures conducting the defence of the Border against the English forces who were acting in support of the Scottish Protestant Lords of the Congregation against Marie and her French army in Scotland, being appointed by the regent as Warden of the Marches and keeper of Hermitage.<sup>71</sup> In 1560 travelled to France to begin the process of ingratiating himself with Queen Mary. As hereditary Lord High Admiral of Scotland, he had an official role to play in the plans for the return of Mary to Scotland, but his three visits to the queen were also used as a means of escaping from the Norwegian fiancée/wife whom he had acquired in Copenhagen in 1559. Already by this time English agents were reporting their suspicions of the young earl, describing him in reports to London as a 'glorious, rash and hazardous young man'.<sup>72</sup> In July 1561 Bothwell returned to Paris for the third and final time, accompanied by the Bishop of Orkney and Earl of Eglinton, who together provided the escort which brought Mary back to Scotland the following month.

<sup>64</sup> TA, viii, 110-111.

<sup>65</sup> RPS 1543/3/47. Accessed 4 February 2012.

<sup>66</sup> M Merriman, *The Rough Wooings: Mary Queen of Scots 1542-1551* (East Linton, 2000), 114.

<sup>67</sup> Merriman, *The Rough Wooings*, 142.

<sup>68</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland 1509-1603*, ed M J Thorpe (London, 1858), i, no. 40. [Hereafter *Calendar of State Papers Scotland*]

<sup>69</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Scotland*, i, no. 59.

<sup>70</sup> P E Ritchie, *Mary of Guise in Scotland 1548-1560: A Political Career* (East Linton, 2002), 126.

<sup>71</sup> Ritchie, *Mary of Guise*, 187n.

<sup>72</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Foreign*, iii, 409.

Bothwell's role in the return of Mary did not bring him the political influence which he had hoped and he was soon out of favour with the queen and those who controlled the Edinburgh-based government. He was quickly involved in a bitter personal quarrel with the Earl of Arran and the powerful Hamilton family, who accused him of treasonable conspiracy. Arrested and confined to Edinburgh Castle without trial, he escaped late in the summer of 1562 and headed for Hermitage. Like his father before him he saw possession of Hermitage as a trump card in his political manoeuvres, for it still represented very real strategic domination of the central portion of the Borders, a focus for leadership amongst leading regional kindreds, and a potent symbol of military power. It was reported on 18 September and 5 October 1562 that he was provisioning and strengthening Hermitage, apparently determined on holding on to it by force and using it as a base from which to rebuild his political power.<sup>73</sup> His challenge, however, came to nothing and he fled to France.

On the fall of his political rivals in 1565, Bothwell returned to Scotland and quickly regained the favour of Mary. His energies were now directed mainly towards imposing his lordship in the Borders and asserting strong rule. Appointed Warden of the Marches in 1566, he appears to have exercised his duties diligently and took the field in person to deliver rough justice. One of his chief actions was an attempt to end a deadly and increasingly violent feud between the Eliotts and the Scotts which was bringing widespread disorder to the central region of his area of oversight. Having ordered the leaders of the Eliotts to surrender themselves into custody at Hermitage, Bothwell proceeded to take direct action against those who failed to comply.<sup>74</sup> On 7 October 1566, during an attempt to arrest one of those who had refused to surrender himself, 'Little Jock' Elliott of Park, Bothwell was seriously wounded and carried back to Hermitage in peril of his life.<sup>75</sup> The account of the event has something of an air of farce, with the wounded earl having to bargain with his Elliot prisoners who had escaped and taken control of the castle for re-entry to Hermitage!

Upoun the samyn day [7 October], James erle Bothwell, lord Hailis of Crychtoun, being send be our souveranis to bring certane thevis and malefactouris of Liddisdail to the justice air, to be puniest for their demeritis, and he being serchand the feildis about the Hermitage, eftir that he had takin certane of the saidis thevis, and had put thame in the place of the said Hermitage in presoun, chancit upone ane theif callit Johne Eluat of the park. And efter he had takin him, the said Johne speirit gif he wald saif his lyff; the said erle Bothwill said gif ane assyis wald mak him clene, he wes hertlie contentit, bot he behuvit to pas to the quenes grace. The said Johne heirand thai wordis, slipsis fra his horse to have rune away; bot in the lychting, the said erle schot him with ane dag [pistol] in the body, and lychtit doun to haue taken him agane; and followand feirsellie upoun the said theif, the said erle slipit ower ane souch, and tomblit doun the same, quhair throw he was sa hurt that he swonit. The said Johne persauend himself schot, and the erle fallen, he zeid to him quhair he lay, and gaif him thrie woundis, ane in the bodie, ane in the heid, and ane in the hand; and my lord gaif him twa straikis with ane quhingar at the paip, and the said their departit; and my lord lay in swoun, quhill his seruantis come and cariit him to the Hermitage. At his cuming thairto, the saidis thevis quhilk was in presoune in the said Hermitage, had gottin furth thairof, and wes maisteris of the place,

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<sup>73</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Scotland*, i, no. 76; *The Border Papers: Calendar of Letters and Papers Relating to the Borders of England and Scotland*, ed. J Bain, i (Edinburgh, 1894), no. 2. [Hereafter *Border Papers*]

<sup>74</sup> J Small, 'Queen Mary at Jedburgh in 1566', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 15 (1880-81), 211-2.

<sup>75</sup> R B Armstrong, 'Note on a feud between the Elliots and the Scotts during the years 1564, 1565 and 1566', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 15 (1880-81), 93-100.

and wald not let my lord Bothwill in the said place, quhill ane callit Robert Elliot of the Schaw come and said, that gif thai wald let in my lord Bothwill he wald saif all their lyvis, and let thame gang hame; and sua thei leit my lord in; and gif he had not gottin in at that tyme, he and all his company haid been slane. And the said theif that hurt my lord Bothwill, deceissit within ane myle, upone ane hill, of the woundis gottin fra my lord Bothwill of befoir.<sup>76</sup>

The story of Queen Mary's ride from Jedburgh to Hermitage to visit the wounded Bothwell has been turned into one of the semi-legendary tales of the Borders and was seen by many as a turning-point in her reign. Presented often as a desperate dash to see a lover whom she feared would die, it is apparent that she concluded most of her business at Jedburgh before she headed west to Hermitage and, whilst at the castle, was still conducting business and seeing to the security of the castle rather than sitting anxiously at Bothwell's bedside.<sup>77</sup> Whatever the truth behind Mary's journey through the hills from Jedburgh to Hawick, up to Priestthaugh at the remote head of the Dodburn valley and over the heights of Swire Knowe to Hermitage and back, there is no questioning the achievement which it represented; the tales of her horse becoming trapped in a bog on the return leg – identified as the Queen's Mire south of Swire Knowe on the shoulder between the deeply-cut valleys of the Crib and Barley burns – should not be dismissed lightly as romantic invention either to heighten the sense of adventure or to illustrate her love-sick folly; the event should rightly be seen as one of the key episodes which has fixed the castle and its wider landscape firmly in the popular imagination for centuries.

After this affair, Hermitage fades back from view in the tumultuous events of the last years of Mary's reign, the murder of her husband Lord Darnley, her all-too-quick remarriage to Bothwell, and her defeat and his flight to exile and death after the 'battle' of Carberry Hill on 15 June 1567. The castle, too, seems to have played no part in the events which followed Mary's escape from Lochleven and brief attempt to regain political power in 1568 before her own flight into exile and eventual death in England.

## End Game

Bothwell had been forfeited following his fall in 1567 and his lands and offices resumed into royal hands. Control of Hermitage, which went with the Wardenship of the Marches, was likewise resumed by the crown and the office was to be exercised mainly by Sir Robert Kerr of Cessford in the later years of the sixteenth century. It was in his capacity as March Warden that Sir Robert came to Hermitage in 1581 to hold court.<sup>78</sup> That same year, however, Bothwell's eighteen-year-old nephew Francis Stewart, a cousin of the young King James VI, who had been given the earldom of Bothwell and the various offices which had formerly attached to it in 1577, began to flex his muscles in the region; although still a royal castle, Hermitage was again back in private and, it soon emerged, very unreliable hands. Bothwell did not gain the Wardenship, but as keeper of Liddesdale and of the castle he held a powerful role in the Borders.

The continued importance of Hermitage for national defence, even at a time when the young James VI was moving towards securing a genuinely lasting peace with England, was swiftly underscored in 1583 when trouble again flared up on the Border. The rumours of a threatened English attack on

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<sup>76</sup> *A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrents That Have Passed within the Country of Scotland Since the Death of King James the Fourth Till the Year MDLXXV* (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh, 1833), 100-101.

<sup>77</sup> Small, 'Queen Mary at Jedburgh', 213-4; W D Simpson, *Hermitage Castle, Roxburghshire* (Edinburgh, 1957), 4.

<sup>78</sup> *Border Papers*, i, no. 105.

Hermitage by a band of 500 English soldiers from Kershope proved to be unfounded, but the heightened anxiety for the security of the castle saw the Scottish government take steps to strengthen the castle.<sup>79</sup> Bothwell was intended to play a key role in the settlement of Border disorder as a precursor to securing the treaty with England and in May 1585 was commissioned amongst several other lords to assist the Warden of the Marches in putting down ‘rebels’ in the region. The following year, in recognition of both his growing political importance and personal relationship with the king and of his status as a major Border lord, Bothwell was one of the three commissioners appointed by James to conclude the treaty negotiations, a task which they completed by July 1586.

A sense of exasperation with the disorder of the central Borders can be seen in James VI’s act ‘for the quieting and keeping in obedience of the disordered subjects, inhabitants of the borders, highlands and islands’, passed in parliament on 29 July 1587.<sup>80</sup> Amongst its specific terms it proposed that:

all such notorious thieves as were born in Liddesdale, Eskdale, Ewesdale, Annandale and the lands sometimes called debatable, or in the lands of the highlands that has long continued disobedient, shall be removed out of the inlands where they are planted and presently dwell or frequent to the parts where they were born, unless their landlords where they presently dwell will become sureties for them to make them answerable to the law as the lowland and obedient men under the pains contained in the acts of parliament.

As an attempt to impose good order on the district it was just as effective of the six decades of legislation preceding. Of even more concern to the king were the activities of his flamboyant and increasingly unpredictable kinsman Francis, who was advocating an invasion of England in response to the execution of Queen Mary on 8 February 1587. Despite having sworn in July 1587 as Keeper of Liddesdale to keep the peace there, in November 1587 a complaint was made to Kerr of Cessford by Lord Hunsdon his English counterpart, that Walter Scott of Buccleuch, keeper of Hermitage, at the apparent command of Bothwell, had raided the country around Bewcastle in Cumberland and carried the spoils back to Hermitage Castle for Bothwell’s enjoyment.<sup>81</sup>

In August 1592, as Bothwell’s relationship with James VI began to deteriorate sharply; it was reported to the English government that he had again based himself in the Borders and intended to hold Hermitage as a redoubt against the Scottish king.<sup>82</sup> Bothwell’s actions down to autumn 1594 ultimately drove James to forfeit and exile his cousin, but the earl was not prepared to go willingly and there was a serious risk of open conflict between the king and Bothwell and his allies amongst the ultra-Presbyterian lords who feared that the king was undermining the particular brand of religion which they favoured. Correspondence between members of the English government and London and their representatives in the north of England and in Scotland reveal much concern over Bothwell’s actions at Hermitage. In September 1594, for example, it was reported that the earl was lingering at Hermitage until King James returned to Edinburgh and that there were rumours of unspecified danger arising from that.<sup>83</sup> On 4 October 1594 instructions were issued by the Privy Council in Edinburgh to Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch, commissioning him to take possession of Hermitage and requiring the keepers of the castle to hand it over to him.<sup>84</sup> Bothwell’s resistance to the king collapsed and by 1595

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<sup>79</sup> *Border Papers*, i, no. 196.

<sup>80</sup> RPS 1587/7/70. Accessed 5 February 2012.

<sup>81</sup> *Border Papers*, i, no. 560.

<sup>82</sup> *Border Papers*, i, no. 766.

<sup>83</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Scotland*, ii, no 34.

<sup>84</sup> *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, v, 1592-1599, ed D Masson (Edinburgh, 1882), 756.

he was an outlawed and forfeited exile who died eventually in Naples in 1612. It has been commented that with his downfall, Hermitage ‘played no further part in history’,<sup>85</sup> but its story was not quite yet over.

Liddesdale and its castle were bestowed by the king on another of his relatives, Ludovic Stewart, 2<sup>nd</sup> duke of Lennox. Given that the new keeper of Liddesdale and, in theory, possessor of Hermitage, had no real interest in these southern properties, he quickly disposed of them to a genuinely interested party, Sir Water Scott of Buccleuch, who happened to be his stepson.<sup>86</sup> Buccleuch was not himself inclined to follow the letter of the law which he was meant to uphold, trouble and disorder continued. In February 1596 he was reported to be strengthening Hermitage as a base from which to launch reprisal attacks on the Turnbulls with whom he was at feud;<sup>87</sup> the platitudes of a government sitting in Edinburgh about restoration of tranquillity in troubled places were not going to carry much meaning in the central and western Borders for some years yet. Buccleuch’s relationship with Bothwell had also been seen as questionable, for it was rumoured that he supported him in his quarrel with King James rather than rendering proper obedience to his royal master.<sup>88</sup> This position was seen as of pressing concern, for Buccleuch had secured the following of nearly all of the men of Liddesdale and, as their effective leader, was acting as if he were the legitimate voice of royal authority in the western side of the Middle March. Some of these fears over his behaviour were realised that same year, when Buccleuch mounted a night-time raid against Carlisle in 1596 to spring one of his following from imprisonment in the castle there. In February 1597, the English Border authorities were still fuming at Scott sitting at liberty in Hermitage and effectively thumbing his nose at them whilst they raged in vain for his surrender to them to answer for his criminal attack on Carlisle.<sup>89</sup>

The Union of the Crowns in 1603 did not at once bring order to a region that had been truly a ‘Debatable Land’, contested by the Scots and the English for three centuries, but the old lawlessness was soon brought to an end. The new stability of what King James VI and I liked to regard as the ‘Middle Shires’ of his two kingdoms had no need for strengths such as Hermitage and the castle lost the strategic significance which had rendered it such a prized possession for centuries. From fortress and garrison post it diminished rapidly to the status of a lesser administrative centre for the western part of the growing landed domain of the Scotts. The changing nature of warfare, moreover, had rendered the old castle redundant and when war once more raged over northern and England and southern Scotland in the late 1630s and 1640s during the Civil War, Hermitage was a bypassed irrelevance. It retained, however, a symbolic significance, described regularly in the documents which listed the lands, rights, powers and privileges of the Scotts of Buccleuch. In 1663, for example, the ‘castell, toure and fortalice’ of Hermitage was described as the chief place in the lordship of Liddesdale which was detailed as part of the marriage contract of Anne Scott, duchess of Buccleuch, to King Charles II’s favourite illegitimate son, James, duke of Monmouth.<sup>90</sup>

In April 1693 parliament in Edinburgh ratified a crown grant of 1687 in favour of Anne Scott, duchess of Buccleuch, and her son James, earl of Dalkeith, of the whole Scott heritage.<sup>91</sup> This confirmed:

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<sup>85</sup> Simpson, *Hermitage Castle*, 5.

<sup>86</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 63, p. 85.

<sup>87</sup> *Border Papers*, ii, no. 218.

<sup>88</sup> *Border Papers*, ii, no. 232.

<sup>89</sup> *Border Papers*, ii, no. 497.

<sup>90</sup> W Fraser (ed), *The Scotts of Buccleuch* (Edinburgh, 1878), ii, 469.

<sup>91</sup> RPS 1693/4/150. Accessed 4 February 2012.

all and entire the lands and lordship of Liddesdale, with the castle, tower and fortalice of Hermitage, with the free forestry and regality thereof, together with all and sundry towns, lands, towers, fortalices, woods, mills, multures and others belonging to the said lands and lordship of Liddesdale and patronages of the churches, chaplainries and prebendaries belonging thereto, and rights of patronages of all the churches, benefices, chaplainries and prebendaries of the said lands, lordships, baronies and others particularly and generally above-written, lying as said is, and contained in a charter thereof granted by King Charles I, under his highness's great seal to the late Francis [*Scott*], earl of Buccleuch thereupon of the date at Hampton Court, 10 November 1647, appointing the castle of Hermitage to be the messuage and a sasine thereat to be sufficient for the whole. And of the Mains of Overhills, with the mill thereof and of certain other lands and others in real warrandice of the said lands, lordship and barony of Liddesdale, baronies of Wilton and Chamberlain Newton, and other lands and patronages above-mentioned.

By the date of this charter, Hermitage itself seems to have been an already derelict and crumbling ruin, or at best part-occupied by farming tenants who worked the surrounding hills. When the Scotts began the systematic reorganisation of their estates between the 1720s and the 1760s, Hermitage ceased to have any role in the management of their properties and fell rapidly into final ruin.

It was in the spirit of antiquarian enthusiasm for the history and traditions of the Border that Sir Walter Scott had engendered that the Duke of Buccleuch undertook a series of repairs at the ruins of Hermitage in the 1830s. In 1833-4 Alexander Harley Maxwell, chamberlain of Eskdale and Liddesdale, accounted for a programme of repairs to the castle.<sup>92</sup> Part of this work included a clearance of rubble from the interior which enabled a plan to be obtained of the ground-floor chambers,<sup>93</sup> but the major works concentrated on the upper levels of the structure to consolidate the wall-walk and parapet and give it the uniform appearance which it still bears today. Further work was undertaken in 1870 when James Connell, the Buccleuch estate chamberlain of Eskdale and Liddesdale, accounted for repairs to the castle.<sup>94</sup> By 1926, shortly before being placed in the guardianship of the then HM Office of Works, the castle was again in such a precarious state of maintenance that the public had again to be excluded from access to the interior.<sup>95</sup> Four years later, when handed over to the state, a programme of repairs were set in train which has resulted in the consolidated ruin which survives today.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> GD224/493/1

<sup>93</sup> RHP93678

<sup>94</sup> GD224/494/26

<sup>95</sup> A Eddington, *Castles and Historic Homes of the Borders: Their Traditions and Romance* (Edinburgh, 1926), 121

<sup>96</sup> Simpson, *Hermitage Castle*, 5.

## 2: Castle and Lands

Hermitage Castle is only the central component in a wider entity that was the lordship of Liddesdale. Castle and lands around it formed part of an integrated unit, interdependent and at one time inseparable. A past tradition in castle studies which had a strongly military engineering and architectural history emphasis, and which saw castles very much as artefacts complete in themselves, often failed to recognise that interdependent relationship; most simply could not to see the relationship with the landscape around castles other than in strategic military terms. Down to the 1980s, the study of castles was very much conceived of as the study of structures built primarily as fortresses and which just happened to acquire secondary functions as residences, economic and administrative centres, and straightforward symbols of coercive power. This attitude can be seen clearly in the manner in which the first detailed description of the castle - undertaken by the pioneering castellologists David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross in the 1880s - which saw its whole rationale for location purely in defensive terms and gave no thought to its relationship with its hinterland,<sup>97</sup> remained unchallenged in the survey of Hermitage undertaken by RCAHMS and published in 1956 in the *Inventory of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Roxburghshire*. The RCAHMS survey focussed entirely on the building and the immediately adjacent earthworks which were clearly part of the castle complex, and paid no attention to the wider system of earthworks, walls and enclosures which extended over the hillside to its north and west.<sup>98</sup> While only the most savage of revisionists would deny that castles had any intrinsic function as fortresses, more recent writing has moved towards viewing castles and their hinterlands as a continuum within which the castle building itself represented only a concentrated node of activity.<sup>99</sup> Whilst most of this revisionist writing is concentrated on the medieval English experience, much of this new view of the castle and castle landscape is relevant for our understanding of medieval and early renaissance lordly society in Scotland. At Hermitage, we are presented with a remarkable case-study which allows the relationship between a castle and its surrounding lordship to be viewed with remarkable clarity,

### The Castle

As set out in the historical discussion in Part 1, the structure known nowadays as Hermitage Castle is at least the second building of that name to stand on or near this site. Neither it nor its predecessor(s) was intended to be the principal centre of the lordship of Liddesdale in which it lies; that role down to the early 1300s was fulfilled by Liddel Castle 6km to the SSW.<sup>100</sup> A castle called Hermitage, however, had come into existence before the end of the thirteenth century and, from its designation as 'Hermitage-Sules' (see above), it was clearly also a possession of the family that had controlled Liddesdale since the first half of the twelfth century. Why they felt that they needed two residences so close together is not entirely clear, but it is most likely that Hermitage had its origins as a hunting-lodge associated with the de Sules' baronial forest of Liddesdale rather than as a main or regular place of residence for the entire family and household of a lord of de Sules' status.

There has been no excavation work undertaken to confirm the suggestion, but it is likely that the 'Hermitage-Sules' of the late thirteenth century is today represented by the earthwork enclosure west

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<sup>97</sup> D MacGibbon and T Ross, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, i (Edinburgh, 1887), 523.

<sup>98</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 63.

<sup>99</sup> See, for example, O H Creighton, *Castles and Landscape: Power, Community and Fortification in Medieval England* (London, 2002); M Johnson, *Behind the Castle Gate: From Medieval to Renaissance* (London, 2002); R Liddiard, *Castles in Context: Power, Symbolism and Landscape, 1066-1500* (Macclesfield, 2005).

<sup>100</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 64.

of the chapel ruins which lie 0.5km west of the later medieval castle.<sup>101</sup> In 1956 RCAHMS conjectured that the earthworks might be those of the 1240s castle which so offended Henry III of England, but dismissed that possibility on the grounds that the ‘defences seem altogether too slight for an important castle of this period’. They were probably right to dismiss that identification and their comments on its greater similarity to a class of high-status residence known as a ‘homestead moat’ is perhaps closer to the mark. Although it has the Hermitage Water down a steep bank to its south and earthwork banks and ditches on its three remaining sides, it is awkwardly crowded onto a small river terrace and overlooked by higher ground immediately to its north; it is not a fortress and was clearly more residential in character. Smaller scale, more lightly defended and in a secluded location, it is possible that this was the site of a hunt-hall where de Sules and his companions would come on hunting expeditions.

Why Hermitage came to supplant Liddel Castle as the chief seat of the lordship is unknown. Liddel did occupy an exposed frontier position and may have been slighted by the Scots soon after 1300. When the brief period of settlement on the Border came between 1327 and 1332, therefore, it may have been decided to develop Hermitage as a slightly more conveniently located centre rather than to rebuild at Liddel. The old site at Hermitage, however, was itself unsuitable as the location for a major new estate centre – too small, confined and overlooked, suitable for a hunting-lodge but not a castle – so the opportunity was taken to relocate to a more spacious position 0.5km to the east on a broad platform above the Hermitage Water.

The new castle may itself have been largely of earthwork and timber construction, represented now by portions of the complex of earthen banks and ditches which surround the stone building.<sup>102</sup> The earthwork enclosure was built on an ambitious scale, probably as the setting for a group of high-status residential buildings including a hall and chamber block, stables, workshops, stores and accommodation for servants, with stock-yards and gardens in the outer part of the enclosed area. At some stage in the mid-fourteenth century – possibly by the Dacres - a decision was taken to replace the main buildings of the probably largely timber complex with a stone structure. The remains of this survive as the oldest upstanding portions of the castle today.



Hermitage Castle: the central courtyard, representing the mid-14<sup>th</sup>-century 1<sup>st</sup> stone phase.

As it appears today, Hermitage is a massive monolith of stone with walls rising almost sheer to a uniform height and crowned by an oversailing parapet and wall-walk; it seems the epitome of a medieval fortress. This massive uniformity, however, is deceptive and analysis of the stonework has revealed that the present form for the most part evolved gradually over two centuries but received its

<sup>101</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 62, p. 75.

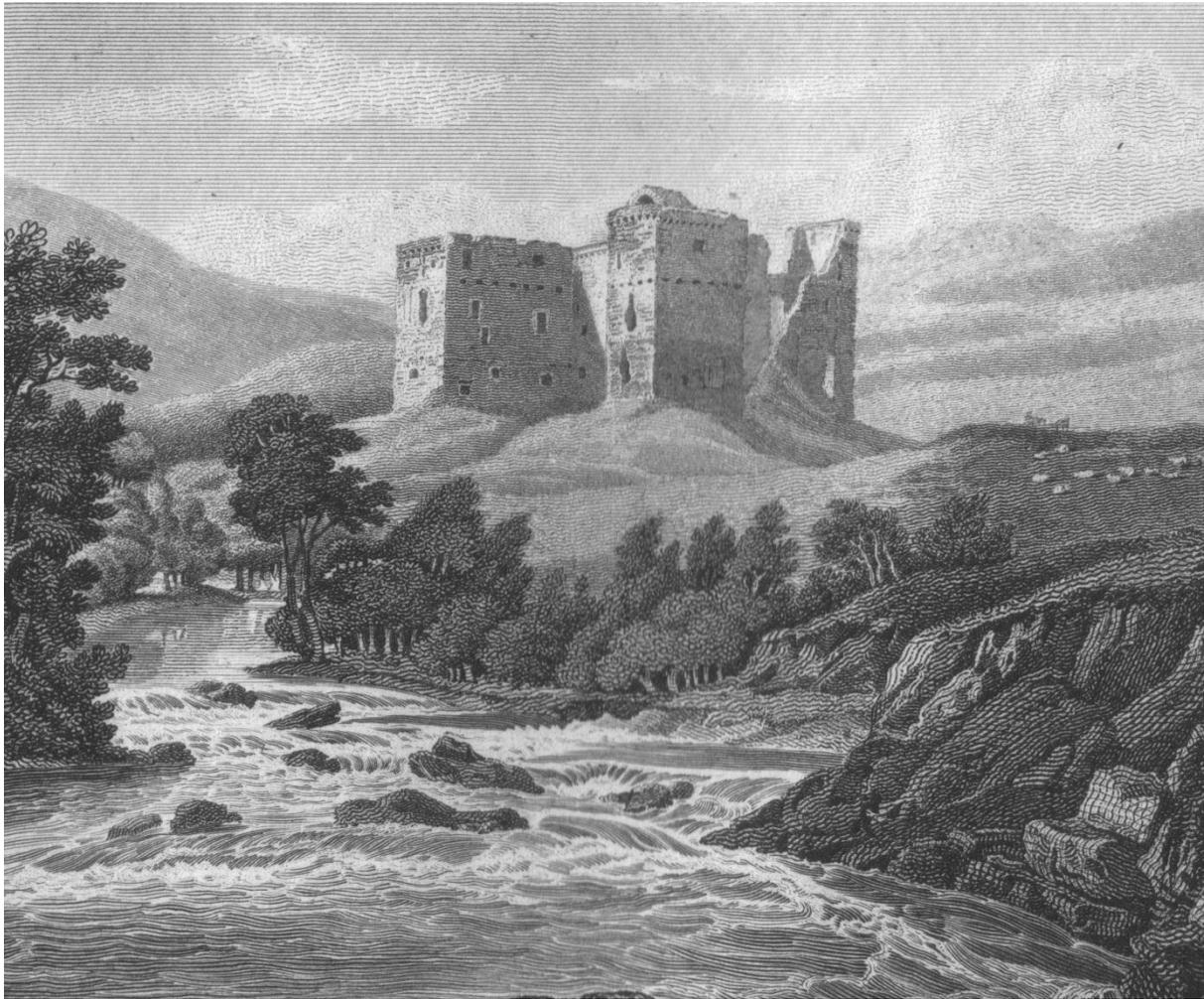
<sup>102</sup> <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/67915/details/hermitage+castle/>



Hermitage Castle from S over Hermitage Water.

present physical appearance only as a result of the 5<sup>th</sup> Duke of Buccleuch's restoration work in the 1830s. What Buccleuch's architects and masons produced was their idea of what Hermitage must have looked like, not necessarily how it had ever once been. The scale of their interventions can best

be seen at the east end of the structure, where the great archway that springs between the NE and SE towers is an entirely nineteenth-century rebuilding, as can be seen in early nineteenth-century



Hermitage from the SE – early 19<sup>th</sup>-century engraving (c.1810).

engravings of the castle. It also appears that substantial parts of the NE tower were rebuilt almost from ground level upwards and that parts of the N wall may also have been largely reconstructed.



Hermitage from the SE today, showing rebuilt E arch and NE tower.

Indeed, RCAHMS in 1956 concluded that most of the superstructure of the castle was rebuilt, as well as much of the E and N sides. The battlements and the corbelling which supports the wall-walk were also renewed as part of that operation.<sup>103</sup> It was a thoroughgoing reworking which transformed the external visual appearance of the castle into something quite different from the building that Sir Walter Scott knew and loved. With the restoration commencing in 1833, the year after Scott's death, it is unlikely that he had been unaware of the duke's plans – indeed, given his attachment to the 'chief of his name' and eminence as an expert in all things antiquarian, it is likely that he had been consulted. It is likely that the result would have tallied well with Sir Walter Scott's personal vision of what the old Border fortress that he thought Hermitage as being would have once looked like.

What was Buccleuch seeking to achieve with this work? Sadly, the correspondence in the Buccleuch archive relating to this restoration at the castle is entirely one-sided – from the duke's local chamberlain – and tells us nothing of his own mind.<sup>104</sup> It was certainly his desire to consolidate what seems to have been a rapidly disintegrating ruin. He may have been following a trend begun by the Earl of Marchmont at Hume Castle in the later eighteenth century, of consolidating a historic ruin associated with his family as a romantic eye-catcher in the landscape.<sup>105</sup> The work at Hume seems to



Hume Castle – distant view of the consolidated 'eye-catcher' from the E

have been completed before 1789, so would have been a well-known feature of the Borders' landscape in the forty years before Buccleuch started his work at Hermitage. It is suggested that

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<sup>103</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no 63, p. 77.

<sup>104</sup> NAS GD224/493/1; GD224/494/26.

<sup>105</sup> R Fawcett and A Rutherford, *Renewed Life for Scottish Castles* (York, 2011), 58, 69-70.

Marchmont's work at Hume may have been intended to stress the antiquity of his own family – a collateral line of the castle's original builders – and may have been associated with the award of the title Lord Hume to his son in 1776. This desire to stress antiquity and title may have been a motive likewise for Buccleuch at Hermitage. A second purpose may have been more functional but equally romantic. The consolidation of the wall-head at Hermitage provided a level and secure belvedere, possibly reached by a timber staircase. Just as the wall-walk at Hume provided a platform from which Marchmont and his guests could view the estate that surrounded his nearby mansion, so Buccleuch could take his guests to view the romantic landscape that Sir Walter Scott had made familiar to the world through his writing.

What the 5<sup>th</sup> duke's men produced was the grim fortress which they believed Hermitage to have been and, given what they understood of its history from the surviving written record and the Border traditions that had built up around it, it is easy to see why they produced what they did. The vision of the grim, forbidding tower which it projected remained fixed in the popular consciousness, for it seemed to typify the notion of castles as uncompromising fortresses, cold, dark and unyielding to any sense of comfort or refinement. This vision of castles in Scotland's past was very much in the spirit of the age, where the buildings were seen to reflect the culture – or lack of it – of the Middle Ages, rough, isolated from the culture of the rest of Europe, and lacking in wealth and sophistication.<sup>106</sup> Seen stripped of their interior fixtures and fittings, bare stonework left where once there had been panelling and plasterwork, the surviving skeletons of these buildings became the visual confirmation of the rough-and-ready nature of the Scots who had so successfully repulsed the English over the centuries; grim and forbidding homes for grim and forbidding men.

That vision prevailed almost unchallenged until the end of the twentieth century when scholars began to question interpretations built on the surviving remains of Scotland's medieval castles. Hermitage became a central element in the challenge to the old orthodoxy, fresh analysis of the surviving structure offering a radically different view to the fortress model which had hitherto been the accepted interpretation.<sup>107</sup> This new analysis highlighted the fact that Hermitage was one of the principal residences of one of the greatest noble families in medieval Scotland – the Douglases – and that from the late 1360s when William 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Douglas had secured possession it had been developed on a grand scale that provided one of the largest volumes of residential accommodation available in any Scottish towerhouse. Of the more than 16,500 square feet of floor space available in the castle, nearly 12,000 was residential space, public and private, with the remaining 4500 given over to service provision. The new interpretation of the structure still saw a significant part of this residential space as possibly being provided as 'temporary quarters for the defending garrison in time of siege',<sup>108</sup> but it is still vastly in excess of the space provided in other Douglas castles, including Threave which has for so long symbolised Douglas military lordship in southern Scotland. In scale, it matched closely Earl William's principal residence at Tantallon in East Lothian, although in physical appearance and overall plan Tantallon and Hermitage are quite different. The need, however, was the same. William, 1<sup>st</sup> earl of Douglas, was a man set on establishing his place as the greatest lord in southern Scotland, commanding the loyalty of lesser families and projecting his power through the scale of his retinue and size of his household. Hermitage, with its multiple halls and ample accommodation was designed as a physical setting in which that magnificent style of lordship could be projected and where visitors would have been left in no doubt of his splendour and social superiority over them.

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<sup>106</sup> C A McKean, *The Scottish Chateau: the Country House of Renaissance Scotland* (Stroud, 2001), 5-7.

<sup>107</sup> C J Tabraham, 'The Scottish medieval towerhouse as lordly residence in the light of recent excavation', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 118 (1988), 267-76.

<sup>108</sup> Tabraham, 'The Scottish medieval towerhouse', 270.

## Forest of Liddesdale and Park of Hermitage

That projection of superiority extended beyond the walls of the great stone castle which he constructed on the site of his predecessors' residence, absorbing the older structure within it in a symbolic act which demonstrated continuity of power and lordship. The projection of power extended to the authority which he exercised over the country round about his new residence and in the manner in which that land was organised, divided and exploited. Visitors to Hermitage would have been made immediately aware of the physical organisation of the district around the castle and understood well that they were passing through a landscape of economic as well as jurisdictional lordship; the structures within that landscape and the functions which they fulfilled would have been immediately recognisable visual indicators of power and status. Of all these various indicators, however, the most potent was probably the designation of the wider region as a baronial hunting forest.

Reservation of large blocks of land as the private hunting-grounds of a limited number of privileged individuals is something that has remained an emotive issue down to present. Coloured by knowledge of the rigorous enforcement of the privileges to hunt – especially for venison – which occurred in medieval England and by more recent experience in nineteenth-century Scotland with the creation of the great deer forest estates and grouse moors, there was for long a tendency to view Scotland's medieval hunting forests as preserves for an elite who jealously guarded their rights and excluded anyone and any other activity from those areas for fear that they might diminish their sport. It was only in the 1970s that the medieval Scottish experience of hunting and hunting reserves was subject to an academic re-evaluation which indicated that far from being static and otherwise economically sterile blocks in the landscape, hunting forests were dynamic economic resources that were exploited in diverse ways for many resources other than just game-meat.<sup>109</sup>

Knowledge that a large– but never defined - part of Liddesdale was designated as forest in the Middle Ages changes our understanding of how the de Sules family and their successors used and perceived their estate. Although none of the original charters which recorded the terms on which Ranulf de Sules received Liddesdale have survived, it seems that he had secured royal permission to have a private hunting forest there from David I. Evidence for this comes from a grant made sometime between 1147 and 1150 when Ranulf gave the canons of Jedburgh priory the right to a teind of all of his venison that was caught in his lands of Liddesdale.<sup>110</sup> Forests were privileges reserved for only those most in favour with the king; this award to Ranulf is surely an indication of his high standing in the king's eyes.

What did a grant of a forest mean in reality? First, we need to bear in mind that forest does not necessarily mean that there were many – or any – trees within the area being so designated. Forest was a designation of function rather than a description of what was there. Within the area so designated, the lord who had received the grant held the exclusive right to hunt for large game animals, principally deer – in Scotland and northern England at this time likely to have been almost exclusively red deer – but often with other game birds and mammals likewise reserved. The exclusive right to hunt, however, did not mean that an existing human population was cleared from the land to create a game preserve; they simply were excluded from certain activities likely to damage their lord's sport. Agricultural activities continued within the existing limits, grazing was allowed within the forest – except usually at key pressure times like the rut in the autumn and during the summer

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<sup>109</sup> J Gilbert, *Hunting and Hunting Reserves in Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1979).

<sup>110</sup> Barrow (ed), *Charters of David I*, no. 167; Gilbert, *Hunting and Hunting Reserves*, 21.

fawning season – provided no permanent structures were built for herdsmen that might affect the movement of the wild game, and other resources like fuel or building materials could be won there. Over time, usually by a combination of attrition pressure and negotiation, lords were persuaded to open up their forests increasingly to other economic activities, especially when population pressure was leading to more demand for land for crops and pasture.

What evidence do we have for the nature of the de Sules' forest in Liddesdale? The straightforward answer is none, but we do possess two inquests *post mortem* concerning the English lordship and manor of Liddel on the south side of the valley which reveal the presence and extent of a baronial forest there and the level of non-hunting-related activity going on there in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. The first survey, drawn up in 1276 for an inquest *post mortem* into the lands and properties of the late Joan de Stuteville, lists the main landed properties and names the various hedged enclosures or assarts (areas of clearance, usually for agriculture) which had been made in the forest by that date.<sup>111</sup> The second survey was drawn up in March 1282 following the death of Baldwin Wake. It provides insight into the scale of its associated forest and, more importantly, the value and use of the park associated with it.<sup>112</sup> The park was described as 'half a league in precinct' (*i.e.* about 1.5 miles around its boundary), and was said to be capable of sustaining 60 oxen or cows during the grazing season, with access to pasture for each being charged at 6d per annum yielding a total of 30 shillings rent. The survey is explicit that the park was not for deer; 'it being only enclosed for oxen and cows'. The forest, called 'Nichole forest' measured 21 miles in length and 9 miles in breadth at one end extending for 12 miles down its length, the remainder narrowing to 3 miles in width. The chief value in the forest was not seen in terms of hunting but in grazing and associated rights. The pannage (charge for grazing of pigs in the autumn) amounted to 30 shillings for both park and forest and could not be extended, it was reported, for there were few oaks to provide the acorns upon which the pigs grazed. The grazing of the forest was held by 139 free farmers, who paid £87 9s 6d, while the sale of deadwood and windfall from the forest netted another 100s annually. What the extent makes clear is that the numerous assarts that had been mentioned in the 1276 inquest *post mortem* were dispersed through the whole forest, that these were primarily arable clearances and that they supported a significant level of human population; far from being an unpeopled hunting reserve, the forest of Liddel was a heavily exploited and densely populated agricultural landscape.

Evidence for a similar process of assarting has been identified by archaeological survey throughout Liddesdale, including in the high ground to either side of the Hermitage valley,<sup>113</sup> and is confirmed by our surviving documentary evidence. David II's 1342 charter granting Liddesdale to Sir William Douglas is straightforwardly formulaic and contains no detail of what the lordship actually comprised. It is under Douglas ownership, however, that the first clear evidence for the extent of the Forest of Liddesdale and the presence of parks at Hermitage and nearby at Castleton is recorded. In the earliest surviving rental from a lay lordship in Scotland, drawn up in 1376, the various components of the forest are listed with rental values, and amongst them is *Park de Ermetag* set at 7½ marks and *Parkis de Casteltoun* at 4 marks.<sup>114</sup> Like the parks in Liddel on the English side of the Border, these ones seem to have been intended primarily to be grazing enclosures rather than the fenced areas to hold a small herd of deer for hunting as they are traditionally identified. In the forest of Liddesdale, a similar process of breaking ground into cultivation through assarts was probably well established before the

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<sup>111</sup> CDS, ii, 19.

<sup>112</sup> CDS, ii, no. 208.

<sup>113</sup> P Dixon, 'Hunting, summer grazing and settlement: competing land use in the uplands of Scotland', *Medieval Settlement in Marginal Landscape, Ruralia VII* (2009), 27-46.

<sup>114</sup> *Registrum Honoris de Morton* (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh, 1853), vol 1, lxxiii.

end of the thirteenth century but it is in the later fourteenth century that the extent of that process is first recorded. An 'extent' of Liddesdale survives from c.1376 as part of a rental and valuation of the lands of the Douglasses of Dalkeith; it lists some 30 individual properties within the forest area.<sup>115</sup> Extensive areas of assart clearance and enclosure have been identified through archaeological survey across Liddesdale.<sup>116</sup> The earthworks which enclose such cleared ground appear to have been relatively slight and have not survived well in areas of intensive modern agriculture or forestry; those in Liddesdale are a rare example in southern Scotland and a very significant survival of a monument class that was probably once common.<sup>117</sup>

Although a park is mentioned at Hermitage in the 1376 extent, there is no other medieval record of a 'live larder' or deer-trap arrangement in association with the castle. Parks, apparently for keeping a convenient supply of deer trapped in a so-called 'live larder' where they could be caught by the parker on demand and slaughtered for delivery to the lord's household, seem not uncommon. If the earthworks west of the chapel originated as a hunt-hall, such a park might have been an associated feature. The first map of the area around the castle, undertaken for the Buccleuch estate in 1718, shows no park structure and makes no mention of such a feature, but in 1750 and 1752 the survey and construction of a dyke around Hermitage Park was recorded in the Braidlie Day Book.<sup>118</sup> Work on dykes in the neighbourhood of the castle in the second half of the eighteenth century is mentioned in conjunction with the story of the discovery of the supposed bones of Sir Alexander Ramsay there;<sup>119</sup> this may be the same operation. The park, however, is not designated as a 'deer park'. By 1863 the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of the area noted the presence of what was by then labelled a 'Deer Park' adjacent to Hermitage in the position defined by the drystone wall which runs in an arc across the hillside north of the castle.<sup>120</sup> The authority for the enclosure's identification as a 'Deer Park' was the farmer of Hermitage at that time, Mr Elliot, and the Ordnance Survey recorder added that the name was 'applied to a considerable tract of ground surrounding Hermitage Castle formerly a forest'. There seems, therefore, to be no older authority for labelling this ground as a park for the holding of deer. This park was recorded as part of the wider landscape around Hermitage in 1946 and first described as such by the Royal Commission.<sup>121</sup> The chief evidence for deer-management in the vicinity of the castle was identified at that time as what was known locally as the 'White Dyke', a length of massively-constructed drystone dyke which extended in shallow arc across the southern face of Hermitage Hill north of the castle. Quite distinct in construction form from the other drystone dykes of the district although built of the coarse limestone blocks which occur naturally in the Hermitage valley, in its better preserved portions it survived up to 5ft high on a base around 4ft wide. It was recognised that much of the dyke appeared to have been thrown down deliberately, possibly in readiness for carting away the stones for use elsewhere. A more detailed survey was undertaken by the Ordnance Survey in 1960 which traced a greater part of its length than the original RCAHMS survey had done, noting that its southern end extending down to the Hermitage Water may have been formed by a ditch and upcast bank.<sup>122</sup> The enclosed area is large, amounting to some 114ha.

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<sup>115</sup> *Morton Registrum*, i, appendix, no. 17; Gilbert, *Hunting and Hunting Reserves*, 202.

<sup>116</sup> Summarised in Dixon, 'Hunting, summer grazing and settlement', 35-9.

<sup>117</sup> P Dixon, 'Settlement in the hunting forests of southern Scotland in the medieval and later periods', *Medieval Europe Brugge*, 6 (1997), 345-54.

<sup>118</sup> Canmore NY49NE 3 [date accessed 6 February 2012].

<sup>119</sup> *OSA*, xvi, 82.

<sup>120</sup> RH4/23/178 OS Name Book Roxburghshire, Castleton Parish, Pt 2, 41.

<sup>121</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, vol 1, no. 124.

<sup>122</sup> Canmore NY49NE 3 [date accessed 6 February 2012].



Hermitage Castle from the S, showing the 19<sup>th</sup>-century field dyke and the line of the White Dyke crossing the hillside above it.

Does the White Dyke define the Hermitage Park of the 1376 rental and was it associated originally with an early hunting lodge represented by the earthworks west of the chapel? There is reason to think that the park enclosure is a later development, added to the original hunting landscape around the castle. The evidence for this is the presence of what was identified by RCAHMS in 1996 as a deer-trap lying adjacent to the castle to its north west.<sup>123</sup> This survives as two arcs of dyke which gradually converge towards each other over a distance of some 300m, the space between them narrowing from 600m wide at the NW end and narrowing to only 10m at its SE end near the present castle. The dyke is formed from an earthen or turf bank, now only some 0.5m high and perhaps originally further defined by a rail-and-post fence or pale. The converging dyke-lines are seen as forming a funnel down which deer could be driven towards a killing-ground at its eastern end, the hunt taking the form of a drive rather than a chase with hounds. Such features are known from several other locations around Scotland,<sup>124</sup> most strikingly on the island of Rum where they survive as low, dry-stone walls, or at Castle Campbell in Clackmannanshire, where a possible deer-trap runs down the hillside west of the castle from the high ground of the Ochil Hills.

The juxtaposition of castle and deer-trap, if they are contemporary, would have served as a striking symbol of the privileged status of the castle's Douglas lords. The forest rights of the de Sules' family had been confirmed to the Douglases in the fourteenth century and, for a family striving to proclaim its status, the very public display of that right through actual performance of hunting would

<sup>123</sup> <http://canmore.rcahms.gov.uk/en/site/67915/details/hermitage+castle/>

<sup>124</sup> Dixon, 'Hunting, summer grazing and settlement', 33-5.

have been an important symbol of their power and privilege. As conflict over possession of the district heated up in the later fourteenth century the maintenance of that deer-hunting privilege



The converging lines of the possible deer-trap run across the centre of the view from left to right, cut at the E end (right) by the later field boundary which runs like an extended reverse-S up the hillside.

may actually have become more important rather than declined. The chase down the hillside to the killing-ground by the castle, from which ladies and guests could have viewed the virile display of their Douglas lords, may have declined as other needs took over and the landscape was reorganised to meet those needs, but the earthwork survives as a potent reminder of an activity which once proclaimed the privileged might of the castle's owners.

Within the boundary of the park formed by the White Dyke the deer-trap is effectively redundant; it is too grand in scale for even a 114ha park and records a time when the surrounding landscape was more open. It formed part of a hunting landscape, formalised through the physical presence of the trap structure. To observers from the castle, the landscape to the west would have been framed within the divergent arms of the trap. The construction of the park enclosure changed that perspective. The wider landscape remained a hunting-ground where Douglases and Hepburns exercised their right to pursue deer, but the area closer to the castle took on a new significance as part of a different economic system.

That new economic system had come into being by 1376 when a park at Hermitage was listed as one of the units contributing to the income of its Douglas lords. There is a very strong likelihood that the area now bounded by the White Dyke is that fourteenth-century park – there is no other obvious candidate anywhere in the neighbourhood for such an enclosure - and, while some of the surviving

sections of walling of the White Dyke may be no older than the mid eighteenth century, that the course follows a much older boundary line possibly represented by the less substantial bank and ditch at its SE end. It is likely that this park, like those mentioned across the valley in England earlier in the century, was intended principally as an enclosure for grazing the flocks and herds of either the lord of the estate or leased for that purpose to tenants. Its juxtaposition with the castle suggests that its original purpose was to enclose the demesne herd or flock, that is those kept for the immediate support of the castle's lord and household when in residence. It offered security to the livestock, not just from human predators in the increasingly disturbed frontier-land but also from animal predators; the hills of Liddesdale and Eskdale were the known resort of wolves.



The Liddesdale Hills from the S – a giant sheep-ranch?

What the 1376 rental that records this new economic world reveals is a crowded landscape in which neither the wars nor plagues of the fourteenth century have left much evidence for their passing. The castle is not sitting in a war-torn frontier-land surrounded by devastation but is the thriving hub of a busy and productive agricultural landscape. This is truly a centre of lordship, where Liddesdale's Douglas lords could proclaim their power and status through the building of a major stone castle, demonstrate the effectiveness of their power and authority through the protection which they could extend from that building over the surrounding communities, and impress on their peers, dependents and rivals the reality of their domination of the region and its people. In account-book terms, the rental reveals a peak of settlement had been reached under Douglas lordship; throughout the valley

157 settlements, freeholds and other portions of land are listed, all apparently occupied and yielding the Douglases rent.<sup>125</sup> That situation was to change dramatically over the next 175 years.

When we are next provided with a snapshot of land-use in Liddesdale in 1541, just after it had been taken into royal hands on the flight into exile of Patrick, 3<sup>rd</sup> earl of Bothwell, the records reveal a striking change; the value of the estate had collapsed to one third of its 1376 level and around 25 per cent of the farms were vacant. There had, however, been little overall decline in the number of farms in 1541 (146) as opposed to 1376 (157).<sup>126</sup> When Walter Scott of Buccleuch gained possession of the lordship in the late 1590s, he used that situation to his advantage to begin to change the organisation of the properties and to merge farms into larger units. Thus, from the 146 farms of 1541 by 1625 there were only 57 listed in the Buccleuch rental.<sup>127</sup> More striking was the rapid build-up by the Buccleuchs of great sheep-flocks being run on certain farms, including Roughley immediately to the east of Hermitage itself, and the disappearance of Hermitage as a significant economic feature of this new landscape. What this suggests is that from the early 1600s there was a gradual intensification of grazing by sheep on this landscape of northern and western Liddesdale and the progressive transformation of the nature of the vegetation as that sheep-pressure increased in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

It appears, then, that the character of settlement around Hermitage and the physical aspect of the landscape has undergone a sequence of changes from the twelfth to eighteenth centuries. From an open, hunting landscape in the mid-twelfth century, gradual rises in human population pressure and the more rigorous exploitation of the economic rights of lordship saw an increase in settlement and new inroads for agriculture and pasture being made in the forest area. Several of these inroads – assarts – became permanent settlements by the fourteenth century, probably ending the style of hunting activity that the early lords had once enjoyed in their forest preserve. Settlement in Liddesdale seems to have reached a peak in the later fourteenth century before starting a long, gradual decline. In association with that shift there seems also to have been the beginning of a move towards a more pastoral economy. The disturbed conditions of the region helped to bring settlement down to just over 100 occupied farms by 1541 and at the end of the century there were the first moves towards reducing that number to almost half. The new lords – the Scotts of Buccleuch – had need for neither the hunting privileges of their predecessors nor the large numbers of rent-paying tenants who had provided the military strength of Hermitage’s former lords. What the Scotts wanted was profit, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that profit came largely from wool from flocks run on increasingly large single-tenant farms. The result was an emptying of people from the landscape and the creation of the sense of openness and solitude which the area around Hermitage retains today.<sup>128</sup> That emptiness aided the next turn of the cycle of economic and landscape change when the wool-profits declined with the new access to Australasian and South American bulk wool imports. Whilst sheep-farming remained a bedrock for the farming economy of the region, much of the upland returned to what it had been when we first encounter it in the twelfth century; a hunting landscape managed and maintained largely for sport but upon which the wider economy of the area was dependent.

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<sup>125</sup> Dixon, ‘Hunting, summer grazing and settlement’, 36.

<sup>126</sup> NAS GD246/59 – Rental of Liddisdail, 1541; Dixon, ‘Hunting, summer grazing and settlement’, 36.

<sup>127</sup> J G Harrison, Liddesdale, a report for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. RCAHMS MS 1155/3, 12-13.

<sup>128</sup> For the detailed discussion of this eighteenth and nineteenth-century development, see Harrison, Liddesdale.



### 3. The Romantic Vision

The vast openness of the Liddesdale Hills which the Buccleuch estate's farm reorganisations had created was what served to fix Hermitage firmly in the imaginations of a new and quite different audience in the early nineteenth century. The man who did most to achieve that was Sir Walter Scott, whose publication of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, a collection of the poetic and ballad traditions of the region, in 1802 triggered a surge in interest in the history and antiquities of the Borders. Amongst the many fragments of ancient poetry he and his associates gathered were extensive sets of tales located in the hill-country between Liddesdale and Teviotdale, with events moving up and down the Hermitage Water and the routes over the hills via the Windy Edge to Priestthaugh or Whitrope to Langburnshiels.<sup>129</sup> Many can be placed firmly in the context of Scott of Buccleuch domination of this area, but whether as keepers of Hermitage for the Douglases or as possessors in the later 16<sup>th</sup> century is uncertain. The landscape image which the ballads present to us, far from being one of impenetrable wastes that were a barrier to communication, is of a land linked by well-trodden hill-routes, ridgeways and passes.

Scott the antiquarian, however, was at pains to provide as much evidence as he could of the historical background to the events alluded to in the ballads gathered in the *Minstrelsy*, and presented his material in extended essays which introduced the traditional tales. It was through one such essay-introduction that he first brought to public attention the epic tale of Lord Soulis, the wizard-lord of Hermitage, and the natural and supernatural landscape around the castle which this dark anti-hero stalked.<sup>130</sup> It is in this essay, too, that the character of Hermitage as a dark and fearsome stronghold, inhabited still by the malevolent spirit-familiar – the brownie Redcap – of the long-dead wizard was first set out in detail. Driven forward over the next three decades by the steady output of his *Waverley Novels*, Scott constructed the basis of the popular understanding of Scottish – and especially Borders – history as it was popularly presented down to the early 1900s. In that new, Romantic vision which Scott constructed, Hermitage featured prominently and it is to his popularising that many of the grislier stories from its history owe their entry into popular culture. Hermitage was of immense personal significance to Scott, underscored by Sir Henry Raeburn's depiction of the castle in the background to his portrait of the author, now in the possession of the Duke of Buccleuch, which shows the unrestored Hermitage from the south-east as viewed up the valley, with the open hills of the moorland beyond it to the north-west. It was, quite simply, Scott's favourite Borders castle.

The popularising of Hermitage owed much to Scott's collaborator on the gathering of material for the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, John Leyden, whose 1802 poem 'Lord Soulis' was printed in volume two.<sup>131</sup> Leyden was born at Denholm near Hawick, the son of a shepherd. His father had ambitions for him and managed to send him to Edinburgh University to study for Divinity with a view to him becoming a minister. Although he eventually completed his degree and was licensed to preach as a minister in 1798, he showed no interest in going into the pulpit. By then he had become known to Scott, who was collecting material for the *Minstrelsy*, and soon joined him in gathering songs, poems, ballads and folklore tales for the great work. Leyden, however, was not just a collector of poetry, he also wrote it, and in two great poems he intertwined several stories with Hermitage at their core which propelled the castle to the forefront of the imaginations of the reading public.

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<sup>129</sup> <http://www.archive.org/stream/sirwalterscottan04088gut/wsbms10.txt> A Lang, 'Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy'.

<sup>130</sup> W Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ii (Kelso, 1802), 327-335.

<sup>131</sup> Scott, *Minstrelsy*, ii, 336-49.

Leyden's poems *Lord Soulis* and the *Cout o' Keeldar* together contain many of the elements of the castle's semi-legendary past. A Teviotdale man, Leyden had grown up with the folktales and legends of the Borders as his introduction to the history of his homeland and had a deeply-ingrained personal identification with the landscapes in which the tales were set. In *Lord Soulis*, the main action is located tightly in the valley to east and west of the castle: the heroine, May, is abducted from Gorrenberry; the young heir of Buccleuch rides on his hunt over the hills from Branxholm; the wizard is finally slain at the prehistoric stone circle on Ninestone Rig. The poem carefully intertwines aspects of the physical landscape known to Leyden with aspects known of its historic form and function. It is a hunting landscape, as it had been through the Middle Ages and down to Leyden's own day, where young Scott of Branxholm:

He shot the roe-buck on the lee,  
The dun-deer on the law<sup>132</sup>

It is also a landscape of wooded glens and tree-edged ridges, revealed as Lord Soulis' men ask Scott to choose the tree from which he shall be hanged. The woodland extended up the hillside from Hermitage towards the Ninestone Rig, pines and aspen giving way to the open moorland. The climax of the tale comes on the shoulder of Ninestone Rig, with Soulis captured on Ninestone Lee and bound with ropes of sifted sand from the bed of the Ninestone Burn. Aided by the master-wizard Thomas the Rhymer, lord of Ercildoune in Lauderdale, Soulis' captors discover how the evil lord, who is protected by magic against all human weapons, can be slain.

The black spae-book true Thomas he took;  
And again its magic leaves he spread;  
And he found that to quell the powerful spell,  
The wizard must be boil'd in lead.

On a circle of stones they plac'd the pot,  
On a circle of stones but barely nine;  
They heated it red and fiery hot,  
Till the burnish'd brass did glimmer and shine.

They roll'd him up in a sheet of lead,  
A sheet of lead for a funeral pall;  
They plunged him in the cauldron red,  
And melted him, lead, and bones, and all.

Lord Soulis meet this deserved and grisly fate on Ninestone Rig, almost within sight of Hermitage. The cauldron in which he was boiled was, according to tradition, preserved at Skelfhill near Priesthaugh across the Windy Edge from Liddesdale, but the spot where he was slain was still pointed out by later generations for there 'the spreat and the the deer-hair ne'er shall grow'. The stone circle on which the great cauldron was supposedly rested stands slightly off the summit of Ninestone Rig,<sup>133</sup> now enclosed in forestry plantation, but down to the mid-twentieth century a place to be visited by the pilgrim-readers of Scott's work.

The *Cout o' Keeldar*<sup>134</sup> harks back to an earlier episode in Lord Soulis' career, when he and his men slew an adversary, the lord of Kielder in upper Tynedale in Northumberland, in an

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<sup>132</sup> Scott, *Minstrelsy*, ii, 340.

<sup>133</sup> RCAHMS, *Roxburghshire*, il, no. 113.

<sup>134</sup> Scott, *Minstrelsy*, ii, 355-72.

encounter by Hermitage Water close to the old castle and chapel site west of the present building. As with *Lord Soulis*, the *Cout o' Keeldar* is heavily overlain with the supernatural and presents the landscape of upper Liddesdale as lying almost on the threshold between the real world and the world of Faery. Again, the tale involves a hunt in the moors between Tynedale and Liddesdale, where the eponymous hero of the poem first encounters a supernatural being 'the Brown Man of the Muirs', and a Gothic-horror landscape of mysterious standing-stones and past human sacrifice.<sup>135</sup> From the high moors, the hero descended into the birch-edged glen, past the chapel to within sight of Hermitage:

And here, beside the mountain flood,  
A massy castle frown'd;  
Since first the Pictish race in blood  
The haunted pile did found

The restless stream its rocky base  
Assails with ceaseless din,  
And many a troubled spirit strays  
The dungeons dark within.<sup>136</sup>

There, Lord Soulis entertains the Cout o' Keeldar and his men to a feast but enchants the Cout's men and leaves them trapped forever in a charmed sleep. The Cout himself escapes from the castle pursued by Soulis and his men. When their weapons cannot penetrate the Cout's armour, they drive him into the river beside the chapel and hold him beneath the water until he drowns in what is still known as The Cout o' Keeldar's pool. It is a breathless tale that leads the reader on a careering course through moorland and glen to the castle, piling layer upon layer of mystery and imagination on to the already myth-shrouded landscape and, like *Lord Soulis* before it, grounding the events it records into the physical reality of what Scott and Leyden's readers could visit either mentally or, in increasing numbers, person as the nineteenth century progressed.

What had begun with Leyden's immensely popular and much-copied poetry was confirmed in Sir Walter Scott's prose introduction and notes. The dark legend of Hermitage became set in its grey stones with his account of the evil that stalked its halls and terrorised the surrounding hills:

'The Castle of Hermitage, unable to support the load of iniquity which had long been accumulating within its walls, is supposed to have partly sunk beneath the ground; and its ruins are still regarded by the peasants with peculiar aversion and terror.'<sup>137</sup>

Scott, through his ready identification of the surviving structure with the scene of the events within the two poems, adding in the further evidence of his own historical research into the 'truth' of the Sules legends, propelled the castle to the forefront of the imaginations of readers who devoured the Gothic and Romance historical fiction which he went on to produce.

Hermitage, then, holds a place right at the foundation of the Romantic vision which Scott created of the history of Scotland and which went on to shape wider popular (mis)conceptions of Scotland's past down to the late twentieth century.

The vision of Hermitage and upper Liddesdale which emerged from the works of Leyden and Scott quickly became fixed in popular literature before the end of the nineteenth century, with added drawing power delivered by renewed antiquarian interest in Queen Mary and her 1566 epic ride from

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<sup>135</sup> Scott, *Minstrelsy*, ii, 361-2.

<sup>136</sup> Scott, *Minstrelsy*, ii, 363-4.

<sup>137</sup> Scott, *Minstrelsy*, ii, 334; Simpson, *Hermitage Castle*, 11.

Jedburgh to Hermitage and back in the same day. Identification of the route which the queen took, coming by Stobs south of Hawick, over to Dodburn and Priesthaugh before climbing to the high tops of the ridge extending from Cauldcleuch Head to Greatmoor Hill around Swire Knowe and the plunging hill-track through the Queen's Mire where her horse came to grief, and so down the Braidlie Burn to Hermitage, fixed the whole of the massif which overshadows the castle to the north deep in the traditions of the Mary legend before the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>138</sup> Tourists came in search of the literary landscapes, often using the poetry and the prose of the Romantic writers as hand-books which illustrated their paths through the physical landscape around them. Places mentioned in the writings of Leyden - and Algernon Charles Swineburne, whose 1909 reworking of the Sules' legend gave fresh impetus to the story<sup>139</sup> - became way-markers on what were prototype 'heritage trails'. To feed the hunger of this new, travelling public, especially after the rapid expansion in private motor car ownership after the First World War, a new generation of writers produced an outpouring of travelogues which guided them around the 'must-see' places. Most are written in a florid style which creates lavish word-pictures of both the scene to expect and, more importantly, the atmosphere that would be encountered. One of the most influential of these writers was T Ratcliffe Barnett, whose earlier series of essays on the Borders produced in the 1920s and 1930s for the weekend edition of *The Scotsman* were gathered into a single volume and published in 1943 as *Border By-ways and Lothian Lore*.<sup>140</sup> For him, Hermitage was 'great grey stronghold, hoary with antiquity, sleeping amid the silence and the sunshine on the side of this whispering stream, like an old warrior tired out after seven centuries of battle – how the crimson tides of war must have roared round these walls!'<sup>141</sup>

The preparation of visitors for the doom-laden *genius loci* of Hermitage is, however, perhaps best represented by the pen of Alexander Eddington, whose 1926 description of Hermitage in his *Castles and Historic Homes of the Borders* set the tone which most subsequent writers over the next decade took up and embellished.<sup>142</sup> Eddington interweaves landscape description with a sensationalised account of the castle's history to thrill his readers with a sense of dark mystery seasoned with Grand Guignol horror in a detailed account drawn from Leyden of the castle's wicked owner meeting his end at Ninestone Rig. The reader is confronted with a transition from beauty to horror, of light into darkness:

'The banks of the stream are well wooded, the alder, the birch, and the hazel enclosing the river in banks of sylvan beauty, till the castle is reached. Then, as with a magic wand of malevolence, all this wealth of foliage vanishes and the landscape becomes at once bleak and almost treeless, a vast expanse of barren heath and morass stretching northward and westward to mountain solitudes. This sudden change in the aspect of Nature strikes a note that corresponds to the atmosphere of tragedy which both history and tradition have invested Hermitage – a grim relic of semi-barbarous feudal days.'<sup>143</sup>

Eddington roots the visitor experience of Hermitage absolutely in the interplay between landscape and building, drawing a figurative line between the softness of the lowland scene of the approach from the south and east with the sudden crossing of the threshold into the empty waste in which Hermitage is set.

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<sup>138</sup> Small, 'Queen Mary at Jedburgh', 213.

<sup>139</sup> W A MacInnes (ed), *Ballads of the English Border* (London, 1925).

<sup>140</sup> T Ratcliffe Barnett, *Border By-ways and Lothian Lore* (Edinburgh, 1943).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 93

<sup>142</sup> A Eddington, *Castles and Historic Homes of the Borders* (Edinburgh, 1926).

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

H Drummond Gauld, whose 1935 guidebook/travelogue *Brave Borderland* combined most graphically this same sense of place with a highlighting of the many dark episodes in the castle's past, using a similar idea of Hermitage as a place set apart from the rest of the world in the harsh beauty of a hauntingly disturbing and haunted landscape. It is no accident that the first place-name he uses in his account introduce the idea of death into the narrative which follows: 'Hard by the lone hills of Deadwater and Larriston, in the lap of the quiet moor where, in unknown graves, sleep many gallant moss-troopers of old, stands the hoary goblin castle.'<sup>144</sup> Throughout his writing, Drummond Gauld built a heavily atmospheric image which sweeps between the castle and the landscape in which it stands:

'...the skies are mournful and wan, and the wind whistles plaintively through loophole and grated window. The curlew utters an eerie scream as he sweeps across Dinley Fell, and the cry of the lapwing is full of the sadness of the boundless moors. A strange, sweet sadness broods over the fells, though the breezes blow softly on the brow, and the heather be in bloom'.<sup>145</sup>

Here is emptiness and desolation, a vast openness populated only by the birds whose plaintive calls give presence to the grief and sorrow of the ruined castle whose only voice is the wind through its shattered walls. There is no suggestion of the sunshine that Ratcliffe Barnett mentioned: the castle is invested with a dark personality that harks back once more to the poetry of Leyden and the Border legends which underlay his verses:

'There is a dark frown on the brow of Hermitage as though the spirit of Wizard Soulis brooded in disquietude behind those craglike walls.'<sup>146</sup>

To visitors who had never before seen the castle, Drummond Gauld's word picture conjured a vision of a dark monolith rearing in the midst of a vast and sunless solitude.

The sense of that solitude is heightened by the assurance that this is not a place that is easy to reach: it is truly a Border fastness secluded in hills through which only the most intrepid of travellers pass. That last point is hammered home subsequently by a short but breathless description of Queen Mary's epic journey from Jedburgh to Hermitage in 1566, but Drummond Gauld first builds up a presentiment in his readers that a visit to the castle requires a dedication and sacrifice equivalent to a true pilgrimage:

'Hermitage is difficult of access ... the great bulwarks of the hills lie between the castle and the towns of Roxburgh, forcing the pilgrim through the tremendous passes of Note o' the gate, or Limekilnridge, or round many a mile by Teviotdale. But those roads, narrow, steep and wild though they be, amply repay a visit in themselves, as they lead through one of the loneliest fastnesses and most impressive scenery on the Scottish Border, where in all the long journey one may meet but a shepherd from the fells, staff in hand, and his faithful collies at his side.'<sup>147</sup>

The traveller is directed along particular routes from the north and north-east which lead through the heart of the open country that straddles the Border between Redesdale on the English side in Northumberland and through Kielder Forest to Liddesdale in Scotland. None of Drummond Gauld's routes take the straightforward road up Liddesdale from Canonbie and through Newcastleton. Instead, the reader is prepared even further for the sensory experience of Hermitage by exposure first to the drop down the Whitrope from the north, or round the shoulder of Arnton Fell by The Steele into the great bowl that is formed by the confluence of the Hermitage Water, Whitrope Burn and Roughley

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<sup>144</sup> Drummond Gauld, *Brave Borderland*, 223.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-4

Burn, or across the hill-caged roadway from Ewesdale to Gorrenberry and the head of the Hermitage valley. But the intrepid visitor will be given access to a hidden treasure which few others have seen, a landscape which symbolises the Border spirit – rugged and untamed – and set apart from the humdrum and bustle of the modern world. Even in the 1930s, visitors sought to escape into solitary places:

‘Though prospects near and far are rugged and untamed, the scenery along the banks of the rivers presents striking contrasts ... Yet all this beauty, sublime and awesome in tremendous precipices, narrow gulleys that confine the raging rivers, and rocky cauldrons boiling with foam, is but little known; few people ever penetrate into the lonely places to woo such scenes.’<sup>148</sup>

Having set the physical scene and built the sense of otherworldly mystery and detachment from the outside world the focus shifts to the deep sense of a violent and bloody past which saturated the landscape of this part of the Borders in particular. Drummond Gauld points to a landscape whose very bones were shaped in conflict:

‘All down the waters of Liddel and Hermitage the peel towers stood, but soon after the Union of the Crowns they were razed to the ground. The Elliots alone garrisoned forty towers on the banks of Liddel and Hermitage...’<sup>149</sup>

Each spot along the way is identified – Gorrenberry, Braidlie, Sundhope, Shaws, Larriston, Dinlabyre – and each is given its story and place in the grander dark legend that is Hermitage itself. Every historical and semi-mythical place or event is woven as an element into a grander narrative that links the physical form of the valley inextricably with its human past – as Drummond Gauld says, ‘every glen is steeped in old traditions, every knoll has its legend of raid and rescue, foray and fight.’<sup>150</sup> There is through all of such accounts an almost overpowering intensity in the sense of the ever-present human past in the landscape around you, where historicity and the mythical jostle:

‘Till less than a century ago, this country of the Elliots was remote and desolate; there were neither roads nor inns, naught save the hills warring with storms and the mists, and the rivers and the thunder peals growling in the glens. A beauty, haunting and weird, is stamped upon this mountainous region; a mysticism intensified a hundredfold by wild tales of the ‘old, unending wars; by such reiver ballads as “Dick o’ the Cow,” “Hobbie Noble,” “Jamie Telfer o’ the Fair Dodhead”; and by traditions like that of Shellycoat and the Kelpie, and the Brownie o’ Gorranberry; by the romance of *Guy Mannering*. For this is the land of Charlies-hope and the stout Border farmer, Dandie Dinmont.’<sup>151</sup>

It is only once the traveller has been brought through this landscape saturated in romance and legend that the castle is finally introduced and discussed in detail. Mood and atmosphere are again in the foreground, giving a sense of place before the building and its history are explored. ‘There is’, we are told, ‘a glamour around Hermitage, the glamour of things centuries old.’<sup>152</sup>

Scott’s image of a castle half-sunk in the earth under the weight of the evil worked within its walls remained the central theme in descriptions over a century later. For Eddington it was ‘A grim relic of treachery and tragedy’, whose dark legends overshadowed even its powerful physical presence and,

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 224-5

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 224

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 225

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 225

even, the bleak grandeur of the landscape around it.<sup>153</sup> Ratcliffe Barnett, writing of the link between the building and its history, dwelt most on the wicked deeds of its owners which polluted its stones: ‘the place of darkest memories is the dungeon.’<sup>154</sup> But it is again Drummond Gauld who gave his readers a shudder at the recent immediacy with which the dark past of the building was confirmed in the reported experience of an unwary vagrant who camped in the shadow of its wall given to him by the surely reliable authority of a local man just two years before he wrote his description:

‘Even to-day the massive ruins are regarded by the local peasantry with particular aversion and terror. No later than the summer of 1933 a shepherd related to the writer how that a gangrel chiel on tramp made his bed of strae in a recess under the great eastern arch, and found his repose so disturbed by horrid dreams and apparitions that he was fain to flee from the place by peep of day, vowing never again to seek the doubtful hospitality of ruined Hermitage.’<sup>155</sup>

This tale, added to the canon of horror, supernatural and ghost-stories which surround Hermitage, has helped to ensure that Hermitage today is billed most frequently as ‘An awesome, eerie ruin, set in a lonely spot, [with] a history filled with intrigue, murders, trysts, torture, and treason’; it is the legend rather than the history which nowadays draws most visitors. Between the darkness of the fantasy horror of the de Sules’ story and the continuing allure of the tragic Queen Mary and her mad dash over the hills to Hermitage, coupled with those in search of solitude or who are seeking an architectural or archaeological treasure, the castle has secured an enduring appeal to an audience of incredible diversity. Indeed, with over 7.8 million web citations identified for Hermitage Castle on Google, and with the majority narrating in multiple languages the dark legend of Lord Soulis and the supernatural happenings there, but all the time building in the narrative which they deliver to their viewers and readership the glory of the building and its landscape setting, the importance of this castle as part of our global intangible cultural heritage seems set to grow and grow.

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<sup>153</sup> Eddington, *Castles and Historic Homes of the Border*, 107, 108, 109.

<sup>154</sup> Ratcliffe Barnett, *Border By-ways and Lothian Lore*, 95

<sup>155</sup> Drummond Gauld, *Brave Borderland*, 225.

## Conclusion

This report has identified that Hermitage Castle and its wider cultural landscape commands a key place in the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Borders, Scotland, Britain more widely and, in more recent years, the world. Hermitage is:

- a structure linked inextricably into the historic and cultural development of Scotland and of the Borders;
- central to many of the key political events in Scotland's history for over three centuries through the long wars with England;
- uniquely associated – with its adjoining hill-country – in tragic narrative of Mary, Queen of Scots;
- one of the few locations in Scotland where the medieval building can be viewed in the context of its wider contemporary setting amidst a hunting landscape remodelled for agricultural use in the later Middle Ages;
- the uniting vertical strand through a landscape stratigraphy of overlying layers of successive land-use;
- set at the core of one of the iconic Romantic literary landscapes of world-class significance created by Sir Walter Scott and John Leyden, where the castle and its environment have both a literary and a physical reality;
- one of the first tourist sites and landscapes to be popularised in Scotland;
- a top-ranking internet phenomenon known to audiences globally through its cultural significance as site of supernatural interest.

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