

English Heritage Battlefield Report: Flodden 1513

Flodden (9th September 1513)

Parishes: Branxton; Ford, Carham

District: Berwick-upon-Tweed

County: Northumberland

Grid Ref: NT 889373 (centred on the battlefield monument)

Historical Context

In 1511 King Henry VIII, eager to relive England's past glories on the Continent, joined the Holy League against France formed by Ferdinand of Spain, the Pope and Venice. To counter the threat posed by England, the following year Louis XII of France prevailed on King James IV of Scotland to renew the two countries' historic alliance. Each undertook to come to the others aid if attacked.

Henry's invasion of France in May 1513 prompted Louis to invoke the terms of his defensive alliance with Scotland. He sent money, arms and experienced captains to help James equip and train a Scottish army. This had the desired effect. On 22 August, after Henry had rejected James' ultimatum, an army containing an estimated 60,000 Scots crossed the River Tweed into England. Over the next ten days the Border fortresses at Norham, Etal and Ford were reduced.

In anticipation of the Scots' intervention in the war, Henry had taken to France troops drawn exclusively from the south of England and the Midlands. This left available to Henry's Lieutenant-General in the North, Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, the levies of the northern shires. Surrey, a 70 year old veteran of Barnet and Bosworth (where he fought for the Yorkists), began advancing from Pontefract as soon as he heard of the Scottish invasion, gathering men as he went. Large contingents arrived from Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire and Durham; lesser ones from Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland. By 4 September around 26,000 men had assembled at Alnwick.

Surrey was concerned that King James, having created the required diversion, would slip back into Scotland without giving battle. He decided therefore to appeal to James' well-known sense of chivalry and challenged the Scots to fight by 9 September at the latest. King James accepted the challenge but, because he detained the English herald, Surrey did not discover until 7 September that the Scots had shifted their position to Flodden Edge, an impregnable feature rising above the Milfield plain to a height of between 500 and 600 feet. A reproachful message from Surrey failed to persuade James to give battle on 'indifferent' ground and so, on 8 September, the English broke camp at Wooler, crossed the River Till and proceeded to march north-eastwards round the Scottish flank.

The Scots were unsure whether Surrey was marching to Berwick, intent on invading Scotland, or simply trying to lure them from their stronghold. As a consequence, James' unwillingness to quit his advantageous position left the Scots rooted to the spot as, during the morning of 9 September, Surrey's army recrossed the Till at Twizel Bridge and Millford, and began to approach the Scottish army from the north. The Scots had two choices: either they could decamp for Scotland before their line of retreat across the Tweed at Coldstream was cut off, or else they could turn about and march the mile that separated them from the northern face of the Flodden massif and await the English on Branxton Hill. King James chose the latter course.

Although the ridgetop position occupied by the Scots, a little over a mile long and rising from 350' in the east to 500' at its western end, was not as daunting as the one they had vacated at Flodden Edge, it was still immensely

strong. This the English columns were soon to realise as, still toiling southwards towards Branxton village, they suddenly noticed the Scottish army - now reduced by desertion and other wastage to between 35,000 and 40,000 men - drawn up on the ridge a short distance ahead of them. To avoid being caught at a disadvantage a line of battle had to be hurriedly formed. By four in the afternoon battle was ready to commence.

Description of the Battlefield

Although today known as Flodden, contemporary accounts dubbed the battle 'Branxton', which is rather more accurate. The Scots were arrayed to the south, upon Branxton Hill and the ridgetop to the east. In front of them the terrain dropped away steeply, particularly from Branxton Hill itself, before flattening out some 700 yards away at an average height of 200-225'. Here the English army was drawn up, with Branxton village to its rear. Piper's Hill, 270' high, was the most elevated section of the English line: today it is crowned by the battlefield monument, erected in 1910.

On the eastern flank of the battlefield, around the hamlet of Mardon, the ground is intersected by gullies. This broken terrain exerted an influence on the course of the battle. Behind the English position the ground falls away to the Pallinsburn, no longer the obstacle it once proved to the advancing English, although its former state is recalled by the name given to the trees that line it: Westfield Bog Plantation. Elsewhere, apart from some additional small tree plantations on the high ground south of Mardon, the battlefield is entirely given over to agriculture: livestock graze the fields after the harvest is taken in.

Landscape Evolution

There is little direct evidence of what the area looked like in 1513. Branxton village is a shrunken medieval village with a church which still retains fragments of medieval masonry. There is documentary evidence for a small pele tower in 1496, though no evidence remains on the ground. There is no obvious evidence from field patterns or hedge lines of a medieval ridged and furrowed open field landscape here, although a 'Town Field' is mentioned on an 1826 map. It is likely there was arable ridge and furrow over the lower land south of Branxton village. It is impossible to know whether the arable crops had been harvested at Flodden by early September, but the Scots would have either to have advanced through a full grown crop or stubble.

North of Branxton lay the bogland of the Pallinsburn, much wider than now having been reduced by years of drainage. It would probably have contained willow and alder scrub together with traditional bog plants. The Branx Brig may have been a bridge over the Burn but a relatively dry causeway across the adjacent bog would have been necessary, especially given the poor weather at the time of the Battle.

The upland of Branxton Hill would probably have been moor and rough pasture used for sheep and cattle grazing. This area was enclosed only in the late 1700s. The only woodland in the area probably lay around the bogland and possibly, near the present Pallinsburn Cottages, as "Blue Bell" place names may indicate. No ancient woodland or hedgerows have been identified in the battlefield area.

In what has always been a township dependent on agriculture, the major change in the landscape occurred with enclosure. This took place in part in 1712 when the three local landowners, who between them had 18 farmholds, decided to enclose their lands (which were still intermixed) and divide the common three ways¹. A regular field and road system was laid down and isolated farmsteads within the new fields were constructed, leaving little trace of any pre-existing landscape. Before 1826 plantations of trees were planted both on the Pallinsburn Bog, around Branxtonhill Farm and around Callernburn.

The landscape today still strongly reflects the enclosure landscape of the late 1700s. The battlefield has been part of the Joicey Estate since 1907². It is the landform of Branxton Hill and the lack of any major man-made feature between it and the village which allows the battlefield area to retain much of its original openness. The

dip below the hill still retains pools of surface water after heavy rain. The major plantations do not visually interfere with the crucial areas of the conflict.

The Sources

There are numerous accounts of the Battle of Flodden. Some of the most familiar are derived from chronicles, both English and Scottish, of the later sixteenth century. The embroideries that adorn them make them entertaining. The accounts quoted, below, however, are strictly contemporary.

Amongst the State Papers in the Public Record Office is the dispatch *Articles of the Bataill bitwix the Kinge of Scottes and therle of Surrey in Brankstone Feld, the 9 day of September*. A contemporary French translation of the dispatch claimed it to have been sent by the Admiral, Lord Thomas Howard, who had joined the army commanded by his father, the Earl of Surrey, with reinforcements from the Fleet:

The Lord Howard at 11 o'clock the said 9th day passed over the Bridge of Twizel with the vanward and artillery; and the said Earl [of Surrey] following with the rearward, the army was divided into 2 battles, and to either battle 2 wings.

The King of Scots' army was divided into 5 battles, and every battle an arrow shot from the other, and all like 'fernes' [distance] from the English army, in great plumps, part of them quadrant, and some pike-wise; and were on the top of the hill, being a quarter of a mile from the foot thereof.

The Lord Howard caused his vanward to 'stale' [halt] in a little valley, till the rearward were joined to one of the wings of his battle, and then both wards in one front advanced against the Scots, and they came down the hill, and met with them in good order, after the German ['Almayns'] manner, without speaking of any word.

The Earls of Huntley, Erroll, and Crawford, with their host of 6,000 men, came upon the Lord Howard, and shortly their backs were turned and the most part of them slain.

The King of Scots came with a great puissance upon my Lord of Surrey having on his left hand my Lord Darcy's son; which 2 bore all the brunt of the battle; and there the King of Scots was slain within a spear length from the said Earl of Surrey, and many more noble men of the Scots slain, and no prisoners taken in those 2 battles. And in the time of this battle the Earls of Lennox and Argyll with their puissances joined with Sir Edward Stanley, and they were put to flight.

Edmund Howard had with him 1,000 Cheshire men, and 500 Lancashire men, and many gentlemen of Yorkshire on the right wing of the Lord Howard; and the Lord Chamberlain of Scotland with many Lords did set upon him, and the Cheshire and Lancashire men never abode stroke, and few of the gentlemen of Yorkshire abode, but fled ... And the said Edmund Howard was thrice felled, and to his relief the Lord Dacres came with 1,500 men, and put to flight all the said Scots, and had about 8 score of his men slain. In which battle a great number of Scots were slain.

The battle and conflict began between 4 and 5 pm, and the chase continued 3 miles with marvellous slaughter, and 10,000 more had been slain, if the Englishmen had been on horseback.

The Scots were 80,000, and about 10,000 of them slain; and under 400 Englishmen slain³.

This account tells us a number of things. The English advanced in two battles but the Admiral, commanding the advance guard, waited 'in a little valley' - presumably the dead ground north of Branxton village, near the Pallinsburn - for his father to join him before the two of them engaged the Scots on a single front. The Scots, in contrast, were divided into five battles, each battle an arrow shot from the other, which invites a calculation of the Scots' frontage as being something over a mile.

The Scots advanced to the attack in the German manner which, at the time, meant a series of massed pike formations. Thereafter the fighting resolved itself into four separate conflicts. The Admiral defeated the Earls of Huntly, Errol and Crawford. To the Admiral's right his brother, Edmund Howard, was initially overwhelmed by the division commanded by Lord Home, the Chamberlain of Scotland, but the intervention of Lord Dacre stabilised the situation. Elsewhere, Sir Edward Stanley beats the Earls of Lennox and Argyll while, in the most titanic of the clashes, King James IV is defeated and killed in his struggle with the Earl of Surrey's division. The Scots are said to have lost 10,000 men overall.

Brian Tuke, Clerk of the Signet, passed to Richard Pace, secretary to Cardinal Bainbridge (then in Italy), the news received of the Battle of Flodden by King Henry VIII, at that time (22 September) besieging Tournai:

Accordingly, on the appointed day, the army attacked the Scots, whose forces were assembled on the summit of a hill, at the distance of a mile from its base, the hill being so strengthened and defended by ordnance that the assailants were obliged to wade through a certain marshy pass, leaving their guns in the rear.

The army of the Scots formed five lines in square battalions, representing the figure of a spear head; all being equidistant from the English army, which was divided into two lines, with two wings.

In spite of the Scottish artillery, which inflicted little or no damage, Lord Howard marched to the foot of the hill, where he halted a short time, until the other wing of the rearguard had joined the last of his lines.

Thereupon the Scots came down the hill in very good order, after the German fashion, with iron spears in masses. The Earl of Huntly, the Earl of Airlie [Erroll], and the Earl of Craufurd broke upon Lord Howard. This force, together with the Earls, all perished.

The perjured King of Scots attacked the Earl of Surrey, at whose side Lord Darcy's son was following; near whom Lord Maxwell, a Scot, with his brother Lord Herries, were killed, and well nigh all the rest of the Scottish nobles, the list of whose names had not yet been received. In these two engagements no prisoners were made, no quarter given. The Earl of Havevves [?Lennox] and the Earl of Argyle, with a very great force, attacked Sir Edward Stanley, who slew the greatest part of them. Lord Edmund Howard, who led his brother's right wing, was assailed by the Chamberlain of Scotland. He was thrice felled by the Chamberlain, to the blame of his soldiers, who were cowards, but Lord Dacres succoured him with fifty horse. The Chamberlain of Scotland alone got home alive, though he nevertheless in like manner lost all his men⁴.

Tuke went on to remark that the English archers and ordnance played only a small part in the victory; the humble billman decided the whole affair.

The alliance of Rome and Venice with England ensured that the Battle of Flodden excited much interest in Italy. The epic poem *La Rotta de Scocesi* (The Rout of the Scots), based on Tuke's letter and other, private information, reflected this⁵. Evidence from *La Rotta de Scocesi* will be considered later as appropriate.

What Tuke wrote both corroborates and supplements the testimony of the *Articles of the Bataill*. The Scots

were drawn up on a hill, a mile from their base: this equates with them moving from Flodden Edge to Branxton Hill. To approach the Scots the English had to wade through a marshy pass - the Pallinsburn. The Scots were arrayed in five divisions - as before - although in facing them the Admiral this time is represented as awaiting his father's reinforcement at the bottom of Branxton Hill, instead of a prudent distance away 'in a little valley'. Battle commenced after the Scots advanced down Branxton Hill 'after the German fashion', the fighting resolving itself into the various struggles the outcome of which was noted by the *Articles*.

A detailed account of Flodden appeared in the popular newsletter *The trewe encountre or batayle lately don betwene Englande and Scotlande*, printed by 'Richard Faques, dwellyng in Poulys Churche Yerde':

My said Lord of Surrey and the said army, the said danger and wanting of drink notwithstanding, courageously advanced forward to get between the said King of Scots and his realm of Scotland, countenancing to go towards Scotland or Berwick. The said King conceiving this and as it is confessed feared that my said Lord and the Army of England would have gone into Scotland, did cause his tents to be taken up, and keeping the height of the mountain, removed with his great power and puissance of people out of the said great fortress towards Scotland. And forthwith the Scots by their crafty and subtle imagination did set on fire all such their filthy straw and litter where as they did lie and with the same made such a great and a marvellous smoke that the manner of their array thereby could not be espied. Immediately, my Lord Howard with the vanward, and my Lord of Surrey with the rearward in their most quick and speedy manner advanced and made towards the said King of Scots as fast as to them was possible in array, and what for the hills and smoke long it was before the array of the Scots could be conceived, and at the last, they appeared in four great battles.

And as soon as the Scots perceived my said Lords to be within the danger of their ordnance they shot sharply their guns which were very great, and in like manner our party recounered them, with their ordnance, and notwithstanding that either our artillery for war could do no good nor advantage to our army because they were continually going and advancing up toward the said hills and mountains, but by the help of God, our guns did so break and constrain the Scottish great army, that some part of them was enforced to come down the said hills toward our army. And my Lord Howard conceiving the great power of the Scots, sent to my said [Lord] of Surrey his father and required him to advance his rearward and to join his right wing with his left wing, for the Scots were of that might that the vanward was not of power nor able to encounter them. My said Lord of Surrey perfectly understanding this with all speed and diligence, lustily, came forward and joined him to the vanward as was required by my said Lord Howard, and was glad for necessity to make of two battles one good battle to adventure of the said four battles.

And for so much as the Scots did keep them several in four battles therefore my Lord of Surrey and my Lord Howard suddenly were constrained and enforced to divide their army in another four battles, and else it was thought it should have been to their great danger and jeopardy.

So it was that the Lord Chamberlain of Scotland being Captain of the first battle of the Scots, fiercely did set upon Mr Edmund Howard Captain of the uttermost part of the field at the west side, and between them was so cruel [a] battle that many of our party Cheshiremen and others did flee, and the said Master Edmund in manner left alone without succour, and his standard and bearer of the same beaten and hewed in pieces, and himself thrice stricken down to the ground, how be it like a courageous and a hardy young lusty gentlemen he recovered again and fought hand to hand with one Sir Davy Home, and slew him with his own hand, and thus the said Master Edmund was in great peril and danger till that the Lord Dacre like a good and hardy knight relieved and come unto him for his succour.

The second battle came upon my Lord Howard. The third battle wherein was the King of Scots and most part of the noblemen of his realm came fiercely upon my said Lord of Surrey, which two battles by the help of Almighty God were after a great conflict vanquished, overcome, beaten down and put to flight, and few of them escaped with their lives. Sir Edward Stanley being at the uttermost part of the said rearward on the East part, seeing the fourth battle ready to relieve the said King of Scots battle, courageously and like a lusty and a hardy knight, did set upon the same and overcame, and put to flight all the Scots in the said battle. And thus by the grace succour and help of Almighty God victory was given to the realm of England, and all the Scottish ordnance won and brought to Etal and Berwick in surety⁶.

The Scots were estimated to have lost between 11,000 and 12,000 men. Twelve hundred prisoners were taken. It was felt that if the battle had started earlier than between 4 and 5pm felt many more Scots would have been slain and taken prisoners.

The trewe encountre then proceeded to analyse the English victory:

In this battle the Scots had many great advantages that is to wit, the high hills and mountains, a great wind with them, and sodden rain, all contrary to our bows and archers. It is not to be doubted, but the Scots fought manly, and were determined either to win the field or to die, they were also as well appointed as was possible at all points with armour and harness, so that few of them were slain with arrows, how be it the bills did beat and hew them down with some pain and danger to Englishmen.

The said Scots were so plainly determined to abide battle and not to flee, that they put from them their horses and also put off their boots and shoes, and fought in the stockings of their hoses every man for the most part with a keen and sharp spear of 5 yards length, and a target before him. And when their spears failed and were spent, then they fought with great and sharp swords...

The above extract from *The trewe encountre* begins by mentioning Surrey's manoeuvre, whereby he placed himself between the enemy and Scotland. In response the Scots shifted their position, obscuring their movements by setting fire to the rubbish in their camp. It was some time before the English caught sight of the Scots, arrayed in four great battles (the discrepancy between this and the accounts that refer to five battles is usually explained by assuming that the Scots kept their reserve behind the crest of the ridge). At this point the sequence of events becomes a little confused. We are told that the superiority of the English artillery provoked the Scots to move forward, and yet are given to understand that the two halves of the English army had not yet united: indeed, it had still to dress its lines, rearranging itself into four battles to comply with the Scottish formation. Be that as it may, when the Scots did attack, the fighting follows the established pattern, except that Sir Edward Stanley, on the eastern side of the field, is represented as taking the offensive in overcoming the Scots opposite him.

The trewe encountre agrees with Brian Tuke in emphasising the contribution made to victory by the English billmen. It agrees too that the English archers, hampered by the rain and the Scots' heavy armour, were relatively ineffective (although the English artillery achieves an honourable mention). The 'German manner' of fighting employed by the Scots passes unremarked, but the tool of the trade, the 15-18 foot pike, is noted.

The hasty adoption by the Scots of the German method of fighting (at the behest of their French advisers, who brought with them thousands of pikes) was a major cause of their defeat at Flodden. On the Continent the famed Swiss pikemen had carried all before them, steamrolling their way to victory in the manner of the Greek phalanx nearly 2,000 years earlier. But success depended on momentum: once a pike column was halted and its cohesion lost, the long pike became an encumbrance in close-quarter combat. The eight foot long English bill, with both a cutting and thrusting edge, was far handier. This the Scots eventually discovered, as Thomas Ruthal, Bishop of Durham, explained in a letter to Thomas Wolsey dated 20 September 1513:

The said Scots were so surely harnessed with complete harness, German jacks, rivets, splents [*forms of body armour*], pavises [*large wooden shields*], and other habiliments, that shot of arrows in regard did them no harm; and when it came to hand strokes of bills and halberds, they were so mighty, large, strong, and great men that they would not fall when four or five bills struck on one of them at once. Howbeit our bills quitted them very well, and did more good that day than bows, for they shortly disappointed the Scots of their long spears wherein was their greatest trust; and when they came to hand stroke, though the Scots fought sore and valiantly with their swords, yet they could not resist the bills that lighted so thick and sore upon them⁷.

In the past Edward Hall's *Chronicle*, first published in 1548 (though written slightly earlier), has been widely quoted in connection with Flodden. At first sight there might not appear any good reason why it should be regarded as more authoritative than the accounts written c.1570 by Holinshed, or the Scottish chroniclers Buchanan, Pitscottie and Leslie. However, it is known that Hall quoted practically verbatim from a contemporary account of 'the order and behaviour' of the Earl of Surrey against the Scots printed 'in Fletestrete at the sign of the George by Richard Pynson, printer unto the King's noble grace'. The account was compiled by 'one unworthy whom it pleased the said earl to have about him'⁸.

The 'unworthy one' described the organisation of the Earl of Surrey's army. Lord Thomas Howard commanded the van, with his brother Edmund Howard in charge of its right wing and Sir Marmaduke Constable in charge of its left. Surrey himself commanded the rearward, flanked by Lord Dacre on his right and Sir Edward Stanley on his left. The description given of the events of the campaign up to the afternoon of 9 September is already familiar: the observation that the Scots switched position under the cover of smoke is repeated:

Then, when the Englishmen had passed a little brook, called Sandyford, which is but a man's step over, and that the smoke was passed, and the air fair and clear, each army might plainly see one another at hand. Then the lord Admiral perceived four great battles of the Scots all on foot with long spears like moorish pikes: which Scots furnished them warlike, and bent them to the foreward, which was conducted by the lord Admiral, which perceiving that sent to his father the Earl of Surrey his *Agnus Dei* that hung at his breast that in all haste he would join battle, even with the brunt or breast of the vanguard: for the foreward alone was not able to encounter the whole battle of the Scots. The Earl perceiving well the saying of his son, and seeing the Scots ready to descend the hill advanced himself and his people forward, and brought them equal in ground with the foreward on the left hand, even at the brunt or breast of the same at the foot of the hill Branxton ['Bramston'], the English army stretched east and west, and their backs north, and the Scots in the south before them on the foresaid hill called Branxton.

There followed an artillery duel, of which the English got the better. Then, once the enemy guns had been silenced, the English switched their fire to the massed pike formations of the Scots. So galling was the cannonade that eventually the Scots advanced to the attack. The unworthy one recounts first the story of Edmund Howard's rough treatment on the English right wing at the hands of Lord Home 'with his battle of spears on foot, to the number of ten thousand at the least'. But in this version the setback remains unrectified; Lord Dacre does not effect a rescue. Instead, 'the lord Dacre with his company stood still all day unfoughten with all'.

Meanwhile, inside Edmond Howard's flank, his brother, the Admiral, defeats 'with pure fighting' the division of the Earls of Crawford and Montrose [?Erroll]. They are both killed.

King James, accompanied 'by many bishops, earls, barons, knights and gentlemen of the realm', assailed the Earl of Surrey's division. The battle was cruel and James fought valiantly, but in the end he too was killed and his followers annihilated.

On the left wing Sir Edward Stanley attacked up Branxton Hill. Once again the English emerged victorious.

All these four battles, in manner fought at one time, and were determined in effect, little in distance of the beginning and ending of any of them one before the other, saving that [of] Sir Edward Stanley, which was the last that [was] fought, for he came up to the top of the hill, and there fought with the Scots valiantly, and chased them down the hill over that place, where the King's battle joined. Besides these four battles of the Scots were two other battles, which never came to hand strokes [? - *the reserve; camp followers mistaken for a fighting formation?*]⁹.

The unworthy one's reference to the English crossing a little brook at 'Sandyford' is of interest. The hamlet of Sandyford lies at the eastern end of the Pallinsburn near its junction with the River Till. It would appear that the English army advanced to Branxton from Twizel Bridge and Millford via this crossing. However, in order to accommodate Tuke's reference to the English being 'obliged to wade through a certain marshy pass', and to explain why there was a dangerous gap between the Admiral's advance guard and Surrey's rear guard (the Admiral's reaction to which the unworthy one dramatically illustrates), it has been postulated that there was a route further west across the Pallinsburn bog which Lord Howard used while his father advanced via Sandyford. The basis of this theory is the claim of Branxton's inhabitants at the end of the eighteenth century that a small bridge across the middle of the bog, known as the 'Branx Brig', which supplemented a neck of firmer ground, had been used by part of the English army during its advance to Flodden Field¹⁰. Most subsequent historians have found the story sufficiently persuasive to include it in their reconstruction of the battle.

Much to the Admiral's relief, the Scots did not attack at this point, as they had seemed likely to do, and the English army was able to take up its position unchallenged. The unworthy one's explicit reference to the English being drawn up at the foot of Branxton Hill, facing south and aligned on a east-west axis, is valuable. Later, provoked by the English artillery, the Scots attack. The description provided of the clashes between the various divisions throws up the interesting fact that Stanley's men on the English left attacked, and the puzzling claim that Lord Dacre remained unengaged. The nature of Sir Edward Stanley's success will be examined later; as to the second point, the *Articles of the Bataill*, which lauds the part played by Dacre, should be regarded as more authoritative.

But why should such a signal discrepancy in the accounts of Lord Dacre's conduct have arisen? The thing to remember is that although the armies of two different nations faced each other at Flodden, neither were entirely homogeneous. An army the size of that fielded by the Scots comprised Lowlanders, Highlanders, Borderers and men from the Western Isles, all very different people who had only temporarily put aside their rivalries. The differences were less extreme on the English side, but still significant. There was suspicion regarding Lord Dacre's conduct. The cautious watchfulness that quickly descended on the western side of the field looked to some like collusion with his fellow Borderer, Lord Home. Mistrust also existed elsewhere. Only a generation before, Sir Edward Stanley's father had helped seal the fate of the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Surrey's father, at Bosworth Field. And even now, according to the Stanleyite poem *Scotish ffeilde*, composed soon after the battle, the Stanleys' Cheshire tenants chafed at having to serve under Edmund Howard. Such considerations provide an explanation of why some accounts of the Battle of Flodden appear partisan. Indeed, *Scotish ffeilde* proves a prime example: in explaining the flight of the Cheshiremen on the right wing, when:

They [the Scots] proched us with spears, and put many over,
That the blood out burst at their broken
harness!

The man who gets the blame is none other than Lord Dacre, 'He fled at the first brade [onset]¹¹. By comparison, the unworthy one's failure to give Lord Dacre a part in the battle is positively charitable.

The Battle

The command structure of the English army at Flodden is clear. The Earl of Surrey rearranged its formation - which originally featured two main battles, each with two wings - into four front line battles, to conform to the disposition of the Scots. Figures for the strength of each battle, given below, are taken from *The trewe encountre*.

On the extreme right, the wing of the Admiral's forward commanded by Edmund Howard remained detached: his 3,000 men were overmatched when pitted against Lord Home's 10,000 Borderers. To Edmund Howard's left was his brother's division. It is generally assumed that the Admiral absorbed the other wing of his forward, commanded by Sir Marmaduke Constable, to achieve a strength of 12,000. Next in line was the Earl of Surrey with 5,000 men. The wing of his rearward commanded by Sir Edward Stanley - 3,000 strong - had not yet arrived in line when the battle started: Stanley would eventually take station on the English extreme left. Surrey's other wing, another 3,000 men under Lord Dacre, likewise remained detached and acted as a reserve: this has been the inference drawn from the account of his intervention to stabilise the line after Edmund Howard's defeat.

The Scottish order of battle can be arrived at by noting which of their divisions engaged its particular English counterpart. This is simplest: relying on the later Scottish chronicles confuses the issue irretrievably.

Lord Home with, according to the unworthy one, 10,000 men, attacked Edmund Howard. Howard was on the English left, therefore Home was on the Scottish right. The Admiral, next in line, was attacked by the Earls of Erroll and Crawford: their 6,000 men (as estimated by the *Articles of the Bataill*) made up the Scottish left centre. The Earl of Surrey's division was assaulted by King James himself: the King was therefore posted in the Scottish right centre. This leaves the Highlanders of the Earls of Lennox and Argyll, on the Scottish right, to face Sir Edward Stanley, on the English left. A fifth Scottish division, commanded by Lord Bothwell, was in reserve¹².

The unworthy one informs us that, apart from the English left, fighting took place along the line simultaneously. Such a definite assertion notwithstanding, later writers on Flodden have preferred to believe that Home's defeat of Edmund Howard preceded the main clash: it makes their description of the battle that much easier. And there is, in fact, some contemporary evidence for the belief: Polydore Vergil, busy assembling facts when Flodden was fought, stated in his *Anglica Historia* (1534) that:

On the right wing Edmund Howard went forward with about three thousand men against whom the Scots suddenly made the first charge. Edmund pressed on valiantly, but his troops were suddenly panic stricken and turned in flight. When King James saw this from a distance he thought the whole army had taken to its heels. He hurriedly dismounted from his horse, seized a weapon and thus, inadequately armed, marched against the enemy¹³.

Thus it was Home's success that prompted King James to descend from a strong position. James had earlier steadfastly resisted the temptation when the English army had lain divided, a bare three quarters of a mile away under his gaze. But now his impetuous nature got the better of him. The Scottish chronicler Bishop Lesley, for what it is worth, seconds this interpretation¹⁴.

Should it be true that King James was spurred on by Home's initial triumph, it proved a poor indicator of success. Lord Dacre quickly checked Home's progress. Thereafter Home's division played no further part in the battle, an inactivity that was laid to Home's charge when he was tried and executed for treason three years later.

The Admiral's division got the better of the Earls of Erroll and Crawford. According to *La Rotta de Scocesi* Lord Howard looked throughout for King James: the two bore a grudge after the Admiral had earlier killed the King's favourite privateer, Andrew Barton, in a naval encounter. As it was, King James was heavily engaged to the Admiral's left, fighting the Earl of Surrey's division. *La Rotta de Scocesi* is the most entertaining in

describing this combat. Its story might be fanciful, or its author may have possessed a Scottish source of information. Whichever, the initial shock of his assault having been met, the King gets his men moving again: 'the King of Scots at last advanced from his company with many of his barons and struck with such force, that he drove them [*the enemy*] back more than a long bow-shot'. James kills five of the English with his pike before it shatters, then five more with his sword. Hoping to exploit his success, the King orders his reserve, the fifth division, to join him, and they 'with all the fury they could and in good order, got into motion and came bravely forward, as you will hear in another poem, if you think it worth to listen'¹⁵.

But things were going badly for King James elsewhere on the field. To his left Home was merely watchful; Erroll and Crawford were in the process of being defeated. Meanwhile, on James' right the Highlanders of Lennox and Argyll were shortly to be overthrown by Sir Edward Stanley. What appears to have happened here is that the Highlanders, with no force opposite them at the outset (Stanley arriving at the field late) remained motionless, watching the struggle to their left. They were nevertheless about to intervene when, as *The trewe encountre* put it, 'Sir Edward Stanley being at the uttermost part of the said rearward on the East part, seeing the fourth battle ready to relieve the said King of Scots battle, courageously and like a lusty and a hardy knight, did set upon the same and overcame'.

Explaining Stanley's success in launching his uphill assault, however, requires some detective work. The unworthy one wrote that Stanley climbed up the hill 'or the Scottes wiste' (i.e. ere the Scots knew it); so there was an element of surprise involved. Looking at the terrain on the eastern side of the battlefield this is quite believable. The gullies already referred to around Mardon provide perfect cover. It is likely that part of Stanley's force managed to work their way round the Highlanders' flank; when the Scots fled 'Sir Edward and his people followed them over the same ground, where the earl [of Surrey's] battle first joined' i.e. they were driven back into the centre of the field. Holinshed, writing later (in 1578), has Lennox and Argyll's command scattered by a flank attack once the English archers have exacted their toll¹⁶.

The unworthy one remarks that Stanley's men's pursuit was cut short when they fell to plundering the Scots slain by the Earl of Surrey's division. The presence of Stanley's men in this part of the field, and the fact that they were said to have despoiled King James's dead body, prompted stories that they had encompassed his death. However, the unworthy one quashes the notion, whilst acknowledging that Stanley's men still deserved credit: 'for a truth this wing did very valiantly'. Instead, so the *Articles of the Bataill* inform us, King James was killed 'within a spear length' of the Earl of Surrey.

By now, the battle having begun late in the afternoon, night was falling. This saved what remained of the Scottish army. The Scottish chronicler Pitscottie, writing in the 1570s, retailed a story that towards the end of the day Lord Home refused a request of the Earl of Huntley that he intervene in the fighting to rescue the King. Home allegedly commented: 'He does well that does for himself. We have foughten our Vanguards, and have won the same: Therefore let the Lave do their Part, as well as we'¹⁷. This was probably malicious, embroidering on the charges that later sealed Home's fate, but it is true that as a result of his inaction Home was able to draw off his division relatively unscathed. He failed to carry off the Scottish artillery train, however, which fell into the enemy's hands intact.

Scottish casualties in the battle were put by the English at between 10,000 and 15,000. Early English reports of the battle claimed that they themselves lost no more than 400 men. While the unworthy one was ready to admit to 1,500 men killed, twenty years later Polydore Vergil revised the figure upwards to 5,000.

Indication of Importance

For Scotland the Battle of Flodden was a catastrophe. Not only was the loss of life heavy but the country lost its King and a large proportion of its nobility. As so often in Scotland's history, a minor ascended the throne, ushering in a new era of political instability.

Flodden had no such lasting effect on English history. The victory was not exploited and Surrey disbanded his army soon after.

Clearly, it is the sheer scale of the Scottish disaster that accounts for the interest shown in the Battle of Flodden today. The battle has mournful, and thus romantic, connotations. During the nineteenth century Sir Walter Scott's poem *Marmion* enhanced the reputation of the battle in this regard.

The death of King James IV added to the sense of loss. In many respects he was well-suited to play the tragic hero: a successful King but fatally flawed. His propensity to start fighting before he had finished giving his orders, abdicating the responsibilities of a general, contributed significantly to the Scottish defeat.

The chief English commanders, the Earl of Surrey and his son, Lord Howard, are equally notable historical characters. During his long life Surrey served four Kings - Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII and Henry VIII - and two very different dynasties, a remarkable achievement. His victory at Flodden earned him his father's old title, Duke of Norfolk, a distinction inherited by his equally long-lived son who, surviving the turbulent later years of Henry VIII's reign, commanded forces in the field for Queen Mary at the age of eighty.

Ultimately, Flodden is perhaps of greatest interest to the student of tactics. The English fought as they had for much of the Middle Ages, with bow and bill. The Scots, in contrast, by adopting the pike wholesale, committed themselves to the latest military thinking. Their style of warfare belonged to a different age - the Renaissance.

Bearing the question of tactics in mind, it is worth observing that the particular value of the written sources for Flodden lies not just in the fact that they enable us to reconstruct the course of the battle with confidence, but that at the same time they shed light on the method of fighting of either side. In the same way, a visit to Flodden battlefield is made especially rewarding because the nature of the terrain is such that it is easy to understand how, in the light of the tactics employed, the battle took the course that it did. From the several excellent vantage points overlooking unspoilt ground the visitor can appreciate how the relatively easy going to the west would have helped Home's pikemen overcome Edmund Howard, whilst noticing that the dip at the foot of Branxton Hill in the centre of the battlefield would have contrived to rob King James's column of much of its attacking momentum. The reasons for Sir Edward Stanley's success on the eastern side of the battlefield become obvious when one stands in the gully at Mardon.

Human remains have been discovered near Branxton and on the western side of the battlefield where Lord Home clashed with Edmund Howard. The ground near the Pallinsburn has also yielded up cannonballs, these having, at the time of the battle, embedded themselves in the bog¹⁸.

Battlefield Area

The battlefield area boundary defines the outer reasonable limit of the battle, taking into account the positions of the combatants at the outset of fighting and the focal area of the battle itself. It does not include areas over which fighting took place subsequent to the main battle. Wherever possible, the boundary has been drawn so that it is easily appreciated on the ground.

On the western side of the battlefield the small ravine by the side of Branxton Hill provides a suitable natural feature through which the battlefield boundary can be traced. Lord Home would have probably rested his left flank upon the ravine¹⁹. The battlefield boundary then runs north-eastwards behind Edmund Howard's position, following the Branxton road as far as Dickies Den. Here it diverts itself along a stream before crossing the ground north of Branxton village and rejoining the road heading towards Crookham. Space is created for Lord Dacre's wing to act as the English army's reserve, while at the same time allowing for the possibility that King James's onslaught might have succeeded in pushing Surrey back as far as Branxton main street - 'the long bow shot' mentioned in *La Rotta de Scoces*²⁰.

In the north-eastern corner of the battlefield area sufficient room must be found for Sir Edward Stanley's division, not yet in line with the rest of the English army but preparing to attack the troops of Lennox and Argyll opposite it. By following the Crookham road as far as Inch Cottage, and then heading south-eastwards across Windy Law and past Mardon, the battlefield boundary provides both sufficient space for the English left wing and incorporates the gully through which part of Stanley's division moved to attack the Scots in the flank. It is conceivable that Stanley's flank attack might have swung even further to the east - there is a suitable re-entrant which could have been used the other side of Windy Law - but including this ground would exceed the rigour required for the Battlefields Register.

From the Mardon Plantation the battlefield boundary turns south-westwards and skirts the rear of the Scottish position. The southern slope of Branxton Hill is included in the battlefield area to allow Bothwell's division to take up position, out of sight of the English on the other side of the hill to the north.

Notes

1. Vickers, Kenneth H A *History of Northumberland XI: The Parishes of Carham, Branxton, Kirknewton, Wooler, and Ford* (Newcastle & London 1922) pp104-115.
2. 'The new battle of Flodden' *The Times* 20 Feb. 1993.
3. *State Papers King Henry the Eighth Part IV Correspondence Relative to Scotland and the Borders 1513-1534* (1836) pp1-2.
4. *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts relating to English Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice and in other Libraries of Northern Italy II 1509-1519* ed. Rawdon Brown (London 1867) p134.
5. The poem is translated and printed in full in W Mackay Mackenzie *The Secret of Flodden* (Edinburgh 1931).
6. Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland VII i 147-151.
7. Quoted in *The Days of James IV 1488-1513* [Scottish History by Contemporary Writers Series] ed. G Gregory Smith (London 1900) pp172-3.
8. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* vol. I pt. 2 (2nd ed. J S Brewer and R H Brodie, London 1920) pp1007-8.
9. Hall, Edward *Chronicle* (1809 ed.) pp557-63.
10. 'The Battle of Flodden' by Robert White in *Archaeologia Aeliana* New Series No. 3 (1859) pp232-3.
11. Quoted in *The Days of James IV* op. cit. pp167-8. See also the comments of Cadwallader J Bates in 'Flodden Field', *Archaeologia Aeliana* New Series 16 (1894) p358.
12. The attribution of the command of the reserve to Bothwell is made on the basis of the chronicler Buchanan's identification. See Lt-Col the Hon Fitzwilliam Elliot *The Battle of Flodden and the Raids of 1513* (Edinburgh 1911) pp67-8, 101.
13. *The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil AD 1485-1537* ed. with translation by Denys Hay. Camden Society 74 (London 1950) p219.
14. See Elliot op. cit. p89.
15. *The Secret of Flodden* op. cit. pp115-122.
16. Quoted in Elliot op. cit. p96.
17. Quoted Elliot op. cit. pp81-2.
18. White op. cit. pp228-233.
19. White op. cit. p229.
20. See Colonel A H Burne *The Battlefields of England* (London 1950) p170.