



Project Report

Background

The project was conceived during the final development phase of the Revitalising Redesdale Landscape Partnership (RR). Following an introduction via the Northumberland National Park Authority the Battlefields Trust (the Trust) agreed to take on the role of lead partner in a new investigation of the battle of Otterburn (1388) as a project within RR in May 2015. The then chairman of the North East & Borders Region of the Trust, Geoffrey Carter, was appointed to lead the project, assisted by local Trust members, and joined the board of RR. The time and expertise of Trust members was provided to the project as a contribution in kind.

Although a small part of RR in terms of budget (£65,100 out of a total RR budget of £2.8 million) the project focuses on what is perhaps the most important historical event in the history of Redesdale. The battlefield at Otterburn is one of only 47 sites designated as Registered Battlefields by Historic England. This should be seen in the context of there being more than 500 battlefields and other sites of conflict in England according to the Trust's *Battlefields Hub* which may be found here:

<https://www.battlefieldstrust.com/resource-centre/index.asp>

Further information about Registered Battlefields including the criteria for registration may be found here :

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/registered-battlefields/>

Attached in the Appendix to this is the formal registration report on Otterburn and the definitive map of the designated area. The registration report is a useful summary of the understanding of the battle at the time of its writing in 1995.

It was decided that the project would comprise a number of elements :

1. a review of the key primary and secondary sources relating to the battle. Historians designate contemporary or near-contemporary accounts of events as 'primary' sources and later writings as 'secondary' sources.

2. a landscape archaeology study to seek to reconstruct the landscape as it would have existed at the time of the battle. This is important in permitting the primary sources to be read closely for references to the ground as it was in the 14th century.
3. a programme of field archaeology to investigate any matters raised in the landscape study and to seek any artefacts that may have been left and survived on the battlefield.
4. the upgrading of the existing visitor area adjacent to the site of the battle to provide a better and more informative experience for visitors to the site. This part of the project accounted for the largest part of the total budget - £43,550 or 67%.

In addition it was agreed that the Trust would produce an education / information pack about the battle in the format previously developed for other conflicts.

As a part of this preparatory work an initial scoping study was commissioned in respect of the proposed field archaeology. This was necessary because the possibility of detecting artefacts would depend on a number of environmental factors including soil PH and the extent and nature of farming of the land in the intervening centuries. The scoping study concluded that only certain areas would be suitable for further investigation. The two reports are attached as part of the Appendix.

The full final project proposal submitted as a part of the overall final RR submission to the National Lottery Fund for Heritage is attached as part of the Appendix.

The project was formally launched at a public meeting held at the Rede, Tyne & Coquet Sports & Leisure Centre in Otterburn on 24th June 2018.

Source Review – Part One

The purpose of the source review was twofold. First, it represented an opportunity to revisit what is known and what had been written about the battle in the light of the archaeological investigations. Second, it was an opportunity to engage local non-specialist volunteers who would both learn about the battle and also gain an understanding of how historians seek to understand the distant past when objective and detailed accounts of events are frequently unavailable and which may be unreliable or contradictory. This part of the project was led by Geoffrey Carter and John Sadler, a Trust member and local historian who has written extensively about the medieval period in Northumberland. Subsequent to this project Geoffrey Carter has retired as chairman of the North East & Borders Region of the Trust and John Sadler has taken on this role.

Following the launch meeting and other local publicity, a group of sixteen volunteers was convened. An initial briefing meeting with fourteen of the volunteers present was held on 5th September 2018. To give everyone the necessary background and context to the 14th century and an introduction to the study of sources, a comprehensive reading list was provided together with links to a number of relevant online programmes from sources such as the BBC *'In Our Time'* series.

As is often the case, the number of volunteers decreased when the extent of the required work became apparent. Indeed, the question of volunteers had been an issue since the

development phase of RR. Redesdale is a large but sparsely populated area of 347 km² and this was highlighted in the RR Landscape Conservation Action Plan submitted to the National Lottery Fund for Heritage in 2017 – *“The size of Redesdale’s population, at around 1,700 people, means that the pool of potential volunteers is small. The potential of available volunteers is exacerbated by the low population density, which makes it hard to provide a natural focal point for activities within the valley. A significant proportion of the 16-65 age group in Redesdale are economically active, with many people commuting considerable distances out of the area for work. This limits the amount of free time available for volunteering. Local people have commented that the majority of voluntary activity that is undertaken in Redesdale tends to come from the same cohort of people, many of whom are retired or work part time.”* With RR comprising eighteen projects competing for the same pool of volunteers it was to be expected that retaining all of those who expressed initial interest would prove difficult. Eventually, the group came to comprise four volunteers together with Geoffrey Carter and John Sadler.

Having given the remaining volunteers sufficient time to complete the background reading and to deal with any questions, a research protocol was devised to provide guidance to the volunteers and to focus their efforts on the key questions about the battle and this is attached as part of the Appendix. A meeting of the volunteers was held in January 2019 to discuss the protocol and answer any questions arising. Following this the volunteers commenced their reading.

Primary Sources

The core primary sources for the battle of Otterburn are a series of chronicles, listed here in chronological order based on the approximate dates of composition :

Walsingham	Chronica Maiora	c. 1388
Unknown Author	The Westminster Chronicle	c. 1388
Jean Froissart	Chroniques Tome III	c. 1390/91
Knighton	Chronicon	c. 1390/91
Wyntoun/Unknown Author	Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland	c. 1390
Walter Bower	Scotichronicon	c. 1440 earliest
Hardyng	Chronicle	c. 1440 – 1457

Walsingham - Chronica Maiora

Thomas Walsingham was a senior monk of St Albans abbey where he would have had access to a wide range of documentary sources and access to the many important people of the period known to have had a connection to the abbey. St Albans, at the time, was second only to Westminster Abbey as a centre of affairs.

His chronicle is thought to have been written almost contemporaneously with the events that it covers. He does not name any of his sources. No complete autograph manuscript of Walsingham's chronicle survives. The modern translation by David Preest (*The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham* The Boydell Press 2004) which we have used is based on the Latin version published by HT Riley in the Rolls series in 1863 / 64 and on an edition of the later years of the chronicle (1406 – 1420) published by VH Galbraith in 1937. He describes it as 'the fullest and most fully revised text ... that is known to have circulated in fifteenth century English manuscripts'. Walsingham's account of the battle of Otterburn is brief and attempts to portray it as an English victory despite the capture of Hotspur.

Unknown Author - The Westminster Chronicle

The Westminster Chronicle was written as a near contemporaneous account of events between 1388 and 1392 by an unknown monk of Westminster Abbey. It appears as a continuation of Higden's Polychronicon and was published in Latin by JR Lumby in the Rolls series in 1886. Westminster was at the heart of government and the monks would have had access to the widest range of documents, including many that have failed to survive. They would also have had an opportunity to speak to many important figures of the period. We have used the 1982 edition and translation by Hector & Harvey (*The Westminster Chronicle 1381 – 1394* The Clarendon Press 1982). Harvey suggests that the continuation was, in fact, written by several different people.

Froissart - Chroniques

The massive chronicle written by the Hainault-born Jean Froissart is too well-known to require much introduction and, despite its many weaknesses, remains one of the principle sources for much of our knowledge of the period. However, we must remember that Froissart was not an historian in the modern sense. He was writing tales for the knightly class which showed them as they would have wished to see themselves. Writing in 'History Today' (*Volume 36 Issue 5 May 1986*) the distinguished historian Kenneth Fowler says "Yet Froissart's weaknesses as a historian are everywhere apparent. His failures derive from his frequent chronological errors, inadequate sense of geography and confusions of persons and places. More seriously, they come from his insufficiently critical approach to the testimony of eye-witnesses and other informants, his inability or failure – for all his protestations to the contrary – to resolve discordant authorities, and his apparent insouciance about advancing different versions of the same events written, probably for different audiences, around the same time."

Froissart wrote at great length about the battle of Otterburn in Book III which survives in twenty four manuscripts and a handful of fragments. These present two main versions, the first is thought to have been composed in 1390/91 and the second in 1396 which is found in a single manuscript. These do not show significant

differences that would affect the account of Otterburn. In the absence of a modern scholarly translation of the relevant sections from Middle French we have used

i) the transcription of the Middle French from MS Besançon 865 (the first version) published by The Online Froissart Project which may be found here :

<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/onlinefroissart/>

ii) the 1871 French translation by Kervyn de Lettenhove which may be found in the online Bibliothèque Nationale de France here:

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k389349/f204.item>

iii) the English translation by T Johnes (*Sir John Froissart's Chronicles of England, France, Spain and the adjoining countries, from the latter part of the reign of Edward II to the coronation of Henry IV Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme 1808*).

iv) the English translation by G Brereton (*Froissart Chronicles Penguin Modern Classics 1968*). This is an edited version of the full account given by Froissart.

Knighton - Chronicon

Henry Knighton, a canon of St Mary's Abbey, Leicester, wrote his chronicle between 1378 and 1396. Leicester was a fief of the duchy of Lancaster, and the abbey was closely in touch with the households of Henry of Grosmont and John of Gaunt. The chronicle covers the period 959 - 1395. The last section from 1377-1395 is considered to be of greatest importance as it deals with contemporary events. VH Galbraith has shown that this section was, in fact, written first – probably in or about 1390. The chronicle was first published in Latin in 1652 and again by JR Lumby in the Rolls series (1889). We have worked from the translation by GH Martin (*Knighton's Chronicle 1337-1396 Oxford University Press 1995*).

Wyntoun/Unknown Author - Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland

The Orygynale Cronykil is usually ascribed to Andrew of Wyntoun, a Scottish prior. However, Wyntoun admits that a large section was, in fact, sent to him by a friend and that he (Wyntoun) was ignorant of the author of that section which includes the account of Otterburn. This leaves us with no knowledge of its provenance, the source(s) of its content or the changes made by Wyntoun in conforming it to the rhyming couplets in which his chronicle is written. The language used (described by Wyntoun as 'Ynglis') is thought by scholars to be the dialect spoken between the Tees and the Tay in the early fifteenth century. There is no reliable modern English translation available and we have worked from the original text as edited by D Laing (*The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland William Patterson 1879*). This edition includes a glossary of dialect words and notes on how to read the language. We have also consulted modern dictionaries of Old Scottish usage.

Bower – Scotichronicon

The Scotichronicon is a 15th-century chronicle by the Walter Bower, Abbot of Inchcolm. It is a continuation of the priest John of Fordun's earlier work *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*. Bower began the work in 1440 at the request of a neighbour, Sir David Stewart of Rosyth. The completed work, in its original form, consists of sixteen books, of which the first five and a portion of the sixth (to 1163) are Fordun's, or mainly his, for Bower added to them at places. In the later books, down to the reign of Robert I of Scotland (1371), he was aided by Fordun's *Gesta Annalia*, but from that point to the close, the work is original. The National Library of Scotland has called it "probably the most important medieval account of early Scottish history." Bower's account of Otterburn has similarities to the *Orygynale Cronykil* and it has been suggested by his most recent translator, DER Watt, that Bower shows no familiarity with Wyntoun's work but that they share some common sources. *Scotichronicon* was published complete in Latin by W Goodall in 1759. We have worked from the English version included in *English Historical Documents IV (English Historical Documents Volume IV 1327 – 1485 Routledge 1995)*.

Hardyng – Chronicle

John Hardyng (the spelling varies) entered the service of Sir Henry Percy (Hotspur) at the age of twelve in 1390 and was present at the battle of Homildon Hill (1402) and the battle of Shrewsbury (1403). He then passed into the service of Sir Robert Umfraville, under whom he was constable of Warkworth Castle, Northumberland, and Kyme Castle, Lincolnshire. He was in Umfraville's retinue at Agincourt in 1415 and later served as a spy for Henry V in Scotland. He was, thus, in close proximity to two of the leading English combatants at Otterburn. He was also the only chronicler of Otterburn who was not a monk and who had real first-hand experience of the realities of medieval warfare. He is known to have been fluent in English, Latin and French and died in 1465 at the age of 87. The chronicle is written in English and in verse.

The first version of the chronicle which survives in a single manuscript (probably the presentation copy) was presented by Hardyng to Henry VI in 1457. A second, unfinished, version was later commenced, initially for Richard, Duke of York and subsequently for his son, Edward IV. This survives in twelve manuscripts and two printed editions from 1543. A modern edition of the earlier parts of the first version edited by S Peverley & J Simpson does not cover the section on Otterburn. We have worked from the 1543 printed edition published in 1812 (*The Chronicle of John Hardyng Henry Ellis 1812*).

It was important to ensure that volunteers were aware of the limitations of primary sources from several hundred years' ago. The key points were summarised in a note by Geoffrey Carter :

The Usefulness of Chronicles

Historians have long been cautious in their use of chronicles as 'history' in the modern, post-Enlightenment, sense. This is not the place for a discussion of the

reasons which are explored at length in Professor Chris Given-Wilson's book *Chronicles – The Writing of History in Medieval England Hambleton & London 2004* which, despite its title, covers the work of Froissart and others writing about events in England. None of this invalidates the use of contemporary sources as a guide to the events of any military campaign but it puts us on notice that we cannot necessarily assume that modern standards of 'truth & accuracy' can be applied here.

At Otterburn there are some specific points which must be borne in mind :

Witness

None of the accounts that have survived are those of eye witnesses. In only one case do we have any specific information as to the chronicler's source.

Froissart tells us that his information came from two places. First, he met two named Gascon squires from Fois at the court of Gaston Fébus, Count of Fois at Orthez. These squires are said to have fought on the English side. From the Scottish side he tells us that he met an unnamed Scottish knight and two squires from the household of Douglas at Avignon. The two Gascons are named as Jehan de Chateauneuf and Jehan Chantiron and both are recorded elsewhere by Froissart as having been captured in the field at Otterburn. In all other cases we have no knowledge of who informed the chroniclers and whether or not their testimony was as eye witnesses or as recipients of information from others who, themselves, may have received it second (or more) hand.

Of Froissart's witnesses we are told that these were present at Otterburn. In the case of the squires we do not know how closely engaged they would have been in the fighting itself. Squires were typically aged from 14 to 21 and were the final rank before knighthood itself. Older squires would have taken the field alongside their masters so may well have taken part in the battle at Otterburn. In the case of the two named Gascons we do not know how early they were taken and thus how much of the fight they had experienced directly.

The three English contemporary chroniclers do not, as previously noted, speak of their sources. It is possible that they had access to some who took part in the battle but those

mentioned by name in Froissart's account are mainly northern knights and many of them are recorded as having been taken for ransom. We do not know if any of them or others who had fought were in Westminster, St Albans or Leicester. We do know that reports of a Scottish invasion had reached Westminster by 13th August as this is mentioned in the public record in the context of Richard II summoning forces to repel them. On 20th August he stood them down as he had heard that the Scots had withdrawn across the border. It seems most probable that the news to the king would have been carried by messenger or letters rather than by anyone engaged in the fighting but any such documents are lost to us. Knighton may have written his account sometime after the engagement but, again, we do not know if he spoke to eye witnesses or drew his information from others or from documents that may have reached him in Leicester.

As noted above, Wyntoun was ignorant of the source of the account of Otterburn that was sent to him. Similarly as noted, Bower seems to have been unaware of Wyntoun's work but may have shared unknown sources as there are similarities in the accounts. Hardyng was writing much later but as a member of the Percy household would almost certainly have heard many accounts as a boy, although these are likely to have been biased in favour of his master. The extent to which his recollection may be considered accurate must also be questionable so many years later when he was living in a Lincolnshire priory.

Extent of Knowledge

Medieval battles were chaotic affairs. In most cases an individual combatant had little or no opportunity to pay attention to anything other than the action in his immediate vicinity. Any knowledge of action in the wider area of the battle would have been second hand at best. For Otterburn we must also consider a factor which is not entirely clear – the time and date of the battle. Ordinarily the date of a battle has no special significance for the action itself. In the case of Otterburn this is different when combined with the time of the English attack.

Several sources tell us that Hotspur launched his attack at the end of the day as the Scots were preparing to settle down for the night. The *Orygynale Cronykil* recounts that the Scots had put on long gowns and some were still eating their meat when they were warned of the attack and states specifically that the battle began at sundown and went on through the night. The *Scotichronicon* recounts this similarly '... they were dressed,

unarmed in gowns and long robes, ready for feasting on the day of St Oswald. As they reclined at table a certain Scot came to them, sitting on a saddled horse, calling frantically to all to fly to arms “because our enemies are speeding upon us”. At this voice all jumped up from their supper, and flew to put on their armour ...’. The chronicle goes on to say that Douglas launched his attack on the English flank ‘shortly before sundown’ and that in due course as the English fled the field the Scots pursued them ‘throughout the night’.

On the English side, the Westminster Chronicle records ‘But Sir Henry Percy was so rash as to make his assault about the time of Vespers ...’ In the medieval period Vespers was generally celebrated at sunset to mark the end of the day. Knighton simply recounts that the battle was fought ‘in the evening’. Froissart supports this with ‘While the Scots were sitting over supper ... suddenly the English fell upon their encampment’. Having established the time of the first attack as being at or about sunset we must combine this with the date. There are two schools of thought on this.

Froissart is clear – he states simply that ‘I was told by those on the Scottish side that the battle fought between Newcastle and Otterburn on 19th August 1388, ...’. His record with dates, however, is not always reliable. Of those other sources which give dates both Bower and Hardyng give St Oswald’s Day – 5th August – as the date. Knighton gives the same date in a roundabout reference to St Lawrence’s Day. The monk of Westminster gives no date but has 12th August as the date of the Scottish invasion which fits better with the 19th as the date for the battle.

Set alongside these are the public records. At a council-general held at Linlithgow the earl of Fife is recorded as having obtained letters patent transferring properties to him consequent upon the death of the late earl Douglas. The date of the meeting and of the letters patent are dated 18th August. This clearly suggests a date earlier than 19th August for the battle of Otterburn with sufficient time for the earl of Fife to have returned from his role in the invasion in the area around Carlisle.

In the English records the Calendar of Close Rolls records Richard II’s proclamation of 13th August that ‘lords, knights etc. are to meet him at the end of August to resist the invasion of the Scotch’ and his further notice dated 20th August that these should now ‘wait at home ... as the king has particular

information that the Scots have now newly withdrawn out of the realm'. While not conclusive it seems improbable that news of a Scots invasion on 12th August as given by the monk of Westminster could have reached Westminster by the 13th or that news of a Scots victory at Otterburn on the 18th and withdrawal home on the 19th could have reached Westminster by the 20th.

The importance of the date is this. Fifth August 1388 was one day before a new moon – i.e. no moon at all. On 19th August 1388 the moon was one day before the full moon. Sunset on the 19th would have been at 19:51 and Civil Twilight would have ended at 20:34. On the 5th sunset would have been at 20:21 and Civil Twilight would have ended at 21:10. These times take account of the fact that the dates quoted in the primary sources would have been quoted according to the Julian calendar which, in 1388, was eight days behind the Gregorian calendar which the UK has used since the 18th century. The times are given as Greenwich Mean Time. Modern astronomical definitions of 'twilight' (the period immediately after sunset) split it into three categories – civil, nautical and astronomical – depending on the angle of the sun in relation to the horizon. During civil twilight, in clear conditions, there is still enough natural light to see and distinguish objects. During nautical twilight, in clear conditions, the human eye can distinguish only general outlines of objects at ground level. During astronomical twilight it is, for all practical purposes, dark. The length of these phases varies by date and latitude. At Otterburn in August civil twilight lasts about 40 minutes followed by about 60 minutes of nautical twilight and then astronomical twilight / full darkness.

Froissart states that the battle of Otterburn was fought under moonlight, consistent with his dating of 19th August and that the weather was 'fine and cloudless'. Calculating accurate moonrise dates in the distant past is near impossible because of the many variables involved and the timing is not consistent year by year in the same month and can vary widely. Modern calculations published by NASA on its web site indicate that moonlight, at its best, is about 400,000 times fainter than sunlight. It also drains colour from human vision and blurs objects. None of the other chronicles mentions the moonlight and it may be that this is one of Froissart's 'enhancements' to improve the story.

Historians have failed to reach a clear consensus on the question date. Some favour the 19th on the basis of Froissart's account

and reference to the moonlight. Others favour the 5th by reference to the chroniclers who name St Oswald's day. Sir William Fraser writing in 1885 chooses 12th August as being a Wednesday (as mentioned by Knighton) and as having a moon since this would then, he believes, fit better with the meeting of the Scottish council-general on the 18th. On balance, a date earlier than the 19th seems most probable.

All of this tells us that we must be very careful of attaching too much weight to the fine detail of the chronicle accounts, especially Froissart's. None of the witnesses can be treated as genuinely first-hand unless there is clear evidence that they could or did witness events themselves, given the limitations as set out above. In most cases their evidence is likely to have been hearsay with all of the weaknesses implied by that.

Language

Next, there is the question of language. In Froissart's case his Gascon sources would have spoken French (Froissart's native tongue) as a second language to their native language, some form of Gascon. Froissart makes a point of the Count of Foix speaking to him in good French during his long stay at Orthez rather than his native tongue but we have no way of knowing if this quality of French also applied to the two squires who informed him of the action at Otterburn. Similarly, with the Scots at Avignon there is a language issue. French was the *lingua franca* of the chivalric classes but either the Scots (more likely) or Froissart were speaking in a second language and we have no way of knowing how proficient they were. In addition, we have no way of knowing whose words we read in Froissart's account. Did he reproduce what he had been told word-for-word or did he write in his own words from notes taken of the conversations? Taken together these points must cause us to be careful in placing too much emphasis on specific wording.

The English monastic chronicles (Walsingham, Westminster & Knighton) were written in Latin. To the extent that they used official written sources these may have been written in Latin or French but were unlikely to be in the vernacular English of the day. Conversations would not have been in Latin. This interposes a translation issue which clouds our knowledge of what exactly they read or heard.

Finally, it must be noted that both The Orygynal Cronykil and Hardyng's work are written in verse. This raises the issue of the

extent to which the author has chosen specific words to fit the metre and rhyming scheme rather than as a particular description of the events under consideration or a faithful reflection of what he read or was told.

Bias

Chroniclers were not disinterested observers or recorders of events. Each of them wrote for an audience. At the most basic level we can expect the English and Scottish authors to favour their own nation. Beyond that they all had personal views and patrons and factions that needed to be taken account of.

Perhaps the clearest example comes from the contrasting view of the two main contemporary chroniclers, Walsingham and the monk of Westminster. They are likely to have gathered their information from similar sources but portray the battle in very different terms. The Westminster Chronicle records 'The calamity that befell our countrymen on this occasion at Otterburn was due in the first place to the heady spirit and excessive boldness of Sir Henry Percy, which caused our troops to go into battle in the disorder induced by haste ...' whereas Walsingham relates that '... the Scots who had been humiliated by this disgrace which they had experienced, fled from England ... And so the whole kingdom through the virtue of one man, Henry, captured though he was, had been set completely free from fear and from the Scots'.

Summary

In looking at the chronicle sources for Otterburn we must bear all of the above in mind and recognise that what we can reconstruct from the various accounts may be no more than a general impression of what actually happened. In looking at the most granular level we must remain aware that we do not know whose words we are reading – those of the informants (in person or via documents) or those of the author interpreting what he has read or been told.

Working together the volunteers produced a summary of their reading of the primary sources, which is attached as a part of the Appendix in the spring of 2019. This broadly follows the research protocol and is colour-coded by source.

It was not expected that this exercise, *per se*, would throw any new light on to our understanding of the battle at this point prior to the proposed archaeological investigations. These sources have been considered by generations of antiquarians and distinguished historians. The prime purpose of the exercise was to give the volunteers a good understanding of the material available to these later writers so as to enable the volunteers

to see how it has been used and interpreted and to assist them in judging the merits of the various accounts (which are not entirely consistent with each other) and to form their own view as to the most likely narrative of the events of 1388.

Secondary Sources

The battle of Otterburn has been considered by generations of antiquarians and historians and it would be impractical to review everything that has been written. Geoffrey Carter and John Sadler created a comprehensive but manageable reading list of key secondary sources which is attached as a part of the Appendix.

At the same time, volunteers were asked to focus on certain key aspects of the battle which have proven to be areas of disagreement between writers :

1. Date and time of the battle
2. Site of the battle / original site of the Percy Cross
3. Site of the Scottish camp
4. Nature of the Scottish camp – one in two parts or two camps?
5. Nature of English attack – deployment of forces / splitting of forces
6. Was there an English flanking attack?
7. Nature of the Scottish flanking attack ?
8. Casualties / Elsdon burials discovered in 19th century.

An initial meeting was held in November 2019 and an initial selection of books and texts from the reading list was distributed. These were :

Classic / Older Works

White – History of the Battle of Otterburn

De Fonblanque – Annals of the House of Percy

Burne – The Battlefields of England

Addleshaw – The Battle of Otterburn

Modern Works

Boardman – Hotspur

Armstrong – Otterburn 1388

Sadler – Border Fury

Following the Christmas break a follow-up meeting was to be held in early 2020 but this never happened due to the arrival of COVID-19. The volunteers were offered several opportunities to carry on remotely via Zoom but indicated that they did not wish to do this. This part of the project thus stalled at that point. It was not restarted until September 2021 by which time the archaeological work had been completed.

Archaeology

During the development phase it was decided that it was prudent to commission a scoping study to ascertain the viability of recovering artefacts from a battle fought in the late 14th century. Battlefield archaeology is a specialist area of field archaeology. The methodology essentially involves metal detecting utilising an approach based on experience built up over a number of years. The standard work on this topic is *The Archaeology of English Battlefields* The Council for British Archaeology 2012 by Dr Glenn Foard and Professor Richard Morris. As Dr Foard had worked with the Trust on a number of projects, most notably the project which had located the true site of the battle of Bosworth (1485) where Richard III had been defeated by Henry Tudor, later Henry VII, it was agreed to ask him to lead a scoping study together with Dr Tracey Partida, a landscape archaeologist, who had worked with Dr Foard at Bosworth. Despite some limitations as to areas which might be usefully investigated fully it was concluded that such investigations would be worthwhile. It was also recommended that a detailed landscape archaeological study of the area would greatly improve the understanding of the landscape at the time of the battle and thus enhance the study of the sources and provide essential information when deciding where to target the field archaeology investigations.

Following the approval of the final project proposals by the National Lottery Fund for Heritage, Dr Foard was appointed as supervising archaeologist to the project and Dr Partida was commissioned to undertake a detailed landscape archaeological survey of the battlefield and surrounding area. The arrangements for the archaeological work were supervised by Karen Collins, Heritage & Engagement Officer for RR.

Landscape Archaeology

Following a period of research with assistance from the Trust members involved with the project, Dr Partida submitted her final report in September 2020 and this is attached as a part of the Appendix. Within the report Dr Partida reconstructed as far as was possible from available sources the landscape surrounding Otterburn in the pre-modern period. In particular her work on the course and early fords of the river Rede gave valuable insights into the possible routes of troop movement in the landscape at the time of the battle.

Field Archaeology

The programme of field archaeology was originally scheduled to take place in the summer of 2020. Due to Covid-19 this was postponed to the summer of 2021. In preparation for the fieldwork the results of the landscape investigation were considered alongside a close reading of the primary sources to determine the best places in which to seek artefacts.

The key points under consideration were the location of the battlefield and the Scottish camp(s), the nature of the initial English attack(s) and the Scottish response – very much the same points as set out for the review of secondary sources. This reading of the primary sources was summarised as follows and should be read in the context of the comments on the use of chronicle sources above.

1 The site of the Scottish Camp

Froissart:

A la parole du conte de Douglas se accorderent tous les autres, tant pour leur honneur que pour l'amour de luy, car c'estoit le plus grant de toute la route,

A la parole du conte de Douglas s'accordèrent tous les autres tant pour leur honneur que pour l'amour de luy ; car c'estoit le plus grant de toute la route,

Every one agreed to what earl Douglas had said; for it was not only honorable, but he was the principal commander; and from affection to him,

All of the others gave in to the Earl of Douglas, both for their own honour and out of regard for him, for he was greatest among them.

et se logierent bien et à paix, car nulz ne leur devoit, et firent grant foyson de logeys d'arbres et de fueilles et se fortiffierent et enclouyrent saigement

et se logièrent bien et à paix : aussi nuls ne leur devoit. Si firent grant foison de logeis d'arbres et de fueillies , et là se fortifièrent et encloient bien et saigement

they quietly returned to their quarters. They made huts of trees and branches, and strongly fortified themselves.

They settled down comfortably and peacefully, no one hindering them. And built a large number of shelters from trees and leaves. They protected themselves by making skilful use

d'uns grans marescaiges qui la sont, et a l'entree et a l'entree de ces marescaiges, le chemin de Neufchastel, ilz logierent leurs varlèz et leurs sommaiges, et

de ungs grans marescages qui là sont , et, à l'entrée de iceulx marescages , le chemin du Neuf-Chastel passé, ils logièrent et misrent leurs varlets et leurs sommaiges , et

They placed their baggage and servants at the entrance of the marsh on the road to Newcastle,

of some big marshes which are there. On the way in between these marshes, on the Newcastle side, they quartered their serving-men and foragers.

mistrent tout leur bestial dedens les marescaiges, et puis firent ouvrer et appareiller grans atournemens d'assaulx pour assaillir a l'endemain; telle estoit

tout leur bestail' dedens ces marescages , et puis firent ouvrer et appareillier très-grans atournemens d'assauls pour assaillir à l'endemain , et telle estoit

and the cattle they drove into the marsh lands.

They placed all their cattle in the marshland. Then they made great preparations to assault the castle again on the next day, for such was

leur entencion.

leur intention.

their intention.

Key :

Froissart MS Besançon 865 : Transcription : The Online Froissart Project

Tr. K de Lettenhove 1871

Tr. T Johnes 1806

Tr. G. Brereton 1968

Other Sources:

None of the other primary sources gives any information about the site of the Scottish camp.

Analysis

This is the only section of any of the surviving sources that gives specific topographical information about the battlefield. It is a part of Froissart's account that is least likely to have been affected by any questions as to the date / time of the engagement as the Scottish camp had been constructed long before the English arrived. It may also be assumed that Froissart's informants for this information were the Gascon squires he met at Orthez who would have most likely been involved in the making of the camp either directly or in a supervisory role.

There are various elements to be considered :

i) The reference to some sort of wet ground (*uns grans marescaiges*). Froissart makes three mentions of *marescaiges* in his account of Otterburn. All of the references are plural, including 'uns grans marescaiges' which uses a peculiar Middle French construct of a plural form of the indefinite article. '*Marescaiges*' appears in various parts of Froissart's chronicle and in many other documents of the late medieval period. Elsewhere in his works he uses the term '*marais*', the contemporary word for a single marsh. Both words survive with the same general meaning in modern French and the difference between the two is not always clear. The 1762 edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* has for *marécage* (the modern spelling) '*une terre dont le fond est humide et bourbeux comme le sont les marais*' – 'ground which is wet and muddy like marshes'.

As noted before, we do not know if *marescaiges* is a word used by his informants who may have been speaking in a second language or a stylistic choice by Froissart himself. Overall, we can read this as referring to a large area of ground which was wet and muddy but whether this was a 'marsh' as we would understand it today is not at all clear. It seems unlikely that the Scots would have placed horses and livestock in an area of deep water however.

ii) The road to Newcastle (*le chemin de Neufchastel*). In an accompanying paper (Otterburn Routes – see below) we concluded that the route taken home by the Scots most likely followed the old Roman road of Dere Street to

Chew Green. We know that there was a road / track which led from Otterburn to Carter Bar. The likely route home diverged from the modern / turnpike route (now the A696) over Carter Bar some three miles to the west of Otterburn near to Horsley, thus outside of the area under investigation. At the time of the battle the Newcastle road / track before that divergence would have followed the general route of the modern road and we can reasonably assume that it is this which is referenced in the account although we are aware that the old road was straightened in the vicinity of Greenchesters Farm (the probable site of the entrance to the Scottish camp) when the turnpike was created to avoid crossing and recrossing the river as is shown on older maps.

iii) The relationship of the Newcastle road to the area of marshy ground. The Middle French is unclear. De Lettenhove added the word *passé* in his 19th century French translation presumably to clarify this. Of the many modern meanings of this verb, 'traverse' or 'cross' seems more likely than 'pass' as in '*passer le pont* : to cross the bridge' or '*passer la frontière* : to cross the border'. Consultation with modern French native speakers suggests a reading that describes the road passing through the area of marshy ground. They confirm that it remains ambiguous however.

iv) The nature and location of the camp itself. We are told that they built a great number (*foison*) of structures from trees and bushes '*et se fortiffierent et enclouyrent d'uns grans marescaiges qui la sont, et a l'entree et a l'entree* (the duplication is in the original manuscript and has been accepted by scholars as a scribal error) *de ces marescaiges, le chemin de Neufchastel, ilz logierent leurs varléz et leurs sommaiges, et mistrent tout leur bestial dedens les marescaiges*'. The use of *enclouyrent* may be significant. In Middle French this can mean 'enclosed themselves in a manner to prevent access' which does not come across in the English translations quoted. This suggests perhaps that the camp was in the midst of the wet ground, but presumably not in a marsh and not necessarily on the road itself. We must again, however, be cautious in reading too much into single choices of word.

Following on, Froissart records that the Scots lodged *leurs varléz et leurs sommaiges* at the entry point of the marshy ground which had some relationship to the Newcastle road. 'Varlets' is a common term for a servant or a knight's young page. It does not have the derogatory connotation that has crept into some more modern useage. '*Sommaiges*' in Middle French specifically refers to those in charge of the pack animals used to carry supplies and equipment – i.e. non combatants and probably not 'foragers' as translated by Brereton. The reference to the road, as noted above, is unclear and this may suggest that this servants' camp was established at the point where the road met the marshy ground. This is followed by the information that they placed their beasts within the marshy area which

suggests that the ground was not so wet as to be unsuitable for animals to be kept. Nothing is said specifically to indicate two separate camps, only that the non-combatants were near the entrance : *'des logeys des varléz qui estoient a l'entrée'*. Similarly, Froissart says nothing more than already noted about the location of the main part of the camp.

2 The English Attacks

The sources diverge on the nature of the English attacks. Froissart makes no mention of an English flanking attack. He only records that the English first attacked the part of the encampment that housed the servants :

Ainsi que les Escocs seoyent au souper et que les plusieurs s'estoient ja couchié pour reposer, car ilz avoient travaillié le jour a l'assaillir le chastel et se vouloyent lever matin pour assaillir a la froidure, et veéz cy venir les Angloys sur leur logeys, et cuidierent les Angloys de premiere venue en entrant en leurs logeys, que des logeys des varléz qui estoient a l'entree, ce feussent les maistres.

Ainsi que les Escots séoient au souper , et que les plusieurs estoient jà couchiés pour reposer (car ils avoient traveillié le jour en assaillant le chastel et se vouloient lever matin pour assaillir à la froidure) veés-cy venir les Anglois sur leurs logeis, et bien cuidièrent les Anglois de première venue , en entrant en leurs logeis , que des logeis des varlets qui à l'entrée estoient, ce feussent des maistres

As the Scots were supping, some indeed were gone to sleep, for they had labored hard during the day, at the attack of the castle, and intended renewing it in the cool of the morning, the English arrived, and mistook, at their entrance, the huts of the servants for those of their masters.

While the Scots were sitting over supper – though many had already gone to bed, for they had had a hard day attacking the castle and meant to get up early to assault it again in the cool of the morning – suddenly the English fell upon their encampment. When they first came to it, they mistook the quarters of the servants, near the entrance, for those of the masters

Froissart MS Besançon 865 : Transcription : The Online Froissart Project

Tr. K de Lettenhove 1871

Tr. T Johnes 1806

Tr. G. Brereton 1968

The Scots are preparing to sleep as they plan an early start to make a further assault on Otterburn Tower in the cool of the August morning *'se vouloyent lever matin pour assaillir a la froidure'*, and mistook the servants' camp at the entrance for the main camp (*'que des logeys des varléz qui estoient a l'entree, ce feussent les maistres'*).

Several of the other sources record that Percy divided his forces and sent a part to attack the Scottish in the rear. None of these sources gives any information as to the route of this attack or whether it was on the right or left flank of Percy's army. These are the ones that make mention of this manoeuvre:

Westminster Chronicle

At length the Scots withdrew pitched their tents some little way off. Their plan, I may say, was that their main strength should fall back and deliver an assault from behind to cut off our rear. Against them our people had thought out a similar plan: Sir Henry Percy was to make a frontal attack with his troops while Sir Matthew Redmayne, joined by other commanders, was to take the enemy in the rear, so that by this stratagem the whole Scottish army would be thrown into confusion and victory would be won.

...

But on the enemy's other side Sir Matthew Redmayne fought a very different battle. After reconnoitring the Scots he delivered an assault so resolute that they ignominiously turned tail and he gave orders for every man of them to be killed with no quarter given except to those who could pay 100 marks for their helmets.

Hardyng's Chronicle

He sent the lorde syr Thomas Vmfreuyle, His brother Robert, & also sir Thomas Grey, sir Mawe Redmayn beyond the Scottes that whyle, To holde them in they fled not away ;

He sent the lord Sir Thomas Umfraville, his brother Robert and also Sir Thomas Grey and Sir Matthew Redmayne beyond the Scots at the same time to prevent them from fleeing; (Geoffrey Carter translation)

Scotichronicon

Henry Percy found that his men were crowded together, so he divided his army into two, He led one part himself, with Ralph Percy, his brother; the other part he entrusted to the lords Maurice Redmane and Robert Ogle, to destroy the pavilions and tents. The arrival of the English increased the hubbub amongst the Scots, who took to flight, keenly pursued by Redmayne and Ogle.

The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland

Thai saw thare fais nere cumand Owte oure a bra downe awaland, That delt ware in batallis twa :

They saw their enemies (*fais – cf foes*) coming near over rising ground (*a bra – cf brow*), riding quickly down the hill (*awaland – cf French avaler : to go or swoop down*). They were in two battles :

The Percy had the mast off tha ;

Percy had the larger part of them.

The tothir rowte, that by thame rade,

The other company that rode with them

Schyr Mawe off the Redmane and Ogill hade.

included Sir Matthew Redmane and Sir Robert Ogle.

That had ordanyd the Percy

Percy had ordered

Wyth all thame off his company

all members of his own company

To mete the Erle, gyve he wald fycht :

to confront the Earl, if he would fight.

The tothir rowt than ryde suld rycht

The other force (*rowt*) should ride directly (*rycht*)

Till the pavillownys, and thare Qwhen the gret rowte fechtand ware, Destroy and sla all that thai fand.

to the Scots tents and there, when the main army was fighting, destroy everything and kill everyone that they found there.

(Geoffrey Carter translation)

Analysis

There is no easy explanation as to why Froissart does not mention this two-pronged attack. It might be expected that his informants from both sides would have had some awareness of this. He does go on later to write at great length about the exploits of Sir Matthew Redmayne and might have been expected to include an heroic attack on the rear of the Scottish camp. It may be put down to the problems mentioned above in terms of who was able to see what or it may be that it simply did not occur, as some historians have concluded.

The two Scottish chronicles may have derived from a common source, as previously noted. Hardyng's account was written many years later. The Westminster Chronicle is believed to be contemporary and to have had access to current reports of one type or another. This remains an unresolved issue amongst historians.

If we follow Froissart's account then the English make their attack at the entrance to the camp and surprise the Scots. This suggests that they had not been seen as they approached. We are told by the Scotichronicon that Percy had 'found that his men were crowded together'. The Westminster Chronicle records '... Sir Henry Percy was so rash ... without on this occasion drawing up his troops in battle formation'. This suggests a somewhat undisciplined approach with the forces moving forward out of any proper formation. It has been suggested by many, the Scots camp was in the vicinity of the modern Greenchesters Farm to the west of Otterburn, the land may have played a role in keeping them unseen in poor light. A.H. Burne (*The Battlefields of England Penguin 2002*) describes the landscape exactly as it remains today with a slight ridge running up from the Rede to the higher ground to the north and with the modern Visitor Area / Percy Cross in the centre of it, some 500 yards from Greenchesters. If the Scots camp were at the level of the road, the English would not be visible until they were past this ridge on the western side. This correlates with the Orygynal Cronykil saying that '*Thai saw thare fais nere cumand Owte oure a bra downe awaland*'. If the main part of the camp were at a higher level on the slope at Greenchesters they should have been able to see the English sooner. However, this (as all of the many variants proposed by historians over the years) is entirely speculative and must be read with all of the caution previously mentioned.

If, for these purposes, we accept that the English did mount some form of flanking attack to get behind the Scots camp there is little evidence of the route taken.

There are two possible references. The Orygynal Cronykil tells us that the English were split into two battles with Percy having the larger part.

*The Percy had the mast off tha ;
The tothir rowte, that by thame rade,
Schyr Mawe off the Redmane and Ogill hade.
That had ordanyd the Percy
Wyth all thame off his company
To mete the Erle, gyve he wald fycht :
The tothir rowt than ryde suld rycht
Till the pavillownys, and thare Qwhen the gret rowte fechtand ware, Destroy and sla
all that thai fand.*

The main question is how to read the word '*rycht*'. It appears throughout the Cronykil with multiple meanings and specialist dictionaries of Scots use in the late medieval period shows it to be a word with many different meanings dependent on context, for example :

A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (up to 1700)

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Richt, Rych(t, *adj.* Also: **richte, right, ryght, ricth, rycth, riche; ruychte; reycht; (riht)**).

[ME and e.m.E. *riht(e), riȝt(e), riȝht*, OE *reht, riht, ryht*, ON *réttir*.]

- I. 1. Straight; not curved, twisting or crooked.
 - b. Of a route or course: Direct; taking the shortest way between two points. Also *absol.* = the direct way.
 - c. Of a blow: ? Well-aimed.
 - d. Of lineage or descent: Direct, (hence) legitimate. Also in *fig.* context.
- II. 2. *The richt gat or way*, the correct and moral way to achieve eternal life. **b.** The correct way to *do* anything. Cf. 1 b above.
 3. Properly pertaining or belonging to a person. Chiefly, of a person's name.
 4. Of behaviour, an action, etc.: In accordance with the principles of justice or equity; just, good.
 5. That is correct when set against some accepted standard, set of beliefs, etc.; in agreement with the facts; true. For further instances of (3) below, see **JUDGE** *n.* 1.
 - b. Of belief: Orthodox, true.
 6. That is suitable or correct in the prevailing circumstances; fitting; appropriate.
 7. Of a person's mind: Sound; normal; whole. *In* (one's) *richt wit (mynd)*, sane.
 - b. With a person as subject: *To be richt in* (one's) *wit (wits)*, to be sane.
 8. Of a person: Virtuous; just in judgment; righteous. *To mak rycht*, to justify. Cf. **RICHTWIS** *adj.* 4. —
 9. Of a material thing: In a good condition; flawless.
- III. 10. Lawful, rightful; legitimate.
 11. That is properly or correctly so called; genuine, veritable, real. **a.** Of a person. **b.** Of a non-material thing. **c.** Of a material thing or of an animal.
 - d. Not pretended or assumed.
 - IV. 12. *Richt hand*, the hand on the right side of the body. *To give ... the richt hand of fellowship*, to hold a person's right hand in one's own as a token of sincerity and comradeship. Also *attrib.*
 - b. *lit.* and *fig.* *On (upon, at)* (a person's) *richt hand*, to his right; on the right.
 13. Of other parts of the body on the right-hand side.
 - b. *On (apon, in)* (the, one's) *richt half (sid)*, on the right-hand side.
 - c. *Rycht wing*, the right-hand side of an army.

Thus, it can be seen as indicating that the attack should ride on the right flank to the pavilions or that it should ride straight / directly to the pavilions. In addition, we must allow that this is a verse chronicle based on a source unknown even to Wyntoun and the choice of word may have been dictated by the need to fit the rhyming scheme. It is uncertain how precise we can take this to be.

The other reference comes in the Westminster Chronicle as quoted above where we are told 'on the enemy's other side Sir Matthew Redmayne fought a very different battle'. This is imprecise and may simply refer to his assault as having come from behind the Scots.

Most historians have concluded that any English flanking attack must have been on the right due to the proximity of the Rede but our better understanding of the landscape may negate that argument. However, an attack on the left would have been on low, open ground which was possibly 'marshy' in the sense described above and would potentially have been easier for the Scots to see depending on the time and available light. The problem with an attack on the right is related to the counter-attack of the Scots once alerted to the English and will be considered alongside that.

3 The Scottish Flanking Attack

Several chronicles record the Scottish response to the English attack.

Froissart:

En celle ordonnance que je vous dy se mistrent les Escocs, et, quant ilz se furent tous recueilliz et mis ensemble, sans sonner mot ilz se departirent de leur logeys;

En celle ordonnance que je vous di, se misrent les Escots, et quant ils se furent tous recueilliés et mis ensemble, sans mot sonner, ils partirent de leurs logeis

When the Scots were quite ready and properly arrayed, they left their camp in silence,

When the Scots had formed up noiselessly in the order I have described, they left their encampment.

et ne prindrent point le chemin en alant tout droit devant eulx pour venir ens ou visaige des Angloys, mais coustierent les marescaiges et une montaigne qui la estoit.

et ne prindrent point le chemin en alant tout droit devant euls pour aborder au visage des Anglois, ainchois costoièrent les marescages. et une montaigne qui là estoit,

but did not march to meet the English. They skirted the side of a mountain which was hard by;

Instead of advancing directly ahead to meet the English face to face, they skirted round the marshes and a hill which was there.

Froissart MS Besançon 865 : Transcription : The Online Froissart Project

Tr. K de Lettenhove 1871

Tr. T Johnes 1806

Tr. G. Brereton 1968

Scotichronicon

But when the part led by Percy was waiting for the fugitive Scots, and was rejoicing at the prospect of their flight, the Earl of Douglas got his best men to mount their horses and advance unseen through thickets and thorn brakes. They approached the field unseen by the English and suddenly burst out near the English line.

The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland

Wyth this the Erle Jamys wes passand

Meanwhile Earl James was moving

Towart his fayis the nerrast way,

toward his enemies by the nearest / quickest route

Qwhare buskis ware, as I herd say,

where there were bushes (*buskis*), as I heard say,

Qwhare Inglis men saw noucht his cummyng ; For thai had welle mare behaldyng

and where the English did not see him coming because they were watching

To Scottis comownys, that they saw fley.

the Scots common / inferior soldiers (*comonwnys*) fleeing.

And qwhen thai had a lytill wey | Behaldane the folk, that fleand was,

And when they had watched the soldiers fleeing a little way,

Schyr Jamys than Off Dowglas

Sir James Douglas

Wes passyd the buskis, and suddanly

had passed the bushes and suddenly

He boltyd wp welle nere hand thame by Wyth twelff displayid baneris, or ma.

he bolted / rushed up very close to them with twelve banners or more unfurled

(Geoffrey Carter translation)

Froissart records earlier that Douglas had prepared for an English attack on his camp and had planned a response taking account of the landscape. When the time came Froissart relates that his force *'ne prindrent point le chemin en alant tout droit devant eulx pour venir ens ou visaige des Angloys, mais*

coustierent les marescaiges et une montaigne qui la estoit – literally, that they did not ‘take the way straight ahead in front of them to get into the face of the English’. ‘Chemin’ translates as path / way / route / road and does not necessarily imply the Newcastle road but may simply be a means of expressing that they did not attack the English directly. This needs to read in the context of Froissart’s account that has no mention of an English flanking attack. Thus according to his version of events, at the point where the Scots are alerted to the arrival of the English and are ready to counter-attack, the front ranks of the English under Percy’s leadership are already in the camp attacking the servants.

Other chronicles speak of Percy fighting in the Scottish camp. Walsingham says that ‘Douglas ... saw ... Henry Percy inside his camp and eagerly spurred his horse against him’. The monk of Westminster says ‘... Sir Henry Percy ... by a heroic effort he dispatched the earl of Douglas in his own tent’. Neither of the Scottish accounts makes mention of Percy and Douglas fighting in the camp. The English accounts, as noted, may reflect common sources and the general lack of consensus may be due to the various problems mentioned above when considering the problems of chronicle sources.

Of the Scots response to the English attack, Froissart tells us that they *‘coustierent les marescaiges et une montaigne qui la estoit* – literally, that they ‘went along the side of the marshy ground and a hill (there are no mountains in Redesdale) that was there’. We are also told in the Scotichronicon that the Scots went ‘unseen through thickets and thorn brakes’ and by the Orygynal Cronykil that they went

‘Qwhare buskis (bushes) ware, as I herd say,
Qwhare Inglis men saw noucht his cummyng’

If Froissart is to be believed this might suggest that the point of the Scots attack into the right flank of the English was into part of the body of soldiers following Percy who was already in the camp. If the camp was near to Greenchesters then this impact would have been somewhere between there and the modern Visitor Area.

The accounts of the engagement itself after the initial impact vary considerably and do not offer any detail as to locations. They are all subject the caveats already stated.

Returning to the English flanking attack mentioned by some, but not by Froissart, raises the question of both forces passing on the same side and not encountering each other. There is no clear explanation for this. Froissart does not mention it and thus there is no problem. Historians who have accepted the accounts in the other chronicles have concluded that the English must have made a wide sweep to the north of the ridge which runs

east from the top of the higher ground at Greenchesters. This, however, is speculation and has no evidence in the sources to support it.

If we take Burne's account as typical of these, he suggests a route of about 1.5 miles, equipped for battle, in the summer, in failing light through unfamiliar and possibly wooded ground. Unsurprisingly, there is no clear consensus amongst historians in the absence of any direct evidence.

In addition, the route taken by the armies from Newcastle to Otterburn were also reviewed to assist in the understanding of the site of the battle. This research was summarised in a short paper which is attached as part of the Appendix.

Following this work a detailed programme for the fieldwork was devised by Dr Foard and his formed the basis for a tender document issued via the Northumberland National Park authority to interested archaeological practices. The programme had two objectives – 1) to seek evidence for the medieval road which would assist in locating the site of the Scottish camp and 2) a programme of targeted metal detecting to seek artefacts that may have survived from the time of the battle. The contract was awarded to Wessex Archaeology. It was additionally agreed that Wessex would be supported by Sam Wilson, a specialist battlefield archaeologist recommended by Dr Foard. Sam Wilson is a trustee of the Battlefields Trust and has worked on a number of Trust projects.

In selecting the areas for investigation it is, of course, necessary to obtain the relevant permissions from landowners. In most cases this was achieved without difficulty. However, it proved impossible to secure permission to work on land close to Greenchesters farm which had been identified as of particular importance in seeking evidence of the Scottish camp. This required the revision of the targeted area for the fieldwork. At this point the project was contacted by Christopher Hunwicke, the archivist at Alnwick Castle. Both he and the Duke of Northumberland are long-time supporters of the Trust's work. Mr Hunwicke sent to the project a copy of a map which he had located in the archive which had been drawn by Sir David Smith in the early 19th century. Sir David was the then Duke of Northumberland's property manager following a distinguished career as a military surveyor, serving as Surveyor General for Upper Canada. Sir David's map shows the original site of the Percy Cross which was said to have marked the spot where James Douglas had fallen in the battle. The cross had been moved to its present location when the Newcastle Road was turnpiked in the late 18th century. This new information was incorporated into the plan for the metal detecting programme together with Dr Foard's revised recommendations for the work programme.

It was always intended that the archaeological component of the project would involve a group of local volunteers. Karen Collins of RR successfully recruited this group who took a full part in all aspects of the work during the two weeks of 9th to 20th August 2021. The volunteers received valuable training in both geophysical and

the specialist metal detecting techniques required for battlefield investigation as seen here:



The full report of the archaeological fieldwork is attached as a part of the Appendix.

At one level it may be thought disappointing that no definitive evidence was found to link the site to the battle of Otterburn. This, however, is unsurprising. The project budget only permitted a very brief and superficial investigation. The two weeks at Otterburn should be considered in the context of the five years' of full metal detecting seasons that were required to uncover the evidence at Bosworth. It must also be remembered that finding artefacts from medieval battlefields is especially difficult. At the end of a battle anything of use – weapons, armour, clothing, shoes etc. – would have been gathered up. These were expensive items and would not have been left behind. Thus, the most likely things to survive would be smaller broken pieces of weaponry, jewellery or the like. On top of this the soil condition and intervening agricultural practices will condition the likelihood of items surviving and after more the six hundred years it is entirely possible that items would have migrated to a depth beyond the reach of modern metal detectors due to the action of worms, especially if the land had not been deep ploughed in the intervening period. The two items which were found and which may date from the late medieval period – a belt buckle and a sword pommel – could have come from any time within a wide spread of years. Swords were commonly worn in the medieval period and fights were far from uncommon in an area that was constantly plagued by Scottish raiders throughout the medieval and early modern period. The principal

value of this aspect of the project has been the expertise and experience gained by local volunteers. A new Redesdale Archaeology Group has been established following this and the other archaeological work undertaken elsewhere in Redesdale and further work on the battlefield will be undertaken in due course.

Source Review – Part Two

Following the relaxation of Covid-19 regulations relating to meetings, the review of secondary sources was restarted in September 2020. The four volunteers remained keen to be involved although one had developed some health issues which restricted her involvement. Given the time lost and the decision not to seek an extension to the overall RR project delivery period it was necessary to revise the secondary reading list by concentrating on the following key texts only :

Classic / Older Works

White – History of the Battle of Otterburn

De Fonblanque – Annals of the House of Percy

Burne – The Battlefields of England

Addleshaw – The Battle of Otterburn

Modern Works

Boardman – Hotspur

Armstrong – Otterburn 1388

Sadler – Border Fury

Wesencraft – The Battle of Otterburn

Redesdale Society (Various) – The Battle of Otterburn

Tuck & Goodman (Ed.) – War and Border Societies in the Middle Ages

It was also decided to ask the volunteers to complete all of the reading and then to convene a series of meetings to work through the key points of the battle narrative that had been the points of difference in interpretation amongst historians. As previously noted, these were:

1. Date and time of the battle
2. Site of the battle / original site of the Percy Cross
3. Site of the Scottish camp
4. Nature of the Scottish camp – one in two parts or two camps?
5. Nature of English attack – deployment of forces / splitting of forces
6. Was there an English flanking attack?
7. Nature of the Scottish flanking attack ?
8. Casualties / Elsdon burials discovered in 19th century.

Date and Time of the Battle

As indicated above, the principal difference is between Froissart who states simply that the battle took place on 19th August and the majority of the other chronicle sources who put the date at 5th August. Robert White follows Froissart as does Colin Tyson in *War and Border Societies in the Middle Ages* on the basis that it would make no military sense to launch an attack on a moonless evening. He also feels that Froissart's informants would not have forgotten that the battle was fought by moonlight and must therefore have told him this. None of other sources mention the moonlight.

Alexander Grant, a Scottish historian, writing in the same volume, opts for the 5th on the basis of the Scottish record of a meeting to dispose of Douglas's property on 18th August. Others simply record that there is a difference of views as to the date.

Taking the Scottish record together with the entries in the Close Rolls mentioned above, we have concluded that 5th August is the more likely date and that the 'moonlight' is more likely to be one of Froissart's literary flourishes.

The time of the battle is of particular interest as Otterburn is one of very few medieval battles fought in the evening. Taking the date as 5th August and thus without the benefit of moonlight the time becomes even more significant.

That the battle was fought in the evening is clear from the primary sources as described previously. Modern writers differ as to the time that the fighting began. Boardman suggests that Hotspur arrived at "dusk" which he puts at 07.00 pm. Allowing for his preference for 19th August as the date of the battle, his time is simply wrong. If we take "dusk" in its common usage as meaning the period between sunset and night-time then he is out by at least an hour as sunset would have been much later as shown previously. He does, however, go on to acknowledge that the engagement may have started much later. The alternative view is summarised by Tyson who writes that "Battle was joined on the ridge just as darkness fell."

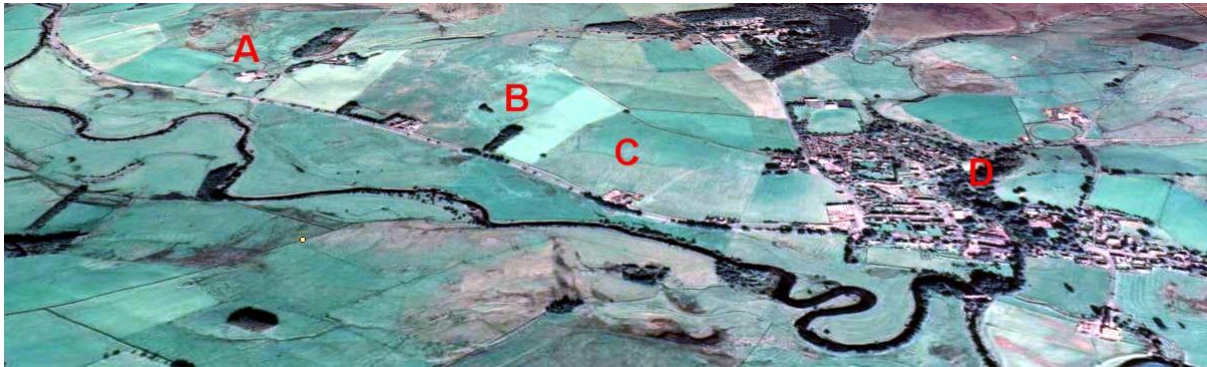
Within the project there were those who preferred an earlier start based on the time it would have taken the mounted contingent of the English to reach Otterburn and those who preferred the later timing based on the primary sources and the calculations of the time if sunset. It is unlikely that this question can ever be answered to everyone's satisfaction.

Site of the battle / original site of the Percy Cross

Frustratingly there is almost no information of value about the location of the battle in any of the primary sources beyond Froissart's statements about the siting of the camp where the Scots lodged their servants and livestock. It was felt at the outset of the project that locating the Scottish camp could be the key to placing the battle unambiguously where most historians believe it to have been fought – to the west of the modern village of Otterburn with the Scots encamped in the vicinity of Greenchesters Farm. The landscape and field archaeology undertaken was, however, unable to shed any further light on this topic.

Most modern writers have agreed that the site to the west of the village is the most likely location for the battle.

This is a 3D representation of that landscape :



Otterburn Landscape 3D Image by Geoffrey Carter

A = Greenchesters Farm **B** = Visitor Area/Percy Cross

C = Percy Cross Original Site **D** = the Otter Burn

As previously mentioned Otterburn is designated as a Registered Battlefield which means that it is included on the Register of Battlefields maintained by Historic England. There are various criteria for inclusion on the Register including a secure location. Historic England's guide to selection says *"To be registered, a battle's location must be securely identified. The nature of warfare is such that boundaries to an area of conflict are rarely precise. However, for inclusion in the Register the area where the troops drew up, deployed and fought while in battle formation must be capable of definition on the ground, and a reasonable boundary to this area must be defined. It is generally the case that the earlier a battle, the less the precision that can be offered in terms of where fighting took place; nevertheless, it remains a requirement for designation that a battle can be placed within a specific and particular topographical location with a fair degree of probability."* which indicates that they are satisfied with the generally agreed location for Otterburn.

Various other sites have been suggested by writers over the years and even modern writers have slightly varying views as to the exact location of the fighting within the registered area. One suggested site is Fawdon Hill near Elsdon which attracted attention due to the presence of presumed burial mounds. These have now been excavated as part of another Revitalising Redesdale project and the excavation report concluded *"With regard to the original motivation for this research, namely, testing Capn. Walton's theory concerning the location of the Battle of Otterburn and, specifically, the position of medieval military burials, it can be concluded that, since the burials alluded to are of likely bronze age origin and no remains of likely securely medieval date survive on the south side of Fawdon Hill, the field survey has not provided positive evidence in support of his theory."*

Of the other proposals the suggestion by Charles Wesenraft that the battle was fought close to Elsdon based on his reading of Froissart was looked at in detail. Wesenraft makes much of the fact that the original French manuscript of Froissart's *Chroniques* clearly states

that on the return journey from Newcastle into Redesdale an assault was made on the 'chastel de Comburch' after the previous assault at Ponteland. In this, Wesencraft is quite right. The transcription is not open to any alternative interpretation – the original French manuscript is thus :



The 'classic' 16th century English translation by Lord Berners treats this as an error and substitutes 'Otterburn'. The Penguin edition of the Chronicles by Geoffrey Brereton follows this. Most scholars prefer to work with the 19th century translation of Froissart into French by Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove. In his edition he follows the same practice. It would seem that the subsequent references to Otterburn have led them to assume that Froissart wrote the wrong name down and must have meant Otterburn. This is not entirely convincing. First, it seems an odd mistake to make given that he was generally familiar with Otterburn as a place / name. Second, he states Comburch to be eight English leagues from Newcastle. This is wrong if he means Otterburn but about right if he means Cambo. Clearly, however, there is some confusion. We know from Froissart that he drew his account from many conversations with both Scots and English veterans of the battle and thus may have received conflicting statements which he has not entirely resolved, being unfamiliar himself with the fine detail of the local geography. Perhaps, as Wesencraft believes, the Scots assaulted Cambo – there were two towers at Cambo. One was knocked down when the house at Wallington was built. The other eventually ended up in the 20th century as the village post office and is still there. Perhaps they assaulted Cambo and Otterburn. Perhaps the name of Cambo was mentioned as being on the route and he has conflated that with the assault on Otterburn. There is no clear explanation. Wesencraft supports his contention by adding that Otterburn Tower was not there in 1388. This seems to be wrong. What little we know from the surviving records indicate that Otterburn was a secondary manor of the Umfraville family whose principal residence was at Harbottle Castle from the beginning of the 13th century. It is mentioned in an undated *Inquisition Post Mortem* of Gilbert de Umfraville in 1245 and described as a 'capital messuage' in the *Inquisition Post Mortem* of his son, also Gilbert de Umfraville, in October 1307. The tower is also listed in a survey of 1415 as 'Tauris de Otiburne'. Beyond that we have little detail of the structure but the description 'capital messuage' suggests a residence of some substance.

Also to be taken into consideration is the location of the Percy Cross which is currently located in the Visitor Area to the west of the village. It is known that this was not the original site of the monument which was said to have been erected to mark the spot where the body of Earl James Douglas had been found after the battle. The monument was moved to its present location in the 18th century when the older road was replaced by the new turnpike. It is also known that the only part of the current monument to be ancient is the small collar which supports the upright which is said to be a lintel from the kitchens of Otterburn Hall.



Percy Cross

The original site of the cross was said by Robert White to have been 180 paces east of the present location based on conversation with a local man who had known the monument before the move. As noted above, during the course of the project Christopher Hunwick, the archivist at Alnwick Castle, sent a map drawn by Sir David Smith in the early 19th century showing a suggested original location. Sir David's map shows the original location as being slightly south of that suggested by White but in the same general area. While it is improbable that the Scots remained long enough to build a monument to Douglas or returned to do so in the aftermath of the battle it is not impossible that a rough cairn might have been left to mark the spot with something more permanent being constructed at a later date. The Historic England registration report makes the point " *The monument was already ancient when it was moved a short distance in 1777 and the tradition has long been that its siting was associated with an event in the battle, possibly marking the spot where the Earl of Douglas was killed. Locating a battlefield in the vicinity of a monument is one method of proceeding when documentary sources fail to provide firm guidance*".

Overall, the project found no compelling reason to differ from the generally held view as to the likely location of the battle. It is hoped that further archaeological investigation will prove possible in the future and that this may help to settle the location question.

Nature of the Scottish camp – one in two parts or two camps?

This question has exercised historians over the years. There is nothing clearly stated in the primary sources to indicate if there was a single Scottish camp, two camps – one for the servants and

mindings of the livestock, comprising horses and stolen cattle - or some variant of the two. Reading the secondary sources allowed the project to consider all of these options but it is impossible to come to a definitive conclusion. The view taken is that there were most probably two camps or a camp in two distinct sections on the basis of the analysis of the limited sources as set out above. The lower part of the camp, most probably astride the road from Otterburn in the vicinity of Greenchesters Farm would be the obvious place to hold livestock with its access to water and grazing while the fighting men and their leaders would have encamped on drier ground somewhere on the rising ground above Greenchesters from where they would have a clearer view of any approaching threat. This conforms to the view of White, Burne and most of the modern historians considered by the project although the suggestion by White that the Scots may have occupied a prehistoric camp site of the summit of the higher ground is not convincing.

Was there an English flanking attack? / Nature of the Scottish flanking attack.

The arguments surrounding these questions have been laid out above. Again, subsequent historians have differing views. The evidence for both the supposed English flanking attack and the nature of the Scottish response has been set and considered in detail out above. The conclusion of the project group is that an English flanking attack to the north is unlikely. The likely route would have been lengthy through unfamiliar wooded areas in failing light and there is the question of its relationship to the Scottish attack into the right flank of the English forces although there is a question of whether these two manoeuvres were contemporaneous. The group has concluded, in line with many historians, that the initial English attack was made by a section of the available forces riding directly into the Scottish camp without realising that they had chosen to attack the part of the camp set aside for the servants and livestock. This alerted Douglas and March who responded by sending men to meet the English while executing a prepared plan of a flanking attack behind the ridge to the north.

The fine detail of what transpired during and after the battle is only set out by Froissart. As a single source it must read and taken for what it is worth while always bearing in mind the generally accepted caveats that apply to Froissart's work.

Summary by the Supervising Battlefield Archaeologist

Looking at the totality of the work undertaken, Dr Glenn Foard, the project's supervising battlefield archaeologist writes :

"The historic landscape study sought to locate the handful of topographical details clearly defined by our analysis of the primary sources. This it appears to have done, though the evidence is based on early modern sources and has yet to be substantiated by work on late medieval documents that are more closely contemporary with the battle. Armstrong's county map of 1769 shows the main road from Newcastle running west from Otterburn to cross and then recross the Rede to the south west of modern Greenchesters. Immediately north east of the first crossing point, as far as the road route and contemporary river course can be accurately placed from such a small scale historic map, is the field name 'the bog'. This is presumably why the early road crossed and recrossed the river, to avoid the marshy ground. Then to the north of this is an area called the Holts, implying land use of woodland or scrub as indeed a part still remained in the late 18th century, lying on the steeply rising ground of the hill above modern Greenchesters. The lack of reference to the farm itself in the battle accounts is easily explained, for there was no farm here in the 14th century, because Greenchesters only moved to this location from a site over the top of the hill in the early modern period.

The research has thus revealed a remarkable combination of exactly the features which appear in the primary sources of the battle, lying in the correct topographical sequence across the landscape as far as the accounts explain. That is: a steep hill (the 'mountain' in Froissart, as English battlefield hills so often appear in continental sources); a name and mapped land use which seems to relate to open woodland or scrub on the slope of the hill, which is the sort of terrain beside a hill through which Froissart places the Scottish flanking attack; then below it, beside the river, is an area of boggy or marshy ground, which Froissart has protecting the Scottish camp where the road from Newcastle entered the marsh. Thus we have a combination of terrain features which could indeed have screened a Scottish camp from attack and obscured a Scottish counterattack. Moreover all these topographical features lie on the western edge of the area of medieval open fields as indicated by wide and curved ridge and furrow surviving on the ground and on modern aerial photography. This extended from the floodplain up to the top of the rise, where the great expanse of common on the higher ground began. It is in this area of former unenclosed arable fields that the Percy Cross originally stood, marking the traditional site of the battle. Where we have tentatively placed the cross site, based on the 19th century map, lies on a great headland between furlongs of the open field. Whether this headland, stretching from near West Townhead, marks the original line of the road is uncertain. But what is clear is that such open field, if in existence at the time of the battle, would have provided a broad, gently sloping and completely open landscape ideal for the sort of action in which Hotspur and Douglas engaged.

That the fieldwork failed to locate the road crossing the river may simply be due to the difficulty of accurately locating the route from a small scale map such as Armstrong's. The situation is further complicated by the high mobility of the Rede, which has both moved rapidly across the floodplain, abandoning a number of channels over the centuries. The failure to characterise and define the extent of 'the bog' was inevitable once access to Greenchesters land was denied. The failure of the detecting survey to recover any battle-related finds is even less of a surprise, given this battle was fought before the introduction of gunpowder artillery to the battlefield, for it is lead round-shot which was the principal artefact that allowed Bosworth to be located. All other battle-related finds at Bosworth were extremely rare and so locating any during a few days detecting was always going to be difficult. But this would be especially true where probably buried by alluvium on the floodplain, or by centuries of worm action on permanent pasture, where the ridge and furrow survives. That is why detecting on the more recently ploughed fields of Greenchesters was needed, for there the finds, if present, would have been more accessible because spread through the topsoil. Though even then locating them would have been a great challenge if so sparsely distributed as at Bosworth.

So, while the project has not provided any definitive archaeological proof as to where the battle was fought, the combination of a new analysis of the primary sources with a reconstruction of the historic terrain has provided strong support for the traditional site of the battle. Further research on early modern and late medieval written sources for the landscape may well demonstrate the presence of the key topographical features in 1388, and enable them to be more securely located. Future research on medieval open fields in Northumberland may also enable the date of the ridge and furrow to be more securely determined. With such clearer definition of the date and exact location of the key terrain features, and given appropriate access, then further archaeological fieldwork might have a far better chance of locating physical evidence for both the terrain and the battle."

Narrative Account

John Sadler has recently published a new book on the life of Sir Henry 'Hotspur' Percy (*Hotspur Sir Henry Percy & The Myth of Chivalry Pen & Sword 2022*) which includes a chapter on the battle of Otterburn. This chapter is reproduced in the Appendix by permission of the author. John Sadler is in the camp that favours the earlier start of the battle while recognising that the matter is not conclusively decided.

Future Work

Archaeology - There is scope for a greatly expanded archaeological investigation of the battlefield. Although the pilot study indicated that not all areas were likely to be productive in terms of metal detecting there are other areas where such work might usefully be undertaken subject to soil conditions including the land at Greenchesters if permission were to become available. This might also permit some further work on locating the medieval road surface. The project volunteers who have received training in battlefield metal detecting would be keen to undertake this work in due course under appropriate professional guidance.

Elsdon Burials – There is a 19th century account of human remains being unearthed during work on St Cuthbert's Church, Elsdon. The report of this published by the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club in 1882 is attached in the Appendix. Any burials associated with the battle of Otterburn would most probably be of English casualties and Elsdon was the only consecrated ground in Redesdale at that time. Very few of the dead who can be clearly associated with a named medieval battle have been found in England. The most prominent are the small number of skeletons found at Towton, the scene of a major battle of the Wars of the Roses in 1461. If the skeletons at Elsdon were to be examined and considered to be casualties of Otterburn this would be a find of national and international importance. The investigation of these burials was considered as a part of the Otterburn project but it was concluded that time and budgetary constraints would make it impossible. The church at Elsdon is a Grade I listed building and the exhumation of burials would require permissions from both Historic England and the Church of England. This was felt unlikely to be a swift process. In addition the costs of such an investigation might be substantial. The Battlefields Trust and the Northumberland National Park Authority intend to keep this matter under review and to investigate the feasibility of undertaking the necessary work. The Parochial Church Council at Elsdon is supportive of the desire to undertake this work.

The Battlefields Trust would like to thank all of those involved in this project - the staff of Revitalising Redesdale, the staff of the Northumberland National Park Authority, the many project volunteers and those people who have attended various meetings and events for their support and assistance. None of this would have been possible without their participation. The Trust would also like to thank the National Lottery Heritage Fund for its financial support which made this project possible.

Geoffrey Carter & John Sadler

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