

IX

A NOTE ON FALSTONE

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WHAT FOLLOWS may be regarded as an additional footnote to the paper of Barbara Harbottle and T. G. Newman, "Excavation and Survey on the Starsley Burn, North Tynedale, 1972".¹ The first section of that paper (pp. 138-54) is devoted to an extremely thorough review of the documentary evidence relating to the medieval settlement of the upper North Tyne valley. The authors point out that in the latter part of the thirteenth century villages were few² and they go on to list all the known place-names indicating either permanent human habitation, or at least regular use as sheilings or grazing ground in connexion with permanent settlement, down to the date, 1326, of the inquisitions post mortem on the estates of John Comyn lord of Tarslet (titular lord of Badenoch), Adam of Swinburne lord of Haughton, and Robert of Swinburne lord of Chirdon.³ With respect to Bellingham the authors say "there was a chapel, the only ecclesiastical building in the upper part of the valley and dependent on the parish church of Simonburn 6 miles away to the south."⁴ The authors say nothing of Falstone in this period. In their discussion of the survey of 1541 they note that "there was by this time a chapel at 'the Fawe stone' for private masses."⁵

In a volume entitled *Illustrations of Scottish History* published for the Maitland Club in 1834⁶ there are printed a number of extracts from a Latin chronicle contained in British Museum MS. Harley 655. One of these extracts deals with events in Northumberland in 1318, and contains the following statements (here abridged and translated)⁷: Robert king of Scotland conferred the land of North Tynedale on Philip Moubray knight, who built for himself a certain fortified stronghold [*presidium*] near the chapel of "Fonstan" [sic]. Richard de Middiltoun, brother of the aforementioned Gilbert, erected another fortification [*munitionem*] for himself on a certain hill called "Ousti", beside "Werk in Tindale"; but being quickly captured was taken to London to be drawn, hanged and beheaded, his head being fixed to the gate of Newgate.

¹ *AA*⁵, I (1973), 137-75. I should like to thank Mr. R. N. Bailey for helpful advice on the carved stone from Falstone and its possible connexion with the name Falstone.

² *AA*⁵, I, 138.

³ *Ibid.*, 139-41; cf. *Cal. Inq. P.M.*, vi, nos. 693 (Robert de Swynburn), 697 (John Comyn), 751 (Adam de Swynburn).

⁴ *AA*⁵, I, 139.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 143; cf. *NCH*, XV (1940), 257-8.

⁶ *Illustrations of Scottish History from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, selected from unpublished MSS in the British Museum and the Tower of London* (ed. J. Stevenson, Maitland Club, 1834).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

Although the Maitland Club editor does not say so, the chronicle from which he printed these and other extracts is a version of the enormously popular *Polychronicon* of Ranulph Higden, a version belonging to the type of *Polychronicon* text which was greatly expanded by incorporating much of the *Historia Aurea* of John vicar of Tynemouth.⁸ The *Historia Aurea*, a vast and largely derivative compilation, has never attracted an editor and is unlikely ever to attract a publisher. The extract abridged above forms part of the material taken into Harl. 655 from the *Historia Aurea*, and clearly shews the Northumbrian interests and knowledge of its author. Many years ago Professor V. H. Galbraith printed a number of passages, including the one just quoted, directly from the *Historia Aurea* as contained in Lambeth Palace MS. 12 (collated with Bodleian MS. 240).⁹ Professor Galbraith was evidently unaware of the Maitland Club edition, since he seems to have published his extracts chiefly because they had not previously appeared in print.

In these passages from John of Tynemouth's work there is a general Northumbrian interest which deserves to be much better known. Here, however, we are concerned only with their relevance for North Tyndale in the earlier fourteenth century. First of all we must note that the Maitland Club edition's "Fonstan" should be read "Foustan". This is Galbraith's reading of Lambeth 12/Bodl. 240 and is also the true reading of Harl. 655, fo. 316^v, col.a. Galbraith correctly identified this as Falstone, and since Lambeth 12 belongs to the first half of the fourteenth century we may accept Foustan as the earliest recorded form of the name so far known. It is so nearly identical with the next earliest occurrence, Faustane, from a document of 1371,¹⁰ that we may safely take this to be the Middle English form, and this in turn is fully borne out by the 1541 form "the Fawe stone". On the strength of these three spellings we may go further and affirm that, as the late Eilert Ekwall thought probable, the name means the "multi-coloured stone" or the "speckled stone" (OE, *fāga stān*).¹¹ Unfortunately, Allen Mawer's work on Northumberland place-names¹² misled Ekwall by giving its authority to the belief that the earliest known occurrence of Falstone comes in the Northumberland Assize Roll of 1256, on which we find the name "Faleston". The context of the Assize Roll entry,¹³ which shews that land

⁸ V. H. Galbraith, "Extracts from the *Historia Aurea* and a French 'Brut' (1317-47)", *Eng.Hist.Rev.*, xliii (1928), 204. On the connexion between Higden's work and the *Historia Aurea*, see J. Taylor, *The Universal Chronicle of Ranulf Higden* (1966), 101.

⁹ *Eng.Hist. Rev.*, xliii, 208-15.

¹⁰ J. Bain, *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*, iv, no. 180.

¹¹ E. Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (3rd edn., 1947), 165. A. H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements* (1956), i, 166, cites Falstone as a name prob-

ably containing OE *fealu*, "yellow" or "dun" and does not refer to Falstone under *fag/fah* (p. 164). Here Smith was following A. Mawer (see next note).

¹² A. Mawer, *Place-Names of Northumberland and Durham* (1920), 80.

¹³ *Three Early Assize Rolls for the County of Northumberland* (ed. W. Page, Surtees Soc., 1891), 52. See also pp. 237, Kirkham Priory versus Thomas de "Plaxton", i.e. Paston, and 374, a reference to "Paleston" (Paston). Normally Tynedale, as a liberty, did not figure on the Northumberland Assize Rolls.

in "Faleston" was disputed between Kirkham Priory and Robert de Ros lord of Wark on Tweed, taken in conjunction with the fact that Paston was a member of the barony of Wark, dependent on Kilham, and a place where Kirkham Priory possessed land and pasture,¹⁴ proves beyond doubt that "Faleston" is a misreading of "Paleston", i.e. Pawston or Paston. The variant early forms of this name are remarkably fully documented and shew that the name goes back to an OE **Palloces tūn*, "the farm-stead of Palloc".¹⁵ We must therefore rule "Faleston" out of court and rest content with the sequence: Foustan (1318), Faustane 1371, the Fawe stone 1541.

The second point of interest is that already by 1318 there was a chapel at Falstone, almost two and a quarter centuries before the earliest evidence of its existence known to the *Northumberland County History*.¹⁶ In the absence of any clear supporting evidence, it can only be speculation to suppose either that this chapel was located where it was because the "speckled stone" marked a site of ancient religious significance¹⁷ or else that in the thirteenth century the settled population of the uppermost part of North Tynedale was more considerable than surviving evidence might suggest. This last supposition is perhaps made more plausible by the fact that Emmethaugh, as the name of a permanent habitation, can be traced back to the reign of Henry II.¹⁸ Any reconsideration of the carved stones from the Anglian and pre-Conquest periods discovered at Falstone in or since the nineteenth century¹⁹ might usefully take the foregoing points into account.

The *Historia Aurea* is the only source for the statements (1) that Robert I granted the land of North Tynedale to Philip Moubray, who is of course famous as the commander of Stirling Castle in 1313-14 for Edward II of England, who reverted to a Scottish allegiance (he was lord of Dalmeny) after Bannockburn;²⁰ (2) that Moubray built a stronghold near the chapel of Falstone; and (3) that Richard de Middleton (brother of the notorious Gilbert de Middleton who in 1317 had waylaid and plundered the two car-

¹⁴ *Northumberland Lay Subsidy Roll for 1296* (ed. C. M. Fraser, Soc. of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1968), 127; cf. *NCH*, xi, 160-1, 170.

¹⁵ Ekwall, *op. cit.*, 341. Further examples of the name may be found in *Northumberland Lay Subsidy Roll*, 127 and *Liber S. Marie de Melros* (Bannatyne Club, 1837), i, 266.

¹⁶ *NCH*, XV, 257.

¹⁷ Cf. Bede's statement that after Saint Oswald's cross at Heavenfield had been venerated for many years its site was made holier not long before he was writing by the building of a church (*Hist. Eccles.*, iii, 2; ed. Plummer, i, 130).

¹⁸ *Pipe Roll 16 Henry II* (Pipe Roll Soc., xv, 1892), 51. Mr. Bailey, in a consideration of the implications of the discovery of the carved stone at Falstone (see next note), came quite independently to the view that there may have been a bigger population in the area than had

previously been believed.

¹⁹ *NCH*, XV, 256-7, 260-1. The best known is evidently part of a memorial pillar (or cross?) with an OE inscription, and was found at Hawkhope in 1813.

²⁰ According to the *Historia Aurea*, in 1320 Moubray was one of those accused of plotting against Robert I in order to put William de Soules lord of Liddesdale on the throne. The *Historia Aurea* is the only source to name Philip Moubray, and this may be an error for Roger Moubray named in other sources. The *Historia Aurea* also names Alexander Moubray as a conspirator who escaped to England. Cf. G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce* (1965), 429-30, where the statement about Murdoch of Men-teith must be modified in the light of the fact that the *Historia Aurea* includes him among the conspirators. It may be noted that Falstone is within easy reach of Hermitage, William de Soules's castle in Liddesdale.

dinals and papal envoys between Darlington and Durham) built for himself a fortress at "Ousti" beside Wark on Tyne. "Ousti" is Houxy, a mile or so north of Wark, where the Houxy Burn—here flowing in a deep-set narrow valley like a natural moat—enters the North Tyne.

Although these two little wartime strongholds of 1318 probably consisted mainly of earth and timber and were doubtless somewhat hastily constructed, it is possible that their exact sites may one day be discovered and it may even be hoped that something will become known about the manner of their construction.