IX

The Location of the Siege Camp at Berwick-upon-Tweed, 1333

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This note identifies the location of the royal camp during the siege of Berwick in 1333, and in the process adds to our knowledge of siege towns in the fourteenth century.

One of the most well-known episodes in medieval Anglo-Scottish relations is the siege of Berwick in the spring and summer of 1333, followed by the decisive victory of the English at the battle of Halidon Hill. The siege had begun in March of that year, when Edward Balliol, erstwhile king of Scotland and client of Edward III, crossed the border and commenced a blockade of the town by land and sea in an attempt to win back the Scottish throne.[1] Berwick had been an essential supply post for English garrisons in the Border regions earlier in the fourteenth century, distributing horses, oats, wheat, corn, dried fish, iron, salt-meat, wine and malt from Newcastle, York and further south.[2] Its strategic importance was bound to have been an attraction to Balliol in launching his campaign there: once the town fell, it could become his political and military headquarters.

Some two months later Balliol's forces were augmented by those of the king's household. The author of the Lanercost chronicle states that Edward III arrived at the siege on 20 May with his brother John of Eltham, but the *Liber Pluscardensis* says he was there from 1 April and the chronicler Geoffrey le Baker puts the date of the king's arrival as late as 24 June.[3] In 1888, the antiquary John Scott claimed that Edward arrived in the area on 16 May and that "the King pitched his tent in Tweedmouth, on which he left an enduring mark; for we have Parliament Street in Tweedmouth to this day. He lay for over two months, closely besieging or blocking Berwick".[4] None of these dates is

correct. The locations given in letters of privy seal sent from the king to his administration in York indicate that Edward and his army arrived at Tweedmouth on 9 May 1333 and from that date onwards the king regularly moved backwards and forwards between there and Berwick, though clearly we may read this term as meaning the siege camp and not the town itself.[5] The royal wardrobe however, supplying food, horses and munitions for the besiegers, was less mobile and spent 9 May to 15 May at Tweedmouth, and then crossed the river to the siege camp itself.[6] This would have been a major undertaking, as the bridge across the Tweed was useless because it lead directly into the town, and was therefore presumably blocked. The wardrobe with all its bulky necessaries, would have had to cross the river in boats or on carts and horses at low tide like the army. After 11 July, when Archibald Douglas burnt Tweedmouth, the king remained permanently stationed on the northern bank of the Tweed, but the exact location of his camp is unclear from contemporary descriptions.

The siege camp was obviously somewhere outside the walls of the town, probably nearest the most heavily-fortified part of the defences. During Balliol's early sapping activities, intended to create defensive ditches for his men, four underground pipes had been broken, giving the besiegers the added advantage of having cut off some of the town's fresh water.[7] In addition, three siege engines, built in Hull, and armed with nearly 700 missiles, had been brought to the scene.[8] This indicates that the encampment was close enough to the fortifications to cause damage to their structure, but not close enough for the English army itself to be threatened. With the eastern and southern sides of the town

surrounded by the sea, the camp must have been to the north or west – beyond the castle quarter – and of some considerable size, as thousands of men had been arrayed in the northern and midland counties to swell the royal forces.[9]

By the mid-fourteenth century, sophisticated infrastructures were rapidly installed in large siege camps, which became temporary towns in their own right, catering for the needs of the many people involved in the hostilities. At the siege of Calais in 1346, for example, Edward III's army built a miniature metropolis outside the walls with a marketplace, woodplank houses thatched with straw and brushwood, and shops for meat, bread and cloth. All streets in the town radiated from the central marketplace, and locals were encouraged to bring their goods into the town to sell.[10] On that occasion the camp was given the amusing nickname of "Villeneuve-le-Hardie" by its inhabitants, so in need were these amenities of a formal identity. It comes as no surprise then, to discover that the camp at Berwick in 1333 was also assigned a name by the Wardrobe clerks stationed there. Rather than simply being called "Berewic apud Twedam" or "iuxta Berewic", as privy seal clerks identified the site, the wardrobe clerks wrote on their daily accounts that they were situated at a place called "Bundington".[11] It is tempting to assume that "Bundington" was merely a nickname for the 1333 siege camp as no "Bundington" appears on modern maps of Berwick. However, "Bundington", or Bondington, was a small hamlet just outside the medieval castle walls, today covered by Castle Terrace, north of the current railway station.[12] In June 1998, during construction work at 21 Castle Terrace, Berwick, work was halted while a brief archaeological investigation of the site took place, revealing a graveyard, cobble foundations and fragmentary upperworks of a medieval church. It is likely that this is 'the parish church of St Mary the Virgin, which is known to have lain somewhere within the parish of Bondington to the northwest of Berwick. . .which would fit well with 21 Castle Terrace perched above the Tweed'.[13] A fourteenth-century rent roll for the town records 'a toft near the church of St Mary and a bank below the church for herbage'.[14] It was clearly from here that the siege of Berwick was masterminded, and the town finally gave way on 19 July 1333.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] The siege has been comprehensively discussed in R. G. Nicholson, "The Siege of Berwick, 1333", *Scottish Historical Review*, 40 (1960), 19–42.

[2] J. R. Hunter, "Medieval Berwick-upon-Tweed", *AA*[5], 10 (1982), 84. Parliament Street did not get its name from the events of 1333, as the only Parliament held in 1333/4 met at York: see W. M. Ormrod, *The Reign of Edward III: Crown and Political Society in England 1327–1377*, New Haven and London (1990), 208.

[3] *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. Joseph Stevenson, Edinburgh, (1839), 273; *The Historians of Scotland: Liber Pluscardensis*, ed. F. J. K. Skene, I (1877), 268–9; *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynbroke*, ed. Edward Maunde Thompson, Oxford (1889) 50.

[4] J. Scott, *Berwick upon Tweed*, London (1888), 52.

[5] Privy seal writs for this period, sealed by the king with details of his location and the date survive in the following files: P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice], C 81/199, C 81/200, E 208/2, E 159/109; E 404/3/16; E 404/3/18.

[6] PRO E 101/386/16.

[7] Nicholson, "The Siege of Berwick", 26; for more details of sapping, undermining and other siege techniques see J. Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, Woodbridge (1992), 241–95; M. Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience*, New Haven and London (1996), 281–304.

[8] Nicholson, "The Siege of Berwick", 27.

[9] Nicholson, "The Siege of Berwick", 24.

[10] J. Sumption, *The Hundred Years War:1337–1360 Trial by Battle,* London (1990), 537; A. H. Burne, *The Crécy War*, London (1955), 209–10.

[11] PRO E 101/386/16.

[12] For an introduction to the history of the site of the castle, see Henry Summerson, "From Border Stronghold to Railway Station: The Fortunes of Berwick Castle 1560–1850", *AA*[5], 23 (1995), 235–48.

[13] Berwick-upon-Tweed Record Office, BRO.801 (Archaeological evaluation of a church and graveyard at 21 Castle Terrace, Berwick-Upon-Tweed, compiled by the Archaeological Practice of Newcastle University's Archaeology Department, 1999).

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[14] C. Innes, ed., *Liber S. Mariae de Calchou: Registrum cartarum Abbacie Tironensis de Kelso, 1113–1567*, Bannatyne club (Edinburgh), Publication no. 82 (1846), 2, 467.