

FLODDEN 500: 1513-2013

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE SURROUNDING THE BATTLEFIELD OF FLODDEN (1513), BRANXTON, NORTHUMBERLAND.

PROJECT DESIGN (MAY 2009) v1.0

Aims and Objectives

In 2009

- To characterise the visible archaeological remains on Flodden Hill
- To provide information for a future project for design and funding

From 2010-2013

- To study the wider landscape of the Battle of Flodden and establish where the two armies met.
- To establish the true extent and location of the remains of the battle and its associated structures
- To learn more about the composition of the armies and the individuals involved
- To provide accurate information to the wider Flodden 500 project for use in interpretation and commemoration.
- To raise the profile of the Battle of Flodden

Introduction

On the 9th September 1513 Scottish and English armies fought the last great medieval battle in a field outside the village of Branxton in north Northumberland. After three hours of intense fighting nearly 15000 men lay dead, including the Scottish King James IV and much of the Scottish Nobility who accompanied him.

With the 500th anniversary of these events approaching in 2013 Flodden 500 has been formed as an umbrella organisation to establish and encourage projects in the commemoration of the battle over the next 4 years (2010-2013). As part of this Flodden 500 and members of the local community have approached Northumberland Conservation to seek support in the establishment of a project to carry out new archaeological and historical research relating to the battle.

Background to the battle

The battle was a clash of nations, ideals and politics as well as a test of new technologies and theories of warfare. It saw the last effective, mass use, of the English Long Bow, the last effective invasion of English soil by a Scots army and set in train a series of events that would contribute within eighty years to the Union of the English and Scottish crowns. While often seen as the culmination of a short regional conflict, its outcome was far more wide reaching. While news of the events was slow to travel, for those few hours on that afternoon 500 years ago the future of the great nations of Europe were being decided at Braxton; their aspirations for the political future both of the Continent and of the British Isles were very much dependent on the outcome. The political ripples the battle left behind have spread for 500 years influencing the development of European culture and politics into the 21st Century.

Background to the project

While the general location of the battle field has long been accepted to lie to the north and west of the village or Branxton, it has become clear from recent attempts to establish its specific extents and location (through archaeological fieldwork) that its actual location and size still remains uncertain. Though the traditionally the accounts of the action of 9th September 1513 have been interpreted as suggesting that the battle occurred over an area spread across several miles of the Flodden Edge ridge (above Branxton), more recent

consideration of the tactics and technologies employed - particularly the use by the Scots of shelter formations armed with the long European pike – suggest that the actual extent of the conflagration may be considerably smaller than previously thought, spanning an area of perhaps as little as 3-500 metres from side to side or three smaller areas of several hundred meters each spread out along the ridge.

In addition to this, consideration needs to be given to the extents of the battlefield in relation to the wider actions that occurred in the several weeks leading up to battle. Both Scots and English armies manoeuvred extensively to achieve an advantage when they finally met and even during the 24 hours preceding the clash between the two forces, their movements ranged over an area that would have a radius of more than 10 miles from the centre of Branxton Village.

Recent fieldwork in the form of excavations and metal detecting survey has had little success in refining our knowledge of the battlefield and the variables discussed above. This in no way reflects on the skills or expertise of those archaeologists who have carried out this work but is simply as a result of either the time and funds available for the studies, or the permissions granted for access.

This project design proposes an integrated landscape archaeology project that will utilise multiple methods to produce an overall assessment of the archaeological remains that are both known, and remain to be identified, relating to the Battle of Flodden. This will cover both the immediate vicinity of the battlefield and the wider landscape where evidence suggests that the armies had an impact.

It will be a community led project that will follow the basic tenet of working from the known to the unknown in an attempt to finally resolve the questions relating to the location of the actual battle. It will start with limited archaeological evaluations during 2009, to establish the archaeological potential of known features within the landscape then move on to more wide ranging archaeological recording in the following 3 years, culminating with a reporting and presentation phase during the 500th anniversary year 2013.

Basic research strategy and methodology

Of all of the archaeologically identifiable remains associated with the battle of Flodden, those on Flodden Hill (from which the battle draws its name) remain the only recognised structural remains. These are earthworks and several cropmark sites identified along the ridge formed between Flodden Hill and the so-called 'King's Chair' that are thought to represent the remains of the Scottish Camp. It is here for a period of approximately 14 days that the Scottish Army –30000+ men (perhaps more including camp followers and baggage train), with countless thousands of associated animals carts and equipment – are thought to have camped prior to the battle.

The hill seems well chosen strategically, providing a high vantage point on the north-western edge of the Milfield plain. It clearly signalled King James' intentions to fight a battle either in the sloping ground around the hill or on the flat plains to the south. During the short period of occupation a number of works seem to have been prepared along the ridge, these include an extensive earthwork fortification (rectangular in shape) on the summit of Flodden Hill and what appear to be at least two artillery redoubts between Flodden Hill and the King's Chair that now survive solely as cropmarks.

Nowhere else in the wider landscape, including at Branxton, can we say with such apparent certainty that either of the protagonists resided for any period of time. It is with this in mind that this project proposes to start archaeological investigations on top of Flodden Hill establishing once and for all whether the visible remains are actually associated with the Scottish force and to what extent they left their mark (beyond the surviving visible remains) on the ground.

From this location it is proposed to work outwards using survey, sampling and prospecting methods to establish whether it is possible to track the movement of the Scottish forces from Flodden Hill in the direction of the battle field. This movement is recorded as having occurred

at short notice and therefore with some rapidity and presumably disarray, on the morning of 13th September 1513, when intelligence suggested that the Scots were about to be outflanked by the English force, thus cutting them off from their line of retreat to Coldstream.

In short order the Scottish army packed, turned its focus to the north, abandoned positions and marched to ensure that they met the English on the most advantageous terms.

Excavations in 2009

As a first phase of work it is proposed to carry out some limited trial excavations on the summit of Flodden Hill, in and around the earthwork remains visible there. This is likely to take the form of 3-5 trial trenches measuring approximately 8 square metres each. These will be sited to allow a thorough evaluation not only of the surviving state of the remains on the site but also to characterise the form and construction.

These trenches are likely to be located in the following areas:

1. Over part of the entrance to the earthworks on their east side
2. Inside the entrance to the earthworks to the south of the entrance
3. In the centre of the earthwork enclosure

Additional trenches may include

1. Platform within the earthworks north-east corner
2. Section across the earthwork bank on west side.

The aim of this process is entirely to support the framing of future research designs and funding applications to take the project forward into 2010-2013.

Other fieldwork in 2009

If conditions allow it is proposed also to carry out some exploratory field walking and metal detecting in the area surrounding Flodden Hill. This work would be likely to occur in August and September in the window following the cutting of the summer crops and the planting of the winter crops.

Currently no activities are proposed for within the Registered Battlefield Area – should activities be proposed for this area then no work will commence without consultation with or the approval of English Heritage.

Staff

Work will be carried out over a 10 day period between 30 May 2009 – 9 June 2009 by volunteer groups including:

- NAG
- CCA
- BAS
- Members of the local community (primarily from Coldstream History Society)

The work will be managed and facilitated by members of (Northumberland County Council) Northumberland Conservation (Christopher Burgess and Sara Rushton) with the support of members of NAG (Jenny Vaughan, John Nolan and Gordon Moir). Between 10-15 volunteers will attend the site daily coming from the groups listed above.

Funding and post excavation

As an initial exploratory season this work is being carried out on an entirely unfunded basis with the support of the volunteers involved. For this reason the approach to the site is one of low scale evaluation leaving the minimum of impact on the site and generating only the information necessary to provide information to support future, funded work.

The post-excavation assessment and evaluation report will be prepared by Christopher Burgess with support from those volunteers who wish to contribute either by helping with processing, or in the preparation of the report.

Dissemination

Primary dissemination will be through the project website – www.iFlodden.info - there will be regular updates on the site during the excavations both by means of Twitter (SMS updates) and also daily reports (or blogs). Reports will be posted on the website for download as they are prepared. A report will also be submitted to Archaeology in Northumberland for the Volume 19 publication.

THIS DOCUMENT IS A DEVELOPING DRAFT AND WILL BE UPDATED DURING THE PROJECT. 13 May 2009 V1.0