

ARTHUR AND THE LOST CITY

WHEN I READ ABOUT SCOTLAND IN THE DARK AGES AND LATER IN MEDIEVAL TIMES, IT IS HARD TO MISS THE NAME OF ROXBURGH. I SOON LEARNED THAT ROXBURGH WAS LOCATED SOMEWHERE IN THE BORDERS SOMEWHERE NEAR SELKIRK AND KELSO, BUT WHEN DRIVING ALONG THE A68 THERE IS NO SIGN POINTING TO ROXBURGH OR ANY INDICATION OF WHERE IT IS OR HOW TO GET THERE, OR EVEN WHICH ROADS LEAD TO IT. ROXBURGH CASTLE CLEARLY HAD BEEN IMPORTANT MANY CENTURIES AGO BUT I COULD NOT DISCOVER EXACTLY WHERE IT WAS OR EVEN IF THERE WERE ANY RUINS LEFT TO VISIT.

THIS LACK OF INFORMATION EVENTUALLY GOT TO ME AND I DECIDED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. I PLANNED A STAY IN ST. BOSWELLS TO DO SOME PHYSICAL EXPLORATION AND IN THE MEANTIME DID SOME READING AND RESEARCH. NOW AS I HAVE MANAGED TO PUT SOME OF THE PIECES TOGETHER I FIND I HAVE UNCOVERED A FASCINATING – AT LEAST TO ME – STORY WITH A LIKELY FAIRYTALE ENDING.

AFTER SOME SEARCHING AROUND THE AREA, I CAME UPON A MOUND ABOUT 100 FEET HIGH WITH STEEP SIDES LEADING TO THE TOP WHICH MADE FOR QUITE A SCRAMBLE TO GET THERE. THE MOUND ITSELF IS LOCATED AT THE JUNCTION OF THE RIVERS TEVIOT AND TWEED WITH THE MAIN ROAD SQUEEZED BETWEEN THE TEVIOT AND THE MOUND, WHICH WAS QUITE OVERGROWN WITH LONG GRASS, BUSHES, SHRUBS AND SOME TREES, AND AT THE TOP I FOUND WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE MASSIVE REMNANTS OF MASONRY WHICH WERE MAINLY BURIED UNDER THE UNDERGROWTH AND MIXED IN WITH SOME TREE ROOTS, - I HAD FOUND THE SITE OF ROXBURGH CASTLE. THERE WERE NO SIGNS OR OTHER INDICATIONS ON THE GROUND TO INDICATE THAT THIS WAS SO, BUT LOOKING AT THE RIGHT MAPS AND TALKING WITH LOCALS CONFIRMED THAT THIS WAS INDEED THE SITE. BUT WHY WAS THE CASTLE NO MORE AND WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO THE OLD BURGH OF ROXBURGH WHICH HAD BEEN SITUATED NEXT TO THE CASTLE? WHY HAD ALL PHYSICAL SIGNS OF THESE DISAPPEARED WHEN THEY HAD CLEARLY PLAYED SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SCOTTISH HISTORY?

THE CASTLE WAS ORIGINALLY BUILT BY THE MACMALCOLM KINGS IN THE 12TH CENTURY – IN FACT SOME OF THE EARLIEST DOCUMENTS TALK ABOUT THE CREATION OF THE OFFICE OF SHERIFF OF ROXBURGH AND THAT SAME OFFICE STILL EXISTS TODAY. WITH THE CASTLE ESTABLISHED, THE TOWN OF ROXBURGH GREW UP NEXT TO IT – ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TOWNS IN SCOTLAND AT THAT TIME. DAVID 1 IS CREDITED AS THE FOUNDER OF THE CASTLE AND TOWN AND IN FACT AWARDED THE TOWN ITS CHARTER THAT MADE IT A ROYAL BURGH.

DAVID THE FIRST WAS RAISED AT THE NORMAN COURT OF HENRY THE FIRST OF ENGLAND AND ONLY CAME TO SOUTHERN SCOTLAND TO RULE. HE IMMEDIATELY SOUGHT OUT ITS MILITARY AND

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ECONOMIC HUB – THE PLACE TO MAKE HIS POWER BASE. ROXBURGH WAS ALREADY PRE-EMINENT WHEN THE YOUNG EARL DECIDED TO MAKE IT MORE SO BY EXTENDING THE CASTLE AND ESTABLISHING SCOTLAND'S FIRST MINT THERE. THE POINT IS A SIMPLE ONE. ROXBURGH WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACE BETWEEN THE LAMMERMUIRS AND THE TYNE, BETWEEN WESTERN GALLOWAY AND THE BERWICKSHIRE COAST. IT WAS ALSO THE MOST POWERFUL STRONGHOLD BETWEEN THE FORTH AND THE TYNE. IT WAS WHERE THE SHEEP, WOOL AND CATTLE SALES WERE HELD FOR MOST OF SOUTHERN SCOTLAND, AND BUYERS CAME FROM EUROPE TO PARTICIPATE. LATER IN MEDIEVAL TIMES THIS TRADE ASSUMED EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANCE WITH ALL THE GREAT LOCAL MONASTIC HOUSES CONTROLLING VAST SHEEP RANCHES. FLEMISH MERCHANTS WERE PARTICULARLY ACTIVE IN THIS TRADE WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR THE HIGH INCIDENCE OF THE SURNAME FLEMING IN THESE PARTS. TRANSPORTATION ROUTES TO EUROPE AND BEYOND WERE READILY AVAILABLE VIA THE RIVER TWEED OR THE OLD ROMAN ROAD TO BERWICK WHICH WAS A MAJOR PORT IN THOSE DAYS. IT TRULY HAD EARNED ITS SPOT AS SCOTLAND'S FOURTH CITY – AFTER EDINBURGH, STIRLING AND BERWICK.

AT ITS PEAK, ROXBURGH CASTLE, WHICH COMMANDED A WIDE VIEW ON ALL SIDES, HAD SEVEN SUBSTANTIAL TOWERS, A DONJON (KEEP), EXTENSIVE BARRACKS AND STABLING AS WELL AS A WELL AND A CHURCH. STATE EVENTS WERE REGULARLY STAGED WITHIN ITS WALLS AND SO IMPREGNABLE WAS IT THOUGHT TO BE THAT POLITICAL PRISONERS AND HOSTAGES WERE IMPRISONED IN ITS DUNGEONS. THE BURGH OF ROXBURGH AT ITS ZENITH HAD FIVE ROYAL MINTS, AT LEAST THREE CHURCHES, SEVERAL SCHOOLS, CIVIC BUILDINGS AS WELL A NUMBER OF MARKETS. DAVID THE FIRST HAD ORIGINALLY FOUNDED A TIRONIAN ABBEY AT SELKIRK BUT WAS LATER PERSUADED TO MOVE THE FRENCH COLONISTS DOWNSTREAM TO KELSO NEAR ROXBOROUGH. THE KINGDOM WAS PROSPERING, THE ECONOMY EXPANDING AND DAVID NEEDED A CIVIL SERVICE TO HELP IT RUN EFFICIENTLY. ABBEYS PRODUCED LITERATE, NUMERATE AND EDUCATED MEN WHO OWED EVERYTHING TO THE KING AND WHOSE LOYALTY AND PROBITY WERE UNQUESTIONING. DAVID LAVISHED INCALCULABLE GIFTS ON KELSO AND IT SOON BECAME THE WEALTHIEST AND MOST POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT ABBEY IN ALL SCOTLAND – IN FACT THE MOST IMPRESSIVE ECCLESIASTICAL FOUNDATION NORTH OF DURHAM. ROXBURGH TRULY WAS THE CAPITAL OF SCOTLAND AT THIS TIME – HOWEVER THE MEDIEVAL GLORY OF BOTH ROXBURGH AND KELSO ONLY LASTED TWO CENTURIES.

SO WHAT WENT WRONG? WHY IS ROXBURGH NO MORE? IN ONE WORD – LOCATION. THE SAME REASON THAT LED TO ITS GLORY DAYS ALSO LED TO ITS EVENTUAL DEMISE. IT LIES ON THE BORDER BETWEEN SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND, AND WAS ON THE FRONT LINE OF THE WARS AND STRIFE THAT EXISTED DURING THE 13TH – 16TH CENTURIES, PARTICULARLY SO DURING THE WARS OF INDEPENDENCE FROM 1296-1318 WHEN IT WAS CAUGHT UP IN EDWARD THE FIRST'S WARS AGAINST THE SCOTS. IT WAS ATTACKED AND OCCUPIED BY BOTH SIDES REGULARLY – VERY MUCH LIKE BERWICK. ROXBURGH WAS ALSO AT THE CENTRE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BORDER REIVERS – HORSEMAN FROM BOTH COUNTRIES WHO RAIDED BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER FROM THE SOLWAY FIRTH TO THE NORTH SEA. MUCH OF THIS WAS DONE IN THE NAME OF REVENGE BETWEEN FAMILIES OR CLANS, AND WAS

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NOTHING TO DO WITH THE TWO GOVERNMENTS – WITH SOME OF THESE FEUDS LASTING OVER 300 YEARS. IN AN ATTEMPT TO CONTROL THESE ACTIVITIES, BOTH COUNTRIES APPOINTED LORDS OR WARDENS OF THE MARCHES FOR THE THREE MARCHES – THE WEST, THE EAST AND THE INFAMOUS MIDDLE MARCH. ROXBURGH INEVITABLY FELL UNDER THE JURISTITION OF THE WARDENS OF THE MIDDLE MARCH WHICH WAS THE HARDEST TO CONTROL. IT IS NOT WITHOUT REASON THAT THESE MARCHES WERE CALLED “THE DEBATABLE LANDS”.

CLEARLY ROXBURGH WAS NOT THE LOCATION FOR THE CAPITAL CITY OF SCOTLAND OR FOR ITS CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT. IT REMAINED IN SCOTTISH HANDS UNTIL 1330 WHEN THE BLACK DOUGLAS, WHO HAD LAST CAPTURED IT FROM THE ENGLISH IN 1314 – THE SAME YEAR AS BANNOCKBURN – DIED IN SPAIN AND THE CASTLE – ALONG WITH SEVERAL OTHERS - FELL BACK INTO THE HANDS OF THE ENGLISH. THERE WERE SEVERAL ATTEMPTS TO RECAPTURE THE CASTLE OVER THE FOLLOWING CENTURY, MAINLY LED BY MEMBERS OF THE DOUGLAS FAMILY, BUT WITHOUT SUCCESS. HOWEVER IN 1460, JAMES THE SECOND DECIDED TO RE-TAKE THE FEW REMAINING CASTLES IN SCOTLAND THAT WERE HELD BY THE ENGLISH, AND BESEIGED ROXBURGH CASTLE. AN AVID PROMOTER OF MODERN ARTILLERY, HE WAS STANDING BY A CANNON, IN WHAT ARE NOW THE GROUNDS OF FLOORS CASTLE, WHICH WAS FIRING AT ROXBURGH CASTLE, WHEN THE GUN EXPLODED AND KILLED HIM. THIS SINGLE ACT UNITED THE SCOTS IN THEIR DETERMINATION TO TAKE ROXBURGH CASTLE AND SEVERAL DAYS LATER IT FELL. IN ORDER THAT IT COULD NOT BE RETAKEN AND USED AGAINST THEM AGAIN, THE SCOTS LEVELLED THE SITE. AS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CASTLE HAD DECREASED OVER THE YEARS SO MANY OF THE CITIZENS OF THE BURGH HAD MOVED AWAY – MANY OF THEM TO NEARBY KELSO, AND WITH THE END OF THE CASTLE THE BURGH ALSO CEASED TO EXIST.

GRADUALLY THE SITE OF THE BURGH AND CASTLE WERE OVERGROWN AND REVERTED TO FARMLAND. TODAY THE SITE OF THE FORMER BURGH IS A GRASSY PLATEAU WHICH FEATURES POINT-TO-POINT RACING TWICE A YEAR. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THROUGHOUT MUCH OF ITS HISTORY A STRONG THEME ASSOCIATED WITH HORSES RUNS THROUGH IT, AND STILL DOES TODAY. BUT WHATEVER THE HISTORICAL REASON, AND IN FACT BY ANY MEASURE, THE COMPLETE DISAPPEARANCE OF ROXBURGH IS ASTONISHING. BECAUSE THERE IS NOTHING TO SEE, NO TOUR OF THE RUINS AVAILABLE, NO PHYSICAL INVESTIGATION ALLOWED UNTIL VERY RECENTLY, THIS GREAT CITY AND ALL THAT HAPPENED WITHIN IT HAS BEEN IGNORED OR AT BEST UNDERPLAYED BY HISTORIANS. NO ONE GOES THERE EXCEPT LOCAL PEOPLE LOOKING FOR A GOOD WALK, OR PUNTERS ATTENDING THE POINT-TO-POINT RACES TWICE A YEAR. IN EVERY SENSE ROXBURGH IS A LOST CITY.

ALTHOUGH THE BURGH WE KNOW AS ROXBURGH HAS ONLY A WRITTEN HISTORY SINCE THE TIME OF KING DAVID THE FIRST, LOGIC TELLS US THAT THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A COMMUNITY THERE WELL BEFORE HIS TIME. GOING BACK TO THE TIME OF THE ROMAN INVASION AND OCCUPATION, WE KNOW THAT THE ROMANS REACHED VERY FAR NORTH EVEN THOUGH THEY NEVER CONQUERED AND

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SUBDUED THE LOCAL TRIBES THERE. AT ONE POINT THEY ESTABLISHED A BORDER AT HADRIAN'S WALL IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND AND THEN TRIED TO CREATE A "BUFFER ZONE" FURTHER NORTH STILL, BY BUILDING THE ANTONINE WALL BETWEEN THE FIRTHS OF FORTH AND CLYDE. THEY ALSO ESTABLISHED A NUMBER OF MILITARY BASES BETWEEN THE TWO WALLS AS PART OF THIS BUFFER. ONE WAS CALLED TRIMONTIUM, UNDER THE EILDON HILLS AND CLOSE TO PRESENT DAY MELROSE. WE NOW KNOW THAT TRIMONTIUM WAS BUILT TO SUPPORT CAVALRY, WITH STABLING AND A LARGE HORSE BREEDING AND TRAINING FACILITY. THIS FACILITY GRADUALLY FELL INTO DISUSE AND DISREPAIR TOWARDS THE END OF THE OCCUPATION, BUT IN 367AD AN ATTEMPT WAS MADE TO RE-IMPOSE ROMAN AUTHORITY IN THE BORDERS AND THE NEWLY APPOINTED PREFECT ESTABLISHED A CAVALRY FORT ON WHAT WE NOW CALL THE CASTLE MOUNT AT ROXBURGH, WITH THE HORSES USING THE HAUGHLAND (HILL FARM) BEHIND THE ACTUAL MOUNT ITSELF. AT THIS TIME IT WAS CALLED MARCHIDUN A CELTIC WORD MEANING "CAVALRY FORT". FOLLOWING THE SUBSEQUENT DEPARTURE OF THE ROMANS A MIST DESCENDS – TRULY THE "DARK AGES". VERY LITTLE WRITTEN MATERIAL EXISTS FOR THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE ROMANS LEAVING AND DAVID THE FIRST GRANTING THE ROYAL CHARTER, BUT USING WHAT DOES EXIST AND THE FEW FACTS WE DO HAVE AS WELL AS INTERPRETING SOME OF THE MYTHS AND LEGENDS THAT HAVE BEEN HANDED DOWN TO US, IT IS POSSIBLE TO COME UP WITH A SURPRISING TWIST TO THE STORY.

IT HAS LONG BEEN DEBATED WHETHER KING ARTHUR WAS A REAL PERSON OR NOT AND IF HE WAS WHERE WAS HIS CENTRE OF POWER – WHERE WAS HIS CAMELOT? GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH - THE FIRST PERSON TO GIVE ARTHUR THE TITLE OF KING - WROTE SEVERAL BOOKS INCLUDING *HISTORIA REGUM BRITANNIAE* - "THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN" – NOTE BRITAIN NOT ENGLAND – WHICH WAS SUPPOSEDLY BASED ON AN EARLIER WORK BY WALTER THE ARCHDEACON OF OXFORD – A MAN KNOWN TO HAVE EXISTED AND WHO DIED IN 1151. THIS LATTER BOOK DEALT WITH THE HISTORY OF BRITAIN FROM THE ARRIVAL OF BRUTUS THE TROJAN (ACCORDING TO SOME THE FIRST KING OF BRITAIN), UP TO AND INCLUDING THE REIGN OF ARTHUR. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT IN HIS FIRST BATTLES ARTHUR FIGHTS AND DEFEATS THE SAVAGE PICTS!

A SECOND CHRONICLER – LAMBERT DE ST. OMER WROTE IN 1120 – " THERE IS A PALACE OF ARTHUR THE SOLDIER, IN BRITAIN, IN THE LAND OF THE PICTS, BUILT WITH VARIOUS AND WONDROUS ART, IN WHICH THE DEEDS AND ALL HIS ACTS AND WARS ARE SEEN TO BE SCULPTED". THIS, AND OTHER WRITTEN DOCUMENTS, ALLOWS A VIEW IN THE TWELTH CENTURY THAT ARTHUR WAS A SOLDIER WHO LED THE CELTIC ARMIES OF BRITIAN AGAINST ITS ENEMIES – WHO WERE THE PICTS, THE IRISH AND THE SAXONS - AND DELAYED THEIR CONQUESTS FOR SOME TIME. THE FINAL DOCUMENTARY REFERENCE I WILL MAKE – AND THERE ARE OTHERS I WILL NOT MENTION - IS *HISTORIA BRITTONUM* (THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH) BY NENNIUS, A WELSH MONK WRITING IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY. HE CLAIMS "I HAVE HEAPED TOGETHER ALL THAT I FOUND FROM THE ANNALS OF THE ROMANS, THE WRITINGS OF THE HOLY FATHERS. AND THE TRADITIONS OF OUR OWN OLD MEN". THE CENTRAL PASSAGE OF THE *HISTORIA* IS A SEQUENTIAL LIST OF THE LOCATIONS OF ARTHUR'S VICTORIES. THERE ARE TWELVE OF

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THEM AND IN A LASTER ONE - THE THIRTEENTH, - ARTHUR IS KILLED. IN REVIEWING THE DESCRIPTIONS OF THESE BATTLES AND THEIR LOCATIONS, ONLY ONE OF THEM COULD POSSIBLY BE LOCATED IN THE AREA WHERE ALMOST EVERY HISTORIAN PLACES ARTHUR. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE TO SHOW THAT ARTHUR'S BATTLES LOCATE HIM AS WELL AS PLACE HIM AT HIS CENTRE OF POWER, THE AREA HE WANTED MOST DEARLY TO DEFEND, WHERE THE ENEMY WERE MOST POWERFUL – AND THAT WAS NOT IN ENGLAND, BUT IN THE SCOTTISH BORDER COUNTRY – THE PLACE HE CAME FROM AND HAD HIS BASE.

A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE ALL THE AVAILABLE DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE TOGETHER INCLUDING THE ABOVE, INDICATES AN OVERWHELMING BIAS TO ACTIONS IN THE NORTH, AND WHEN THIS IS ADDED TO OTHER EVIDENCE, THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION THAT IT LOCATES ARTHUR'S BASE IN THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND, PROBABLY IN THE TWEED BASIN. ROXBURGH'S VOICES ARE SILENT NOW, ITS STORIES LOST IN THE GRASS WHERE THE SHEEP GRAZE AND WHERE TWICE A YEAR HORSES THUNDER BETWEEN THE HURDLES. AND YET IT WAS A PLACE OF DETERMINANT IMPORTANCE TO THE WHOLE HISTORY OF BRITAIN. IT WAS THE PLACE WHERE ARTHUR CAME BACK TO, WHERE HE HELD HIS OWN POWER, WHERE HE KEPT SAFE HIS PRECIOUS CAVALRY HORSES, WHERE HE DREW HIS LINES OF COMMUNICATION TOGETHER, WHERE HE SAT IN HIS CASTLE HALL FEASTING WITH HIS LOYAL WARRIORS. IT WAS, TO USE A MYTHIC TERM, HIS CAMELOT. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO "PROVE" THIS CLAIM, BUT LOOKING AT TRADITIONS THAT ARE STILL, IF BARELY, REMEMBERED NOW, AND THEN PIECING TOGETHER THE PAST FROM THE DECAY OF THE OLD CITY, BACK TO ITS MEDIEVAL ZENITH AND THEN USING TOPONYMY (PLACE NAMES), GODODDIN SOURCES, MILITARY LOGIC AND THE DICTATES OF ANIMAL HUSBANDRY, IT CAN BE CONCLUDED THAT ARTHUR WAS LORD OF CALCHVYNDD, THE GREAT GULEDIG OF THE CELTIC KINGDOMS OF THE SOUTH OF SCOTLAND, THE SCOURGE OF THE PICTS AND THE MAN WHO STOPPED THE ANGLES AND SAXONS IN SEVERAL BATTLES. FROM ROXBURGH HE RODE OUT TO FIGHT TO KEEP SCOTLAND SCOTTISH, WALES WELSH AND PARTS OF ENGLAND CELTIC.

I FIND THE ARGUMENTS STRONG AND HOPE TO DO MORE RESEARCH IN THIS AREA. AT THE VERY LEAST I HOPE YOU HAVE FOUND THIS DISCOURSE ENJOYABLE AND HOPEFULLY EDUCATIONAL AS WELL. I STARTED OUT TO FIND WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO ROXBURGH AND FINISHED UP IN AN ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED PLACE. IF YOU WANT MORE INFORMATION IN A VERY READABLE FORM I RECOMMEND THE BOOK "ARTHUR AND HIS LOST KINGDOMS" BY ALISTAIR MOFFAT.

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