HISTORY
OF THE
BERWICKSHIRE
NATURALISTS' CLUB.
INSTITUTED SEPTEMBER 22, 1831.

"MARE ET TELLUS, ET, QUOD TEGIT OMNIA, COELUM."

VOL. XVI.—1896-1898.

ALNWICK:
PRINTED FOR THE CLUB
BY HENRY HUNTER BLAIR, MARKET PLACE.
1899.
Notes on the Flodden Banner, preserved at Wedderburn Castle. By Colonel Milne Home.

(Plate XI.)

The accompanying sketch is intended to represent what has always been known in our family as "The Flodden Banner." The banner is, however, but a ruined relic at best, faded and frayed, from the usage, or the non-usage, it has had during the centuries through which it has somehow survived. The fragment which remains, and which is here depicted, is 3 ft. 10 in. long by 3 ft. 3 in. wide; its original dimensions must have been a little less than double these measurements. (See Plate XI.)

This flag, or rather this remnant of a flag, I exhibited to the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club at their Annual Meeting in Berwick last October, when my year of office as President ceased. It had been previously shown by my father when the Club visited Kinnerghame. (See Proceedings, vol. viii., p. 206.) But so intense was the interest in the "Banner" expressed by the members present, who had not seen it then, that I consented to allow its picture to be specially taken, and to write a short note of its history for the Club's Proceedings, in the production of which I have had ready help given me by Mr Maddan, Berwick-on-Tweed, and Mr Henry Paton, H.M. Register Office, Edinburgh. The banner is of silk, and was apparently charged with a white saltire—a St. Andrew's Cross—on a green ground; the colours are appropriate, being those of the family's livery, but the cross seems to have nothing to do, heraldically, with this branch of the family.

The banner was found in a chest at Wedderburn in 1822, among a number of less ancient uniforms and dresses, with
a card attached, on which are written the words: "Banner raised by the Homes of Wedderburn on the Battle-Field of Flodden." There is no other written record that I can find of it having been the flag so raised; but the tradition handed down, and believed in by the family, has every appearance of reliability. It is well known that Border chiefs and Highland clans had, in the olden time, rallying banners—banners which were sometimes looked on with superstitious reverence—e.g. the "Fairy Flag" of the Macleods, which hangs to this day on the walls of Dunvegan Castle. (See an article, "Over the Sea to Skye," in the Border Magazine for February 1899.) There is also preserved at Cavers House, near Hawick, a very ancient banner, or standard, 13 feet long, tapering in width towards the end, charged with a saltire, or St. Andrew’s Cross, a heraldic lion, and certain other emblems from the Douglas arms with their motto. It is said to have been borne before the great Earl of Douglas at Otterburne (1388), and has remained in the possession of his descendants ever since. It is in good preservation, but though its alleged date is earlier than our Flodden banner, Otterburne was, at best, a brilliant and romantic encounter between two great nobles; whereas Flodden and Dunbar were pitched battles between two nations, which perhaps accounts for the damaged state of our heirloom. But in regard to clannish flags, I may refer, very particularly, to a stanza in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel"—a stanza which is specially prized by us, owing to the occasion of its insertion. It may be interesting to Border readers to know that the stanza in question was not in the first edition of the "Lay," but was introduced into the second, as explained in an autograph, and hitherto unpublished, letter from Sir Walter Scott to Mr George Home, which accompanied a presentation copy of the work (published 1806.)

The book is inscribed:

George Home, Esqre,
of Paxton:

from his obliged friend The Author; and the letter there-with runs as follows:
NOTES ON THE FLODDEN BANNER

My dear Sir,

Will you pardon the vanity of an author in hoping a copy of a new edition of his work may not be unacceptable to you as a man of letters* and an ancient borderer. It contains some lines on p. 138 relative to the Homes of Wedderburne and the Swintons (my own maternal ancestors) with a few others, which were added since to the quarto edition. I am ever, with great regard,

Dear Sir,
Your obliged and faithful servant,
W. Scott.

Castle Street,
Friday.

The lines on p. 138 are:—

"Vails not to tell each hardy clan,
From the fair Middle Marches came,
The bloody Heart blazed in the van,
Announcing Douglas, dreaded name!
Vails not to tell what steeds did spurn,
Where the Seven Spears of Wedderburne
Their men in battle order set,
And Swinton laid the lance to rest,
That tamed of yore the sparkling crest
Of Clarence's Plantagenet.
Nor lists, I say, what hundreds more
From the rich Merse and Lammermore,
And Tweed's fair borders, to the war

* With reference to Sir Walter's flattering phrase, "man of letters," it may be as well to quote the following from "Scotch Legal Antiquities," by Cosmo Innes, the well-known antiquary and historian:—"George Home, of Wedderburn and Paxton, was learned especially in Commercial Law. He managed the affairs of Douglas, Heron and Co.'s Bank, after its bankruptcy—the most noted bankruptcy, I suppose, in Scotland, previous to the failure of the Western Bank. There is a tradition that it was the general wish of his profession that Mr Home should be raised to the Bench. I think Sir Walter Scott succeeded him as Clerk of Session. He contributed some papers to the Mirror."
NOTES ON THE FLODDEN BANNER

Beneath the crest of old Dunbar,
And Hepburn's mingled banners come
Down the steep mountain, glittering far,
And shouting still, 'a Home, a Home'!

Considering who the writer was, of letter and lines, I feel I need not apologise for having quoted them in full. The new stanza follows on that alluding to the "Truce," which ends with the lines:

"And feudal banners, fair displayed,
The bands that moved to Branksome's aid,"

showing that on all warlike occasions each feudal company or troop had its banner. It is mentioned in the archives of my family that the Wedderburn vassals and retainers, being attached to the royal brigade at Flodden in 1513, the commander, Sir David Home, was slain in defence of the King's person; and that, while the body of the hapless monarch fell into the enemy's hands, the chief's body, with his standard, was brought off the bloody field by his followers and interred in the family vault in Duns Church.

It is also stated that the colours of the Covenanters in the reign of King Charles II. were lodged at Wedderburn; while the standard and colours of the Wedderburn detachment that fought at the battle—the "Drave," as it is sometimes called—of Dunbar, in September 1650, against Cromwell, were brought from the field, wrapped round the dead body of the Sir David Home of that day, who, with his only son, fell at Dunbar.

In 1822, when the banner, I write of, was brought to modern light, an eye-witness stated that it was "visibly

* The banner hidden away in an ancient Charter Chest seems to have been in a way forgotten, and was discovered, in 1822, when searching for papers connected with a noble Border House. It seems to have been unknown to Sir Walter's friend and correspondent, or in the quickly succeeding third edition of the "Lay," in a learned historic note, this inadequate paper would probably have been anticipated by a paper penned by the Mighty Minstrel himself.
drenched in blood.” There are still stains visible on the faded fragment, which are doubtless those more plainly seen in 1822. Visitors to the Antiquarian Museum in Edinburgh can see on the walls there two banners very similar to what this, our Flodden banner, must have been when entire. Both are framed under glass, and are thus carefully preserved. “One,” so says the description in the Society’s Proceedings, 1857-60, p. 258, “was used at Bothwell Brig, and carried by a Corps of Burgher Seceders, associated as a regiment of volunteers, who were posted at the College when the Highland army entered Edinburgh, 1745.” The other is said to have been carried by Stewart of Garscube at the battle of Worcester, and was afterwards used at the battle of Bothwell Brig. It is in very good condition, and although now faded, a weak green and dull orange colour seems originally to have been pink and blue. These being Covenanters’ flags, it is not surprising to find on them the motto watchwords of the time, thus:—

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

The first mentioned has five roses in centre; the other has a Scotch thistle.

Our flag, being of a much earlier date, would naturally not only be more torn and worn, but would not contain
the above watchwords, peculiar to the period of the Covenanters.

These, then, are the grounds on which my family hold to the tradition that we are the unique* possessors of a flag that waved on Flodden Hill nearly 400 years ago. Of it a modern bard has written:—

"The Homes of old were warriors bold,
   As e'er said Scotland ken'd, man;
Their motto was Their Country's Cause,
   And 'true unto the end,' man.
This is the banner which they raised
   On Flodden's Battle Field, man;
These noble men, their name be praised,
   They died ere they would yield, man."

To stay further dilapidation the precious remnant has now been, by the firm of Messrs Romanes & Patterson, placed under glass, and framed like a picture, in bog oak, in fashion precisely similar to its younger compeers in the Antiquarian Museum, and so hangs in Wedderburn Castle, a silent, yet telling, reminder of those days of stress and storm, in which our Border ancestry lived and died.

* It must not be overlooked that a bannerette or pennon, which was also at Flodden, is to be seen over the entrance to the Advocate's Library in the Parliament House, Edinburgh. The descriptive oard bears:—"Standard of The Earl Marshal of Scotland, carried at the Battle of Flodden Field, 1513, by his Standard Bearer, 'Black' John Skirving of Plewland Hill." Skirving was taken prisoner, having, however, previously concealed the banner about his person. The relic, an heirloom of the family, was presented by Wm. Skirving, Edinburgh, to the Faculty in the beginning of the present century. The crest is that of the Keith family. Besides, it is recorded that, at the meeting at Selkirk in 1876, "Mr James Brown, manufacturer, exhibited a flag said to have been taken at Flodden by a member of the Corporation of Weavers." (See Proceedings, Vol. viii., p. 15.)
Banner carried at Flodden by the Homes of Wedderburn.

(The top left hand corner with dotted line shows the portion of flag still in existence.)