ENGLAND’S NORTHERN FRONTIER

The three counties of England’s northern borderlands have long had a reputation as an exceptional and peripheral region within the medieval kingdom, preoccupied with local turbulence as a result of the proximity of a hostile frontier with Scotland. Yet, in the fifteenth century, open war was an infrequent occurrence in a region which is much better understood by historians of fourteenth-century Anglo-Scottish conflict, or of Tudor responses to the so-called border reivers. This first book-length study of England’s far north in the fifteenth century addresses conflict, kinship, lordship, law, justice and governance in this dynamic region. It traces the norms and behaviours by which local society sought to manage conflict, arguing that common law and march law were only parts of a mixed framework which included aspects of ‘feud’ as it is understood in a wider European context. Addressing the counties of Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland together, Jackson W. Armstrong transcends an east–west division in the region’s historiography and challenges the prevailing understanding of conflict in late medieval England, setting the region within a wider comparative framework.

Jackson W. Armstrong is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Aberdeen, where he specialises in late medieval Scottish and English history. He has led two major funded projects concerned with Scotland’s earliest and most complete body of legal and town records, the UNESCO-designated Aberdeen council registers. Armstrong has previously served as book reviews editor for the Scottish Historical Review and as a trustee of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.
Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought
Fourth Series

General Editor:
JOHN ARNOLD
Professor of Medieval History, University of Cambridge, and Fellow of King's College

Advisory Editors:
CHRISTOPHER BRIGGS
Senior Lecturer in Medieval British Social and Economic History, University of Cambridge, and Fellow of Selwyn College

ADAM J. KOSTO
Professor of History, Columbia University

ALICE RIO
Professor of Medieval History, King's College London

MAGNUS RYAN
Senior Lecturer in History, University of Cambridge, and Fellow of Peterhouse

The series Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought was inaugurated by G.G. Coulton in 1921; Professor John Arnold now acts as General Editor of the Fourth Series, with Dr Christopher Briggs, Professor Adam J. Kosto, Professor Alice Rio and Dr Magnus Ryan as Advisory Editors. The series brings together outstanding work by medieval scholars over a wide range of human endeavour extending from political economy to the history of ideas.

This is book 118 in the series, and a full list of titles in the series can be found at: www.cambridge.org/medievallifeandthought
ENGLAND’S NORTHERN FRONTIER

Conflict and Local Society in the Fifteenth-Century Scottish Marches

JACKSON W. ARMSTRONG
University of Aberdeen
For Vicky, Findlay and Innes
CONTENTS

List of Figures page ix
List of Maps x
Acknowledgements xi
List of Abbreviations xiv

1 INTRODUCTION 1
   Overview 1
   The Far North, Conflict and Governance 4
   The Problem of Conflict 22
   The Governance of the ‘contreis . . . in euerie partie of the lande’ 36
   Sources and Outline 44

Part I 47

2 FRONTIERS AND BORDERLANDS 49
   Frontiers and Borderlands 49
   Boundary and Gateway 57
   Writing the Marches 65

3 EARTH AND STONE 74
   Towers and Castles 75
   Landscape and Settlement 93
   Conclusion at Part I 105

Part II 107

4 THE NOBILITY, GENTRY AND RELIGIOUS HOUSES 109

5 LORDSHIP, KINSHIP AND THE SURNAMES 119
   Lords and Men 120
   Kinship and Landed Society 124
   Naming Customs and Practices 130
   The Surnames 136
   The Surnames of 1498 139

vii
Contents

English Surnames with Scottish Dimensions 145
Models and Indications of Leadership among the Surnames 155
Conclusion at Part II 163

Part III 165

6 The Administration of Justice 167
   Justice in England and Europe 168
   Royal Justice and English Common Law 172
   Border Justice and March Law 181
   Conclusion at Chapter 6 197

7 Patterns of Conflict 199
   Court Records and Figures: The Evidence Assembled 201
   Conflict and Court Activity 210
   Conflict, War and Truce 224
   Violent Offences 232
   The Border Liberties 236

8 Cross-Border Conflict 242
   Lesser Illicit Activity 246
   Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini’s Report 259
   ‘Raiding Culture’ 264
   Conclusion at Chapters 7 and 8 268

9 Discord 270
   Language and Social Emotion 273
   The Support Group 291
   The Nature of Violence 297

10 Concord 308
   Love and Law 309
   The Objectives of Peacemaking 315
   Reconciliation Ceremonies 320
   Compensation 328
   Contracts of Lordship and Kinship 331

11 Conclusions 337

Bibliography 346
Index 387

viii
FIGURES

1 National upheaval and new KB (total), 1400–50  page 202
2 National upheaval and all KB (total), 1400–50  202
3 National upheaval and new KB (total), 1450–1500  203
4 National upheaval and all KB (total), 1450–1500  203
5 National upheaval and new KB (by county), 1400–50  204
6 National upheaval and all KB (by county), 1400–50  205
7 National upheaval and new KB (by county), 1450–1500  206
8 National upheaval and all KB (by county), 1450–1500  207
9 JUST 3 (gaol delivery) offences (total), 1395–1460  208
10 JUST 3 (gaol delivery) offences (by county), 1395–1460  209
11 Truces and new KB (total), 1400–50  225
12 Truces and all KB (total), 1400–50  225
13 Truces and new KB (total), 1450–1500  226
14 Truces and all KB (total), 1450–1500  226
15 Truces and JUST 3 (gaol delivery) offences (total), 1395–1460  227
16 Redesdale, Tynedale and Hexhamshire mentioned in KB, C 1, JUST 3, DURH 3, DURH 19 (offence date used where possible) (total), 1395–1495  228
MAPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Map Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  The Far North and cellular ‘Country-Provinces’</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  The Anglo-Scottish Borderlands</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Cumberland, Westmorland, Furness and parts of Scotland</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Northumberland and parts of Scotland</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Towers in Ireland and Britain</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Rural ‘Settlement Provinces’ (after Roberts and Wrathmell)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No piece of sustained scholarship would be possible without the generosity and support of others. That is especially so in a work of long gestation, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge the most important debts of gratitude that I have incurred on the long the path of researching and writing this book. My first thanks are to the institutions and people that have given their financial and organisational support for the work that has contributed towards this project. This includes my old college, Trinity Hall, where during 2001–2 and 2003–7 at various times I held funding from the ORS Awards Scheme, a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council doctoral fellowship, and funding administered by the Cambridge Commonwealth Trust, the Faculty of History, and the Master and Fellows of Trinity Hall. More recently the University of Aberdeen has supported me with funding for archival research trips, and semesters of research leave in 2013 (when I composed much of Chapter 1 and the broad frame of argument) and 2015 (when Chapters 2 and 3 were written). I owe thanks to the editors and everyone concerned in the production of the book at Cambridge University Press, especially Liz Friend-Smith and Professor Rosamond McKitterick, for their patience and support since this work was first proposed. I am grateful to the series editors and anonymous readers for their reports on draft chapters, and to Stephanie Sakson, who copy-edited the text, and Kate McIntosh, who created the index.

Some acknowledgements are necessary regarding source collections. All materials in the National Archives of the UK and in other repositories have been consulted directly unless stated otherwise. The Anglo-American Legal Tradition, the digital image archive assembled by R.C. Palmer, E.K. Palmer and S. Jenks (aalt.law.uh.edu/aalt.html) has been used to check various references. I also register my thanks to those highly skilled archivists and librarians at a number of institutions who have given their expert and invaluable guidance to me on so many occasions when
Acknowledgements

consulting collections in their care. Some of those collections have been in private hands, and I appreciate the permission of the duke of Northumberland to consult archives held at Alnwick Castle and microfilms held in the British Library. Some materials were made accessible to me by other scholars: I remain indebted to Dr Rosemary Milligan-Hayes and Professor Richard Hoyle for, some time ago, generously allowing me access to unpublished transcripts of king’s bench indictments after 1460.

We learn from people most of all, and a great number of people have helped advance my understanding of the past in various connections with this book. That includes my colleagues, students and friends in Aberdeen since 2008, particularly those whose conversation has enriched my perspective on England and its neighbours: Mr David Gibbons-Wood; Drs Andrew Dilley, Edda Frankot, Claire Hawes, William Hepburn, Dan MacCannell, Aly Macdonald, Andrew Mackillop, Andrew Simpson, Paula Sweeney, Adelyn Wilson; and Professors Michael P. Brown, Peter Davidson, Karin Friedrich, Robert Frost (and his Pennington kinsfolk), Jane Geddes, Michael Gelting, Bill Naphy, Ralph O’Connor and Jane Stevenson. I should also like to thank my academic colleagues elsewhere whose intellectual stimulation and conversation has helped in the development of this project in different ways, and at different times. This includes the two examiners of my PhD, who were Professor John Watts and the late Dr Jenny Wormald; Dr Amy Blakeway and Dr Peter Crooks (both of whom generously read and commented on portions of the book in draft), Professor Steve Boardman, Professor Michael H. Brown, Dr Caroline Burt, Dr Ali Cathcart, Dr Paul Cavill, Dr Neil Coates, Professor Chris Given-Wilson, Professor Julian Goodare, the late Professor Tony Goodman, Dr Sandy Grant, Dr Andy King, Professor Christian Liddy, Dr Iain MacInnes, Dr Tony Moore, Professor Cynthia Neville, Mr Richard Partington, Professor A.J. Pollard, Dr Sandra Raban, Dr Gianluca Raccagni, Professor Christine Reinele, Professor Jörg Rogge, Dr James Ross, Dr Andrea Ruddick, Dr Benjamin Thompson, Dr Carl Watkins, Dr Paul Webster, and Mr Gunnar Welle are some who stand out. Several others are recognised with specific thanks in the footnotes, and more still unnamed here will know who they are. In many ways this project first began when I was an undergraduate visiting at the University of Edinburgh in 1999–2000. I benefitted from the encouragement of the academic faculty there, a number of whom are named above. That year I also had the pleasure of finding a welcoming network of historically minded friends in and around Carlisle, whose warmth and hospitality were so important to me, and to this project, that year and during subsequent research trips: Stuart Hepburn, Diana Armstrong, and Fiona Armstrong. At Queen’s University at Kingston, Professor Monica Sandor
faithfully supervised my Honours dissertation (comparing John of Lancaster’s letters with Robert Carey’s memoirs), and while at Queen’s and in subsequent years I remain grateful to Professor Bob Malcolmson for his counsel and wisdom.

My chief academic debt is to Professor Christine Carpenter, who supervised the postgraduate dissertations from which this book has grown. When we first corresponded about my MPhil application well before we met, we bonded over the fact that we were both descended from disreputable border Surnames. Christine mentioned her delight when, many years ago while still a Johnston (her maiden name), she saw a production of John Arden’s great play Armstrong’s Last Goodnight at the National Theatre, and in the opening scenes the plot was set in motion by the killing of Johnston(e) of Wamphray by Johnnie Armstrong of Gilnockie’s relations. Since that first exchange and long after her official duties as supervisor concluded, Christine has been an inspiration, teacher and friend of the highest order. In her capacity as the book’s progress editor for the Cambridge University Press series she also read the entire manuscript, providing an unstinting critique. We may disagree on various points of interpretation, but her support has always been full and so is my gratitude. It should go without saying that any errors of fact or judgement that remain in this work are my own.

My final thanks are for my family: For my parents Andy and Wynne, whose encouragement and support first enabled me to embark on the journeys that have led to this book. For my parents-in-law Jane and Neil, who have supported me in so many ways, including steady supply of coffee and cheese during writing spells at Greenbank. For my children Findlay and Innes, both always in their ways understanding and wonderfully diverting. My greatest thanks are to my wife Vicky for her patience, love and intellectual companionship. In a sense, I also owe this book thanks for helping me to find her: it was during a research stay in Edinburgh as a postgraduate student that we first met. I have no doubt that her relief at publication will exceed my own. With love this book is dedicated to Vicky, Findlay and Innes.
ABBREVIATIONS

Note: All references to archival documents in the notes begin with an abbreviation denoting the name of the repository, except for references to documents in The National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office), Kew.


ADC, 1  The Acts of the Lords of Council in Civil Causes, 1478–1495, ed. T. Thomson (Edinburgh, 1839)

BIHR  Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research

BJRL  Bulletin of the John Rylands Library

BL  British Library

CAC  Cumbria Archive Centre

Cal. Deeds  Calendar of Ancient Deeds

Cal. Papal Reg.  Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers

Cata. Deeds  Catalogue of Ancient Deeds

Cbl.  Cumberland

CChR  Calendar of the Charter Rolls

CCR  Calendar of Close Rolls

CDS  Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland

CFR  Calendar of Fine Rolls


CIM  Calendar of Inquisitions Miscellaneous

CIPM  Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem


CPR  Calendar of Patent Rolls
List of Abbreviations

CWAAS  Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society
DCM  Durham Cathedral Muniments
DSL  Dictionary of the Scots Language, Scottish Language Dictionaries (2001–), http://www.dsl.ac.uk/
DUL  University of Durham Library
EHR  English Historical Review


ER  The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, ed. J. Stuart et al., 23 vols (Edinburgh, 1878–1908)

Foedera  Foedera, Conventiones, Litterae etc., ed. T. Rymer, 10 vols (Hagae Comitis, 1745; reprint, Farnborough, 1967)

Fox’s Register  The Register of Richard Fox, Lord Bishop of Durham, 1494–1501, ed. M.P. Howden, Surtees Society, 147 (London, 1932)


HMC  Historical Manuscripts Commission

HNP  Howard of Naworth Papers (in DUL)


Incerti  Incerti Scriptoris Chronicon Angliae . . ., ed. J.A. Giles (London, 1848)

JLH  Journal of Legal History

JUST  Justices Itinerant

KB  King’s Bench

LHR  Law and History Review


List of Abbreviations

**MED** The Middle English Compendium (including Middle English Dictionary), ed. F. McSparran et al., University of Michigan (2006–), at https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mec/index.html

**NA** Northumberland Archives

**Nbl.** Northumberland

**NCH** A History of Northumberland. Issued under the Direction of the Northumberland County History Committee, 15 vols (Newcastle, 1893–1940)

**Northern Petitions** Northern Petitions Illustrative of Life in Berwick, Cumbria and Durham in the Fourteenth Century, ed. C.M. Fraser (Durham, 1981)

**Northumb. Petitions** Ancient Petitions Relating to Northumberland, ed. C.M. Fraser, Surtees Society, 176 (Durham and London, 1966)

**NRS** National Records of Scotland

**NUL** Newcastle University, Philip Robinson Library


**Pèlerinage** Le pèlerinage de l’âme de Guillaume de Deguileville, ed. J. J. Stürzinger, Roxburghe Club (London, 1895)


**Pylgremage** The Pylgremage of the Sowle, ed. F. van Vorsselen (s.d.), consulted at http://pilgrim.grozny.nl


xvi
List of Abbreviations


RPS  The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707, ed. K. M. Brown et al. (St Andrews, 2007– ), www.rps.ac.uk


SHR  Scottish Historical Review


Statuta Ecclesia  Concilia Scotiae: Ecclesiae Scoticanae Statuta tam Provincialis quam Synodalia quae Supersunt MCCXXV–MDLIX, ed. J. Robertson, Bannatyne Club, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1866)


TCWAAS  Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society

TDGNHAS  Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society

TRHS  Transactions of the Royal Historical Society


© in this web service Cambridge University Press  www.cambridge.org