RIDING THE MARCHES IN SCOTLAND

c. 1500 - 1996

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Declaration

This thesis has been composed by me, and all the work contained here is my own.

Signed

Kenneth R. Bogle
Abstract of Thesis

The ‘Riding of the Marches’ or the ‘Common Riding’ refers to a series of festivals which take place annually in several Scottish towns. These festivals are loosely based on the old custom of a ceremonial procession, usually on horseback, around the boundary of the burgh common, which was intended to delineate the area and check any encroachment upon it by neighbouring landowners and others. Some ridings, such as Lanark, Linlithgow and Selkirk, have a continuous history since the sixteenth-century, whilst others are more recent innovations. The modern event is primarily associated with the Scottish Borders. The purpose of this thesis is to trace the historical development and evolution of the ridings from the sixteenth-century to the present. The thesis is broadly chronological and is arranged in six chapters. Chapter One provides a detailed introduction and overview of the modern ridings. The intention is to explain some of the terminology and other features of the ridings, and to indicate the nature of these events and state why they are important. Chapter Two begins the chronological history of the ridings by examining the earliest records of the event. Chapter Three considers the battle of Flodden Field (1513) and the various Common Riding traditions about it. Chapter Four examines the form and functions of the eighteenth-century ridings. Chapter Five covers the period between 1830 to 1900, when profound social and economic change challenged and influenced the event. Chapter Six concludes the history of the ridings, and covers the period between 1880 to the present. There is also a plate section between Chapters Three and Four. This thesis demonstrates that the modern ridings are complex events, which are the product of several centuries of adaptation and development. Although derived from an old custom, the modern ridings continue to occupy a vital place in the lives of people who participate in them.
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<td>NLS</td>
<td>National Library of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSAS</td>
<td>New Statistical Account of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSAS</td>
<td>Old Statistical Account of Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHR</td>
<td>Scottish Historical Review</td>
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<td>THAS</td>
<td>Transactions of the Hawick Archaeological Society</td>
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<td>TSAS</td>
<td>Third Statistical Account of Scotland</td>
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Introduction

The 'Common Riding' or the 'Riding of the Marches' is the name given to a group of community festivals which take place annually in several Scottish towns. These festivals are loosely based on the old custom of a ceremonial procession on horseback around the boundary of the burgh common, which was intended to delineate the area and check any encroachment upon it by neighbouring landowners and others. The earliest records of the ridings date from the sixteenth-century, and in some towns the event has had an almost continuous history since that time. In other towns, the ridings are more recent innovations. An equivalent event in England is known as 'beating the bounds'.

This thesis traces the history and development of the ridings in Scotland from the sixteenth-century to the present. Clearly, some definition of common land is necessary at the outset. At its simplest, common land is land possessed in common by different proprietors. There are several different types of common land in Scotland, but this thesis is principally concerned with burgh commons. Burghs were established in Scotland from the twelfth-century onwards by both the Crown and local barons. Most burghs received extensive territories and wide privileges for the use and support of their inhabitants, and these property rights were burgh commons. Robin F. Callander points out: '[Burgh commons] did not represent a single type of common land, but might encompass the full range of Scottish commons: commonties, common mosses, runrig lands and common hill land, greens and loans.' The uses of the burgh common are fully explored in chapter two, but included such functions as grazing cattle, cutting peat for fuel, and gathering wood and other raw materials. Burghs depended on these privileges for their survival and prosperity,

1. 'Marches' refers to the frontiers or boundaries of the common land, and has the same derivation as 'mark'.
2. R. F. Callander, A Pattern of Landownership in Scotland (Finzean, 1987), p. 120.
and constant vigilance was needed to secure them. Thus, to protect the common from unlawful encroachments, burgh authorities made regular inspections of the boundary lines and markers which defined the limits of their land. Because the boundaries of the common were often very extensive, at least some individuals made the inspection on horseback.

Burghs across Scotland once rode their marches as a matter of course. In the sixteenth-century, ridings took place in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Stirling and Dundee; and also in smaller burghs like Haddington, Rutherglen, Arbroath and Inverness. Today, only a few burghs outside of the Borders continue to ride their marches. The most important of these are Linlithgow, where a 'Marches Day' has taken place almost annually since at least 1541; Musselburgh, where the local riding was first recorded in 1682 and which has taken place approximately every twenty years since then (although from 1936 the town has also had an annual 'Honest Toun' festival); and Lanark, where 'Lanimer Day' or 'Landmark Day' was first recorded in 1570 and which also boasts an almost uninterrupted history.3

However, there is no doubt that the home of the Scottish ridings is the Borders, that region immediately to the north of the Anglo-Scottish frontier. All of the Border towns stage a summer riding of some kind, and these can be divided into two basic categories. First, there are the 'genuine' or 'real' Common Ridings, which have developed from the original riding of the marches. These ridings have a long and, in most cases, an almost continuous history since the date they were first recorded. Selkirk Common Riding is probably the oldest of the Borders ridings, records of which begin in the early sixteenth-century. Hawick Common Riding may date from around the same time, although the earliest record of the event comes from 1640. Langholm Common Riding has held a riding of the marches annually

3. In the twentieth-century, most of the ridings were suspended during the First and Second World Wars. Linlithgow Marches Day was also cancelled in 1926 because of the General Strike.
since 1816, although it is known that a perambulation of the marches occurred before this date. Finally, Lauder Common Riding can be traced back to the seventeenth-century, although the event was curtailed for a period of about 80 years in the nineteenth-century, and only revived in 1911.

The second group of Borders ridings have a slightly different emphasis from the original Common Ridings, although they also have an element of the town ‘riding-out’. These festivals were instituted in the late nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, and take place in towns which did not possess common land and therefore had no tradition of riding the marches. Instead, these towns have developed festivals which are based on notable events in their history. For instance, Galashiels ‘Braw Lad’s Gathering’ focuses on, amongst other things, the granting of the town charter. Likewise, Jedburgh (or ‘Jethart’) ‘Callant’s Festival’ stages a re-enactment of the Raid of the Reidswire (1575), in which local men played a prominent role. Peebles ‘Beltane Festival’ revives the tradition of the medieval summer fair, which has been combined with a symbolic riding the marches. Towns also include formal visits to places of note in their immediate neighbourhood. Melrose and Kelso visit their local ruined abbey, whilst Coldstream stages a ‘ride-out’ to the battlefield of Flodden (1513). As stated, all of the festivals are modern inventions, and were created in imitation of the original Common Ridings. They are sometimes, rather unkindly, referred to as artificial or ‘ersatz’ festivals.

As this thesis will show, the ridings have been regularly imbued with new meanings and functions. Today, the actual riding of the marches continues only in a symbolic way, and the event has acquired different meanings for the local community. It will be shown that the modern ridings are complex events, which are the product of several centuries of adaptation and development. But although they are rooted in history, the modern ridings are not chance survivals or anachronisms.
Rather they are meaningful traditions which continue to occupy an important place in the lives of the people who participate in them.

There is one general feature of the ridings to mention at the outset which is so obvious that it could be easily ignored: namely, the intimate relationship between man and the horse. In many ways, the history of the ridings is a celebration of this ancient partnership. In his book, *The Role of the Horse in Man’s Culture*, Harold B. Barclay has written: ‘With the possible exception of the dog, no animal has attracted man more than the horse, and with no other animal has man developed such an intimate relationship. The horse is alert, agile, sleek in form and movement, and possesses sufficient intelligence to respond to man, to trust him and to work with him.’

Horses give their rider the thrill of speed, and they can also be affectionate to those who are skilled enough to activate the response. ‘There is no rapport so deep as that possible between horse and rider,’ writes Elwyn Hartley Edwards.

Horses are not naturally aggressive animals, although they have been adapted to the battlefield. As we will see, many of the earliest references to the Common Ridings state that the marches were *ridden*. The horse has always been a symbol of power and authority. A mounted man looks down on a pedestrian, whilst the latter is forced to look up. It is only in the later twentieth-century that horses have lost many of their economic and social functions, and become primarily associated with recreation and leisure.

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Purpose and Arrangement of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the historical development of the ridings from the sixteenth-century to the present day. It will be shown how the ridings have evolved in the face of different social environments, and how the ability to adapt and change has been the key to their survival. As we might expect, the ridings reflect the society in which they have taken place, and over time they have been used to promote different values and ideals. It will be shown that the ridings have survived because they cater for the real needs of individuals and communities, and these needs are often far removed from the original purpose of the event.

The thesis is broadly chronological and is arranged in six chapters:

Chapter One provides a detailed introduction and overview of the modern ridings. The intention is to explain some of the terminology and other features of the ridings, and to indicate the complex nature of these events and state why they are important. The chapter begins by considering the towns where the ridings take place and various factors at work within these towns which influence and support the ridings. This is followed by a general description of the ridings, which illustrates common themes and features shared between them whilst stressing their individuality. There is an examination of the preparation for the ridings, followed by the events themselves and their aftermath. There is also an exploration of the 'true' meaning of the ridings and their importance in the lives of local people. It will be shown that the emotions which the ridings engender are genuine and deeply felt. This has been demonstrated recently over the issue of women's involvement. In 1996, as this thesis was being written, Hawick Common Riding gained national attention because women are excluded from taking part on horseback. The controversy over women's involvement, its causes and ramifications are fully
considered. The chapter concludes by noting the close association between history and identity.

Chapter Two begins the chronological history of the ridings by examining records of the event from the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. Throughout their history, the ridings have always been an expression of 'community', and this chapter begins by exploring the concept of community in sixteenth-century society. An important focus of communal identity and civic pride was the common land of the burgh, and its uses to inhabitants of the burgh are noted. Because the common was a vital resource to the community, its protection from encroachment by neighbouring landowners and others was essential, hence the development of the riding of the marches. The ridings may also have been a means of 'controlling' young people and adolescents by providing an outlet for their energies. The bulk of this chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the early ridings, and some similarities between the ancient and modern ridings are noted. The chapter concludes by examining the impact of the Reformation on the ridings.

Chapter Three considers the battle of Flodden Field (1513) and the various Common Riding traditions which surround it. Flodden is an important aspect of Hawick and Selkirk Common Ridings, and in both events the Flodden traditions have, to some extent, obscured the original purpose of the riding of the marches. This chapter examines the historical authenticity of the Flodden traditions. It is also noted that these traditions, whether accurate or otherwise, are an important symbol of local identity and culture.

Chapter Four examines the form and function of the eighteenth-century ridings. As we might expect, accounts of the ridings become more extensive in this period, and provide a clearer picture of the development of the event. Whilst many features of the ridings continued, new themes and challenges emerged. The chapter
demonstrates that the eighteenth-century ridings were a complex mix of civic and popular functions. The chapter begins by considering the civic functions of the ridings, and shows how the ridings were used to check encroachment on the common; to consolidate authority and status in the burgh; and to cement social relations and group unity. Moreover, in the later eighteenth-century, the ridings developed a political dimension. Local and national patriotism became closely associated, whilst the ridings were also linked with radical political opinion. Consideration is given to the popular and recreational functions of the ridings, and there is an examination of the ridings as festive occasions. The chapter then explores the 'language' of the eighteenth-century ridings, with particular attention to the use of 'stage-props' and other artefacts. Finally, this chapter examines the decline of the ridings in the eighteenth-century, and the reasons why the event survived in some burghs but not in others.

Chapter Five covers the period between around 1800 to 1880, when profound economic and social change presented new problems for the ridings. First, there is consideration of the rise of a 'respectable' society, whose social mores and codes of behaviour were often in conflict with popular and traditional customs. Objections to the ridings, and the attempts to undermine them, are fully considered. Whilst the ridings aroused hostility, they also had many fervent adherents who continued to participate in them. However, the supporters of the ridings were not immune from wider social change, and there was a general trend for the ridings to become more organised, restrained and orderly. By the late nineteenth-century, the debate about the ridings focussed on their reform rather than their abolition.

Chapter Six concludes the history of the ridings, and covers the period between 1880 to the present. By 1880, the ridings had shed much of their disreputable image, largely as a result of complex social changes taking place throughout Britain in the nineteenth-century. These changes made the ridings more
attractive to ‘respectable’ society, who could promote themselves by involvement in the event. Their influence is explored, including the production of songs, monographs and paintings with Common Riding themes. The impact and legacy of local emigration and the revival of medieval chivalry are also considered. The period between 1870 and 1914 has been described as the age of ‘invented tradition’, and this period saw the development of new events, such as Peebles Beltane Festival. The chapter then examines the First World War, when the language and imagery of the ridings was used to inspire and console. The impact of the war led to the invention of new festivals, such as Galashiels Braw Lad’s Gathering. Likewise, the Second World War brought fresh challenges to the ridings, and ultimately led to the development of new festivals. The chapter examines the unique intellectual enthusiasm of Hugh MacDiarmid for Langholm Common Riding, and concludes with an assessment of the state of the modern ridings.

There is also a plate section between Chapters Three and Four. These plates have been carefully chosen to illustrate the main features of the ridings, and also some of the paintings which have been inspired by them.

The Literature of the Common Ridings

The literature of the ridings is both plentiful and sparse. As we might expect, much has been written locally about the ridings, although the bulk of this material is highly derivative. Moreover, because the ridings are private events and largely unknown to the ‘outside’ world, there is a general lack of serious or impartial writing about them.

The most obvious primary source for a study of the ridings is the various records of burgh councils, such as council minute books and court books. In some burghs, these
have survived from the sixteenth-century, and they provide a fascinating insight into burgh life of different periods. Ridings are regularly recorded, and there are often precise details of the physical location of the boundaries. Unfortunately, burgh records of this kind tend to be very repetitive. The same wording is often used year after year, and official records rarely offer descriptions of the ridings or state what the event actually entailed. A slightly different angle on the ridings is provided by the records of various craft guilds, such as the Shoemakers of Selkirk, who for centuries were the mainstay of the event.

Undoubtedly, the most useful primary sources about the ridings are local newspapers. In the Borders, local newspapers were generally first produced in the later nineteenth-century, including the Hawick Express (1870), the Hawick News (1882) and the Southern Reporter (1855). These newspapers are invaluable sources of local (and national) history. Unlike the official burgh records, local newspapers often give extremely detailed accounts of the local ridings. For instance, speeches at various functions are reported verbatim and the ceremonies themselves are described in considerable detail. Local newspapers also gave extensive coverage to various controversies about the ridings, and protagonists used the columns of the local press to express their opinions and debate the issues. As stated, many local newspapers were established in the later nineteenth-century, and this was also a boom period in local historical studies. Many of the standard works of British local history were produced around this time. Two books of particular value to this thesis were Robert Craig's and Adam Laing's The Hawick Tradition of 1514, which was published in 1898; and Thomas Craig-Brown's History of Selkirkshire, which was published in 1886. These contain much useful material on the respective Common Ridings of Hawick and Selkirk. They are also beautifully manufactured books. Likewise, the Transactions of the Hawick Archaeological Society, which have been produced annually since 1856, contain a wealth of information about the history and folklore of Hawick and the Borders.
The Common Ridings themselves have attracted little academic interest, which, as stated, reflects their private and unobtrusive nature. A notable exception here is Gwen Kennedy Neville's book *The Mother Town. Civic Ritual, Symbol, and Experience in the Borders of Scotland*, which was first published in New York in 1994. The author is Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, and she has carried out fieldwork in the Borders since 1972. In her book, Neville focuses on Selkirk Common Riding and uses it as a model to trace the development of the concept of 'the town' in Western culture. Neville's book, which contains little actual history of the ridings, forms a useful complement to the present work.

However, although academic interest in the ridings is generally lacking, it is possible to place the ridings in a broader historical context, a task which this thesis attempts to fulfil. In the last twenty-five years, several academic studies have been produced which focus on popular customs in Britain. Unlike earlier folklore 'collections', which merely listed traditions or events, these recent studies have examined the general themes and motives of popular custom. Of course, the historical evidence of these events is often limited and inadequate, not least because contemporaries regarded popular customs as trivial and insignificant. Likewise, after generations of neglect, historians now recognise that the study of popular customs, like that of sports and amusements, provides a rare and valuable

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insight into the individual and collective mentality, and gives a voice to people who are otherwise historically silent. The study of popular customs also illustrates more general notions of social organisation and control.
Chapter One
The Modern Ridings

‘This day, we hae done a guid thing!’
Common Riding phrase

The opening chapter of this thesis aims to give a general description of the modern ridings. The greater part of it provides an outline of events and highlights some of the traditional features of the ridings. It also explains some of the emotions which the ridings arouse and why they are important. First, there is some background information on the towns themselves, illustrating local factors working in favour of the ridings and contributing to their survival and growth. These notes concentrate on towns in the Borders, the home of the classic Scottish Common Riding. They are followed by a detailed description of the modern ridings, which aims to stress the complexity of these events. There is also consideration of the recent controversy over women’s involvement in the ridings, and finally the inter-play of history and identity.

The Scenes of the Ridings

The towns which stage ridings are small and compact. Most have a population of under 10,000 people, although Galashiels, Hawick and Musselburgh are slightly larger at between 12-20,000 people. As well as having a small population, some of the towns, such as Selkirk and Hawick, are rather isolated from the cities. The Borders is often said to be ‘cut off’ or remote from the outside world, and even in the 1990s, travelling in some parts of the region is slow and time-consuming. There are no motorways and only a few stretches of dual carriageway, and since the late 1960s, the Borders has been deprived of a railway link with the rest of the country. Consequently, Edinburgh and Glasgow, and city lifestyles, can seem very far away,
especially for people who do not possess their own transport. Of course, the reverse is true of Musselburgh and Linlithgow, where the overbearing presence of Edinburgh has long intensified local identity.

Partly as a result of their size and isolation, the towns which stage ridings are close-knit, homogeneous communities. There are strong kinship connections within these towns and locals often stress their links with other families. The local feeling is that ‘everyone knows, or is related to, everyone else’. Kinship is one of the essential markers which differentiates between locals and incomers, a division which is further enhanced by the use of dialect. In the Borders, each town has its own distinct dialect which is different from that of neighbouring towns. Local people are finely attuned to the differences. They may not use their dialect at work or at school, but they resort to it when at home or with their friends. Not to speak in the local manner would be to risk sounding like someone from ‘outside’.

As we will see, the division between ‘locals’ and ‘outsiders’ is one of the key themes of the ridings. Local people know immediately who qualifies as ‘local’ and who does not, although they would find it difficult to define these terms. There is rarely hostility or prejudice against incomers, but they bear a certain stigma which they will find very hard to lose. It is not unknown for people to have lived in the town for twenty or thirty years but still to be labelled as, say, ‘Edinburgh’ or ‘Glasgow’ rather than ‘Selkirk’ or ‘Hawick’. In Peebles, the local population is divided between ‘gutterbluids’, who are the established natives of the town, and ‘stooriefits’, who are the resident incomers.1 Needless to say, the gutterbluids consider themselves rather more ‘genuine’ than the stooriefits.

1. ‘Gutterbluid: a native of a particular town; a person whose ancestors have been born in the same town for generations, esp of Peebles.’ ‘Stooriefit: in Falkland and Peebles, a resident who is not a native of the town, an incomer [orig a traveller, a stranger who arrived on foot.]’ M. Robinson (ed.), Concise Scots Dictionary (Aberdeen, 1985), p. 255 and 675.
An important factor in the survival of the ridings in the Borders is that locals not only live close together but many of them also work together. Since the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the Scottish Borders has had a heavy concentration of woollen textile mills and related industries, and today the region is renowned for the production of high quality knitwear and tweeds. Hawick, for example, is home to the knitwear giants Pringle of Scotland and Lyle and Scott, although both labels are now owned by distant multinational companies. In the last twenty-five years, there have been attempts to diversify the local economy, notably into electronics and circuit-board manufacture. The presence of these light industries means that a large number of people work together in factories and large units, and not in isolation, thus increasing their knowledge and awareness of each other.

However, although light industry has come to dominate the local economy, towns still have a close link with the land and farming. Local people retain an instinctive feel for the countryside, even if, for most of them, their direct experience of it comes only through recreation. Although the towns have expanded in recent years, the countryside remains very accessible, perhaps only a few minutes walk from the town centre. This is an important factor in the survival of the ridings because it facilitates the ownership of a horse. Unlike city-dwellers, local people can keep a horse relatively cheaply and easily. In Hawick and Selkirk, the ‘principals’ in the local Common Ridings almost always own their own horse. There are numerous stables situated nearby and there is plenty of space to ride and exercise in safety. It is not uncommon to see a horse and rider passing through the quieter streets of the Border towns. It is also relatively inexpensive to take riding lessons. Unofficial horse racing or ‘flapping’ is very popular and working men sometimes club together to buy shares in a racer.
A highly localised patriotism flourishes in the Scottish Borders, which is popularly validated as a legacy from the days of Border warfare. Local people are proud of their traditions and take a keen interest in local history. The Hawick Archaeological Society, a typical Victorian institution, has a sprightly, if aging, membership of over 600 people. The Society organises a winter programme of local studies lectures which generate enough interest to fill the town hall. By far the most popular lectures are those concerning the town itself. Since 1856, the Society has published an annual volume of Transactions, which detail almost every aspect of local history and environment. Other towns have similar societies, although none are quite so long established. The strong inward pride of the burghs, created in part by their isolation, means that locals feel distinct and superior to the outside world. In the Borders, this has created an intense but peaceable rivalry between local burghs, summarised in the popular sayings: 'I'd rather be a lamp-post in Selkirk than provost of Gala' or 'The best thing to come out of Gala is the road to Hawick'. The main outlet for local rivalry is the sports field. In the Borders, local rugby teams are the focus of civic pride and identity. It is indicative of the intensity of local rivalries that a 'Border League' was established over seventy years before the introduction of a national competition (1901 as opposed to 1973). Local 'derbies' are always fiercely competitive and teams can compensate for a disappointing season by defeating their local rivals. The importance of rugby in the Borders' psyche was illustrated in 1988 when Jed-Forest and Kelso met in a special 'play-off' to decide Border League honours. Kelso Community Council immediately cancelled its monthly meeting so that its members could attend the match.2

The next section aims to give an overview of the modern ridings. It introduces their general features and explains some of their terminology. To produce a broad description in this way is a task fraught with difficulties and pitfalls. Each one of the ridings is unique and has its own special atmosphere and traditions. A local person who reads the following pages would probably say, 'Yes, but that's not how

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2. The Scotsman, 22 April 1988, p. 22.
it's really done!', meaning that certain aspects of their riding are different and
that theirs is the only 'true' riding. However, whilst acknowledging local
variation and sentiment, it is possible to give a broad outline of the ridings because
they follow a similar pattern to each other.

Preparations for the Ridings

Several weeks before the riding, the leading participants or 'principals' are chosen
and made known to the town. Generally, the principals are selected by a committee
of interested personnel, although the approaches and selection of candidates may
move in mysterious ways. The identities of the principals are the cause of much
speculation and, although officially secret, they are well known throughout the
town by the time of the official announcement. By far the most important
appointment is the man (and it almost always is a man) who is chosen to be the
symbolic leader of the year's riding, and who will have the honour of carrying the
burgh flag on the day itself. The correct nomenclature for this rider is very
important and is strictly observed. Border towns appoint the following riders:
Outside of the Borders, Musselburgh appoints a ‘Town Champion’ for the Riding of the Marches, which is held approximately every twenty years, and an ‘Honest Lad’ for the annual ‘Honest Toun’ Festival. Lanark appoints a ‘Lord Cornet’ to lead the annual Lanimer Day celebrations. (See plate 1.)

As stated, the standard bearer is usually selected by festival committee. In Selkirk, the appointment is made by the Common Riding Trust, which is composed of local councillors and which is the successor to the Town Council for this historic purpose. In Langholm, more democratically, the selection is made at a public meeting of the town’s inhabitants, and if there is more than one candidate, a ballot

3. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests a military origin for the word ‘cornet’. Several definitions are listed, all of which were first recorded in the late sixteenth-century. These include: ‘The standard of a group of cavalry (originally a long pennon narrowing to the ground)’; ‘A company of cavalry, so-called from the standard carried at its head’; and ‘The fifth commissioned officer in a group of cavalry who carried the colours: corresponding to the “ensign” in infantry’. The earliest recorded use of ‘Cornet’ in Hawick dates from 1705 when James Scott, called of Westport, was nominated by the Town Council ‘to be corronett for the yeare’. Hawick Burgh Records, 28 May 1705.

4. ‘Standard bearer’ is a generic term used throughout this thesis to denote ‘the man who carries the burgh flag at the riding’. It should not be confused with the Standard Bearer at Selkirk Common Riding. (There is also a Standard Bearer at Innerleithen).
is held. In Hawick, the choice of Cornet lies solely with the two previous occupants of the post. All towns expect the same qualities of their appointee. He must be young, of good character, mindful of tradition, and, needless to say, a competent horseman. He should also be a long-term native of the town, preferably born and educated there, and someone who is actively involved in the local community, perhaps through membership of a sporting club or a youth group. He must have taken part in several ridings before, ideally from a young age, and shown an enthusiasm for the festival and the position of principal. In the older Common Ridings, such as Selkirk and Hawick, he must also be a bachelor, and is expected to remain so throughout his period ‘in office’ (for two years, or three ridings). Although the standard bearer receives an official allowance, the position is an expensive one, and he - or more correctly his parents - must be able to meet this expense. The financial commitment required of the standard bearer means that the appointee usually comes from local manufacturing or business groups: for example, he may be the son of a local shop-owner, farmer or tradesman. At the time of their

5. For example, the following is a profile of the 1995 Hawick Cornet: ‘Cornet Lee James Matthews (22), 12c Myreslawgreen, Hawick, is the son of Mr and Mrs Jim Matthews. The Cornet’s father, Jim, has been an avid mounted supporter of Hawick Cornets all through his life. The 1995 Cornet is employed as a Frameworker with Pringle of Scotland. Lee first followed when he was 11 years old. Educated at Drumlanrig Primary School and Hawick High School, he is a keen sportsman, having played rugby for Hawick P. S. A., Y. M. and Hawick Harlequins. Lee is a member of Hawick Conservative Club, also Mosstroopers’ and Burns’ Clubs and sees his appointment to Cornet as being a boyhood ambition achieved.’ Cornet’s Official Time-Table 1995 (Hawick, 1995), p. 2. (See plate 2.)

6. This always seems to have been the case. Recalling the early nineteenth century, ‘Old Hawick Callant’ noted that the Hawick Cornet ‘was chosen from among the small farmers and tradesmen’s sons, generally of the wealthier classes. It was not everyone who could be Cornet. It was very expensive. It cost Andrew Dickson [the Cornet in 1817] £300 [Scots] to support the honour of his position.’ Hawick Express, 11 June 1881, p. 2. Hugh MacDiarmid made the same point when writing about Langholm Common Riding. See page 339 of this thesis.
appointment, the last ten Cornets of Hawick have had the following occupations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>J. Elliot Turnbull</td>
<td>Knitwear clerk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Stuart W. Farish</td>
<td>Storeman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>John Henry Douglas</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Colin Murray</td>
<td>Plumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Gary Scott</td>
<td>Power Knitter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Craig Niblo</td>
<td>Stable Lad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Rory O. Culton</td>
<td>Insurance Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Robert Pringle</td>
<td>Butcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Lee James Matthews</td>
<td>Frame-worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Alan A. Wear</td>
<td>Joiner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whilst several of the 'newer' ridings, such as Galashiels and Duns, have recently had difficulties in filling their posts, there is much competition and rivalry in the older ridings to attain the position of principal, and it takes several years of dedication and involvement before a young man becomes eligible.7 In Selkirk, there is said to be a ten-year waiting list to become Standard Bearer. It is considered a great honour to be appointed as the principal rider, and the position is much valued and cherished. An important social function of the ridings is that they provide ordinary people with a realistic opportunity to acquire prestige and status,

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7. For example, the Selkirk Standard Bearer in 1986 was Ian Rodgerson, a 25-year old television engineer. He had already ridden the marches eighteen times. Southern Reporter, 1 May 1986, p. 3.
at least within the confines of their local community. For the standard bearer in particular, the day of the riding will be the most memorable of his young life. He will briefly be the focus of everyone’s attention, like a bride on her wedding day. In 1983, Hawick Common Riding occurred the day after the British General Election: although the constituency returned a new member to Parliament (Archie Kirkwood, who, following a promise, actually took part in the riding), the day was said to have ‘belonged’ to the Cornet of Hawick rather than the new MP. This idea of being ‘king for a day’ is an ancient feature of festival life and one to which we will return.

The formal selection of the standard bearer takes place several weeks before the riding on ‘picking night’, usually at the beginning of May. In Selkirk, the Standard Bearer is announced in a ceremonial escorting through the town by the Common Riding committee and ex-Standard Bearers, a process known as being ‘chaired out’, which means that the new Standard Bearer is actually carried on a chair above the shoulders of supporting young men in a procession around the town. In Hawick, the Burgh Officer takes a letter from the Provost’s Council to the honoured young man asking him if he wants to become Cornet. On accepting, the Cornet-elect is presented with a new shilling (‘a piece of silver’). He then leads the ‘Cornet’s walk’ around the town, and must visit the site of the former toll

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8. The same can also be said of sports and games. See R. W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society 1700-1850 (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 85-6. Malcolmson says that through sports, ‘the common people were able to create small-scale success systems of their own’. Sport provided an ideal (and for some the only) channel for gaining personal recognition. The same theme is echoed in Laurie Lee’s essay An Obstinate Exile: ‘City honours are not village honours. Like certain wines, they do not travel ... Village honours are still severely local. They include life-long success on the dart-board, sharp wits in the cattle market, skill at growing whopping but useless vegetable marrows, weight-lifting, spitting, ringing bells, ... Outside things don’t count - and why should they?’ L. Lee, I Can’t Stay Long (London, 1975), p. 44.
houses nearest and furthest from his home. The evening ends in a congratulatory reception (known, rather archaically, as a 'smoker').

To help him perform his duties over the coming weeks, the standard bearer is accompanied by some kind of bodyguard or guide. In some burghs, he is supported by the standard bearers of the previous two years, now known as the 'Right-hand man' and the 'Left-hand man' (or 'Right' and 'Left', referring to their riding positions in relation to the standard bearer). (See plate 3.) The Left-hand man is always the retiring principal. Like the standard bearer, these two must be bachelors. In Coldstream, the Right-hand Man is the successor to the Coldstreamer, whilst the Left-hand Man is his predecessor. In Selkirk, the Standard Bearer is supported by a small group of 'Attendants', and he must have been an Attendant for at least one year before he can become Standard Bearer. In Hawick, the Cornet is supported by his Right and Left, and also by an older, married man known as the 'Acting Father'. The Acting Father has several official duties: he represents the Town Council (now the Provost's Council) on horseback; he leads the married men of the town; and he keeps a friendly, paternal eye on the younger spirits. Similarly, at Jedburgh (Jethart) Callant's Festival, an official 'Herald' is appointed to guide the riders.

It will be noted that all of these positions, the most important in the ridings, are occupied by men. There are some roles for women, but generally these are supportive and peripheral. The standard bearer is expected to have a female partner to accompany him at functions like the annual ball. She may be permitted to ride with him around the burgh marches, and she may also have some official duties, such as 'bussing' the burgh flag before the riding. However, her role is largely decorative. Unlike the standard bearer, she is not appointed by the town. Rather she is chosen by the standard bearer to be 'his partner' or 'his lass'. It is rare for a woman to be appointed in her own right, although there are exceptions. In

9. In Hawick, there were four toll houses which formerly controlled the payments on goods entering and leaving the town. THAS (1994), p. 51.
Galashiels, the town selects a 'Braw Lass' to accompany the 'Braw Lad', and in Musselburgh an 'Honest Lass' is selected for the Honest Toun festival. Both of these events were instituted in the 1930s. Much younger girls (primary school seven) are chosen as 'Festival Queens' in Lanark ('the Lanimer Queen', instituted 1893), and in Peebles ('the Beltane Queen', instituted 1899). But even in these towns, the symbolic 'leader' of the festival is always a man. It is extremely rare for a woman to carry the burgh flag.10

The standard bearer and his supporters take part in a variety of events and functions in the weeks preceding the riding. The standard bearer leads his mounted followers on official practice rides, which are known as 'ride-outs'. Most towns organise only one or two of these, but Hawick has an extended series of ride-outs to neighbouring villages and farms. The ride-out is essentially a practice ride for those intending to take part in the main riding. Formal ride-outs are a quite recent innovation, none pre-dating 1900. In Hawick, although the ride-outs are led by the Cornet, they are not officially part of the Common Riding. Ride-outs often incorporate visits to sites of local significance or commemorate historic events. On the Tuesday evening of Duns 'Reiver's Week', the Reiver and his supporters ride from the centre of the town to Duns Law, where an open-air service is held to commemorate the gathering of the Covenanting army in 1639 and the signing of the National Covenant by local supporters. Likewise, the Gala Braw Lad and Lass and their supporters ride on the Monday evening to Lindean kirkyard, site of the first parish church of Galashiels. Ride-outs can also include a formal meeting or 'tryst' with the principals of other towns. For example, the Gala Braw Lad and Lass have a ride-out to meet the Selkirk Standard Bearer, and they also ride-out to meet the Lauder Cornet. Similarly, the Jethart Callant meets the Kelso Laddie at Morebattle, which is roughly midway between the two towns. (See plate 4.) Goodwill and friendship is expressed when the two parties meet, and bottles and hip-flasks are exchanged. Ride-outs may also involve visiting the local nobility.

10. See page 345.
For example, the Kelso Laddie and his supporters have an official ride to Floors castle where they are entertained by the Duke of Roxburghe or his representative. Likewise, the Coldstreamer and his followers visit the Hirsel, the ancestral home of the Earls of Home. The Gala Braw Lad and Lass visit Torwoodlee, home of a branch of the Pringle family, and there crave permission to remove a sod of earth and a stone from the old tower of Torwoodlee for use in the forthcoming festival (the sod and the stone will be used to represent the ceremony of sasine).

Like the riding itself, the ride-outs are impressive spectacles and can attract large numbers of mounted followers. Some of the ride-outs require stamina and endurance to be completed successfully. The 'Mosspaul' ride-out at Hawick is 24 miles over rough moorland. The 'Redeswire' ride at Jedburgh is 25 miles return journey from Jedburgh to the Redeswire (the modern Carter Bar), the site of an encounter known as the 'Raid of Redeswire' (1575), when the timely appearance of the men of Jedburgh with their battle cry of 'Jethart's Here!' turned the tide of a battle against an English force. The Redeswire is reckoned to be the toughest ride on the Borders circuit. Riders who complete certain ride-outs for the first time are presented with commemorative badges in recognition of their achievement. In Hawick, those who complete the Mosspaul ride-out are presented with a badge (which bears the image of a horse's head), and they are enrolled in 'the Ancient Order of Mosstroopers', a local society named after the sixteenth-century outlaws of Teviotdale and Liddesdale which promotes the Common Riding. (The Ancient

11. Mosspaul is a hotel on the county border of Roxburghshire and Dumfriesshire. Traditionally, a hostelry has existed on the site for hundreds of years and is supposed to have been founded by monks from Melrose Abbey. Many famous travellers have broken their journey at Mosspaul, including Sir Walter Scott, the Wordsworths and the Liberal Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone. When the railway between Hawick and Carlisle was opened in 1861, the hotel lost most of its passing trade and quickly fell into disrepair. In 1900, a company of local gentlemen, many of whom were Common Riding stalwarts, rebuilt the hotel to cater for the then modern craze of cycling.
Order was formed in 1920. It is currently male-only.) Badges are also presented to men and women who complete the Redeswire Ride for the first time.¹² Ride-outs of this kind might be thought of as an initiation test for those intending to take part in the main riding. There are no rules that a rider must have completed a ride-out before he or she can take part, but there is strong social pressure to 'earn your badge'.

The ride-outs set the scene for the main riding. Like all modern festivals, the ridings are now timed as a matter of convenience. The Borders festivals are always held in the same order, roughly on alternate weekends, thus avoiding rivalry between towns and allowing principals and others to attend neighbouring festivals. (There is however some overlap. Melrose and Peebles, and Duns and Jedburgh hold their festivals in the same week.) The dates of the modern Borders festivals are calculated as follows:

¹² In 1994, 33 first-time riders received their Redeswire badges. Southern Reporter, 7 July 1994, p. 3.
Hawick  Thursday, Friday and Saturday after the first Monday in June  
Selkirk  Friday after the second Monday in June  
Melrose  Third full week in June  
Peebles  Third full week in June  
Galashiels  End of June, sometimes the first weekend in July  
Jedburgh  Ends second Saturday in July  
Duns  First full week in July  
 Musselburgh  Ends third Saturday in July  
Kelso  Middle of July  
Langholm  Last Friday in July  
Lauder  Ends first Saturday in August  
Coldstream  First full week in August

In 1996, this created a Borders' festival calendar as follows (main festivals only):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 to 8 June</td>
<td>Hawick Common Riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 June</td>
<td>Selkirk Common Riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 22 June</td>
<td>Melrose Summer Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 22 June</td>
<td>Peebles March Riding and Beltane Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 June to 29 June</td>
<td>Galashiels Braw Lads Gathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 June to 13 July</td>
<td>Jethart Callant's Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 13 July</td>
<td>Duns Reivers Week and Summer Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 to 20 July</td>
<td>Musselburgh Honest Toun Festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 to 20 July</td>
<td>Kelso Civic Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 July</td>
<td>Langholm Common Riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 July to 3 August</td>
<td>Lauder Common Riding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 10 August</td>
<td>Coldstream Civic Week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outside the Borders, Lanark's Lanimer Day is traditionally held on 'the Thursday between 6 and 12 of June' (in 1996, 6 June). Linlithgow Marches is held on

13. Musselburgh is not, of course, a Border burgh, but retains close links with the Borders festivals. The Honest Lad and Honest Lass and their supporters take part in the Borders ridings, and the compliment is returned when the Borders principals take part Musselburgh Honest Toun festival.
'the first Tuesday after the second Thursday in June' (in 1996, 17 June). Ridings are held in midsummer when, in theory, it is warmer and drier, and this will encourage more people to participate.14 Most ridings avoid August, the principal month for summer holidays.

Festival week begins on Sunday when the principals and their supporters attend a church service known as ‘the Kirkin’. Here, a blessing is given on the coming event, and the standard bearer and his lass are presented with Bibles. The service may be held in the standard bearer’s own church, but it usually takes place on the oldest religious site of the burgh, even when the buildings on that site are in ruins. Peebles Beltane Festival begins with a united church service held amongst the medieval remains of the Old Cross Kirk. The Kirking is a rare religious interlude in the course of the ridings. It is customary to say a prayer when the principals lay wreaths at the town war memorial, and also to say a grace before an official meal or dinner, but otherwise the ridings are secular events. The Kirking itself is not an old feature of the ridings, but was introduced in the later nineteenth century as part of a wider effort to sanitise an unruly popular festival. The Kirking of the Cornet at Hawick Common Riding was introduced as recently as 1887. The secular nature of the ridings is in marked contrast to the 'beating of the bounds' in England, where the parish bounds are perambulated and the procession is led by the parish priest. The riding of the marches may have had some religious (and

14. Unfortunately, as is well known, the Scottish summer regularly fails to deliver. Bad weather at the Common Riding is an old complaint. In 1858, Hawick Common Riding races was hit by a sudden thunderstorm and torrential rain, which had sad results for Hawick’s 'bright-eyed daughters': 'Gay dresses, which a few minutes ago swept along the turf in graceful folds, were huddled over shoulders ..... petticoats bedraggled and streaming as if fresh from the washing tub; their extremities, boots and stockings of one clayey hue. Bright ribbons and flowers parted with their tints, which mingled with rosey complexions made sweet faces appear as if tattooed.' Hawick Advertiser, 19 June 1858, p. 4.
superstitious) input before the Reformation, and it is possible that the Reformation altered the character of the ridings, removing much of their religious symbolism. 

Following the Kirking, various events take place in the week of the riding. In some towns, the riding is part of a more general 'Civic Week', which includes musical concerts, sports tournaments, and competitions such as 'Best Dressed Shop Window' (Peebles), 'Most Attractive Floral Display' (Linlithgow) or 'Children's Pet Show' (Kelso). Practice rides or ride-outs may also take place during the week. The standard bearer and his companions are kept busy at this time. They are expected to undertake a round of visits and engagements, including visits to hospitals, old people's homes and local schools, where the standard bearer has the important duty of requesting a holiday for pupils for the duration of the riding (which is always granted, of course).

A significant feature of festival week is an official reception for 'exiles', people born or raised in the town who moved away but who have returned for the riding. (See plate 5.) These people may have spent many years away from the town, but now they are making a temporary return to what-is-considered their 'true home'. To qualify as an exile, a local person has to live more than a set distance from the town. By modern standards, the distance is often small, perhaps 150 miles, and thus includes people who live in other parts of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. But everyone knows that the 'real' exiles are people who live overseas. Every year, individuals and families return from across the world for the riding. Predictably, there is always a preponderance from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The presence of the exiles, and that of other people who are normally absent from the town, lends the riding a special poignancy and significance. A typical family reunion occurred at Galashiels Braw Lad's Gathering in 1994:

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15. For more on the Reformation and the Ridings, see pages 114-7.
Evidence of the Gathering being a time of reunion was certainly evident. The Chalmers family - brothers Eric and Roy, and sister Mabel - have not met up together since 1957. Younger brother Eric (47) of 3 Elm Grove said: ‘Our celebrations have been going on for two weeks’, while 58-year old Mabel, from Canada, recalled walking down the street at early Gatherings. However, the most poignant response came from 59-year-old Roy, who comes from New Zealand: This is still home to us ..... and always will be.16

Exiles have a special status in the ridings. Their names are formally announced in the local newspapers and they are welcomed with great respect and pride. Special songs and poems are written and sung in their honour. In Langholm, while the railway still existed, it was the custom for the local band to meet the last train to arrive on ‘the nicht afore the morn’, full of Langholm exiles, and to escort the returning exiles through the town.17 Selkirk has a special ‘Colonial Society’, which is represented in the procession on Common Riding morning. Over the years, emigration, like warfare, has drained many people away from Scotland’s towns. Those who stayed know that emigration threatens the survival of their town, so the return of the exiles represents a temporary victory of the town over death.

For all those associated with the riding, the period leading up to the event is a time of anticipation and increasing excitement, like the approach to Christmas and the New Year (from which the riding takes place at a convenient six months interval). The town gets much busier than normal, the streets are brightly decorated with coloured flags and bunting, the travelling showmen arrive and set up their attractions, and there is a great deal of activity as people get ready for the big day. Preparations for the riding are made well in advance and this requires

17. TSAS, vol. xii, p. 405. Although Langholm has not had a railway since the late 1960s, the band still makes the Thursday night visit to the site of the station.

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careful foresight and planning. Here we find the traditional role for women in the riding: to be stage managers and organisers of the event rather than its principal actors. Women are responsible for making all the important domestic arrangements without which the riding could not take place. As managers of the household budget throughout the year, women are expected to juggle resources between everyday needs and the future demands of the riding. Closer to the day, women buy and prepare food for parties and guests; they make ready special clothes; they clean the houses and prepare to welcome visitors. In other words, the men occupy the public stage whilst the women organise in the background. This attitude has recently been criticised as being appallingly old-fashioned, but the traditional division of roles is rather more than institutionalised sexism. Local women are often perfectly happy to play their part and stay in the background looking after everyone. Indeed, many women are often downright patronising towards their menfolk. Let the men have their fun, they say. The women know that without their support, the men would not get far.

The approach to the riding is also a time of music and song. Several towns have their own song-book, which contains tunes and lyrics familiar to local people but quite unknown to the outside world. Favourite local songs are sung and heard repeatedly in the course of the riding. Curiously, they are rarely heard at any other time of year, even though many of them do not have the riding as their subject. These songs have few claims to musical artistry. They are sentimental and

19. "It [Hawick Common Riding] is totally male-orientated," said 18-year-old Bridie O'Dowd. "The women are expected to be tartan Cindy dolls. They've been pushed into the outskirts to be bystanders, makers of the packed lunches and to pick up the pieces when the men lie drunk in the gutters." The Scotsman, 3 June 1985, p. 8. J. A. Liston, 'Phoney Festivals. Where are all the Women?', Harpies and Quines (October/November 1992), pp. 40-3.
20. This passage has been partly inspired by R. Morris, Tories. From Village Hall to Westminster: A Political Sketch (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 46-8.
full of local patriotism, but local people are as proud of them as they are of the riding itself. As we will see, the musical tradition of the ridings is very old. In the Borders, a few of the songs may derive from the old ballad tradition, although most originated in the late nineteenth-century. The riding songs have several general themes: they speak of the beauty of the homeland and of local people’s love for their home; the longing of exiles to return home and to their family; and the reasons why the town is superior and why it is unique. The images presented in the songs are how the town likes to see itself and its past. There are also songs which are just plain odd and defy description. The Hawick Common Riding favourite Pawkie Patterson’s Auld Grey Yaud is about, of all things, a talking horse on its way to the slaughter-house. The Common Riding songs are a powerful symbol of unity and of membership of the town. As one ex-Cornet said recently: ‘Lose the songs and you lose your community.’21 Common Riding song-books are sold locally and recordings are available on record and cassette tape, but every native knows the words of the songs ‘by heart’ and can recite them when prompted. The songs are taught and sung in local schools and rehearsed informally in homes and local drinking clubs as the riding draws near. They are an essential aspect of the celebration.

Shortly before the riding, a formal announcement is made that the marches are due to be ridden and that townspeople (or more correctly male burgesses) are expected to attend. The announcement is made by a burgh official, who in some towns perambulates the streets of the burgh to alert the inhabitants of the forthcoming event. In Linlithgow, the ‘Crying of the Marches’ takes place at lunchtime of the preceding Friday. The town crier, resplendent in his black velvet jacket and knee breeches and his distinctive plumed hat, marches along the High Street accompanied by a drummer and a bodyguard of two uniformed halberdiers plus an army of local schoolchildren. At certain spots along the route, the procession halts and the town crier, who is introduced by ‘tuck of drum’, announces

that 'the burgesses, craftsmen and whole inhabitants of the Royal Burgh of Linlithgow' are to attend the riding 'according to the use and custom of the ancient and honourable Burgh', and that they must attend 'in their best carriage, equipage, apparel and array'. In other towns, the announcement of the riding is made from a balcony of the town hall. The crying of the marches is a relic of the days when proclamations and official news were conveyed by word of mouth. Originally, the announcement was an important duty because fines were levied on burgesses who failed to participate in the riding. The Linlithgow proclamation still warns that burgesses who do not attend will suffer a penalty of 'One Hundred Pounds Scotch each'.

Another significant moment is the formal presentation of the burgh flag to the standard bearer, who is instructed to carry it safely around the burgh marches and then return it to the burgh authorities. Symbolically, youth has been entrusted with the well-being of the town. In Musselburgh Honest Toun festival, the 'sashing' (or investiture) of the Honest Lad takes place on the Wednesday evening of the festival week. In an impressive outdoor ceremony (weather permitting), the new appointee is presented with his sash of office by a local personage, and then he is presented with the burgh flag to be carried on Saturday's riding. In Hawick, the formal presentation of the burgh flag to the Cornet takes place 'the nicht afore the morn' (Thursday evening before Friday's ride) in the town hall. The ceremony, which includes song-singing and a speech by an official guest, is known as the 'Colour Bussing', because the Cornet's Lass ties ribbons on the head of the staff of the burgh flag - she 'busses' the flag - before it is presented to the Cornet. This tradition is found in all the ridings, and it imitates the ancient practice of women decorating their men as a sign of affection and good luck before they went to war. In Langholm, the presentation of the burgh standard to the Cornet takes place on the morning of the Common Riding. The Provost of Langholm charges the Cornet to

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guard the flag well in 'gaugin oot in defence o oor property and see if a oor marches they be clear'.

The burgh flag is central to the riding. It is the symbol of the town, representing its honour and traditions. The flag is treated at all times with reverence and respect, as if it were a holy relic. In 1994, the Hawick Cornet said: 'After receiving the Banner Blue from the Master of Ceremonies, it was like being given a holy grail - it will not bring me eternal life but it will give me eternal happiness.'23 Few people are permitted to handle the flag, and those who do are made aware of their privilege. Ill-treatment of the burgh flag, which fortunately is a very rare occurrence, is considered sacrilegious and a serious insult to the town. In her book on Selkirk Common Riding, Gwen Kennedy Neville quotes an ex-Standard Bearer who felt that he had a duty to 'protect' the flag: 'he related a story of watching the flag-casting practice one evening and seeing that the burgh flag was not being treated with what he considered proper respect. "I got right put out about this," he said, "it's like someone playing about with your wife!"'24 An example of bureaucratic irreverence to the burgh flag occurred recently in Hawick. In 1995, the 'Black Tower' of Drumlanrig, an old coaching hotel which incorporates a fourteenth-century tower house, was reopened as a museum and visitor centre after many years of neglect. To promote the building, a logotype device was introduced which used the image of the Hawick Common Riding flag. The new device was unpopular among many local people, who felt that their sacred emblem had been cheapened and degraded for commercial purposes. Requests were unsuccessfully made to have the image removed. The incident reveals the gulf between officialdom and local sensitivity, a division which has occurred many times in the history of the ridings. (There is, however, an element of double standards here because some local societies and drinking clubs use the image of the flag as their motif.)

Common Riding Day

‘Common Riding day’ or ‘Marches day’ begins in the very early morning, testifying to the pre-industrial origins of the festival. Townspeople are roused by the local band perambulating a traditional route through the older streets of the burgh. Local variation is immediately apparent. Langholm Common Riding begins with a race for foxhounds over a circuit in the Ewes valley, considered to be one of the most important events in the sport. Hawick Common Riding begins at 6am with the ‘Snuffin’ ceremony, where small packets of snuff are fought over by a boisterous crowd of spectators. (See plate 6.) Snuff is thought to have been introduced into Scotland in the seventeenth century. The exchange of snuff is a traditional expression of good will, rather like sharing a bottle of whisky. Several Scottish burghs, including Hawick, retain a municipal snuff-box for use on ceremonial occasions. A snuffing ceremony also takes place at Annan Common Riding, where the burgh snuff-box is passed around the riders. The silver snuff-box was presented to Annan by Brigadier General Dirom of Mount Annan for supporting his candidature for Dumfries Burghs in 1806. The Provost of Annan is obliged to produce it at every public meeting and to keep it well filled with good snuff.25

Most ridings begin with an official breakfast for the principals and their guests, which is usually hosted by the local provost (‘the provost’s breakfast’). This is an exciting and enjoyable occasion when everyone anticipates the day ahead. Speeches are made and songs are sung, the first of many renditions of the day. The breakfast is an official ‘send-off’ for those who are about to take part in the riding, and originated when riders (and walkers) went around the entire boundary of the common. Throughout the town there is an almost tangible sense of excitement. It is often remarked that ‘everything is different on Common Riding day’. The town becomes ‘an island out of time’, as if the rest of the world has ceased

to exist. People busy themselves with last minute preparations and have little concern for the outside world. It has been written of Lanark Lanimer Day: 'If people switched on the news, it was not to hear about the international situation. What worried Lanark was the weather forecast.'

Following the official breakfast, the stage is set for the day’s ride. This begins with a formal procession or parade, which may commence from the market cross (or the site of). The procession is headed by a band playing local airs. (See plate 7.) In the Borders, most towns have several different types of bands, and each of these is likely to be involved in the riding. In Selkirk, the ‘Silver band’ marches on the Common Riding morning and plays the following day at the ‘games’; the ‘Flute band’ (or ‘fife band’) marches around the streets of the town at 4am to awaken the people for the big day; and finally there is the ‘Pipe band’, composed entirely of bagpipers, which also plays during the Common Riding. The members and leaders of all these musical companies are local residents. Likewise, Hawick has a silver band, known as the ‘Saxhorn band’ after a nineteenth-century instrument, and a flute band, known as the ‘Drums and Fifes’. (See plate 8.) The town also has a pipe band but it is not involved in the Common Riding. This may be the only public display in Scotland which does not feature a pipe band. In contrast, the Drums and Fifes play only at the Common Riding. Flute bands of this kind usually have connotations of sectarianism and religious extremism. But in Hawick and Selkirk, whilst the flute band may have originated as a symbol of Protestantism, it does not have any religious connotations. For local people, the flute band is like the clatter of horses’ hooves: it is one of the essential sounds of

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the Common Riding. Each band involved in the riding is expected to follow a strict code of performance. Tunes are repeated over and over, and each tune has its defined place in the day's proceedings. In Hawick, the Drums and Fifes play specific tunes in certain streets of the town.

The procession at the beginning of the riding is likely to include civic dignitaries and official guests, who are chauffeur-driven in limousines and who do not take part in the actual ride. In Selkirk, the procession is headed by members of the crafts guilds (the Hammermen, the Weavers, etc) who march in predetermined order with their guild banners. However, pride of place is given to the standard bearer and his equestrian guard. The standard bearer is the 'man of the moment', the local hero who represents the honour of the town. His importance is emphasised by his special costume, which includes an embroidered sash of office and coloured rosettes and ribbons. Undoubtedly, the most distinctive uniform is that of the Hawick Comet, who wears a top-hat, a riding coat of dark green, white breeches and a crimson sash. The Common Riding is the only occasion when the Comet is permitted to wear this outfit: he does not wear it on the preliminary ride-outs. Ex-Cornets wear their green jackets when right and left hand men; thereafter only at the Common Riding Ball.

The principals are followed by the cavalcade of mounted supporters, which in some festivals can number over 300 horse. (In 1995, 332 riders took part in Hawick Common Riding, and 411 at Selkirk.) The age of the riders ranges from under five to over seventy, and, for many of them, this is the only time of year when they ride a horse. The enthusiasm for taking part is such that it encourages many novice or

27. Scottish dramatist O. H. Mavor ('James Bridie') was 'principal guest' at Hawick Common Riding in 1950. He commented on the fifes and drums: 'I used to think fifes sounded like piddling in biscuit tins, but, when they played Teribus [the Hawick Common Riding song], they are really spirit-stirring all right.' R. Mavor, Dr Mavor and Mr Bridie (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 146.
unskilled riders, ‘wha clap their spurs to toe in place of heel’. The atmosphere in the procession is jovial and good natured, but it is also a dignified occasion. Riders are smartly dressed, and are expected to wear a necktie (special ties are produced), a riding-jacket or knitwear, riding-boots and headgear. Brightly coloured clothing, including scarlet hunting-jackets, are not permitted. A curiosity of the Hawick Common Riding is that the all the riders wear sprigs of oak leaves attached to their jacket lapels. The origins of this custom are unknown, although oak is a traditional symbol of strength, durability and courage. In the Borders ridings, the procession includes visiting principals from other towns, who are recognisable


Bakers and brewers, birliemen and fleshers,
Horse tailors, smiths, an’ clockies, undertakers,
Tanners and hosiers, grocers, haberdashers,
Skinners and ma’tmen, slaters, candlemakers,
Beaux wha despise the name of occupation,
Blood-suckin’ bugs wha live upon taxation.

Horses were in such demand that some riders took part on donkeys. Needless to say, there were many accidents.

29. Oak is associated with the Norse thunder gods, Thor and Odin. There may also be a Flodden connection. In March 1906, the Hawick News noted ‘a Common Riding heroine’ called Jenny Smith, who ‘about 80 years ago’ went to Flodden Field and gathered twigs for the Cornet’s coat. Hawick News, 2 March 1906, p. 4. In England, 29 May is known as Oak Apple Day, a date which marks the anniversary of the Restoration of 1660. Traditionally, the Restoration is commemorated by wearing oak apples or oak leaves. Popular legend states that after the battle of Worcester on 6 September 1651, Charles Stuart - the future Charles II - escaped the Parliamentarian forces by hiding in the branches of an oak tree. It may be relevant that many of the old May celebrations abolished under Cromwell’s Commonwealth featured oak and other greenery. Celebrating 29 May became an excuse to bring these festivities back: a shift from Puritan austerity to royalist merriment.
by their different coloured rosettes. Most towns have their own permanent colours: Hawick's and Lauder's are blue-and-yellow; Selkirk's and Jedburgh's scarlet-and-blue, Peebles red-and-black, and so on. Throughout the week of each riding, the town is hung with bunting in the appropriate colours, and people sport rosettes. An unusual feature of Langholm Common Riding is that the annual choice of colours is the same as those worn by the winning jockey at the Epsom Derby. Whilst there is great rivalry between the Border towns, they are anxious to support each other's ridings, and it is an important part of the principal's duties that he represent his town at neighbouring events. Border towns also send their bands to other ridings. In 1996, Peebles Beltane Festival included the Langholm Silver Band, Coldstream Pipe Band and Selkirk Pipe Band. The procession is watched by an eager crowd of townspeople and visitors, who cheer the riders on and wish them a safe return.

With its flags, horses and stirring music, the procession has rather a military feel about it. Watching the riders as they pass through the town, it is difficult not to think of them going away to war.

The procession is the prelude to the main business of the day: the riding of the burgh marches. Leaving the confines of the town for the first time, the riders sometimes engage in a fierce gallop called 'the charge' or 'the chase' (ie chasing the standard bearer as he leads the gallop). This has no real purpose except to release excess energy and excitement. It is undeniably a thrilling spectacle. In 1981, a native of Langholm was quoted as saying: 'I've heard television commentators say that the Derby is the greatest horse race in the world, but I say they're folk of very limited experience - they've obviously never seen the Langholm Charge!'30 Things settle down when riders head into the country. (See plates 9 and 10.) Today, the riding of the marches is largely symbolic. Riders rarely go around the entire boundary of the burgh lands as they once did, although the original purpose of the ride has not been forgotten. In Hawick and Langholm, riders visit the furthest


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extremity of the common (the point furthest from the town), where the Cornet cuts a sod of earth to mark the limits of the burgh territory. In Musselburgh Riding of the Marches, which is held approximately every 20 years, turfs are cut at various points on the old boundary line by the official ‘turf-cutter’, who casts the divots with a hearty cry of ‘It’s a’ oor ain’ (‘It’s all our own’). Also in Hawick, the Cornet and his Right and Left (but no other rider) ford to the middle of the River Teviot where the Cornet dips the staff of the flag three times in the water to mark the site of a burgh boundary. Towns without common land make every effort to incorporate historic sites within their riding, and, if possible, to involve the local nobility. In Galashiels Braw Lads’ Gathering, riders visit Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott, where the principals are entertained by Scott’s direct descendants. Similarly, in Jedburgh, riders visit Ferniehurst castle, traditional seat of a branch of the Kerr family.

Throughout the riding, regular halts are made to refresh the riders and their mounts. Official refreshment stops have sometimes become an important part of the day’s traditions. In Selkirk Common Riding, riders gather at the ‘Three Brethren’ cairns, which mark the northern extremity of the common, and drink toasts to the Standard Bearer, the Provost, the Royal Burgh and Her Majesty the Queen. In Hawick, riders are entertained at a local farm where they are served a traditional dish of ‘curds and cream’ (curds and whey, known locally as ‘soor dook’), which was once part of the staple diet of the lower orders.31 Riders also consume an alcoholic cocktail of rum and fresh milk. Special drinks of alcohol and milk can be found in other ridings, such as the ‘Blackness milk’ (milk and whisky) at Linlithgow Marches, and also in other British festivals, which testifies to their agrarian roots. In Dorset, the opening of the local commons for spring grazing was

31. Curds and cream are mentioned in William Langland’s Piers the Ploughman of 1362: ‘Twey grene cheeses and a fewe curddes and crayme’ (A text: passus vii, lines 265-6). Also in William Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale: ‘Good sooth she is The Queen of Curds and Creme’ (act 4, sc. 4, line 161).
traditionally celebrated by a ‘syllabub’, which consisted of the milk of separate cows mixed in a bucket with alcohol. Unusual and distinctive features such as the ‘rum and milk’ help to emphasise the special nature of the day.

Whilst the ride is enjoyable for participants, it does have some potentially dangerous moments. On their way to Abbotsford, riders at Galashiels Braw Lads’ Gathering make a spectacular fording of the river Tweed. In 1958, the Selkirk Standard Bearer was actually swept away and drowned during the Galashiels festival in an attempt to cross the flood-swollen river. (Precautions are now taken to avoid a repeat of the tragedy.) Galloping on hard roads has obvious dangers, particularly for inexperienced riders. Likewise, rain can make the earth slippery and the ride uncomfortable. Riders are regularly thrown off their mounts, and occasionally there are broken bones and other injuries. It is also not unknown for horses to be injured and to have to be destroyed. No doubt, part of the lasting enjoyment of taking part is the telling and retelling of stories about bad weather and narrow escapes, and also of returning home safely and with dignity intact.

Once the riding is complete, the principals and riders come back to the town. In Selkirk, the riders return with a thrilling, high-speed gallop called ‘coming in at the Toll’, where they are cheered home by a large crowd. This is followed by ‘casting the colours’, where the Standard Bearer and representatives of the town’s guilds take it in turn to ‘cast’ a flag (i.e. turn a flag in figure eight motions about the bearer’s body). (See plate 11.) Other towns conclude their riding differently. The highlight of Peebles Beltane Festival is the crowning of the ‘Beltane Queen’, and a

33. For example, in the 1995 Selkirk Common Riding, BBC television presenter, Jenni Falconner, who was making a film about the Common Riding for the adventure activities programme The Big Country, fell from her horse and broke her thumb. Southern Reporter, 22 June 1995, p. 15.
colourful parade of school children in fancy dress. In some towns, these children's events have become more important than the actual riding. In Peebles, the main riding (known as 'the Cornet's Canter') takes place on the Wednesday evening, whilst the crowning of the Beltane Queen takes place on the Saturday morning and is the climax of the week's events.34 (See plate 12.)

A universal feature of the ridings is a visit to the burgh war memorial, where the principal (or festival queen) lays a wreath of remembrance on behalf of the town. (See plate 13.) It is often observed that principal is around the same age as those who are commemorated by the memorial. Inevitably, the 'wreath laying' is the most sombre and serious moment of the festival. It commemorates all local men who have died in war, and in particular those who fell in the two world wars. The inclusion of a wreath laying ceremony in the riding reflects the strong feeling of loss to the community through war. It also suggests the need for vigilance and the need to defend the community against threats from the 'outside', which is one of the themes of the riding. However, there is nothing xenophobic or insular about this ceremony. The wreath-laying honours men and women who fought for Scotland and Great Britain (and until recently the Empire) as well as the town. Throughout the course of the ridings, local and national loyalties, especially to the British state, regularly overlap and bolster each other. Local allegiances are in the foreground but the nation is never diminished or forgotten. Thus, the Union flag and the Scottish saltire fly from the town hall; toasts are drunk to the health of the monarch; and, in many towns, the playing of 'God Save the Queen' concludes the formal events. Likewise, although many of the ridings commemorate incidents from the Anglo-Scottish wars, including the calamitous Scottish defeat at Flodden, there is no hostility or ill-will expressed towards England. The past is used to provide universal values and truths, not fodder for nationalistic excesses. The ridings are uniquely Scottish, but they are not anti-English.

Once the official riding is complete, most towns organise an afternoon programme of horse racing or athletic sports, possibly both. In Selkirk, horse racing is held ‘at the Rigg’, a course just outside the town, whilst in Hawick people go ‘up the Moor’ (locally pronounced ‘Mare’). Meetings have ‘ceremonial’ races for horses which have gone around the marches and other races for horses which are racers only. Special prizes and trophies are awarded year after year. The Scottish Borders is the heartland of British ‘flapping’, which means horse racing on unlicensed tracks and not recognised by the Jockey Club, the custodians of the rules of racing. The Common Riding meetings are the highlights of the annual flapping circuit. Townspeople and visitors flock to the course, whether interested in racing or not. Car boots are opened and picnic hampers produced and the good work of the previous days and weeks is shared and enjoyed. There are also tents selling food and drinks. Old friends and family gather together, perhaps for the first time since Christmas or the New Year, possibly since last year’s riding. There is much fun and amusement as normal inhibitions are lowered and drinks are exchanged. This is the real purpose of the day. (See plate 14.)

Meanwhile, the standard bearer has to complete his official duties and report back to the burgh authorities to confirm his inspection of the burgh marches (which may happen before the races or sports.) Originally, he would have informed the burgh authorities of encroachments on the burgh land or any other problems, but today he simply reports that all is in good order. In some towns, he has to sign the burgh map. The provost congratulates the standard bearer on his conduct during the riding and the past weeks, and presents him with an official medal or gift as a lasting memento of his appointment. It is also the standard bearer’s duty to return the burgh flag to the safe keeping of the burgh authorities: the flag which went ‘safe oot’ to the furthest part of the common is now ‘safe in’ with its honour ‘unsullied and unstained’. For the standard bearer, the ‘handing
back of the flag' is a poignant moment, signifying that 'his' riding is now officially over. In an interview in 1981, Alex McVittie, Langholm Cornet of 1919, undoubtedly spoke for many: 'To be Comet gives you an inexplicable feeling, it is very emotional: the handing in of the flag brings tears to your eyes.' In some towns, the burgh flag is then publicly displayed for a short period as a symbol that the riding has been successfully completed. In Hawick, the Cornet handles the flag for the last time when he displays it from the balcony of the town hall overlooking the High Street. In a short, moving ceremony, the local band plays a sad hymn-like tune known as The Invocation whilst the Cornet lowers the flag and the mounted supporters stand in their stirrups as if to attention. Festivals like the ridings are often said to encapsulate the human life-cycle, and at this moment it is difficult not to think of death and loss. (See plate 15.)

In all towns, the riding concludes with an official dinner in honour of the town, the festival and the standard bearer; and also with the official ball, where dancing continues well into the night. The festival ball is an annual social highlight in the town: tickets are much sought after and are highly prized. The ball is an important opportunity for display: women wear long gowns (possibly hired or home-made) and men wear dinner suits or 'highland' dress (again probably hired). For most people, the ball is a rare opportunity to dress-up, just as the festival is their only chance to ride a horse. In both cases, those involved might be thought of as being members of a temporary aristocracy. They are treated with respect, admiration and some envy. In Hawick, members of the public pay to watch the Common Riding Ball from a balcony.

The ball blends together traditional dances ('country dances') and popular modern trends. There may be special dances reserved for the principals, such as the 'Cornet's Reel' at Hawick Common Riding which is danced at midnight by ex-Cornets and their partners only. The final dance of the evening may be symbolic: in

Langholm, the principals lead the dancers and all their supporters on foot to the burgh market place, pausing three times en route for them to dance a special Common Riding polka. In Hawick, the final dance takes place at sunrise on top of the 'Moat hill' (the surviving 'motte' of a Norman motte and bailey castle), where the principals greet the sunrise and the new day. Some fanciful suggestions have been made to explain this tradition, but, as one level-headed Victorian wrote, 'probably the visit is only the outcome of a little hilarity on the part of the Cornet and his lads'.

For people not fortunate enough to attend the official ball, the evening is passed with friends and family, or with a visit to the fairground (known throughout Scotland as 'the shows'). The fair arrives in town at the beginning of festival week, and stays for the duration. The fair has an unusual relationship with the riding: it is an important part of it, but it is also aloof and separate. The fair does not originate locally and it has no local roots. None of the people who work in it are local, and they probably have little knowledge of the festival in which they are involved. Similarly, no-one in the town asks where the fair comes from or where it goes once the riding is complete. Both sides keep their distance, and only come together when business transacts. Local people know that a visit to the fair is a sure way to lose their money, but, in true festival spirit, no-one really cares.

The riding may extend over two days (usually Friday and Saturday), but, like Christmas day and Boxing day, the second day has an air of anti-climax and weariness. By the end of the second day, even the most avid supporter is beginning to wilt. The Sunday at the end of the riding is 'recovery day'. The town is subdued and quiet, nursing its collective hangover. The atmosphere is captured in Robert Murray's poem The Reckoning (The Sunday after the Common Riding):

36. *Hawick Express*, 26 April 1895, p. 3.
Can they be the kirk bells ringin?
Weel, aw canneh gaun the day
Aw'm no in the tid for sermons,
So aw'd better bide away.

Eh, but my een ir drumlie,
An ma heid is unco sair;
Oo must have been gaun a dinger
Baith at the Haugh and at the Muir.37

Friends and visitors gradually disperse and after a few days the town returns to normal. However, the riding lingers in the memory and forms a major topic of conversation for several weeks to come. Events are dissected and individual performances assessed. The riding is widely reported in the local newspapers, and spreads of photographs provide an impressive window into the pageantry of the day. The layout and subject-matter of these photographs and reports is ritually repeated from year to year, complementing the ritual formality of the events themselves and contributing to their survival. Recording the riding at set points has become an important part of the occasion: like ‘official’ photographs at a wedding, it would be considered incomplete without them. The inevitable comment is made in the newspaper and in the town that it is only 52 weeks until the next riding.

The ‘Inner’ Meaning of the Ridings

This completes a general description of the ridings. Inevitably, the description is flawed because it captures nothing of the complexity of the ridings, or the passions which they arouse. To the ‘outside’ world, including people who live locally but

who do not have strong roots in the town, the ridings might appear to be little more than horses and a picnic: at best, they are a pleasing anachronism, at worst, an excuse for excessive drinking and boorish behaviour. But for those who have ‘grown up’ with a particular riding and who take part in it year after year, the event is far more important than this. It is often said that the ridings are ‘of the spirit’ and that they are ‘better felt than telt’ (told). A Hawick Common Riding poem states:

It’s no’ in steeds, it’s no’ in speeds,
It’s something in the heart abiding;
The kindly customs, words and deeds,
It’s these that make the Common Riding.38

Local people know exactly what is meant here but they would find their feelings very difficult to explain.

Above all, the ridings are private. They are organised by and for local people: outsiders are not the intended recipients. A council booklet on the Borders ridings, which presumably was partly aimed at tourists, stated: ‘these are not events staged for visitors but rather community celebrations for the townspeople and their friends.’39 Towns do not promote or ‘package’ their event, apart from limited local advertising. Some elements of the tourist board are distressed and frustrated at this apparent failure, but the truth is that the ridings have very little for the tourist industry to exploit.40 Indeed, casual visitors to the ridings might wonder what all the fuss was about. The ridings have impressive processions and traditional displays, but are generally short of pageantry and colour. ‘Those looking for spectacle and merry-making will be disappointed,’ said The Border

40. See page 347.
Visitors and non-natives are destined to feel out of place at the ridings. A description of Selkirk Common Riding stated: 'The living loyalty of the native is to be seen then moving on every face, and one feels almost an intruder upon the mysteries performed in a scared place.' This does not mean that visitors are unwelcome, but they will soon realise that they are joining a family.

Like all families, the ridings have their own modes of behaviour which are strange and unfamiliar to outsiders. As we have seen, 'the Common Riding songs' are known exclusively to local people and are a powerful expression of identity and belonging. Similarly, local people say that their riding 'is in the blood'. It is like a passionate allegiance to a football team or a religious group. It is an accepted part of life. It is part of them. In 1922, *The Border Magazine* commented on Selkirk Common Riding:

> You must be bred into it, or caught young and inoculated. The 'cult' of the Common Riding is of the spirit. Every son or daughter is supremely happy at the Common Riding but a whole lot of them would be hard pressed to explain why. It's the Common Riding and that is held to be sufficient.

What counts is the local response: the way people speak of the riding and the part it plays in their lives is what differentiates them from others. The riding is a significant reference point in the lives of local people. The following observation was made about Selkirk Common Riding in 1900, but it is still valid today:

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42. TSAS, vol. xxiv, p. 360.

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With many of the people the Common Riding is the outstanding event of the year. All their important family and social engagements are dated from the festival season. They are married at the Common Riding, their baby was born just before the great event, their father died on the very day of the celebration .... To the outsider it is all very puzzling and mysterious.44

Local people say that the riding is ‘theirs’ and that it ‘belongs’ to them. Consequently, they are very protective of their riding and are suspicious when outsiders try to interfere or meddle in it, however good their intentions. An article written in 1970 about Selkirk Common Riding summarised local feelings:

A few years ago, a royal visit to the Border country was in the offing, and the idea was floated that a special performance of some elements of the Common Riding should be mounted. The suggestion was received in Selkirk with frozen disbelief. What was being proposed would be a solecism on a scale that nobody had ever been called to contemplate - rather as if the President of a South American republic came to stay at Buckingham Palace and asked if his wife might try on the crown jewels after dinner.45

The underlying traditionalism and conservatism of the ridings has made them an easy target in recent years. They have been accused of being insular and out-of-step with the modern world, and, on occasion, lacking in ‘political correctness’. But critics rarely appreciate the strength of local sentiment and pride in the ridings, and that criticism which comes from outsiders is certain to be counter-productive. This was clearly illustrated in the approach to the Peebles Beltane Festival in 1991, when one woman (ironically an exiled Peeblean) objected to the use of ‘golliwog’ costumes in the annual children’s parade. These, she

considered, were unacceptably racist, and she offered to replace them at her own expense with less controversial outfits. Local people rejected her offer and busied themselves to ensure a bigger golliwog presence than ever. On the morning of the event, *The Scotsman* reported: 'The 1991 Beltane has seen a “save-the-golly” campaign, specially printed golliwog tee-shirts and a golly song which is already selling like hot-cakes. The Green Tree Hotel has changed its name to the Golliwogs Rest for the Festival.'

It would be easy to misinterpret this as racial prejudice or insensitivity, when there was no intention of causing offence or embarrassment to anyone, except perhaps to the woman who made the original complaint. Coloured people were welcome to attend the Beltane Festival if they wished. Rather this was a popular reaction against interference in a private event, and it demonstrates the strength of local attachment to the minutiae of tradition. Besides, when it comes to the riding, the outside world can think what it wants.

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The Women’s Issue in Hawick Common Riding

Nowhere has the depth of feeling towards the local riding been so clearly demonstrated than over the issue of women’s involvement in Hawick Common Riding. In 1996, as this thesis was being written, the issue became highly topical and it deserves special consideration. As we have seen, women have an ambiguous role in the ridings. They are entitled to participate in most events, but they tend to be marginalised and secondary. The accepted role for women is to be supportive of men, to be ‘the makers of the sandwiches’. Women rarely become principals in their own right, and they are excluded from dinners and social gatherings. There is no denying the intense maleness of the ridings. When women take part on horseback, they are treated as honorary men (arguably like women in Parliament). But in Hawick Common Riding, women are not allowed to ride at all.

In 1996, Hawick Common Riding was thrust into the national spotlight for its ban on women riders, although the issue had been simmering for several years before this. The explanation for the ban was that it had ‘aye been’, and that the Common Riding would suffer if the tradition was altered. In fact, the ban on women riders was a bogus tradition. Women had taken part in Hawick Common Riding on

47. The dispute over women’s involvement in Hawick Common Riding has parallels with the recent controversy in the Church of England over the ordination of women priests. Jonathan Petre has written: ‘The issue of women priests aroused deep emotions in people who had not darkened the door of a church since childhood except at weddings and funerals, perhaps because the debate exhumed unresolved tensions and prejudices about the role of women in society that were supposed to have been long buried. For some, the notion of women priests aroused deep antagonism, even a sense of indecency. Others were so consumed with outrage at the perceived injustice to women that they stopped their ears to any argument against female ordination. Most people were, however, bemused by the ferocity with which normally mild-mannered churchmen and women engaged in battle.’ J. Petre, By Sex Divided. The Church of England and Women Priests (London, 1994), pp. 11-12, passim.
previous occasions. In 1914, Miss Monteath of St. Boswells was recorded as having ridden on the Common Riding Friday, 'astride in a graceful and gallant manner'. Interestingly, the Cornet of the day, George Wilson, thanked her publicly for her support.48 Women continued to ride throughout the 1920s, and were only prohibited after 1931 when, at the Common Riding of that year, one woman fell off her horse and broke her leg. In the years that followed, a few isolated protests were made. In 1955, Jean Mckenzie, a 19-year-old dairymaid from Melrose, disguised herself as a young boy and rode with the men on the Moss paul ride-out (the most important in the Hawick circuit). Her subterfuge was only uncovered on reaching Moss paul, where she was castigated for her behaviour. 49

Women's involvement in Hawick Common Riding attracted occasional media interest and derision, although, like the golliwogs issue in Peebles, this tended to be counter-productive. Maverick actions aside, it seems that women had little choice but to passively accept their lot.

The participation of women in Hawick Common Riding became an issue in 1988 when Mrs Myra Turnbull, a Conservative member of Borders District Council, was chosen to be the town's first female provost. Whilst no-one disputed the appointment of a woman to the provostship, her role in the Common Riding raised problems, at least in the eyes of Common Riding traditionalists. The issue concerned the provost's involvement in Common Riding functions and events, all of which were male-only. In particular, the provost was expected to chair a meeting in the 'Hut', a barn-like construction outside Hawick where riders gather together on the

49. *Hawick News*, 3 June 1955, p. 4. Locals were far from amused at the incident, which was taken as an insult to the Cornet. Writing to the *Hawick News*, 'Supporter' described it as a 'mean trick'. The incident also caught the imagination of the outside world. According to the *Hawick News*: 'A Glasgow daily paper headed the exploit "Bravo Jaunty Jean!"', and claimed that "she had struck a blow for her sex and brought colour to prosaic modern day".'
Common Riding morning to sing local songs, drink heavily and generally behave in a boisterous way. Those involved say it is the highlight of the day, although, like a rugby club dinner, 'it is no place for a lady'. As one local gentleman put it in 1990: 'Everybody likes Myra, but the Hut is not the place for her. There has never been a woman in there. No way is there ever going to be. It has aye been like that.'50 Thus, despite her official position and the traditional involvement of the provost, Mrs Turnbull was forced to wait outside until the men had finished. The case became something of an annual cause célèbre for the national media. Newspaper photographs showed the unfortunate woman clad in her ermine robes of office stranded in the rain whilst men pushed past her or barred her way. (See plate 16.) Consequently, Mrs Turnbull found herself in an unusual position for a Conservative: she had become a martyr for women's rights and a symbol of the need for change. When interviewed, she tended to be rather evasive, preferring to maintain a dignified and diplomatic silence and let events do the talking. However, her decision in 1994 to invite Lady Jane Grosvenor, Duchess of Roxburghe, as 'principal guest' at the Common Riding might have been deliberate act of provocation. (Despite her impeccable aristocratic credentials, Lady Jane was not permitted to ride a horse.) The shabby treatment of Mrs Turnbull highlighted the issue of women's involvement in the Common Riding and led to wider calls for women to be allowed to take part on horseback. Local opinion was divided on the issue. Some women defended the status quo whilst others supported change. In 1994, The Scotsman quoted one local woman who said: 'You wonder why, when Nelson Mandela is achieving racial equality in South Africa, it's so hard to get sexual equality in Hawick.'51 But the appeal for change fell on deaf ears. The Common Riding Committee, who were empowered to organise the festival, consistently ignored the issue, no doubt hoping that it would go away.

50. Scotland on Sunday, 10 June 1990, p. 5.
51. The Scotsman, 11 June 1994, p. 3.
Matters finally came to a head in 1996, ironically the year of Mrs Turnbull’s retirement from the provostship. Two local women, Ashley Simpson, a 23-year-old factory packer, and Mandy Graham, a 21-year-old millworker, announced that, whatever the consequences, they would take part in the Common Riding as mounted supporters. Both were skilled horsewomen, having worked in livery stables and with hunters and polo ponies. ‘We have wanted to support the Cornet all our lives,’ they said.52 The women’s announcement split the community and a heated debate took place between ‘traditionalists’ and ‘reformers’ over the issue of women’s involvement. Judging from correspondence to local and national newspapers, most people seemed to favour the women’s cause. The traditionalist’s point of view was expressed in a speech by ex-Cornet Robert Pringle, who dismissed the women as ‘suffragists full of vision of their own glory’, and added:

It is not the public or the Press that dictate tradition. Tradition is dictated by what happened in the past. Centuries ago the men of Hawick fought and died to protect their women and children. It was the women who suffered and wept when the warriors didn’t return. The answers are all there in tradition, if these co-called reformers care to look. You cannot re-invent history, so you cannot change tradition.53

The controversy over women’s involvement was not, however, a simple division of the sexes. Some local women were vehemently opposed to change, arguing that despite the prohibition on female riders, women already had a major role in the festival. Former Cornet’s lass Loris Szoneberg said: ‘The leaders of other Common Ridings are envious of how much involvement the Hawick women principals have in the ceremonies. The greatest honour of all is when the Cornet’s lass ties colours to the burgh flag. It’s the only festival where women are allowed to touch the flag.’54 As the 1996 Common Riding approached, tempers became

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frayed. Mandy Graham and Ashley Simpson were vilified and abused, whilst one local councillor who favoured their case claimed to have received death threats. Likewise, Alan Wear, the 1996 Cornet, speaking on behalf of the Common Riding committee, claimed: 'We have been verbally attacked and spat at, described as Nazis and chauvinists. None of it is justified.'

In the week preceding the Common Riding, events took a bizarre and rather sinister twist. Following the announcement that the two women would take part in the preliminary ‘ride-out’ to the village of Denholm, a local solicitor and member of the Common Riding Committee, acting on behalf of the Cornet, sought an interim interdict at Duns sheriff court forbidding the women from carrying out their threat. The application asked the sheriff to forbid Ms Simpson and Ms Graham ‘molesting, annoying and embarrassing’ Cornet Alan Wear, and ‘encouraging any others of the female sex to join the cavalcade or any other in the month of June’. Sheriff James Patterson dismissed claims that the women’s presence could lead to public disorder. He said that the application was wholly lacking in substance and ordered that the men should pay costs. Legally, nothing could now prevent the women from taking part in the ride-out.

On 1 June 1996, amidst rumours that the ride-out would be cancelled, Ashley Simpson and Mandy Graham, plus two other women, demonstrated remarkable courage and conviction, and appeared at the muster-point on horseback (accompanied by their guardian, Norman Pender, a former Scottish rugby prop). Taking up a position at the rear of the cavalcade, the women were cheered by some spectators and verbally abused by others. As the cavalcade made its way out of Hawick, headed by a distraught Cornet Wear, a large group of ‘traditionalist’ women formed a human barricade across the street, successfully isolating the four

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55. Ibid.
56. Ibid, 31 May 1996, p. 3.
women riders from the main body of horse. Eventually, the women riders reached Denholm, where they received congratulations and handshakes from scores of well-wishers. Thankfully, despite the depth of feeling and tension aroused by the occasion, there were no arrests or injuries, although one local councillor was later charged by police for threatening and abusive behaviour towards the women riders. The national media and the outside world looked in bewilderment. Events were prominently featured on television news bulletins and received extensive coverage in newspapers, including the editorial column of The Scotsman.

Both parties retired from the ride-out badly shaken, although the moral victory had undoubtedly been won by the women riders. Fortunately, cool-heads prevailed and with the Common Riding imminent, both sides called a truce.

57. This was almost certainly a pre-planned move, because many of the women were former Cornet's Lasses or former Acting Mothers.

58. As did other ridings. In Peebles, the fancy dress parade on the Friday evening of the Beltane Festival featured several jokes at Hawick's expense. ('Hawick women can't ride, but - it's aye been - they make a good cup of tea!') Ashley and Mandy were invited to be guests of honour at the 1996 Annan Common Riding. In August 1996, the Common Riding featured on the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Innerleithen poet Howard Purdie performed as the Reverend Jeremiah Ayebeen delivering hell fire and damnation sermons on the theme 'Rampant Bampotism in Hawick'. Perhaps the wittiest comment on the controversy was made on the 'small-ad' notice-board at a Hawick supermarket: 'Message to the Common Riding Committee: The wheel has been invented!'

59. Under the heading 'Let Fraternity Reign', The Scotsman commented 'that most Scots would be astonished at the attitudes exposed [over women's involvement]. It was noted that the Common Riding traditions are not easily challenged, and that they reflect the homogeneous nature of the town. 'Close-knit does not refer to the main local industry.' It was concluded: 'Before condemning, it is worth remembering that the Common Riding debate, however hotly disputed, reflects a strong sense of community. Change, though it will come slowly, will come.' The Scotsman, 3 June 1996, p. 12.
women agreed not to take part in the Common Riding in exchange for a pledge of immediate talks with the Common Riding Committee about women's involvement (a pledge which was later reneged upon by the committee). The 1996 Common Riding went ahead as normal, much to everyone's relief, and demonstrating that the event was more important than the issue. One local man was quoted as saying: 'Those girls behaved with great dignity, but they are right not to ride today. Our Common Riding is very special to us and the day belongs to everyone and should not be spoiled. If some things have to change, it should be done with common sense and good will.'60 Following the Common Riding, an Association of Lady Riders was formed to fight for formal recognition at the festival. It was predicted that there could be '200 female riders' at the 1997 Common Riding.61 In August 1996, a rival organisation was established called The Supporters of Hawick's Customs and Traditions, which pledged itself to resist change. The latter society included six women on the steering group. In late August 1996, it was agreed to hold a public referendum in Hawick to settle the question of women's involvement. At the time of writing, the issue remains unresolved, although, as one committee man said: 'No matter what agreements are reached for the future, it is clear Hawick Common Riding will never be the same again.'62

Liberal commentators have been mystified by the controversy. It is, they say, typical of the worst excesses of provincial backwardness and parochialism, a pathetic last stand against progress. And yet there is more to the case than chauvinism and sexual prejudice, important though these factors are. Traditionalists stress that they are trying to 'protect' the Common Riding, and that they have the best interests of the festival at heart. There is fear that if the ritual of the Common Riding is tampered with, in this case by allowing women to ride, then it will lose its potency, and this is something which cannot be allowed to

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happen. It is acknowledged that change does occur, but it must be controlled and take place gradually from within. Reformers admit that by allowing women to ride, the Common Riding will be altered. However, there is general agreement that the decision to introduce change rests with local people, because the Common Riding ‘belongs’ to them and that they are the only ones who understand its ‘true’ meaning. Indeed, traditionalists have tried to shift the blame for the controversy onto outside influences, in particular the national media, who have been castigated for their negative and sensationalist reporting. It is significant that the controversy was suspended during the Common Riding itself, and not allowed to interfere with the actual event. When the national media appeared on Common Riding day, there was no story to report, except the riding itself.

‘The Mother Town’ and the Role of the Past

It is clear that local people have genuine love and affection for their town, and it is these sentiments which are expressed in the riding. The town is more than a place to live. It has a character and identity of its own, which has forged locals together and given them a unique sense of ‘belonging’. Consequently, locals have a strong personal commitment to their town, which is clearly reflected in the imagery they use to describe it. As Gwen Kennedy Neville observes, the town is often portrayed as ‘mother’ (hence the title of her book on Selkirk Common Riding, *The Mother Town*). Locals think of themselves as being ‘children’ of the town, that it is the place which ‘bred’ them. The ‘mother town’ is a recurring image of the ridings. The standard bearer is expected to be ‘a son of the town’ and his lass ‘a daughter’. Indeed, in Hawick and Selkirk, mothers who wish their expected babies, if sons, to become eligible for Common Riding honours ensure that they give birth in the local hospital (and thus ‘on burgh soil’) rather than in hospitals away from the town. Likewise, the loss to the town through war and emigration, which is a major theme
of the ridings, is presented as a mother sending her children to the outside world, many of whom never return. The sadness and poignancy is that of a mother grieving for her lost young. Female imagery also occurs in local songs which often portray the town as a beautiful and adored woman. A popular song at Hawick Common Riding is *The Border Queen*, whilst Selkirk 'colonials' sing *Her Bright Smile*.

Locals regularly express notions that their town is special and that they are a community which is distinct. The songs of the ridings present an idyllic view of local life, and stress that locals have good fortunate to live in the town because it is 'a spot supremely blessed'. There is a widespread sense of belonging to a community whose families, history and native dialect are different from resident incomers and from those of other places. The riding is the obvious expression of their distinctiveness, and it is something they can share together. It has been written of Peebles Beltane Festival that: 'It moves the whole town and is an expression of the loyalty of its citizens of all ages and classes.'63 As we have seen, this creates a boundary between natives and outsiders in the way each riding is perceived and acted-out.

The close attachment to the riding does not mean that locals live in the past, always resisting change and afraid of the present. On the contrary, locals live thoroughly modern lives, but they do so without denigrating or deserting the past. Their sense of historical consciousness is heightened because there is a profound sense of historical continuity in the ridings. On one level, it is the personal past of those who are involved. It has been noted that the riding is an annual fixture in the lives of local people. As they meet to renew traditions each year, they inevitably think of past ridings and their experiences of the event. Older people discuss the riding and the changes it has undergone, usually with a tone of regret that the present is inferior to the past. Taking part in the riding conjures up a host of memories and incidents, sometimes deeply personal. The following passage

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63. *TSAS*, vol. xxiv, p. 162.
describes one man’s feelings during the casting ceremony at Selkirk Common Riding in 1994:

It was the Colonial Society Standard Bearer, Ernie Hume, who gained one of the most rousing receptions. Symbolising just how passionate the casting ceremony can be, the 55 year old designer - who left Selkirk 30 years ago to set up home in Maryland, USA - was clearly moved by the occasion. Wiping a tear from his eye, he said: ‘When I heard them play The Liltin’ I thought back to when I used to sit on my father’s shoulders right here. I can remember him taking his cap off and I saw he was crying. I couldn’t understand why then .... but I can now.’

Such sentiments are often expressed in connection with the ridings, where they are widely appreciated and understood. The riding is an opportunity for locals to reflect upon changes in their own lives, and to observe changes in the lives of their friends, relations or acquaintances. They are often heard to say that it seems like no time since the last riding, and that time is ‘whistling by’. A myriad of individual and family traditions make-up the broader canvas of the ridings. At Langholm Common Riding, locals are said to stand on the same spot each year to watch the ‘crying of the fair’. One man was quoted as saying: ‘Looking round, you know whom you’ll see, and if you don’t see them then you know he or she is likely to be dead.’

The past is also a crucial factor in creating and nurturing local identity. The riding of the marches is itself a relic of the past. It is often stressed that it has taken place ‘for hundreds of years’, and that the tradition is ‘ancient’ (even in cases where it is not). The past is ever-present in the ridings, as Ian McIntyre observed of Selkirk Common Riding in 1970:

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However big the crowds, there is always a greater company that goes with them unseen. Those who have ridden those marches and marched in these streets make up a mighty army now; and on Common Riding day it is as if they are summoned up to ride and wave and sing and cheer as they did in their own generation.66

In addition, the past is used as a cultural resource. Throughout the course of the riding, locals tell and re-tell traditional stories about their town and community. In Hawick and Selkirk, the Common Ridings have become inextricably linked with traditions about the battle of Flodden Field (1513), which, like the Christmas Nativity story, are repeated annually and transmitted across the generations. No-one really cares if these traditions are historically accurate or not. Rather these are stories which people like to tell about themselves. They project a positive self-image and extol local identity. Unsurprisingly, the towns which have ‘invented’ or ‘ersatz’ ridings have given prominence to distinctive features in the town’s history. For instance, Melrose Summer Festival, instituted in 1938, is a jumble of historical imagery. On Festival Saturday, the principals make a ‘tour of ceremonies’, which, in the words of the 1994 Melrosian Gavin Ross, ‘pay tribute to the men and women who have bequeathed to us what we will always hold dear’.67

The first call is Newstead, where the principals are entertained by the Masonic Lodge of Melrose, said to be the oldest in country. The Southern Reporter continues the day’s events:

The next stop of time-travelling took the cavalcade back to Roman times at Trimontium. There Gavin joined hands across the centuries with a Roman soldier, played by Malcolm Crawford. It was then back across the Tweed to Gattonside, site of the orchards cultivated by the lay brothers of Melrose Abbey. After monks had distributed cherries to the tour party, the next welcome came from Dame Jean and Mrs Patricia Maxwell-Scott at Abbotsford. Sir Walter Scott’s great, great-granddaughters greeted the tour party on the lawn, where Gavin spoke a few words of tribute about ‘our greatest man’. Next stop was Darnick Tower which the Heiton family built in 1425. Guarded on the day by two stalwart Border reivers, the tower once played host to Mary Queen of Scots. The final stopping point was Melrose Abbey, where 850 years of ecclesiastical history were recalled.

‘History’ is used to emphasise the distinctiveness of the community. Consequently, locals believe that they have inherited a ‘better’ way of life from outsiders.

And perhaps they are right. The second half of the twentieth-century has brought huge changes to urban life. Standards of living have risen, and the majority of people are wealthier than ever before. Material prosperity has obvious and desirable benefits, but it has also had the unfortunate side-effect of undermining community life. People live much more privately than they once did, partly because they are economically independent and rely less on one another for support. Many of the economic functions traditionally undertaken by family, friends and neighbours are now the responsibility of the state. Families have themselves changed. People have fewer children than before, possibly none at all, so there are less opportunities for family celebrations and ‘get-togethers’. Young adults have increased work and educational opportunities, often away from home, which means that parents and children see a lot less of each other. Small aspects of life have also contributed, such as changing shopping patterns. Until the 1960s, married women often went shopping every day, as much to exchange news and gossip as to purchase provisions. Today, shopping is carried out on a weekly (or even monthly)

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68. Ibid.
basis in an anonymous ‘superstore’. Likewise, people use a motorcar rather than public transport; laundry is done in the home; people watch television; and there is an increasing tendency to ‘work from home’. The influence of the church, a traditional focus of the community, has been eroded in an age of secularisation. In short, there are far fewer opportunities for human contact, and people live increasingly isolated and lonely lives. A common complaint is that society is not so civil as it once was: that a town used to be a much friendlier place, but increasingly seems full of strangers.

Community festivals like the ridings offer a counter-balance to the isolation of modern life. They are an opportunity, if only for a moment, for people to do something together, to recapture a feeling of belonging. The ridings stress simplicity, altruism and friendship in an age which is bedevilled by materialism, selfishness and lack of human contact. Moreover, they encourage a humanist ideal that people have an intrinsic worth in themselves, something recognised in this nineteenth-century account of Hawick Common Riding:

One of the engaging features of the Common Riding is its conciliatory nature. There, on neutral ground, people of different ranks and opinions meet together and soften their asperities; there the supporters of Trevelyan and Elliot forget their political differences and converse serenely once more; there uncharitable thoughts are unknown; kindness reigneth supreme; the toil and anxieties about business and work have no power to harass.69

Local people rarely articulate such thoughts. Ask them why they take part in the riding, and why it is important to them, and they will struggle to give you an answer. The Common Riding is part of them, and that is sufficient. The following description of the people of Selkirk and their attitude to the Common Riding sums it all up:

69. Hawick Express, 8 June 1872, p. 3.
They know what the Common Riding is: it isn’t really something to be described at all, but something to be experienced - something they live through together and in a sense re-create anew each year. As much as anything it is a celebration of communal identity: a declaration of attachment to each other and to the place that bore them: an assertion by the people of this town of what they feel and know themselves to be. They do it each year because they have always done it: they do it because of what they are.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{70} McIntyre, ‘Flowers of the Forest’, p. 371.
Table One  
Riding the Marches in Scotland - List of Modern Festivals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town/City</th>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Principal(s)</th>
<th>Notes and features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annan</td>
<td>Riding of the Marches</td>
<td>The Comet</td>
<td>Revived in 1947, previously held at irregular intervals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biggar</td>
<td>Riding of the Marches</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Instituted 1951 to mark quincentenary of the Burgh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coldstream</td>
<td>Civic Week</td>
<td>The Coldstreamer</td>
<td>Instituted in 1952. The main feature is the ride to Flodden Field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawick</td>
<td>Common Riding</td>
<td>The Cornet</td>
<td>Earliest reference is 1640. Continuous history (apart from war years).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innerleithen</td>
<td>Cleikum Ceremony</td>
<td>Standard Bearer</td>
<td>Instituted in 1901.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jedburgh</td>
<td>Jethart Callant's Festival</td>
<td>The Callant</td>
<td>Instituted in 1947. Two-week festival including the Reidswire Ride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelso</td>
<td>Civic Week</td>
<td>Kelso Laddie</td>
<td>Instituted in 1937. Includes the Yetholm Ride.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Town          | Event                          | Role                  | Notes                                                                 
|--------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------
| Lanark       | The Lanimers                  | Lord Cornet           | First recorded in 1570. Continuous history.                          
| Langholm     | Common Riding                 | The Cornet            | First ceremonial riding in 1816. Includes the procession of the 'four emblems' and the crying of the fair. 
| Lauder       | Common Riding                 | The Cornet            | Revived in 1910.                                                    
| Lockerbie    | Riding of the Marches         | The Cornet            | Instituted in 1955.                                                 
| Linlithgow   | Marches Day                   | -                     | Earliest reference is 1541. Continuous history (apart from war years). 
| Melrose      | Summer Festival               | The Melrosian         | Instituted in 1938. Includes the Melrose Festival Queen.            
| Musselburgh  | Riding of the Marches/Honest Toun Festival | Town Champion/Honest Lad and Honest Lass | Riding of the Marches first recorded in 1682. Continuous history of Ridings held approximately every twenty years (the last in 1995). The annual Honest Toun Festival was instituted in 1936. 
| Peebles      | March Riding and Beltane Festival | The Cornet            | March riding recorded in sixteenth-century. The modern ceremony dates from 1897. The Beltane Queen introduced in 1899. 
| Penicuik     | Huntsman's Ride               | The Huntsman          | Instituted in 1914.                                                 
| Selkirk      | Common Riding                 | Royal Burgh Standard Bearer | Earliest reference 1509. Continuous history. Unique ceremony of 'Casting the Colours'. 
| West Linton  | The Whipman Play              | The Whipman           | Instituted in 1803.                                                 
|              |                               |                       |                                                                     |
Like many other aspects of Scottish history, our knowledge of the riding of the marches begins in the sixteenth-century. Some of the earliest references to the ridings in Scotland include: the Selkirk riding of 1509; Aberdeen, 1525; Linlithgow, 1541; Peebles, 1556; Lanark, 1570; Glasgow, 1574; and Edinburgh, 1583. Clearly, the riding of the marches was widespread across lowland Scotland, and it was probably practised in other Scottish burghs. In the seventeenth-century, there are records of the Hawick riding of 1640; Rutherglen, 1664; and Musselburgh, 1682. This chapter will examine the riding of the marches in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scotland. Much of the chapter is devoted to a detailed description of the ridings, which has been pieced together from contemporary burgh records. Consideration is also given to the impact of the Reformation on the ridings. The chapter begins by examining some of the social functions of the ridings. To fully appreciate these, it is necessary to understand the importance of community in Scottish burgh life. In the sixteenth century, as today, the riding of the marches was an event which depended on, and also expressed, the community of the burgh.

*Social Functions of the Ridings*

One of the most important factors which contributed towards the development of community in the burghs was the general insecurity of burgh life. People faced an uncertain and potentially dangerous environment, from war, plague, harvest failure and fire, all of which threatened disaster and necessitated co-operation if the
community was to survive. In the Borders, problems were exacerbated due to the closeness of the frontier and a neighbouring, often hostile, power. In 1451, the lands and privileges of Peebles were confirmed by James II because the town’s charters and other documents had been destroyed by war. Similarly, the renewal of Selkirk’s charter in 1536 takes into account that all previous charters had been lost because of the assaults of war, pestilence and fire.\(^1\) A consequence of the general insecurity of burgh life was, firstly, a need for constant vigilance and a deep distrust of strangers. People were forced together to defend themselves, especially in the smaller burghs, which in turn created a sense of shared responsibility. In the Borders, intermittent warfare and a consequent tendency towards lawlessness plus the failure of central government to offer much assistance meant that people had to rely on themselves for their own protection. Anne Cardew has written: ‘Reliance on local sources of protection rather than on the government tends to breed an independence of spirit and a consequent feeling of isolation from the state whose authority is rejected.’\(^2\) In the burghs, this helped create the awareness of being a distinct and separate entity. Moreover, people developed some skill in arms, partly because of their general military obligations to their superiors and also because they tended to rely on their own means of defence. The Anglo-Scottish Borders has been described as a ‘society prepared for war’, and one of the most important military skills was the ability to ride a horse, especially for the pursuit of marauders and other raiders. As we will see, the riding of the marches was almost always described as a ‘riding’, an event which involved horses, although, unlike today, some of the participants probably took part on foot. In addition, the general insecurity of life inclined people to follow tradition. There was much comfort to be


gained from what was familiar, and in an insecure world, it seemed dangerous to abandon the well-trodden paths of tradition.

Whilst individuality was obviously important in the burghs, there were many instances of co-operation and interdependence between townspeople, leading in turn to strong feelings of community solidarity. The idea of a community as a self-conscious and coherent body of people bound together by common rules and often sharing a common purpose was well established in Europe before the end of the twelfth-century. The Berwick guild statutes of 1249, for instance, prescribed the framework of government for the ‘commune’ of the town, declaring that the mayor and aldermen shall be elected ‘by the view and judgement of the entire community’, the whole body of the burgesses. Community was very important if a burgh was to flourish. Trade would not prosper in a town without some degree of harmony and consensus among its members: therefore, common economic interest encouraged unity and co-operation. As Geoffrey Barrow has written, ‘Town life encouraged, indeed necessitated, a strong community spirit’. People who lived close together generally developed a mutual recognition of reciprocal obligations, encapsulated by the word ‘neighbourliness’. People had to be looked after and cared for, especially when they were babies, very old or sick. Of course, life in a sixteenth-century Scottish burgh was never a peaceful idyll of order and harmony. Close proximity does not necessarily lead to brotherly love, or even easy-going toleration. Social relations were often very cool, and there seems to have been a constant threat of casual interpersonal violence. The situation was made worse by people carrying knives and other weapons with them as they went about their daily business.

Nevertheless, there were many factors at work within the burgh which sustained and developed community life. Municipal affairs demanded cooperation,

4. Ibid, p. 94.
and certain privileges were granted to burgesses in common, helping to establish feelings of equality and joint responsibility. Two of the most important influences on the community were the local trade and craft guilds. Much of guild life was concerned with the convivial friendship of members, and there was great stress on members coming together for drinking, feasting and celebration. Reviewing the Gild Court Book of Dunfermline, Pat Torrie states: 'guild life occasioned regular consumption of ale, beer and wine, whether in private houses, one of the town's several taverns or in the tolbooth, where the guild court was held.' The guilds were an important complement to burgh life itself. For instance, guild members provided mutual assistance and charity for each other. When a guild member died, his fellows ensured that he received a proper burial, that masses said for his soul, and that his widow and orphans were provided for. Until the Reformation, guilds had a strong religious and spiritual component. They gave donations for the upkeep of the burgh church, which was itself an object of community pride, and they had their own specific altars within the church. Guilds organised solemn and less formal processions in the burgh. Religious processions were made on holy days, and they were also held in honour of the patron saint of the guild. Geoffrey Barrow concludes: 'Mercantile and craft guilds rather than the town council gave expression to social aspirations and communal feeling of most townspeople.'

Within the burgh itself there were tangible signs of a sense of community. The focus of burgh life was the market place, which was the centre of local trade and a meeting place for the community and for visitors. Proclamations and other announcements were made from the market cross. Facing onto the market place was the townhouse or the tollbooth, which was a symbol of local pride and identity. As Elizabeth Ewan states, 'the possession of a tollbooth was a mark of civic pride, a

statement that the burgh had come of age'. The building of the new Aberdeen townhouse at the beginning of the fifteenth-century was made a responsibility of the whole community, free and unfree, every inhabitant being required to contribute one day's work to the construction or pay 4d. The townhouse combined the activities of burgh administration, legislation and justice. It was the site of the burgh court and of council meetings, the place where market tolls were collected, and where criminals were imprisoned. Some burghs were too poor to afford a townhouse and instead held meetings in the open air, sometimes in the church yard. The burgh church was also a focus of municipal pride. Corporate identity was given further expression by the possession of a burgh seal. By 1400, at least thirty two burghs in Scotland had their own seals. Burghs held other items of common property, including musical instruments and burgh flags. All of these items involved common interests and responsibilities on the part of the community, and in particular for the burgesses. In Selkirk, the burgh charter and other precious documents were kept in a common chest (as happened in other burghs). As an additional safeguard it was ordered that the charter and other documents be copied and put in the safe keeping of three reliable burgesses ('thre fathfull menes').

Clearly then, there were many factors supporting a sense of community within the burghs. Of course, one of the most important items of common property which the burgh possessed was the common land, which like the tolbooth or the burgh church provided a focus of civic pride. Until the advent of industrialisation in the late eighteenth-century, Scottish burghs depended on a mixture of trade and agriculture for their survival. The average burgess was both townsman and farmer,

seeing no distinction between the needs of his land and his livestock and the needs of his trade or craft. There were strong links between urban and rural life, and these links gave urban communities a great interest, not just in the individual ownership of land, but also in common land. The common land of the burgh had many important uses. It provided grazing, and might, if the land was good enough, provide hay or winter fodder. In less favoured areas the common land was likely to be little better than rough or hill grazing, but still of importance to the communities controlling its use, who were able to move sheep and cattle away from the arable land during cultivation, growing time and harvest, returning the animals to folds on the better land after the harvest to restore soil fertility. A common herd was employed to look after the burgh’s cattle and was expected to restrict grazing to the area appropriate to various seasons of the year. The common was also a source of natural resources for the urban community. It provided wood and peat for fuel, and in some cases coal, and also the raw materials for other aspects of burgh life. In smaller burghs, almost all of the buildings were thatched with heather taken from the common. In Selkirk, a house with a slate roof (‘the sclaithouse’) was rare enough to be given a special mention in the burgh records.11 The common provided timber, which was an essential building material and which was used to make equipment and other utensils. Only burgesses were allowed to collect fuel or heather from the common, and then only in a controlled way. In some cases, the common included fishings and mills, although these often remained in hands of the burgh superior.

Clearly, common land was an important asset to the burgh. The riding of the marches of the common land was designed to protect the boundaries of the common and to check any encroachments upon it by neighbouring landowners or other communities, some of whom might also claim rights to use the common land. The

inspection of the boundaries was made routinely, and, in the words of the Aberdeen burgh council of 1576: 'quhair the commound and communitie is fund hurt, the same to be reformit witht all diligence'. As we have seen, the common was of great importance to the community, and its protection required constant vigilance. 'Liners' or 'landemires' were appointed to demarcate the true boundaries. During the Selkirk riding of May 1536, participants discovered that a stone wall had been built which encroached on the Selkirk common. 'Our landmearis sett ane carne of stanes quhair the dik suld be maid. And thair instantlie yong William Wod, in nayme and behalff of the gudeman of Yair [a neighbouring landowner], hes faithfully promist to remouf the vrangus dik and put it quhar the landemearis hes bit[it] the stanes.' Likewise, in 1574, Glasgow town council noted 'faltis gevin upbe the outlandemeris', which included turfs cast upon the Summerhill, 'be quham we misknaw'. Communities dealt with these kind of encroachments very severely. Unauthorised buildings and dikes were pulled down and destroyed. For example, on 22 July 1524, the community of Selkirk chose 'thir agit veil avyssit men' to ride the north common on their behalf. The riders found a yard built at Philiphaugh, and dikes erected on the bounds of Whitmuir Hall and at Howdenburnfoot. The latter encroachment was the work of 'Rynyen Smyth', and after the yard and all the dikes had been destroyed Smyth and his local laird, Thomas Ker, promised never to take the land again. Similarly, on 23 June 1539, John Watson was found to have 'bigit ane house at the Yair burnflat, wrangusly ane our common without leif .... [the] haill communte pullit it doun'. Communities issued 'letters of cursing' against those who destroyed boundary dikes and cairns. On 5 October 1529, the Selkirk burgh council decreed that the 'brekaris' of barrows, if known, were to repair them, and if not known they were to be cursed by the vicar,

and the barrows to be repaired at common expense.17 When communities found that crops were being unlawfully grown on their common land, they took action and trampled them down. On 3 June 1539, the community of Selkirk was ordered to destroy corn planted on the common land by Simon Fairlie, and ash trees planted by a priest, John Michelhill. On 12 June, the ‘haile communitie’ rode the north common to the area where Fairlie had planted corn, and rode over the growing crop and destroyed it. Fairlie promised publicly that he would never again occupy that portion of common.18 Occasionally, neighbouring landowners and others deemed guilty of encroachment did not accept judgement so passively. In Selkirk, the most serious incident of encroachment led to the murder of the provost, John Mithag, and one of the bailies, James Keyne. Both men were murdered on 25 July 1541 (St James’s day) by James Ker, Ralph Ker and William Renton, kinsmen of a local laird and claimant to Selkirk common land, Ker of Greenhead. James Ker was said to have tilled common land ‘for the quhilk the communitie sowmont hyme and his complices before the Lordis’. Selkirk won a decreet of the Lord of Council against Ker, and Mithaig and Keyne were murdered when they were riding to Edinburgh for the third production of proofs.19

Riding the marches at regular intervals not only gave communities the opportunity to check any encroachments on their land but it also provided the community with a ‘mental map’ of their common. In the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, there were no accurate written maps, plans or surveys of the common, therefore a detailed knowledge of the extent and nature of the common could be gained only by physically inspecting the land on a regular basis. It was important for communities to maintain a collective knowledge of their common, and to transmit this information between generations. When the commons were ridden,

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communities made a point of taking some of their oldest members to indicate the actual site of the boundaries and to lend their authority to the riding. When the south common of Selkirk was ridden in 1536, the provost and bailies were accompanied by '13 aged, knowledgeable and worthy men'. Likewise, when the north common was ridden on 1 May 1536, the riding included 'the vothiest and best agit men of our burgh'. Old people were believed to have acquired honesty and wisdom throughout the course of their lives, and it was beneficial for the community to learn from their experience. Their knowledge of the common was difficult to challenge because of their age and superior social standing. Similarly, when communities rode their marches, they also used a more general appeal to the past. In 1588, the Lanark riding was described as an 'ancient and yeirlie custome', which had been performed 'past memour of man'. Keith Thomas has written that 'the most common reason for invoking the past was to legitimise the prevailing distribution of power'. Traditions were often invoked by communities to justify their civic rights, including their entitlement to their common land.

It was important to involve older members of the community when the ridings were staged, but their usefulness also depended on young people taking part (which meant, of course, young men). There were good practical reasons for involving young men in the riding of the marches. Primarily, it gave the community the opportunity to impress on young people the boundaries of the common land and the importance of protecting the common. In addition, the riding of the marches also provided a

21. Ibid.
24. In June 1796, Hawick burgh council appointed twelve burgesses 'to ride the whole marches of the town. Part of them being old and acquainted with the marches and others of them being young in order that they may be acquainted with the marches.' Hawick Records, 7 June 1796.
convenient outlet for the vitality and natural exuberance of young adults and adolescents. It was shown in chapter one that young unmarried men have special status in the modern ridings. The standard bearer or cornet is almost always a bachelor, and, although married men are entitled to take part in the ridings, the main supporters are the ‘Cornet’s lads’. Even today, it is accepted that the lads have licence for misbehaviour. As one Common Riding song puts it: ‘What though her lads are wild a’ wee/And ill tae keep in order’.25 The division between married men and bachelors seems to be an old feature of the ridings. In the mid-nineteenth century, separate dinners were held at Hawick Common Riding for married men and the Cornet and his lads.26 Indeed, some of the earliest records of Hawick Common Riding, which date from the beginning of the eighteenth-century, give emphasis to ‘the young unmarried men and lads of the said toun’.27 In the sixteenth-century, the division between married and unmarried was a basic feature of festival life. In Britain, as Richard Holt observes, ‘there were numerous Shrovetide games directly linked to the traditions of the European Carnival in which the bachelors of around fifteen to twenty-five would assert their right of “misrule” against those with the right to procreate, and often against the wider social and spiritual hierarchy as well’.28 Violent ‘football’ games took place between teams of bachelors and married men, the division underlining the age and status of both groups. Marriage was seen as a significant dividing line in an individual’s life. Lawrence Stone has written that: ‘Marriage is the legal rite of passage which marks the transition from youthful independence to joint responsibility in the creation of a new nuclear family.’29 In other words, marriage

26. *Border Advertiser*, 16 June 1848, p. 3.
27. Hawick Records, 1 June 1706.
meant becoming an adult, and for individuals and society this implied changes in attitudes and behaviour. In sixteenth-century Edinburgh, only married men were considered responsible enough to become burgesses. In these circumstances, it was an extraordinary feature of life in North West Europe from the fifteenth-century onwards that the middle and lower classes of both sexes married remarkably late. Lawrence Stone suggests that the average marriage age for males was between 26 and 30 years old. The main cause for the delay was the need to save money to buy necessary goods and the need for young men to complete their apprenticeships. In addition, individual wishes in matrimony and sexual relationships were generally subject to more parental and community sanctions than today.

The extended period between puberty and marriage meant considerable sexual denial on the part of young men and women, and this in turn created serious problems of social control. Young people were troublesome and awkward. In The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare wrote: 'I would there were no age between ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest' (Act 3, scene 3, lines 59-60). As a partial solution, young people were encouraged to channel their energies into festive occasions and celebrations. The organised role of young people in

31. In *The History of Hawick*, Robert Wilson, an ex-Cornet, describes a traditional local football match played annually on 'Fastren's Eve' between young men living on either side of the River Slitrig: 'This amusement had a bad tendency in keeping up, and promoting, time out of mind, between people of the East and West divisions of the town. This feud, in which the boys below sixteen were the chief combatants, was fostered by their seniors; and even parents and masters have been known to encourage their apprentices and children to join in the scene of contention. The youngsters of that period, too, formed themselves into regiments; had drums, standards, and halberds, and were armed also with stones, clubs, and even swords. These battles were sometimes carried to such a height that adults were induced to mingle in them.' R. Wilson, *The History of Hawick*, 2nd edition (Hawick, 1841), pp. 178-9.
festive occasions was only one manifestation of an institutionalised system of youth groups that existed in many parts of pre-industrial Europe. Some of these groups had important civic and moral duties. They could serve as as a local militia, drilling together and participating as a group in the civic ceremonies of their communities. Festive occasions of this kind are often seen as a pre-political 'safety valve' for a tightly-structured, hierarchical society, although in practice they sometimes blew out-of-control. It has also been argued that civic festivals were opportunities to perpetuate certain values in the community. As Natalie Zemon Davies has observed, small communities used youth groups as a kind of social control and to enforce village norms. Young people had a festive licence to mock, where they became the uproarious voice of the community's conscience, clarifying certain functions and responsibilities in the life of the village.32

Unfortunately, it is difficult to know the extent of young people's involvement in the riding of the marches. It has been noted that in Hawick Common Riding, for example, the young men or 'callants' have enjoyed special status since the beginning of the eighteenth century, and this adulation of youth may date from an earlier period. It is, for instance, possible that the Flodden traditions of Hawick, and perhaps Selkirk, have their origins in the culture of local youth groups. Another feature of festival life which has parallels in the modern ridings was the election of a young man to lead the revels. The appointment of a 'mock king' was an old tradition of European festival life and was associated with summer and winter festivals, and in particular the May games. The appointment involved role inversion, where a young and otherwise insignificant individual became 'king for a day'. The process has been described as 'liminality', which in Victor Turner's words:

is frequently found in cyclical and calendrical ritual, usually of a collective kind, in which, at certain culturally defined points in the seasonal cycle, groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors.33

In the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries, Scottish burghs appointed their own mock king. As with the ‘principals’ in the modern ridings, these mock kings were known by different names in different burghs: an ‘abbot of narent’ and ‘lord of inobedience’ in Edinburgh; ‘the abbot of unrest’ in Peebles; and ‘abbot and prior of Bonaccord’ in Aberdeen. Interestingly, from the late fifteenth-century, the tradition of the mock king was commonly blended with the cult of ‘Robin Hood’. In 1508, the Aberdeen town council appointed ‘Robert Huyid and Little Johne, quhilk was callit, in yrs bipast, Abbat and Prior of Bonacord’.34 It has been suggested that Robin Hood of the summer revels was originally unconnected with the famous outlaw, and was probably based on ‘Robin’ of the French pastourelles. In the fifteenth-century, ‘Robin’ was adopted into the May games where the association of the summer revels with the forest led to the connection between Robin Hood and the Lord of May.35 Robin Hood received some royal approval. In June 1503, James IV made a special payment to the Robin Hood of Perth.36 The cult of Robin Hood was widespread throughout Scotland, and, as we will see, survived until the Reformation.

Whatever his origins, this traditional figure has parallels with the standard bearer of the modern ridings. In Aberdeen, the appointment of the abbot and prior took place annually in April or May, and the duration of office was either for the summer or the whole year. The appointees were often the sons of prominent

burgesses and they were expected to be young men of good character (‘honorable’). It is not stated whether they had to be unmarried to be eligible for office, but it is clear that it was considered a great honour for a local man to be chosen, at least in the eyes of the council who appointed him. In 1531, Aberdeen town council described the position as ‘ane office of honor this tymes begane’. Burghs extended their patronage to the appointee, who, in some cases at least, were handsomely rewarded for their efforts. In 1555, new burgesses in Peebles had to pay their burgess silver ‘to my lord Robene Hude’. The fact that burgh authorities gave their official blessing to the appointment suggests that they were largely in control of the event, and perhaps it was not so subversive as first appears.

Despite the material rewards, there was reluctance on the part of some individuals to assume the burden of office. In April 1531, ‘Sandris Gray’ and ‘Sandris Knolls’ both rejected their election as Aberdeen Lords of Bonaccord, thus incurring the displeasure of the town council who threatened that ‘our souveigns lords lettres sould be execuit on thame in the charpest maner’. Sandris Knolls eventually agreed to accept the office ‘gif the toun walde gif him the auld fee’. Like the standard bearer of the modern ridings, the appointee was expected to perform his duties to the satisfaction of the council. These duties are generally unspecified, although in 1552 the Aberdeen town council stated that the Lords of Bonaccord had the responsibility of ‘halding of the gud toun in glaidnes and blythtnes, with danssis, farsiis, playis, and gamis in tymes convenient’. In Aberdeen, the abbot seems to have had a leading role in burgh processions, with responsibilities for conducting ridings on holy days, royal visits, and, in particular, on St. Nicholas day, when a great procession was held to honour the patron saint of the burgh. The abbot also had the duties to organise processions at ‘uther neidfull

37. *Aberdeen Records*, vol. i, p. 140.
times', and this might have included the riding of the marches. All adult males were expected to support the abbots in their duties. In May 1507, Aberdeen burgh council decreed that: 'all manere of youthis, burgieis and burges sonnys, salbe redy everie halyday to pass with the Abbot and Prior of Bonacord'.\(^{41}\) Likewise, in November 1511, the Aberdeen burgh council decreed that 'ale personis, burges, nychbouris, burges sonis, and induellaris within the said burgh' were to take part in the St. Nicholas day procession.\(^{42}\) Anyone who did not take part was to pay a fine to the abbot. The young men of the burgh were required to support the abbots during their reign. In April 1539, the Abbots (at this time called the Lords of Bonaccord) issued their own plea through the town council requesting the support of 'all the yong able men within yis gud towne'.\(^{43}\) It is clear that the abbot was associated with high spirits and revelry, and this sometimes incurred the displeasure and wrath of the burgh authorities. In April 1445, Aberdeen town council complained of 'diverse enormyteis done in time bygane be the abbotis of this burgh', and tried to discourage the abbots by not paying them fees.\(^{44}\) Likewise, in 1552, Aberdeen town council condemned the Lords of Bonaccord for making 'mony grit, sumpteous, and superfleous banketing induring the tyme of thair regnn, and specialie in May, quhilks wes thocht nother profitabill nor godlie'.\(^{45}\) It was also stated that the revelry 'did hurt to sundry young men that wer elekit in the said office', a complaint which has remarkable parallels in the nineteenth-century Common Ridings.\(^{46}\) The appointment of an abbot generally ceased at the Reformation, but it is possible that some of his functions, such as the leading of burgh processions, may

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42. Ibid, pp. 441-2.
43. Ibid, p. 160.
45. Ibid, pp. 279-80.
46. Ibid, p. 280. See also pages 250-3 of this thesis.
have survived. In the mid-seventeenth century, Aberdeen appointed a young man as 'bearer of the tounes standart and ensigne' at the riding of the marches.47

It is possible that the riding of the marches also had an underlying superstitious or 'magical' purpose. It is very difficult for the modern mind to appreciate that many popular festivals and traditions were believed to influence both natural and supernatural forces. Primitive football games, for instance, were not solely recreations but were designed as a ritual to ensure prosperity and fertility, or generally work some good for the community. In some Border villages, newly married couples donated a ball or the bride started the game by giving the ball a token kick.48 In festivals of early summer, young people and children were often decked with flowers and vegetation, symbolising the rebirth of nature and the victory of life over death.49 One possible function of the riding of the marches in the pre-Reformation era was an attempt to obtain supernatural protection for the burgh and its lands. It was widely believed that a procession around an object or an area had a purificatory impact upon it and would cleanse and protect it. Whilst the riding of the marches was primarily concerned with the practical delineation of the burgh lands, there may also have been an underlying religious purpose to the festival. We should not be surprised that men and women turned to supernatural

47. On 15 August 1662, Robert Gray, second son of the late Thomas Gray, 'sometyme provest of Aberdein', was chosen to carry the burgh flag at the riding of the marches. Extracts from the Council Register of Aberdeen 1643-1747, ed. J. Stuart (Scottish Burgh Records Society, Edinburgh, 1872), p. 203.
49. In 1793, it was customary 'time out of memory' for participants at Rutherglen riding of the marches to deck their hats with broom. D. Ure, The History of Rutherglen and East Kilbride (Glasgow, 1793), p. 93. Similarly, in 1897, it was noted of Lanark Lanimer Day: The feature of it at one time was 'the birks' or band of young stalwarts of the town and neighbourhood, bearing branches of trees, that marched in procession with representatives of the various trades.' Scottish Notes and Queries, 2nd series, vol. viii, no. 1 (July 1906), p. 14.
methods in an attempt to control their immediate environment and seek relief from human misfortune. They lived in an intensely insecure and hazardous world. The food supply was precarious and harvests often failed; there was a constant threat of war or sporadic violence; fire, plague and epidemic could bring sudden disaster; people had a low life expectancy and those who survived could expect a lifetime of intermittent physical pain. People simply lacked the knowledge and practical control of their environment and were essentially helpless in the face of natural disaster. One option was to resort to supernatural means. Keith Thomas has written: ‘Magic is dominant when control of the environment is weak.’\(^{50}\) Superstition and magic results when man comes to a hiatus in his knowledge or powers of practical control. As Keith Thomas explains, the alternative to helpless impotence is magical ritual. Superstitious practice seemed to offer a way of obtaining power and control over the unpredictable and unknowable earthly environment. It might have been illusionary but it made people think that they were doing something to help themselves, converting them from helpless bystanders into active agents. In short, it ritualised their optimism.

‘It takes a considerable effort of the imagination for modern urban man to appreciate what seems to have been the rather crude and superstitious beliefs of his largely rural forebears,’ writes Charles Phythian-Adams.\(^{51}\) It is possible that when people rode or processed the boundary of their common land, they tried to enrol supernatural help for the protection of their land and their community. In an uncertain environment, they wanted their land to be fertile and for their crops to be protected from fieldmice, blight and other natural and man-made disasters. Until the Reformation, participants in the riding of the marches possibly carried certain holy objects as they went in procession around the burgh lands. These ‘stage-props’ were regarded as more than passive items. Some people may have carried candles,


which were believed to remove or prevent disorder in the natural world. Others may have taken hand-bells or other musical instruments, in part to frighten away evil spirits. Likewise, wealthier burghs in Scotland possibly had their own holy relics, which were brought out and displayed in important local processions. However, the most important object likely to have been carried around the burgh marches was a banner, which may have been painted or embroidered with the image of a saint. Like holy relics, these banners were credited with miraculous powers. The worship of the saints was an integral part of the fabric of medieval and early sixteenth-century society. It was, in a sense, a two-way deal. The worship of the saints depended on the belief that the saints could still employ supernatural powers to relieve the adversity of their followers upon the earth. The saints were seen as intercessors whose prayers were particularly efficacious in obtaining benefits from God for those who venerated them. Prayers to the saint could be private or communal. Communities or other groups offered a corporate supplication, especially through large processions. By taking the image of a saint around the marches, participants hoped that the saint would encourage God to show favour upon them and divert the course of nature.

In medieval and sixteenth-century England, ceremonies were conducted in the open air to secure fertility and good weather. For example, trees were blessed on the twelfth day of Christmas to make them grow; the Bible was read next to springs to make the water purer; and corn was blessed by young men and women after they had received the sacrament on Palm Sunday. Fertility has always been a significant

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52. For an example of a sixteenth century banner: in the aftermath of battle of Pinkie, 10 September 1547, English soldiers found, 'a banner of whyte sarcenet, whereupon was paynted a woman with her hair about her shoulders, knelynge before a crucifix, and on her right hande a churche'. See W. Patten, 'The Expedicition into Scotalande of the Most Woorthely Fortunate Prince, Edward Duke of Somerset', *Fragments of Scottish History*, ed. J. G. Dalyell (Edinburgh, 1798), p. 73.
part of all carnival and festive occasions. It has a visible and tangible symbol in flowers and greenery, and for this reason people often carried greenery in processions and bedecked their houses with it. Whilst the riding the marches was not primarily regarded as a magical method for making the crops grow, it is possible that at some point participants took the opportunity to give thanks to God for the fruits of the earth and also to pray for His continuing bounty and provision.

An Outline of the Early Ridings

The previous section examined the social functions of the riding of the marches in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. The main purpose was to consolidate the boundaries of the common land and to check any encroachment on the common. The ridings may also have been used to ‘control’ young people by incorporating them into an event which expressed the community of the burgh. Moreover, until the Reformation at least, the ridings were possibly an attempt to obtain some magical control over an unpredictable earthly environment. The next section of this chapter aims to give an overview of the riding of the marches at this time. The intention is to answer the question, what were the ridings like? Fortunately, it is possible to provide a general picture of the ridings, although in so doing, it is necessary to exercise caution. Burghs were always keen to stress their individuality and what happened in one riding may not have happened in another.

The timing of the sixteenth-century ridings is rather complex. Unlike today, burghs seem to have been fairly flexible about the date of their riding, although, in some cases, the ridings may also have been linked with Saints’ days. On 8 August 1522, Selkirk held a riding of the common ‘in the norcht part’ (the town having a north and south common).53 Thirteen years later, in 1535, ‘the ballyeis with all

and syndry the communite' rode the north common on 19 May, but the following year, the north common was ridden on 1 May. Likewise, on 18 June 1532, the inhabitants of Selkirk were ordered to be ready on foot and horse to ride the south common on 'Mydsymer day', which was also the date of the Nativity of St John the Baptist. It must be remembered that all of the ridings had the practical function of checking encroachments on the burgh land: their festive and ceremonial aspects, although significant, were not as overbearing as today, thus the timing of the riding was flexible. Special ridings were organised when an encroachment was reported or when trouble threatened. On 6 July 1536, the burgh council organised an 'emergency' riding 'one Sunday a vi houris', which was in response to 'Voll of Wod [who] has tane in ane portioun of our common and dikit about it abone the Yair'.

In post-Reformation Scotland, other burghs were equally flexible about the timing of their ridings. In 1576, the burgh council of Aberdeen 1576 decreed: 'the townis landimaris be ridden anes auerie yeir, and specialie upoun the fyftene day of Aprill' (which in 1576 was Palm Sunday). But in 1599, the Aberdeen marches were 'to be riddin and perambulat in the said moneth of May nixt'. By 1623, the timing had changed again and the Aberdeen council 'appooyntes Mononday the allevint day of August nixt, for ryiding of the tounes wther marches of thair fredome and commoun landis'. In modern Scotland, the riding of the marches is usually described as a 'summer festival', but in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries ridings were also held at other times of the year. In post-Reformation Edinburgh, the riding of the marches took place on 31 October, the eve of All Saints' Day or 'Halloween'. On 30 October 1579, the Edinburgh council decreed: 'all merchantis craftisman and otheris inhabitaitis within this burgh to be in redynes the morn be xi houris to accompany the provest bailies and counsall to visy thair meithis and boundis'. The council also decreed that 'Alhalloumes far to begyn the morn be xii

55. Ibid, p. 151.
hours', which suggests that the Edinburgh riding was deliberately staged to coincide with the fair, thus giving the burgh authorities a ready-made audience to witness their majesty and display. In 1583, the timing of the Edinburgh riding was altered, to take place ‘in all tyme cuming upon the Trinitie fair evin, yeirly’. In Stirling, the riding of the marches took place in early March and was linked with the election of a new burgh council. On 18 March 1611, it was decreed that the town’s marches would be visited ‘on the Monday nixt and immediatlie following the electioun and admissioun of the provest, bailies and counsall’. In 1653, the Stirling riding took place on the ‘first Taysday of Mertche’.

Participants had to be forewarned that a riding was due to take place and that they were expected to take part in it. On 4 December 1583, the Edinburgh town council decreed that the burgh marches would be inspected on the day of the Trinity fair, and that ‘intimatioun to be made the day before’. On 10 June 1584, the ‘nibbouris’ of Edinburgh were instructed to ‘convene on Setterday nixt at fyfe houris in the morning, at the provests lugeing’, and to be in readiness for the inspection of the burgh marches. In some towns, people were alerted to a riding by the town drummer, who perambulated the streets and proclaimed the riding. In 1599, it was decreed that the inhabitants of Aberdeen be given one day’s advance notice that a riding was due to take place: ‘upon xxili. houris aduerteisment to be maid to thame obefoir be the drill’. In June 1572, the inhabitants of Peebles were expected to convene ‘at the stryking of the swische’ (at the sounding of the drum, or possibly the trumpet). However, although members of the community were supposed to take part in the ridings, it is clear that individuals were sometimes reluctant and often failed to appear. In contrast to the modern events, the riding of

the marches was primarily a responsibility, and getting people to take part was an constant headache for the burgh authorities. No doubt, some individuals thought that the local riding was just a waste of time. In June 1578, the Glasgow burgh council complained, 'that on Witsontysdaye last thair come nane, at the leist ane small number, of honest men to accompany the prouest and bailies for the viseng of thair merchis of the toun'. This kind of non-appearance was considered a serious offence by the burgh authorities and fines were levied on absentees. The response of Glasgow council to the failure of June 1578 was to threaten a fine of 'aucht schillingis ilk persone' on those who did not turn-up for the next riding.62

Similarly, in 1584, the Edinburgh council decreed that individuals would be fined eight shillings if they did not appear at the riding on the Trinity fair.63 The earliest reference to Hawick Common Riding dates from 1640 and states that 'whatsomever person that beis not present yeirlie at the common-ryding and setting the faires, sal pay forty shillings'.64 Presumably these ordinances would not have been required if people had not been absenting themselves from the ridings. One method of checking attendance during the riding was by compiling a list of the burgesses who were present. The 'burgess roll' was often read or compiled at the furthest extremity of the common. In 1641, Dumfries town council paid: '12s. to Patrick Campbell and Jon Johstown, for paper and wryting the Town-Roll at the marches ryding'.65

What form did the procession to ride the marches take? Almost certainly, they began at the market cross, which symbolised the centre of the community, and which, in Elizabeth Ewan's words, was 'the symbol of the burgh's position within

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64. Hawick Records, 4 January 1640.
the realm'.66 It is envisaged that the ridings had an element of 'theatricality' about them. Peter Borsay has written: 'All rituals and ceremonies were a piece of theatre in which the participants conjured a drama around themselves.'67 Thus, the ridings employed certain 'stage-props' and theatrical effects to establish the drama of the occasion and, in turn, to emphasise the innate power of corporate institutions and officers. One of the most obvious symbols of authority was banners and flags, which were carried prominently in procession. Before the Reformation, these included saints' banners, which were believed to radiate protective powers and, as we have seen, may have been used to lend a supernatural authority and protection to the boundaries of the common land. Craft and trade guilds had their own religious banners which were carried whenever the guild went in procession. Burghs also had their own special flags. In the early seventeenth-century, the burgh council of Aberdeen purchased a new ensign made of red and white taffeta, which had the town's coat of arms embroidered in the middle, complete with the town's motto of 'Bon Accord'. The new flag was a replacement for one made in 1561 'for the quenis entrie', which, through the passage of time, had become 'all lacerat and revin, and nocht seiming to be borne'.68 In May 1626, Glasgow town council elected Robert Bar and James Robieson, baxter, to carry the 'tounes cullouris' at the next muster day.69 Another symbol of burgh authority which was probably carried at the riding of the marches was a halberd axe, a weapon consisting of a long shaft with an axe blade and a pick, topped by a spearhead. In 1660, Peebles town council paid 4 s. to Johne Fisher 'to mak the yron worke of ane halbert' and 12 s. to Hew

Blacke ‘for cullering the halbert with lingit oyll’. The ‘halberdiers’ are still a feature of some modern ridings. Riders also carried weapons, such as swords and daggers. In 1599, the ‘nichtbouris’ of Aberdeen were ordered ‘to be in reddines in armes’ for the riding of the burgh marches. In Hawick Common Riding, riders went fully armed until the late eighteenth-century. Participants might have worn armour, if they had any. It is also possible that some of them dressed-up to take part in the ridings and wore their best clothes. Describing popular culture in early modern Europe, Peter Burke states that, ‘a sharp distinction between working days and festivals may be expressed in the sharp distinction between working clothes and “Sunday best”’. It has been noted that when young men followed the Abbot of Bonaccord in Aberdeen, they were instructed to wear smart green coats.

Who took part in the riding of the marches? Some of the most obvious participants have already been noted: the provost, bailies, town council, craft guilds, and, possibly, a young man carrying the burgh flag accompanied by other youths. Contemporary records usually state that the ridings involved the ‘burgh community’ or the ‘haill communite’, but unfortunately it is not very clear who or what was meant by this phrase. It might be assumed that the burgh community referred only to the burgesses, who consisted of about a third of adult males in the burgh, and that the riding was restricted to this specific group. But occasionally burgh records are more specific and suggest that other people were involved. In June 1532, Selkirk burgh council decreed that ‘all men betuex saxte and xvi, burges and induellaris within our burgh’ were to take part in the riding of the south common, and anyone who did not take part would be fined (there were different penalties for burgesses and other indwellers). Clearly, in this instance, the riding was not restricted to burgesses, but encompassed all adult males.

Like other processions in the sixteenth-century, the ridings were intended to represent the 'social body' or unity of the community. ‘Community’ was more than an abstract notion at this time, and people expressed it by doing things together, such as taking part in a procession. However, although processions of this kind were meant to symbolise the unity and ‘oneness’ of the burgh, they were also socially divisive. Processions were deliberately ordered to represent the social hierarchy of the burgh and underline its permanence and immutability: hence, the most important positions were always occupied by the politically active and the powerful. Unsurprisingly, there are many instances of rival craft guilds squabbling over their positions in civic processions. In pre-Reformation Scotland, there was regular antagonism between craft guilds over the order of Corpus Christi processions, and which guild would occupy the prime site near the sacred host.74 It will be shown in chapter four that these disputes have subsequent parallels in the riding of the marches. Civic processions further stressed social inequality because many people were excluded from taking part in them and could only watch from the sidelines, thus being reminded of their lowly status. The largest and most obvious group excluded from the riding of the marches were women. Although they might at times hold the position of burgess, or play a significant role within the local economy, women had no place within the urban hierarchy, and until the late nineteenth-century, the riding of the marches was an all-male performance.75 Other people excluded from the ridings probably included non-burgesses (in some

74 In May 1531 Aberdeen burgh council gave strict instructions about the order of the craft guilds at the Corpus Christi procession. Each guild was to march behind their craft banner, and anyone who tried to break the order of the procession or ‘makkis trubill’ would be fined. Aberdeen Records, vol. i, p. 450.

75 However, it was not unknown for women to become burgesses. For example, on 29 October 1459, a woman named Meg Woodhall was made a burgess of Peebles, and there are records of other women being appointed. R. K. Marshall, Virgins and Viragos. A History of Women in Scotland 1080-1980 (London, 1983), p. 51.
cases), children, the sick and the aged. At best, their purpose was to provide an audience for the main event. Intriguingly, whilst many locals were excluded, the ridings sometimes involved people from outside the burgh. In 1586, Lanark burgh council hired a horse for John Bruce 'to gang to Lythgow to se gef the prowost wald cum to ryd the merches'. Clearly, the council thought that their riding was good enough to invite important visitors, which suggests that the town was staging something that it wanted to show off. It seems rather odd to think of a sixteenth-century tourist trade, but perhaps people travelled around to visit other ridings, as they did to local fairs (which admittedly had significant economic functions). Burghs might have been eager to attract visitors to their riding because they spent money and increased the size of the audience for the display.

It is interesting that many early records emphasise that the marches were ridden. In July 1524, the 'haill communite' of Selkirk, 'raid baitht the northt common and the souith'. In October 1576, the burgh council of Aberdeen ordained that, 'the townis landimaris be ridden anes auerie yeir'. Similarly, in October 1579, the inhabitants of Edinburgh were ordered to accompany 'the provest bailies and counsall to vesy thair meithis and boudis, as ordour hes bene, on horsbak'. In May 1592, the town council of Lanark issued an instrument for 'the ryding of thair merchis and bounding of thair commoun landis'. Clearly, the inspection of the burgh marches in Scotland often made use of horses. In part, this was simply practical because the perimeter of the common land, in most cases, measured a

76. Lanark Records, p. 90.
77. In August 1536, Selkirk proclaimed the St. Lawrence day fair at market crosses in other Border burghs and in the Lothians, obviously trying to bring people into the town. Selkirk Burgh Court Book, vol. ii, p. 173.
78. Ibid, vol. i, p. 73.
80. Edinburgh Records, vol. iv, p. 124. See also the following page of this thesis for an entry of June 1584.
considerable distance. In Selkirk, for instance, the perimeter of north common extended for fourteen miles, and that of the south common was twenty miles. Although people were more accustomed to walking long distances than today, for example by walking to and from the parish church each week, a perambulation of the burgh marches was exhausting and time-consuming, especially when some of the participants were only half-interested in the outcome. The use of horses in the riding of the marches also reflects their wider importance in society. Until the invention of mechanised transport, horses were an essential component in human activity. Horses were utilised in many different ways, and there was a variety of horses for different tasks, from warhorses and chargers to work and plough-horses (although oxen were also used to plough). The fourteenth-century chronicler Froissart mentions ponies and bay-horses in the Border marches. A good horse was a symbol of power and authority, and this also explains their use in the riding of the marches. Like motor-cars in the twentieth-century, horses were status symbols, and they reflected the social position of their owner. In a famous description of the Border 'Reivers' in the sixteenth-century, John Leslie stated: 'a verie abiecte man thay halde him that gangis upon his fute'.

Throughout history, men and women have loved horses. They have been companions in toil, travel and recreation, and provide the thrill of speed and constant companionship. In the sixteenth-century, horses, like other animals, were sometimes treated badly, but more often they were highly prized. Leslie stated that the Border Reivers valued horses above anything else, and that as long as they had a fast horse and enough clothes to dress themselves and their families, 'thay are no mekle kairful for the rest of the househalde geir'.

However, it is unlikely that all participants in the early 'ridings' were mounted. No doubt, some people were unable to meet the 'running costs' of a horse

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and had to take part as a pedestrian. In June 1584, the town council of Edinburgh ordained, 'that the town suld visy thair mairchis at the Trinity fair on fute', although in Edinburgh's case the boundary of the common land was not very extensive.84 In May 1588, the 'haill cunsall and commonatie' of Lanark, 'personally past one hors and fuit to the performing of thair commoun welth'.85 One individual who may have made the inspection on foot was the official burgh 'turf-cutter', the man who carried a spade and who cut turfs at certain points to mark the boundary of the common land. Another group who made at least part of the journey on foot were the burgh musicians. Music, in R. W. Malcolmson's words, was 'a central component of plebeian experience'.86 As Malcolmson states:

Music was the most accessible, the most public, and the most democratic, of the creative arts. It was inherently non-exclusive: it could not be privately possessed ..... and the material prerequisites for its practice and enjoyment were minimal, at least for singing and some kinds of instrumental music ..... Music, of almost any sort, revealed the transforming potential of the plebeian imagination: it helped to tame a harsh reality, to assist people in coping with life; it offered hope and consolation; it gave expression to a sense of resilience and determination, and of the longing for a better life.87

There has always been a close association between festival life and music, and when communities rode their marches they may have been accompanied by musicians, part of whose function was to draw attention to the procession and to make it noticeable and impressive. In the modern ridings, music is generally supplied by a brass band or a pipe band, but these are innovations of the nineteenth-century. Hawick and Selkirk Common Ridings also feature flute bands ('the drums and fifes'), a musical combination which was known in the sixteenth-century

Border marches. At a meeting of the wardens of the marches in July 1585, the Scots threatened trouble by 'strykinge up a larome with sownde of dromes and fyfe, ensigne displayed'. A fascinating insight into the musical world of early modern Scotland is provided by Robert Sempill's poem The Life and Death of Habbie Simson, the Piper of Kilbarchan, which was written in the mid-seventeenth century. Sempill's poem captures the rough folk-energy of popular festivals, and illustrates that music was a vital ingredient of everyday life. Habbie Simson played his pipes at fairs, feasts, weddings, football matches and horse racing. According to the poem, he was something of a local hero, much loved by children ('gaitlings'), old men ('carl'), and young people ('whan he play'd, the lasses leuch'):

So kindly to his neighbours neast
At Beltan and St. Barchan's feast
He blew, and then held up his breast,
As he were weid:
But now we need not him arrest,
For Habbie's dead.

At fairs he play'd before the spear-men,
All gaily graithed in their gear men,
Steel bonnets, jacks, and swords so clear then
Like any bead:
Now wha shall play before such weir-men
Sen Habbie's dead?

Many Scottish burghs employed their own musicians. In 1487, there were

‘commoun pyperis’ in Edinburgh.\textsuperscript{90} In 1522, every ‘nictbour’ in Aberdeen was obliged to pay the minstrels ‘thair meit and wagis’. Failure to do so would result in a fine: ‘And gif ther be ony puyr folks at ar not abill till gif thame meit, that thai gif thame ii d. to thair fee and costis.’\textsuperscript{91} Burgh musicians had a duty to play an early morning ‘alarm call’ to the inhabitants, and also to play in the evening to announce the night curfew. In 1540, the burgh council of Aberdeen appointed ‘Andro Lausone and Jame Lausone, his broder, thair commound menstrallis for the tyme’, and they were expected to play ‘at ewin and morn, and vder tymmis neydfull, concerning the toune’.\textsuperscript{92} Musicians also had duties to play at fairs and other events in the burgh, including the riding of the burgh marches. On 16 December 1556, the treasurer of Edinburgh paid ‘Jacques and his sons for thair playing on Alhallow evin and all the tyme of the fair twis in the day throw the toune’.\textsuperscript{93} As we have seen, Halloween was the date of the Edinburgh riding. In 1575, Lanark council paid 6s. 8d. ‘to tua menstrallis ..... George Simsoun and Jhon Watsoun for ganing throw the common’. Their playing seems to have been satisfactory because in 1581 ‘Jhon Watsoun’ was appointed ‘toun mensstral for ane year ..... hie to gang throw the toun with the swys [drum] morne and evining’.\textsuperscript{94} The drum was clearly a valuable piece of common property because on rainy days Watsone was to ‘gang throw with the pyp’, thus protecting the drum from damage.\textsuperscript{95} In the seventeenth-century, the burgh council of Peebles paid 13s. 4d. each to ‘Hew Blak and Gairden for playing on drum and pyp about the said commounes’.\textsuperscript{96} At the Dundee riding of 1727 the burgh council paid £3 Scots to ‘ane hautboy and violine’.\textsuperscript{97} Musicians were considered to

\textsuperscript{90} Edinburgh Records, vol. i, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{91} Aberdeen Records, vol. i, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, pp. 166-7.
\textsuperscript{94} Lanark Records, p. 70, 79.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{96} Peebles Records, vol. ii, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{97} Dundee Records, p. 184.
be burgh officials, and they were supplied with special costumes or uniforms to enhance their authority. In 1607, Stirling supplied 'George Crafude, drummare, and John Forbes, pyper' each with a pair of woollen 'breekis'. In 1622, Stirling provided: 'to the foure officares and to the drummer and pyper, ilk ane of thame, ane garment of rid Ingleshe kaser, viz: coit, breikis, and shankes, with whyte kneltingis, wrocht in gude fassoun'.98 On 4 May 1706, Linlithgow purchased 'six coats for the officers, drummer and pyper' in preparation for the riding of the marches.99

Musicians were clearly involved in the ridings in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, although unlike today, burghs did not have organised bands but made do with a drummer and a piper. Musicians probably walked in the forefront of the procession, and they may have entertained people once the riding had been completed. We can only speculate on what tunes they played. Habbie Simson, the piper of Kilbarchan, is said to have played The Day it Dazvis and Hunt's Up, which presumably were popular tunes of the day. It is possible that burghs had their own songs which were sung or played at the ridings and which praised the locality and its traditions. The inhabitants of the Borders certainly loved music and song. Sir Walter Scott wrote in the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border that: 'Where the pen and the press are wanting, the flow of numbers impresses upon the memory of posterity the deeds and sentiments of their forefathers.'100 As we will see, the Common Riding traditions of Flodden Field, whether accurate or not, may have been transmitted by song.

How were the marches of the common land defined? There were no maps or plans, and many people taking part in the riding would have been illiterate:

therefore much depended on physical markers on the ground. The most obvious method of defining the boundaries was by using prominent natural features in the local landscape. Thus, boundaries were defined by rivers and streams ('sykes'). In the early sixteenth century, part of the boundary of Selkirk north common was defined by 'the burn callit Philopburn evin up the vatterfall of the hill callit Lamelaw'. The marches were also defined by the crests of hills or other natural ridges. Woods, hedges and solitary trees were used. In 1556, a willow bush ('ane sauch bus') marked part of the boundary of Peebles common. It seems that the boundaries were often marked by the site of a well or spring. In 1556, riders at Peebles visited the 'Sclait Hole'. Wells and springs have a significant role in folklore. They were credited with having magical powers, and as providers of health and vitality from the heart of the earth. They were also welcome refreshment stops for thirsty riders and their mounts.

The boundaries of the common land could also be defined by man-made features. Special boundary ditches were cut, walls and 'march dikes' were erected, and rows of trees were planted, especially elder trees or 'bourtrees'. Likewise, boundaries were marked by stone cairns ('carne of stanis'), such as 'the gret carne of the thre breder' ('the Three Brethren'), which marked the extremity of Selkirk north common. Each time the marches were ridden, participants probably added a few more stones to the cairn. Agricultural features in the landscape were also utilised to define the marches. A boundary of Lanark common was marked by a cattle enclosure ('the ald punfald'). Boundaries were often defined by field walls. In 1592, 'the haill cunsall and commonatie' of Lanark passed by 'the southwest nuik of ane corne fauld dyk pertening to William Levistoun of Gervesswod'. Stone and wooden crosses and crucifixes were utilised, although they were also objects of

104. Lanark Records, p. 104.
devotion and perhaps had uses as locational signposts for travellers. In 1556, a boundary of Peebles common was defined by ‘Hammildone croce’. Interestingly, the boundaries of the common were also defined by artificial features which pre-dated the common itself. At Hawick Common Riding, the reading of the burgess role took place on the ‘Ca Knowe’ (or ‘Call Knowe’), a small mound near the furthest extremity of the common. The site, which was also known as ‘the Heroes Grave’, was excavated in the early nineteenth century and found to contain an ancient stone ‘cist’ and human remains. By utilising the marks of antiquity, people invested their marches with an ancient authority and immutability. It is an intriguing speculation how they interpreted the remains of previous generations.

A further method of defining the boundaries of land ownership was by the erection of special ‘march stones’ (also known in Scotland as ‘witter stanes’). These stones were set up at regular intervals from each other, usually in places where there were no other features to distinguish a boundary line. When the marches of Lanark common were ridden in May 1588, participants inspected, amongst others, ‘the merche stain in the nuik of the dyk at Muisbrig’; ‘the merche stain in the commoun gait’; and ‘the merche stain one the Hirdstainlaw’. Special ridings were held for the purpose of erecting new stones. On 25 May 1535, the inhabitants of Selkirk came to the north common, and ‘raid the marchis distinklie be the devyss of our eldest and vysset burgess and set up march stanes be tweix Carterhaucht and us’. In the seventeenth-century, the town council of Stirling decreed that ‘ilk burges and gildbrother at their entrée’ were to pay the town treasurer ‘twentie four shilling Scotts’ for the erection of a new march stone, ‘of thrie foot long and one foot square, of broatched worke, with the year of God hewin in figures on the upmost

end'. Evidently, this was most successful because seven years later the town council decreed that 'thair is noe more neid of stains,' and instead new burgesses were to give a donation for buying arms for the burgh arsenal.\textsuperscript{109} However, there was no room for complacency because march stones were easily removed or relocated by neighbouring landowners. Following a 'perambulatioun of the merches' in June 1574, the town council of Glasgow were informed by the 'outlandemeris' of a 'march stane tane awaye of the Symmerhill, and brocht doun ae greit space inwith the commone'. In May 1589, the Glasgow town council decreed that, 'all personis quha hes ony of the tounes commoun landis that they haif ane merche stane ..... to be placit at everie half aiker end of the said commoun land'.\textsuperscript{110}

March stones had to be distinctive and obvious. When the 'council and community' of Peebles inspected the bounds of Hamilton common in June 1556, they passed, amongst others, 'be tua gray stanis to ane quhite stane ..... [and] done the hoip to ane red hedit stane ..... [and] done the syke to ane gray stane'.\textsuperscript{111} This suggests that march stones were sometimes brightly painted, or, alternatively, made from naturally coloured stone, such as white quartz. In the seventeenth-century, the stones which bound the common of Dundee had sculpted on them a lily, which was the symbol of the town, and also the date of their erection ('1619').\textsuperscript{112} The march stones which bound the Rutherglen common were shaped, 'somewhat resembling a man's head, but the lower part is square', a format which was found elsewhere in Scotland.\textsuperscript{113} A march stone which bound the Aberdeen common at 'the furd callit Leslie's furd [was] merkit with the letter P. for propertie of the towne of Aberdeine's marche'; several others bore the mark of 'Sanct Peiteris key';

\textsuperscript{110} Glasgow Records, vol. ii, p. 13, 137.
\textsuperscript{111} Peebles Records, vol. i, p. 230.
\textsuperscript{112} A. Maxwell, The History of Old Dundee (Dundee and Edinburgh, 1884), p. 243.
\textsuperscript{113} Ure, History of Rutherglen, p. 93.
and others were ‘perfytelie merket with the signe of the sauser’, a depression carved on the top of the stone. It has been suggested that the depressions on these ‘saucer stones’ were filled with molten lead, which was then embossed with the Aberdeen burgh seal. However, in the Aberdeen riding of October 1861, the saucer depressions were filled with wine, which participants then drank directly from the stone.114 At Hawick Common Riding in the eighteenth-century, and possibly earlier, a depression in the keystone of the ‘Auld Brig’ was used as a communal ‘mill’ from which snuff was distributed to riders as they set out on their inspection of the burgh marches. Sharing food and drink has always been an important expression of group solidarity. Using a burgh march stone as a communal drinking cup or a snuffbox cleverly emphasised belonging to that community.

Clearly, the boundary of the common was defined by a variety of prominent features and landmarks. Riding around these at regular intervals gave the community a ‘mental map’ of their common, which could then be drawn upon if disputes occurred with neighbouring landowners over the position of the boundary. To further impress this knowledge on individuals, and thus on the collective memory of the community, the riding of the marches often involved an element of physical induction. New burgesses were knocked against march stones (‘the doupin stanes’) so that they would remember the location of the stones (and thus the position of the boundary). The ‘doupin’ of new burgesses survived in Aberdeen until the late nineteenth-century. In Lanark, those who perambulated the marches for the first time was forcibly immersed in the ‘Ducking Hole’ in the river Mouss, so that they would remember the point were the boundary of the common met the water. It also seems likely that in some ridings young men were physically beaten

114. Aberdeen Records, vol. ii, pp. 322-6. following the Aberdeen riding of 1861, it was commented: ‘It’s few places that hae a wassail cup on ilka march stane, to fill wi’ wine, if they hae a mind, an’ the watchword o’ “Bon-Accord”, that won a hail countryside, for the friendly pledge o’ the drinkers.’ The Rydin’ o’ the Landimyres 12 October 1861 (Aberdeen, 1861), p. 3.
at certain places en route, so that in future they would remember the site of the boundary. A description of the Aberdeen riding of 1755 states: 'the young men were taken to each of the march stones, and there subjected to that peculiar mode of flagellation which, at the present day, is employed in order to embue the mind with a knowledge of Greek, Latin, and English Grammar.' Likewise, Thomas Wilkie, a collector of folklore and customs in the 'southern counties of Scotland' at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, recorded in his notebooks:

It is a common custom when March-stones are set up, for sons of the proprietors of land in the vicinity, to be asked to stand as witnesses. After the stone, or stones are fixed, these young men are laid hold of, and their ears are cruelly punched, by the lairds of the lands newly marched. This is to make them remember the transaction of the stones placed.

Similarly, in 1764, a group of old men were consulted to settle a dispute over the boundary of Wilton common, near Hawick. One of them, James Scott, remembered that when he was young he saw the boundary being established and that one of the participants 'struck a boy standing in his reach and said to him he would mind the marching forty years after'. James Scott and other boys ran away 'fearing Falnash [the participant] might strike them also', but clearly they never forgot the site of the assault, or that of the boundary. A more pleasant form of impressing young people with knowledge of the boundary was to give them money, sweets or other treats at certain places on the route. At Lanark riding of the marches, cakes were thrown to the crowd from the window of the provost's house. Anthropologists describe such actions as 'dramaturgical forms of

expression', meaning the passing of acquired wisdom and experience from
generation to generation by physical means, in this case by linking a particular
place with a memorable (and often unpleasant) experience. The practice also seems
to resemble an initiation rite, which are often violent and a test of endurance and
courage.

What happened once the riding was over and participants returned to the
burgh? Here, we must exercise caution. Since the late eighteenth-century, the
ridings have been largely festival occasions and primarily associated with
celebration and enjoyment. But previously, the ridings had the serious purpose of
protecting the burgh land, which perhaps meant that their festival element was
rather more limited than today. In sixteenth-century Scotland, the most important
burgh occasions were undoubtedly the annual fairs, which attracted visitors,
travelling showmen and traders. As well as having important economic functions,
they were also occasions of festivity and 'carnival'. In most burghs, the riding of
the marches was separate from the fair, although in late sixteenth-century
Edinburgh the riding was linked with the Allhallows and the Trinity fairs.
Whilst it seems unlikely that the riding of the marches was celebrated with the
intensity of the fair, there has probably always been a carnival element about the
event. It has been noted that musicians were involved in many ridings, and the
young men of the burgh enjoyed a special role and licence. Participants in the
ridings felt a strong sense of community and bonhomie with their fellows, not least
because the burgh provided food and drink to sustain them on their journey.
Likewise, the ridings concluded with some form of corporate dinner or feast for
participants, a tradition which survives in the modern events. In 1727, Dundee town
council paid for a dinner at a local alehouse, including 9s. for three broken
glasses.\footnote{Dundee Records, p. 184.} One reason for the popularity and survival of the ridings in many
burghs was that they introduced 'jollification' into life and provided a temporary

\footnote{Dundee Records, p. 184.}
escape from toil and brutality. Festivals and other burgh occasions of this kind were times when food and drink were consumed in huge quantities. Alcohol, in particular, was part of every public and private ceremony, commercial bargain and craft ritual. The excessive use of alcohol can be partly explained by the dismal social conditions in which men and women found themselves. As Keith Thomas reminds us: ‘Alcohol ..... was an essential narcotic which anaesthetised men against the strains of contemporary life. Drunkenness broke down social distinctions, and brought a temporary mood of optimism to the desperate.'\textsuperscript{120} Festivals and other celebrations depended on alcohol to lower inhibitions and lubricate all types of social intercourse.

One of the most important activities and amusements associated with the riding of the marches was, of course, horse racing. Horse racing is an ancient sport which emerged naturally in a world where horses had social and economic significance. Horses, like motor cars, were status symbols. They represented their owner’s wealth and social status. Inevitably, there was rivalry between owners to establish who had the fastest horse, which eventually led to the development of race meetings. Horse racing was taken very seriously, and individuals acquired great skill and social prestige through their involvement in the sport. In April 1504, James IV paid 18s. to the boy that ‘ran the Kingis hors’. Likewise, in May 1504, James paid 28s. to ‘Dande Doule, whilk he wan fra the King on hors rynnyng’.\textsuperscript{121} In the sixteenth-century, horse racing took place, amongst others, in Dumfries, Haddington, Stirling, and, most famously, Leith. Town councils tried to encourage racing by giving financial support to their local meeting. In 1653, Peebles town council provided a saddle ‘worth ten merkes mony’ to be ridden for at the Beltane fair. Ten years later, Peebles provided a silver cup ‘with werkmanshipe’,

\textsuperscript{120} Thomas, \textit{Religion and the Decline of Magic}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{121} Treasurer’s Accounts, vol. ii, p. 428, 430.
whilst in 1666 there was 'ane silver queich, with the tounes armes auddit on'.

Burghs tried to encourage meetings because they brought visitors into the town. Race meetings, like the local fair, were proclaimed in other towns. In 1661, Peebles paid '14s. to two boyes that carried ane letter to Selkirk to proclaim the race'.

Races attracted all social groups, because primarily they were social occasions. As well as racing, there were all the elements of 'carnival' life: music, dancing, travelling peddlars and minstrels, feasting, drinking, excitement and colour. The atmosphere and energy is captured in Robert Sempill's *The Life and Death of Habbie Simson*:

> And at horse races many a day,  
> Before the black, the brown, the gray,  
> He gart his pipe, when he did play,  
> Baith skirl and skreed:  
> gart - compelled  
> skirt and skreed - shrill and screech  
> Now all such pastimes's quite away  
> Sen Habbie's dead.

Other athletic events accompanied the horse racing, including contests of skill, speed, strength and endurance. In 1663, Peebles awarded 'a quare and ane half of paper' to the boys that ran a race when 'the commons was marched about Hamilton'. Sports meetings of this kind may also have been a 'shop-window' for local men to promote themselves. Richard Holt has written that: 'Sport ..... is among other things an ancient display of prowess'. Holt states that the young men who took part 'no doubt hoped to make themselves more attractive to the limited pool of marriageable girls by the display of bodily vigour'. Perhaps they were

also trying to appeal to local chieftains and nobles, who were always interested in imposing bodyguards and warriors.

The Reformation and the Riding of the Marches

This chapter concludes by considering the effect of the Reformation on the riding of the marches. As we have seen, many records of the ridings post-date the Reformation, and it is obvious that the ridings continued to take place. Common land remained an essential asset to the community, and there was still a need for burghs to delineate the boundaries of their common and to check any encroachment upon it. Before the Reformation, the riding of the marches, like burgh 'wappinshaws', was primarily a secular event which had a practical purpose, although there may also have been some religious or even superstitious input. Moreover, in the Borders, the survival of the ridings was assisted by the relatively slow progress which the Reformation made in the region. Learned men and able preachers were rarely attracted into the area, whilst church buildings were often of very poor quality due to the effects of war. Teviotdale still faced a shortage of ministers in 1588. In Selkirk, the continued support for Roman Catholicism can

127. In England, the Reformation put a stop to religious processions, although the annual perambulation of the parish boundary in Rogation week was allowed to continue because, like the riding of the marches, it had the practical purpose of defining the boundaries and was a corporate manifestation of the community. Every effort was made to purge the ceremony of popish associations. Saints’ banners were prohibited, and there was to be no stopping at wayside crosses. The ceremony was ‘not a procession, but a perambulation’. See J. Strype, The History of the Life and Acts of Edmund Grindall (Oxford, 1821), pp. 55-6.

be seen in the 1590s when several indwellers hindered the new reformed ministers, occupied their manses and kept hold of their glebes.\footnote{129}{Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, vol. iv, 1585-1592, ed. and abr. D. Mason (Edinburgh, 1881), pp. 521-2.}

Another reason for the survival of the riding of the marches was that people were deeply attached to traditional festival or holiday occasions and not willing to give them up. As Allan White has noted: ‘Observance of traditional Catholic holidays seems to have been one of the most difficult traces of the pre-Reformation Church to eradicate’.\footnote{130}{A. White, ‘The Impact of the Reformation on a Burgh Community: The Case of Aberdeen’, The Early Modern Town in Scotland, ed. M. Lynch (London, 1987), p. 98.} It was of the customs themselves that the people were tenacious, not of the meaning. A deep attachment to tradition was very strong amongst craftsmen’s guilds. Allan White continues: ‘The seasons and ceremonies of the Catholic church had been of special significance to them, since they allowed for the public expression of corporate identity together with a demonstration of the rank and importance of the craft.’\footnote{131}{Ibid, p. 97.}

The Reformation came as a shock to the craft guilds because it struck at the root of their distinctive identity and traditions. The frustration of their religious character drove them to seek other ways of promoting and expressing their sense of corporate identity, and this may have encouraged the guilds to become more fully involved in the riding of the marches. In this way, the Reformation can be seen to have given a boost to the ridings.

It seems that any changes which occurred in the riding of the marches as a result of the Reformation were largely superficial, even though the outward and visible signs of Catholicism were abandoned. Saints’ banners, for instance, were no longer carried in processions. Likewise, a characteristic of the Reformation was an offensive against ‘pagan’ survivals, which were believed to be rallying points for
Catholicism. In 1579, the practice of making pilgrimages to wells from superstitious motives was prohibited by an act of Parliament. It has been noted that in the pre-Reformation period, the riding of the marches might have included blessing the fields and visiting wells and other holy places. These practices would have been discontinued, although it is difficult to believe that the superstitious motives which lay behind them also suddenly ceased. The world remained a dangerous and uncertain place, and control of the earthly environment was essential for people living a precarious existence.

As well as suppressing pilgrimages to holy wells and other pagan practices, the Scottish Parliament also brought an end to the Robin Hood processions, which were prohibited in 1555. It is clear however that many people were deeply attached to the custom and that burgh authorities had difficulty trying to stamp it out. In 1561, 'the prentissis and seruandis of merchattis and craftismen and vtheris' of Edinburgh were accused by the burgh council of planning to 'mak convocatioun and assemblie efter the auld wikit maner of Robene hude'. Whilst the cult of Robin Hood eventually disappeared, it is possible that the tradition lingered with the appointment of a young man to carry the burgh standard on important civic occasions.

There may also have been some moral objections to the riding of the marches. Popular festivals of this kind were seen as occasions of licence and sin, especially drunkenness and gluttony, and as periods which encouraged servitude to the world, the flesh and the devil. But, as we have seen, burghs continued to employ minstrels at the ridings, which suggests that an element of carnival still survived. It is unlikely that people would abandon the opportunity for feasting and drinking. One area where the reformers probably had some influence was dancing. Before the

Reformation, dancing was much more of a communal activity, taking place at festival time in the open-air. For the reformers however, wild dancing epitomised the abandonment of self-control and thus had to be discouraged and stamped out.
Chapter Three

'O Flodden Field!'

The Common Riding and Flodden

Tradition, legend, tune, and song,
Shall many an age that will prolong
Sir Walter Scott, Marmion

No work on the Scottish Common Riding would be complete without considering the battle of Flodden Field and the Common Riding traditions which surround it. Flodden was fought on 9 September 1513 between an English army led by Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, and a Scottish army under King James IV. The day has long been recognised as a military disaster for Scotland. 10,000 Scots were killed in the battle, including the King and a vast number of the Scottish nobility. The memory of that dreadful defeat is still perpetuated in the Common Ridings of Hawick and Selkirk. Both towns have a tradition of local involvement and loss at Flodden: Hawick also remembers the young men or ‘callants’ who defended the town after the battle. The Flodden traditions have become an integral part of the Common Ridings and largely obscure the original purpose of the festival. Indeed, it is sometimes said that the Common Ridings are really ‘about Flodden’ rather than the riding of the burgh marches. But are these traditions historically accurate or simply local invention? This chapter will assess the Flodden traditions by comparing them with surviving historical evidence. The first section considers

1. Instituted in 1952, Coldstream Civic Week also has a strong Flodden link. Thursday of Civic Week features a ride-out to Flodden Field where the Coldstreamer lays a wreath at the Flodden memorial to commemorate the dead of 1513, followed by a short service at Branxton and the Oration delivered by a guest speaker. In 1991, the guest speaker was the 27th Earl of Surrey, a descendant of Flodden hero. Speaking of his invitation, the earl said, ‘Maybe it is a sign that after almost 500 years the role of my predecessor at Flodden has been forgiven.’ Brave words indeed. The Scotsman, 25 June 1991, p. 3.
local involvement and loss at Flodden, especially that of Selkirk. This is followed by an examination of the Hawick tradition of 1514.

The Selkirk Tradition of 1513

In Selkirk, the highlight of the Common Riding is a ceremony called 'casting of the colours', which takes place on Common Riding morning after the riding of the burgh marches. On a covered dais erected in the market square, the Standard Bearer 'casts' the burgh flag, meaning that he turns the flag in figure-eight motions about his body to the rhythms of the tune The Souters o’ Selkirk. Although it has striking similarities to some Italian customs, the casting is said to imitate a solitary survivor of Flodden who on his return to Selkirk swung a captured banner round his head and then in deep swoops to the ground, thus indicating the nature of the defeat. Other bearers cast their flags on Common Riding morning, including those of the Selkirk craft guilds, the Fleshers and the Merchant Company. When the last - that of the ex-Servicemen - has been lowered, there is a profound and moving silence broken only with the playing of the traditional Scottish lament The Flowers of the Forest, which is known locally as The Liltin. There is no doubting the emotion generated by this simple ceremony. As the local saying goes, 'there is not a dry eye in the market square'.

The earliest known written reference to the Selkirk tradition about Flodden was made around 1722 by John Hodge. 'Hodge’s manuscript' is contained in Walter Macfarlane’s ‘Geographical Collection Relating to Scotland’, three hand-written volumes dated 1748-9, now housed in the National Library of Scotland:
King James IV, on the way to Flodden, where he engaged the English army, had from the burgh of Selkirk eighty well-armed men commanded by the town-clerk, who were all, except for the clerk, cut to pieces. The clerk only returned, and brought with him one of the English banners and a halbert axe, which are yearly carried before the magistrates at the riding of their common.2

This tradition was firmly established at the end of the eighteenth-century (and thus pre-dates the popular interest in Flodden created by the success of Sir Walter Scott’s Marmion, which was first published in 1808). The tradition was recorded by Reverend Thomas Robertson, minister of the parish of Selkirk, in Sir John Sinclair’s Statistical Account of Scotland of 1791, although in this version the number ‘who followed the fortune of James IV on the plains of Flowden’ was given as ‘100 citizens’.3 Sir Walter Scott also considered the tradition in The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border of 1802-3, which, remarkably, seems to have been the only time he ever wrote about the Border Common Ridings. Scott recorded The Souters o’ Selkirk and two versions of The Flowers of the Forest, songs closely associated with Flodden and Selkirk. Scott utilised the tradition given in the Statistical Account, stating that it contained nothing which was ‘inconsistent with probability’.4 The modern version of the tradition is similar to that recorded in Hodge’s manuscript.

An important part of the Flodden tradition of Selkirk (and Hawick) is that the town sent a large number of men to join the campaign. The military

3. OSAS, vol. ii, p. 436. The Flodden battlefield is not ‘plains’ but hilly ground. This was an important factor in the course of the battle.
arrangements of sixteenth-century Scotland certainly required this. The army of
the time has been described as a ‘citizen army’, with military service demanded of
all able-bodied men between the ages of sixteen and sixty.\(^5\) This was for a
maximum of forty days in any one year. Each man was expected to supply his own
provisions and weapons, the latter fixed according to his status. Periodic
‘wappenshawings’ were ordered by local sheriffs and barons to ensure that those
living within their jurisdiction possessed the appropriate arms. Such arrangements
made for an inexpensive army but also one with severe limitations. There was little
effective machinery to enforce the regulations, so much depended on the willingness
of subjects to co-operate. This must have created problems in a notoriously lawless
area like the Border marches, where local people routinely spurned authority
when it threatened their personal well-being or profit. Thomas Rae has described
the Anglo-Scottish marches as a society ‘where national feeling was almost
meaningless, [and] many men refused to recognise the suzerainty of the monarch on
either side of the frontier’.\(^6\) It was less than twenty years after Flodden that
Johnny Armstrong ‘and all his gallant company’ were executed after an infamous
career of robbery and theft. Brigands like Armstrong flourished in the Borders at
the time of Flodden, and they would have been unwilling to put their lives at risk
for a monarch and a cause they did not recognise.

But not everyone in the Borders defied the law so blatantly. For the
inhabitants of the Border burghs, there must have been considerable social pressure
and obligation to take up arms. Indeed, a royal burgh like Selkirk might have
considered it a matter of local pride and honour to supply men for the king’s army.
An entry in the \textit{Selkirk Burgh Court Book} dated 2 August 1513 gives ‘unusually
detailed’ instructions ‘efter the tenor of the kingis letteris’ for a wappenshawing to

\(^5\) P. Symms, ‘Selkirk at the Time of Flodden and the Charters’, \textit{Flower of the
\(^6\) T. I. Rae, \textit{The Administration of the Scottish Frontier 1513-1603} (Edinburgh,
1966), p. 11.
be held ‘in the boig befor the balyeis one Woddynnesdaye Sanct Lorence day nixt to cum’, which suggests that the town was preparing to do its duty and send some men to join the campaign.7

However, even if Selkirk and the other Border burghs fulfilled their military obligations, there is still doubt about the Common Riding tradition which says that almost all the local men were killed on the battlefield. We should remember that Flodden was the unfortunate conclusion of an otherwise successful campaign. Prior to the battle, the Scottish army had spent nearly three weeks in England, capturing Norham castle - an old ambition of the Scots - and advancing up the valley of the river Till. The length of this campaign caused severe problems in the Scottish army, notably of supply and motivation. Norman MacDougall, the most recent biographer of James IV, has written that ‘it was difficult, if not impossible, to keep the host in the field for much longer than a week to ten days, a fortnight at the very most, in spite of the theoretical forty days’ service’.8 Officially, each man was supposed to bring provisions for forty days but it is more likely that the individual soldier carried enough food for only ten or twelve days, after which time the army began to melt away through desertion. The problem was compounded in the Flodden campaign by atrocious weather and pestilence which had dogged the Scottish army since assembly. Moreover, in capturing Norham castle, the Scots had won a major victory, and to many soldiers, especially the unpaid commoner, it must have seemed that the job was finished and that they could go home. Thomas Ruthal, the bishop of Durham, wrote that 20,000 men left the Scottish army at the siege of Norham.9 Several days before Flodden, the burgh council of Edinburgh complained about ‘all maner of personis that ar cummyng

fra his [the king’s] army’. MacDougall has suggested that it might have been easier to keep the service of the contingents provided by the royal burghs for the full forty days. On 2 August 1513, the Aberdeen burgh council authorised the raising of a tax of £400 Scots to provide a small force ‘to pas with our souerane lord in his weres in Ingland, for the space of x1 dais after thair cuming to his grace’. But there is no evidence that Selkirk, a much poorer royal burgh, made similar arrangements, and, as the Edinburgh desertions suggest, payment may not have been very effective.

Turning to the actual battle, any attempt to ascertain the fate of the Border contingents involves speculation and conjecture. The surviving records of Flodden are few and contradictory and they were all of course written by the English. Unsurprisingly, there is no reference to the Border burghs. At the beginning of the battle, the Scottish army arranged itself into great formations, each being ‘an arrowe shotte’ from its neighbour. These ‘battles’ were not random concentrations of men, but complex constructions of smaller units recruited through a family, lineage or feudal relationship, and grouped around a flag or a leader or united by a common war-cry. At Flodden, some or all of the Border levies fought together on the extreme left of the Scottish army in the battle led by Alexander Lord Home, and Alexander Earl of Huntly. The chronicler Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie wrote that Home and Huntly fought ‘[on] the feild of Flowdoun .... witht the borderaris

and countrymen to the number of ten thousand'; 14 another near contemporary, George Buchanan, wrote that Home was in charge of 'the March men'. 15

Alexander Home was the leading Border noble at this time, and as such he must have been able to exert considerable social influence and prestige throughout the region, particularly after his appointment to the wardenship of the Scottish east and middle march in 1511. 16 An important part of Home's remit was to muster the marches in times of war, and for this purpose he 'had at his disposal by the terms of his commission all the men of his march [or marches] who were liable for military service'. 17 Home had his own military court with the right to prosecute cases of non-attendance, thereby increasing the pressure on people to join the campaign.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the men mustered from Selkirk fought under Home. It has been suggested that as royal tenants of the burgh and of Ettrick Forest, the Selkirk contingent may have fought under the direct command of the king rather than the warden. 18 The animosity between the Forest and the Merse expressed in the Selkirk Common Riding song The Souters o' Selkirk has been taken as evidence that the Selkirk men did not fight under Home (a 'Souter' is a shoemaker and a nickname for a native of Selkirk, shoemaking once being the staple industry of the town):

17. Rae, Scottish Frontier, p. 44.
It's up wi' the Souters o' Selkirk  
And down wi' the Earl o' Home,  
And here is to a' the braw laddies,  
That wear the single soal'd shoon:  
It's up wi' the Souters o' Selkirk  
For they are baith trusty and leal;  
And up wi' the lads o' the Forest,  
An' down wi' the Merse to the deil.19

Although The Souters of Selkirk has no clear association with any historical event, Sir Walter Scott, writing in The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, said that it does refer to Flodden. Scott cited Mr Plummer, a Selkirk antiquarian of the late eighteenth century, who said that, 'although the words are not very ancient, there is every reason to believe that they allude to the battle of Flodden'.20 Scott also included the assertion of the Reverend Robertson (above mentioned) that the verse was actually about a 'football' match between the Souters of Selkirk and the men of Home, in which the former gained complete victory. It is significant that neither of these two authorities suggest that the verse was composed in the immediate aftermath of the battle. Indeed, the shoemakers guild in Selkirk had no corporate identity until 1601, and the earldom of Home, to which the verse refers, was not created until 1604.21 In his book on the song culture of eighteenth-century Scotland, Thomas Crawford states that:

Not too much should be made of the tradition that the song refers to the brave service of 80 burgesses of Selkirk at the battle of Flodden, or the other tradition that it celebrates a football match between the burgesses and the family of Home. But the appeal to intensely local loyalties is obvious.\textsuperscript{22}

Returning to Flodden, the first hand-to-hand fighting involved the battle led by Home and Huntly.\textsuperscript{23} This appears to have taken place on the Scottish left where Home’s battle met an English force led by Sir Edmund Howard, who ‘had with hym 1000 Cheshire men, and 500 Lancashire men, and many gentilmen of Yorkshire’.\textsuperscript{24} Home and his force swept all before them in this initial assault. At the sight of the approaching line of Scots, ‘the Cheshire and Lancashire men never abode stroke, and fewe of gentilmen of Yorkshire abode, but fled’, leaving Howard with only a small force to fight his way to safety.\textsuperscript{25}

Home and Huntly were unable or unwilling to capitalise on their victory to assist the rest of the Scottish army. Before they could wheel round and make a flank attack on the English centre, their advance was checked by the arrival of Thomas Lord Dacre, the warden of the English marches, and his force of Border horsemen. What happened next has always been something of a mystery. Andrew Lang, man of letters and a native of Selkirk, wrote, ‘I have never been able to understand the conduct of Home’s Borderers at Flodden’.\textsuperscript{26} Some sources suggest

\textsuperscript{22} T. Crawford, \textit{Society and the Lyric. A Study of the Song Culture of Eighteenth Century Scotland} (Edinburgh, 1979), p. 142. Crawford suggests that \textit{The Souters o’ Selkirk} is a work-song, similar to weavers songs or whalers songs. The purpose of a work-song was to ‘sweeten labour’.


\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Articles of the Bataill}.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{SHR}, vol. iv, no. 13 (October 1907), p. 89.
that, 'like a good and an hardy knight', Dacre charged his men (who may have been mounted) into Home's division, 'and put to flight all the said Scottes, and had aboute 8 score of his men slayne. In whiche bataill a grete nombre of Scottes were slayne'. By this timely action, Dacre, 'who was a fine captain and counsellor', saved Sir Edmund Howard and prevented the collapse of the English right wing.

Other sources suggest that Dacre's role at Flodden was less honourable. Rumours spread soon after the battle that Dacre had been reluctant to get involved in the fighting. 'The lord Dacre with his company stood styll al daye unfoughten with all.' In late October 1513, the bishop of Durham sympathised with Dacre that 'many reports had been circulated to his dishonour', and suggested that King Henry VIII send a letter of encouragement to the unfortunate lord. Similar stories were spread against Home. It was said that he had refused Huntly's plea to go to the aid of James IV, and that he had held his force back as the rest of the Scottish army was cut down. In 1516, these accusations were used against Home when he was convicted of treason and beheaded:

This deed gave rise to more general admiration than grief, for Alexander was already most notorious among the people as stained by treachery because in the English war he had not gone to the aid of his countrymen when they were distressed and falling in front of the camp of which he was in command.

Perhaps it was significant that Home and Dacre led formations which were composed largely of men from the Border marches. In pitched battles like Flodden,
Borderers were known to be wary about attacking their neighbours from the other side of the frontier. Political and national differences might have to be settled by warfare, but there was no desire to upset the complicated system of Border relationships and feuds. Thus, unofficial ‘arrangements’ were sometimes made between Border soldiers for their mutual safety and convenience. At the battle of Pinkie on 10 September 1547, the English Borderers displayed handkerchiefs rolled on their arms and letters embroidered on their caps:

They [the English Borderers] said themselves the use thereof was that each of them might know his fellow .... howbeit, there were of the army among us (some suspicious men perchance) that thought they used them for collusion, and rather because they might be known to the enemy, as the enemies are known to them (for they have their marks too), and so in conflict either each to spare each other, or gently each to take other.33

It is not known whether a similar understanding was made between the Borderers at Flodden, but it would explain the reports of mutual inaction between the two sides. In addition, some of Home’s men probably lost interest in the battle after their victory over Sir Edmund Howard, turning their attention to prisoners and winning booty. English sources state that many prisoners ‘were taken by the lorde Chamberlayne of Scotlande whych fought with the wyng of Sir Edmond Howard’, some of whom were later ransomed.34 It is interesting that the earliest versions of the Selkirk tradition refer to items having been brought back from the battlefield - for example, a flag, a sword, a halbert or a horse. Reverend Robertson’s Statistical Account states that the Selkirk men returned ‘loaded with spoils taken from the enemy’.35 The only reference to Flodden in The Burgh Court Book of Selkirk is an entry for 29 October 1521 which states:

34. Hall, Chronicle, p. 563.
That daye Stewyn Clerk tuk to preff this daye xv daye be Wol Chepman and other part of nychburis of Selkyrk that he broucht ane blak hors furtht of Ingland at Flodoun.36

Here we also have evidence of one Selkirk man who was present at Flodden and who returned to Selkirk after the battle.

However, the criticisms of Home and Dacre originated sometime after Flodden, and probably had a lot to do with political opportunism and manoeuvring of their respective rivals rather than what happened on the field. Many of the English nobility were known to be jealous of Dacre’s close relationship with the Earl of Surrey, whilst Lord Home, as one of the few Scottish nobles to survive Flodden, was a convenient scapegoat to explain the defeat. Pitscottie’s assertion that Home and Huntly lost ‘few of thair men either hurt orslain’37 does not agree with casualty lists, which show considerable losses amongst the Scottish Border nobility, including members of the Home family; John Murray of Fala Hill, the sheriff of Selkirkshire; and John Scott of the Haining, the local laird of Selkirk.38

Unfortunately, the best Border source for the period, The Burgh Court Book of Selkirk, contains almost nothing about Flodden. This has appeared to some historians ‘as if a silent oath had been taken that the dreadful day should be forever blotted out of record’.39 As previously noted, an entry for 2 August 1513 gives instructions for a wappenshawing, but there is nothing recording those from Selkirk who took part in the campaign or those who failed to return from the field.


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Common Riding tradition says that eighty burgesses went from the town and that a man called Fletcher was the only 'Souter' to come home. However, a number of names which figure in the pre-Flodden pages of the Burgh Court Book can also be seen afterwards, and as Thomas Craig-Brown noted in his History of Selkirkshire, 'the clerk’s handwriting remains the same, old names are repeated in lists of members, orders about the watch are given in much the same terms as formerly'.

The Burgh Court Book also shows that there is no dramatic increase in the creation of new burgesses in Selkirk for the period after Flodden, which would have occurred if the traditional eighty had been killed. In an average year the town appointed only one or two new members: 1536 was exceptional when forty-six new burgesses were created to raise money to pay for the confirmation of Selkirk’s charter as a royal burgh. At the time of Flodden, one new burgess was created in 1513, and only one in 1515. Nothing indicates a sudden surge of replacements.

The Hawick Tradition of 1514

Selkirk is not of course the only Border town to have a popular tradition about Flodden. Twelve miles away, the battle also features in Hawick Common Riding.

In 1898, at a time when the Common Riding was under severe criticism, Robert S. Craig, an advocate, and Adam Laing, the burgh chamberlain of Hawick, published The Hawick Tradition of 1514: The Town’s Common, Flag and Seal, which, in the authors’ words, set out to examine and verify, ‘the facts bearing on the time-hallowed tradition of 1514, and also on the possession of the Town’s Common, and

40. Ibid. See also Symms, ‘Selkirk at the Time of Flodden’, p. 47.
the ancient ceremony of the Riding of its Meiths and Marches. Craig and Laing summarised the Hawick tradition as follows:

[After Flodden] in Hawick few men were left to defend the town. It was at the mercy of the English, who in the year of Flodden and in the subsequent year, over-ran the country pillaging and killing. One such party did in 1514 approach the town of Hawick and threaten it. In default of their elders, mostly slain at Flodden with Drumlanrig, their local leader, the younger men of the town rose to the occasion. They went out as far as Hornshole, some two miles farther down the river, encountered the enemy there, routed them and took from them the flag they carried. This flag, or at least a replica of it, has been carried annually at the ceremony of the Riding of the Common ever since.

Craig and Laing state that this tradition, 'was well known to the inhabitants of Hawick at the end of the last [ie the eighteenth] century'. The earliest known reference to the 'Hornshole incident' can be found in The Common Riding Song, the words of which were written by Arthur Balbirnie sometime in the 1790s (the exact date of composition is unknown):

At Flodden field our fathers fought it,  
And honour gain'd though dear they bought it;  
By Teviotside they took this Colour,  
A dear memorial of their valour.

Balbirnie's song is still sung annually at the Common Riding, where it is now known as The Old Song (the new song being James Hogg's Teribus). Another early reference to the tradition is contained in Robert Wilson's History of Hawick.

43. Ibid, pp. 61-2.  
44. Ibid, p. 62.  
which was published in 1825. 'History' is something of a misnomer because Wilson, who had been Cornet of Hawick in 1799 and who was a noted radical, used his book to assess political issues of the day rather than historical events. Wilson embellished the tradition with 'details', probably of his own creation. He states, for instance, that there were 'two hundred stout men ... who shouted unanimously to be led into battle [against] the enemy, about forty in number.' In 1826, John Mason recorded the Hawick tradition in The Border Tour, one of the earliest tourist guides to the Borders:

The marches of the land belonging to Hawick are annually perambulated by the magistrates, followed by every inhabitant who can meet with a horse to bestride. In the centre of the cavalcade is a burgess, or the son of a burgess, called the Comet, bearing the town standard, on which is inscribed '1514', a similar flag having been taken in that year from a marauding party of the English by the inhabitants.

Other visitors to Hawick at this time, such as Dorothy Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott, did not record the tradition. Ironic perhaps, because poets and song writers are largely responsible for the impressions we have of Flodden. Nowhere is this more apparent than the Hawick Common Riding song The Colour, or, as it is

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popularly known, Teribus, the words of which were written at the beginning of the nineteenth century by local stocking-maker and self-educated working man, James Hogg. Hogg's twenty four verse epic (thirty nine verse if we include his lesser known work Flodden Field) has become the standard account of the Hawick tradition. Selected verses from it are sung and heard repeatedly in the course of the modern Common Riding.

Critics rightly agree that Teribus is historically unreliable. 'The author has assumed considerable poetic licence, and drawn pretty much on his imagination'. Hogg's song is 'fictional reportage' like the old Border ballads. But perhaps we should not dismiss Teribus so easily. It has been noted that Balbirnie's Common Riding Song and Hogg's Teribus have close similarities with each other. Both songs have the same tune and contain lines and phrases which are similar. For

48. The popular name Teribus comes from the song's chorus:

Teribus ye Teri Odin,
Sons of heroes slain at Flodden
Imitating Border bowmen,
Aye defend your rights and common.

The origin of the phrase 'Teribus ye Teri Odin' is obscure. The explanation given by John Jamieson in An Etymological Dictionary of the Scots Language of 1808 and accepted by James A. H. Murray in Dictionary of the Southern Counties of Scotland of 1873 is that the phrase derives from an Old English phrase meaning: 'May the god Tyr keep us, both Tyr and Odin'. However, The Scottish National Dictionary of 1974 states that this explanation, 'seems to be a piece of dubious eighteenth century antiquarianism', and comments: 'The phrase may well be a succession of meaningless syllables meant to represent the sound of a march played on drums and bagpipes.'

49. James Hogg should not be confused with his illustrious namesake, James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. For more on Hogg, see I. W. Landles, 'The Other James Hogg - A Bicentennial Reminder', THAS (1980), pp. 30-6.

50. Hawick in Song and Poetry, p. 78.

example, 'Up wi’ a’ the Border bowmen,' (Balbirnie) and 'Imitating Border bowmen,' (Hogg); 'Our ancestors of martial order/To drive the English o’er the Border,' (Balbirnie) and 'Off they marched in martial order/Down by Teviot's flowery border,' (Hogg); and 'Up wi’ Hawick's richts and Common,' (Balbirnie) and 'Aye defend your rights and Common' (Hogg). The two songs were written around the same time so one writer might have plagiarised the other (presumably Hogg from Balbirnie). However, it is also possible that both writers were both drawing words and phrases from an old ballad with which they were acquainted but which is now lost. There is no doubt that they utilised an old tune. When he was asked about his song, Hogg said, 'Its air's eternal'.52 Francis H. Groome, the compiler of the *Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland*, wrote of *Teribus*: 'the music dates from the most ancient times, and describes more than any other air, the wild and defiant strain of the war tramp and the battle shout'.53

Was there an old ballad about Flodden and/or the Hawick tradition upon which *Teribus* was based? Unfortunately, there is no sign of the 'missing' ballad in George Caw's *The Poetical Collection*, published in 1784 and one of the first books printed in Hawick or the Borders. Nor is there anything in Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, but then Scott preferred to ignore Hawick because of its then radical sympathies. Nevertheless, *Teribus* does seem to follow in the tradition of the Border riding ballads. One of the principal functions of ballads was passing traditional tales from one generation to the next, and often these tales were based on actual events. John Leslie, a sixteenth-century historian of Scotland, wrote of the Borderers: 'Thay delyt mekle in thair awne musick and harmonie in singing,

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quhilk of the acts of thair fowrbearis thay have leerned.54 Ballads were cherished, 'because they gave heroic tinge to their environment and society'.55 The Hawick tradition of the defeat of an English raiding party and the capture of their flag was exactly the kind of heroic tale to be immortalised in a ballad. Moreover, although Hogg's Teribus is of recent origin, it retains many of the characteristics of the traditional ballads.56 It is 'a folk-song which tells a story', a narrative which focuses on the action of a single event. The story (of the captured flag) is told dramatically with a minimum of comment and descriptive setting. And it is learned from the lips of others rather than by reading. Even today, local people know Teribus 'by heart' because they are taught it in school or hear it from relations or friends.

So perhaps there was an old ballad about Flodden of which Teribus is the direct descendant, and Hogg and Balbirnie were drawing on a folk memory of the Flodden and its aftermath. Traumatic events like Flodden were not easily forgotten, and legends of the battle might have been stored in the collective memory. This was certainly the case with another Border battle, the battle of Ancrum Moor, which was fought in 1545. Thomas Wilkie, a collector of Border lore, visited the battle site at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and discovered a folk memory of the battle, even after 250 years:

The people there, being in the immediate neighbourhood of the scene of action, give a more circumstantial, and consequently a more interesting account of the battle than any of our historians .... William Fiddis, an old man, said he had heard his grandfather say, that the farm-house of Morridge-hall was the place where the wounded men were carried into; and that the most bloody part of the engagement was on a ridge running northward from that house.57

Clearly, folk memories of this kind can survive for a very long time. But although they are highly durable, we must be very wary about using them as reliable historical evidence. Folk memories and popular traditions are often confused and tend to use the past selectively and without objectivity. Facts and invention often become blurred together, whether deliberately or by accident. It has been written that, 'legends, unlike history, can not tolerate ignorance, and so legend-makers invented whatever details seemed necessary to command belief'.58 Myths and legends are commonly dressed with 'facts' - names, dates, places, descriptions - which make them more difficult to refute. For example, Hawick Common Riding tradition says that the town supplied a large contingent to the Scottish army at Flodden, and after a brave and gallant fight, 'the barony of Hawick lost its Lord of the Manor [Sir William Douglas] and 200 men'.59 This specific statement regarding Hawick losses at Flodden is worthy of further examination. In George Ridpath's Border History of 1816, it is reported that after James IV had insulted Archibald Earl of Angus, on the eve of Flodden, the Earl departed from the Scottish camp leaving behind him his two sons who 'fell in the battle with 200 gentlemen of the name Douglas'.60 In the Annals of Hawick by James Wilson, published in 1850, it is related that 'Sir William Douglas of

Drumlanrig, superior of the burgh [ie the burgh of Hawick] .... with 200 gentlemen of that name were killed in the engagement'. 61 However, in *Upper Teviotdale and the Scotts of Buccleuch* by Jane Rutherford Oliver, published in 1897, there is this assertion:

The muster from Hawick is stated .... to have been about two hundred, who marched under the banner of Douglas of Drumlanrig; but as no authority is cited, the statement must be regarded as traditional, or conjecture perhaps, but there is no reason to doubt that it is approximate to truth. Sir William Douglas was killed in the battle, and it is asserted that his followers were nearly exterminated. 62

Thus, from an original statement that two hundred gentlemen of the name Douglas were killed at Flodden, a tradition has been manufactured that the same number of Hawick men fought and fell there!

To summarise so far: there is a tradition in Hawick about Flodden which is closely linked with the Common Riding. The tradition was current at the end of the eighteenth century, and is possibly much older. Local writers have embellished the tradition with some fanciful details, but the basic story is that after Flodden, the youth of Hawick resisted an English raiding party and captured their flag. But is the tradition accurate? Did it really happen? Unsurprisingly, there are no contemporary records of the event, but it is possible to use evidence from the Flodden period to provide the historical background to the tradition. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to place the tradition in its appropriate historical context.

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An important element of the story is that in the aftermath of Flodden, the Scottish marches were defenceless and were laid waste by English raiding parties. James Hogg’s *Teribus* states:

After Flodden was decided,
Surrey had his troops divided,
Turned them loose to lawless plunder-
Heaven just! Why slept thy thunder.

At the word each fiend advances,
Flodden’s blood yet dimmed their lances;
Entering hamlet, town and village,
Marked their way with blood and pillage.63

This notion that the Border marches were devastated after Flodden is very important to the Hawick tradition because it emphasises local triumph at a time of national adversity and disaster - ‘Scotia’s boast was Hawick’s callants,’ as *Teribus* puts it. However, the impression that the Scottish marches were devastated after Flodden is largely false. There was no invasion of Scotland after Flodden, and there is no indication of increased English activity in the Scottish marches immediately after the battle. Flodden had been a decisive battle and a major English victory, but, in the words of Geoffrey Elton, ‘surprisingly little was done to follow it up’.64

The absence of an English invasion is partly explained by the great cost of military campaigning. It has been estimated that in the six years that Henry VIII had been king, the treasury of the Chamber, the major financial office, had paid out a little over a million pounds, ‘of which some two-thirds went on war and nearly half in a single week of 5-12 June 1513’.65 The English army at Flodden took

the King's pay, and Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, the English commander, was acutely aware of the need to save money. Thus, on 14 September 1513, Surrey dismissed the greater part of his army, boasting that he saved the Exchequer the wages of 18,689 men for a fortnight. 66 Henry VIII was still waging war in France at this time, and to have launched a second campaign in Scotland would have been financially disastrous. Besides, Henry was enjoying some success in France, having captured Therouanne and won victory at the 'battle of the Spurs' (named after the rapid flight of the French cavalry). Henry had no intention of throwing away his newly-won military prestige by a miserable campaign in Scotland. No doubt Henry was jealous that his success in France had been eclipsed by the stunning victory of his general.

Moreover, Flodden had been fought in mid-September, and it was around this time of year that armies began to think of suspending their activities for the oncoming winter. This was partly a problem of supply. Armies could not be expected to forage and live off the land during the winter months, especially in the barren frontier marches. There had been enough problems during the Flodden campaign, when the English army had ran out of beer and been reduced to drinking puddle water. 67 Surrey's victory at Flodden had been a brilliant defensive action and achieved against the odds but he was too wise and wily to push his luck further by launching a hasty invasion of Scotland. He probably could not have mustered the force for an invasion anyway. The English army were hungry and weary from a

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67. The point being, of course, that untreated water carried disease whereas alcohol was less likely to contain harmful bacteria. This recalls the ancient proverb of Saxony: 'Drink wine, and reap the benefits from it; drink ale, and become fat; drink water, and die.' The sixteenth-century English dietitian Andrew Boorde wrote: 'Water is not wholesome sole by itself for an Englishman.' See A. Barr, *Drink. An Informal Social History* (London, 1995), p. 252 and 270.
long, hard campaign, and now, with the battle won and loaded with plunder from their shattered enemy, most of the force would only have been interested in going home.

In the absence of a major invasion of Scotland, Thomas Lord Dacre of Gilsland, the English warden of the marches who had fought at Flodden, was left to guard the frontier and keep the Scots in good order. Henry VIII’s orders to Dacre have not survived so it is difficult to determine the official policy regarding Scotland and the marches. The warden was probably expected to throw the Scots onto the defensive by subjecting them to a series of destructive raids. Fortunately, most of Dacre’s correspondence is still extant. It provides a fascinating insight into the life of a Border warden, and is the ideal source for assessing the extent of frontier activity in the months after the battle, thus providing the background to the Hawick tradition of 1514.

The first reference in Lord Dacre’s correspondence to English actions in the Scottish marches is in a letter of 22 October 1513, some six weeks after the battle. Dacre admitted that these first raids were small in scale, although he said no less annoying to the enemy. On the following day, Dacre mentioned some specific actions by noting three raids into Annandale and four raids into Teviotdale. Detailing the latter, Dacre reported the burning of Howpaslot tower on the Borthwick water near Hawick and the subsequent haul of twenty eight score sheep, goods and ‘insight’ (furniture); a similar attack upon Carlanrig winning about eighty head of cattle; and a great raid made by the inhabitants of Tynedale and Redesdale, who burnt Ancrum and took sixty prisoners. Dacre did no mention the fate of the fourth raid, although, like the other three, it was probably in the

69. Ibid, no. 2390.
vicinity of Hawick. On 29 October, Dacre informed Thomas Ruthal, Bishop of Durham, of two further expeditions into Scotland. On the night of Tuesday 24 October, Dacre sent sixty of his own tenants from Gilsland to Eskdalemuir 'upon the middill marches', and burned there seven houses, winning thirty six head of cattle. On the morning of Thursday, 26 October, Sir Christopher Dacre, brother of the warden, and a band of his subjects burnt Stakehughe tower and the surrounding area, 'continewally birnying from the breke of day to one of the clok after noon'. Finally, on 13 November, Dacre wrote to his king giving lengthy details of a 'Great Raid' into Liddesdale and the Scottish middle march which he had recently planned and executed.

These are all the raids recorded by Lord Dacre for the period between the battle of Flodden in September 1513 and the signing of the peace treaty between Henry VIII and Louis XII of France in August 1514. There is no reference to any attack made upon Hawick, although it is clear that English raiding parties were in the close vicinity of the town. No doubt Dacre hoped that his reports would much impress his superiors. The Bishop of Durham, for one, favourably commended Dacre on the many injuries he had done to the Scots. Some historians have subscribed to this view. George MacDonald Fraser claims in his popular Border history *The Steel Bonnets* that the Scottish marches, 'could hardly have fared worse if Henry had brought all-out war north of the Border'.

In fact, rather than a crushing blow, the Dacre raids followed the traditional pattern of cross-Border 'reiving'. The raids were small and unambitious, targeted

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70. *Ibid*, no. 2406.
71. *Ibid*.
against isolated farm houses and towers, always with an eye for a quick exit before the Scots could organise and respond. Many of the places which Dacre recorded lay just over the frontier from the English west march and the main properties of the Dacre family. The close proximity of England and the obvious vulnerability to assault suggests that these locations had little economic or strategic importance. Writing to the council of England, Dacre reported the destruction of Canonbie as if it were a major military victory.75 Several years earlier however, James IV had visited the same place during his ‘raid upon Eskdale’ to root out local thieves and outlaws, and found it so poor and wasted that it could not supply the royal party with any victuals, so a guide had to be found to accompany Sir Thomas Alane back to Edinburgh for a new supply of wine.76 Likewise, Dacre recorded the burning of several towers and farm-steadings in Teviotdale, including Carlanrig and Howpaslot tower. Geographically, these were very isolated and vulnerable to attack. The sixteenth-century ballad Jamie Telfer of the Fair Dodhead describes a raid upon a lonely settlement situated only a few miles from Howpaslot tower. According to the story, the unfortunate Jamie Telfer could do nothing to prevent the intruders taking his cattle and belongings, since his only defence was ‘ae auld sword without a sheath/That hardly now would fell a mouse.’77

Lord Dacre’s willingness to attack only soft targets is underlined by his caution when Henry instructed him to undertake larger, more destructive raids upon the Scottish marches. On 20 October 1513, Dacre acknowledged ‘the King’s desire’ for him to make raids upon all three Scottish marches.78 Dacre had clear reservations about these raids. He replied that Richard III, Duke of Gloucester and former warden of the west march, considered an expedition into Teviotdale to be a

great enterprise, even with all his friends and adherents. Dacre’s hesitancy about making an invasion of the Scottish marches resulted from his wealth of experience in Border warfare. Dacre knew that an expedition into Teviotdale required careful organisation and planning, and was a dangerous undertaking. Border warriors like Dacre didn’t like hanging around in their enemies backyard. In 1523, the younger Earl of Surrey (son of the Flodden hero) wrote a vivid description of a raid upon Jedburgh which illustrates what Dacre was afraid of. Surrey claimed that the town was ‘most dangerously to be entered that ever I saw’. During the night, the fiendish Scots continually ambushed and harried the English encampment, causing the horses to stampede and much distress and alarm amongst the invader. Surrey commented:

I dare not write of the wonders that my Lord Dacre and all his company saw that night, six times, of sprights and fearful sights. They all say that the devil was among them six times. I assure your grace, I found the Scots at this time the boldest and hottest men that ever I saw in any nation.

Although he was writing an official dispatch, Surrey indicates the fear and trepidation which he experienced during the raid. Ten years earlier, Thomas Dacre knew that an expedition into Scotland was a dangerous undertaking and had the potential to go horribly wrong. Significantly, it does not seem to have occurred to Dacre that the Scots would be any weaker and less able to resist after their defeat at Flodden.

Dacre was also reluctant to undertake raids on the Scottish marches because of his own weakness as warden, particularly of the English east march. His appointment to the wardenship of all three marches in 1511 had represented, ‘rather a lack of any more suitable candidate than a reflection of Dacre’s particular

80. Ibid, no. 3364.
talents'. 81 Dacre’s main problem was finance. There is no record that he ever received an official salary, and as a result he struggled to fulfil his remit, both in defence and attack. On 17 May 1514, he countered criticisms of his wardenship, saying: ‘Right harde and impossible it is for suche a poure Baron as I am, to make resistance and kepe the King’s subgeitts ... without great help and assistance.’ 82 Dacre’s problems were compounded by his failure to get on with the Northumbrian gentry. In the English east march, the Dacre family were thought to be little more than Border brigands. Loyalty in the east march lay firmly with established families like the Percies. Dacre complained that he had, ‘no strienth ne help of men, freynds, ne tennants, within the same est Marchies ..... non of them doo service for me’. 83 When reporting the ‘Great Raid’ of November 1513, Dacre bemoaned the absence of Lord Ogle, the constable of Alnwick, and many others of the east march, who had promised to support the venture but who didn’t turn-up at the appointed meeting place, ‘whereby I was not accompanyed as I thoght to have been’. 84 Dacre suggested that in future the King send his letters of command directly to Percy and Clifford rather than to Dacre because the tenants of those families refused to serve Dacre unless they had the official sanction of their traditional superiors.

It appears therefore that the Border marches were relatively quiet after Flodden and that punitive English raiding was limited and half-hearted. Lord Dacre, the English warden, had too many problems to get heavily involved in Scotland whilst King Henry had other things on his mind. Certainly, there was nothing like the ‘Hertford raids’ of 1544 and 1545, when much of southern Scotland

83. Ibid.
84. Ibid, no. 2443. The full text of this letter is given in F. W. Elliot, The Battle of Flodden and the Raids of 1513 (Edinburgh, 1911), pp. 210-214; see also Craig and Laing, Hawick Tradition, pp. 97-106.
was devastated by English raiding. It is possible that through time the memory of those brutal years became confused with traditions of the Flodden period. When James Hogg wrote 'Hawick they left in ruins lying' in Teribus, he might have been unwittingly drawing on a folk-memory, not of Flodden as he thought, but of the Hertford raids of the 1540s. It has been noted that oral traditions and folk history have little sense of a relative past and tend to 'telescope' events, pushing them together and missing out 'uneventful' times (such as the thirty years between Flodden and the Hertford raids).\(^8^5\) This might explain the popular belief that the Border marches were devastated after Flodden.

But what about the Hawick Common Riding tradition of the defeat of the English and the capture of their flag? As stated, there are no records of the event, but Lord Dacre's correspondence suggests that the tradition has some validity. On 13 November 1513, Dacre wrote a long letter to Henry VIII to inform the King that he had recently made a 'Great Raid' on the Scottish middle march.\(^8^6\) This letter is worth considering in detail because it illustrates that the normal Border defence mechanisms were still operational after Flodden and the Scots retained the ability to resist a major English raid, which is the essence of the Hawick tradition. In his letter, Dacre estimated that the English force consisted of 4000 horsemen and 400 'fute men with bowes'. Contemporary figures of this kind are notoriously unreliable and can only be taken to mean 'a very great number'. Nevertheless, the English force was of sufficient size to occasion a lengthy report from the warden, and, unusually for a Border raid, it included a company of infantry. Both facts suggest that the expedition had more serious intent than the usual frontier raids, although Dacre did not record his objective or purpose.

Curiously however, despite its strength, the 'Great Raid' does not seem to

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have achieved very much, apart from burning some isolated towers and hamlets and winning booty 'of no gret substance'. The reason seems to be that the English encountered a defensive force which was sizable and vigilant and ready to attack the would-be spoiler. Dacre wrote that during the raid, 'the Scots persewed us right sore ... bekered with us, and gave us hand stroks'. Resistance to the invader came from a variety of sources. As the English crossed the valley of the Rule Water, they were attacked by the Turnbull family, upon whose traditional territory they were transgressing. Dacre wrote that, 'Mark Trumbill was strikken with a spere and the hede left in hym'. Three Scottish 'standards' came to back the Turnbulls, making a pincer-like assault upon Dacre's force:

That is to say, David Karr of Fernehirst, and the lard of Bongedworth open the oon side, and the sheriff of Tevidale on the othre side, with the nombre of Dcc men or mo.

As the English fled for home, the Scots were further strengthened by the appearance of their own warden, Alexander Lord Home, 'with ii M men, and four standerds [unfortunately unnamed]; the othre thre standerds resorted to hym, and so the countre drew fast to theym'.

We can only speculate on the extent of co-operation and organisation between the various packs of defending Scots. Dacre acknowledged that they had time to prepare for the raid: 'The countre was warned of our comyng, and the bekyns burnt fro mydnyght forward.' The appearance of Lord Home is significant and must have given Dacre a nasty shock. It was Home's sworn military duty as warden to

87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
continuously harry and drive any invaders back over the Border. His presence suggests that the Border defensive systems functioned effectively in November 1513. But the success of the operation against Dacre may have owed more to traditional impetuosity than organisational genius. The Borderers probably reacted to the raid with a characteristic outburst of excitement, vigour and haste. Writing sometime around 1521, the Scottish historian and theologian John Major captured the spirit of this brave but often reckless defence:

The nearest chief gathers the neighbouring folk together, and at the first word of the presence of the foe, each man before mid-day is in arms, for he keeps his weapons about him, mounts his horse, makes for the enemy’s position, and, whether in order of battle or not in order of battle, rushes on the foe, not seldom bringing destruction on himself as well as the invader.93

Whatever the extent of co-operation amongst the Scots, there is no doubt that they put up a highly effective resistance to the intrusive English. There is no sign of the weakness or submission usually associated with the Scottish marches at this time, even though the Great Raid of November 1513 had taken place just two months after Flodden.

With the failure of the Great Raid in November 1513, English activity in the Scottish marches seems to have petered out. There is no record of Lord Dacre having fulfilled his intention of undertaking a great raid upon the Scottish east or west marches, despite his assurances to the King. In a letter of 17 May 1514 to the council of England, Dacre gave a list of ‘towyns and howsys’ which had been destroyed by English raiding. This might be taken as evidence for increased English activity in early 1514.94 However, many of the places recorded in this letter are also

mentioned in previous correspondence which suggests that Dacre was giving a
rehash of earlier raids. It is interesting that earliest accounts of the Hawick
tradition, including James Hogg’s Teribus, refer to the period ‘sometime after
Flodden’ and not to the year ‘1514’. In this the tradition is similar to the Border
ballads, which sometimes specify a certain day or month but rarely affix a year to
the incidents they record. The Battle of Otterburn, for example, says ‘It fell about
the Lammas tide’, but does not mention that the battle was fought in 1388.
Likewise, the earliest surviving replicas of the Hawick flag bear a contemporary
date (for example ‘1707’) and not one of a historical incident. However, there is
no need to contest the main point of the Hawick tradition, namely that the town
resisted an English raiding party. It might be relevant that Lord Dacre’s letter of
23 October 1513 referred to four raids having been made into Teviotdale very near
Hawick, whilst recording the success of only three parties. The tradition possibly
originated in the Great Raid of November 1513, where the Scots put up a valiant
and successful resistance. Dacre recorded the participation of Hawick’s local
superior, Sir James Douglas of Cavers, sheriff of Teviotdale, in defence of the
Scottish march. Dacre also detailed that part of the English force retreated home
to Hexham, and it has been noted that the arms of the Priory Church of St Andrew
at Hexham bear a gold cross on a blue background very similar to the ‘Banner Blue’
or replica of the captured flag which is still carried as the centre-piece of Hawick
Common Riding.

As we have seen, flags and banners have a key role in the modern ridings.
They are treated with reverence and care, and those permitted handle them are
considered specially privileged. There is no doubt that flags and banners had great
importance at the time of Flodden. Indeed, it would be easy to underestimate their
value to a society which was largely non-literate and where messages had to be

96. This was first suggested in Craig and Laing, Hawick Tradition, pp. 70-6.
conveyed by symbols. Flags and banners were part of the international sign language of heraldry and had important military functions. On the battlefield, soldiers fought as long as their banner flew. It was a sign of a successful attack or of continuing resistance, plus a useful practical rallying point and a unique symbol of authority. The Scots prepared new flags and banners for the Flodden campaign, including the 'Kingis baner' and 'Sanct Androis and Sanct Margrettis baneris', complete with special protective covers. Flags were credited with magical properties and as lucky charms. On the way to Flodden, the Earl of Surrey said mass in Durham cathedral and borrowed the holy banner of Saint Cuthbert to bring his side good fortune. The banner had been used previously against the Scots, and victory at Flodden was attributed to the personal intercession of the saint. Flags and banners were also important in the chivalric code, which was still prevalent at the time of Flodden. In August 1513, Lord Home suffered a severe mauling in a preliminary raid in Northumberland ('the Ill-Raid'). It was noted that Home lost all his booty, many of his supporters (including his brother), and also his banner, the implication being that this was a great embarrassment to Home's prestige.

Clearly, it was considered an achievement to capture someone else's banner, especially one belonging to an important noble, and possibly this was an event which people celebrated and remembered. Stories about captured banners were not uncommon in the Borders. In Jedburgh, the shoemakers guild claimed that their flag had been taken from the English at the battle of Newburn in 1640, whilst the weavers guild were said to possess two flags, 'one taken from the English at

99. 'The lord Hume, lord Chamberlayne fled and his banner taken.' *Ibid*, p. 556.
Bannockburn, and the other from the Highlanders at Killiecrankie'. Selkirk Common Riding tradition states that 'Fletcher' returned from Flodden bearing a captured English banner. Even closer to Hawick, old Cavers house held an 'ancient' flag said to have been captured by James 2nd Earl of Douglas from Sir Henry Percy at, or before, the battle of Otterburn in 1388. Cavers is only two miles from Hawick so the legend of 'the Cavers Ensign' or 'the Percy Pennon' would have been known in the town, and locals might simply have imitated or adapted it. Certainly, flags and banners were often the subject of embellishment. Trade guilds were known to fabricate stories about their banners to make them more important than those of their rivals, thus adding status to the guild. The legends attached to the banners of the Jedburgh guilds probably originated in two guilds each trying to outshine the other.

In Hawick, the earliest references to the burgh flag date from the early eighteenth-century. There is no mention of Flodden but it is clear that the flag was much valued and had a significant role in the Common Riding. The flag in use in 1706 having become 'altogidder torn and useless', the Council 'did unanimouslie aggree that ane new colour, standard, or pencell, should be bought and be in readiness at the nist ensuing Common rydeing'. Nothing is said about the age or origins of the old flag, although the council were very specific about the design of its replacement. Bailie Martin made a visit to Edinburgh to obtain coloured silks and ribbons, and the council paid to have the new flag specially made. In May 1707, 'George Deanes, merchand, was the first that carried the new colour'. The

103. Ibid, 30 May 1707.
council considered the flag as one of the town’s most precious possessions. In April 1710, ‘the new pencill or colour’ was placed in the town’s charter chest, ‘and delyvered the same to the custodie and keiping of Robert Browne, and on key of the said Chest to Baylyea Roucastell, and the other key to Baylea Hardie’.104

In conclusion, the evidence about the Flodden traditions is predictably ambiguous. Some Border men definitely fought at Flodden under the command of Lord Home whilst others may have fought with the King. No doubt, some – perhaps many – were killed at the battle, but others returned safely to the burghs. We must be wary of ‘exact’ numbers slain at Flodden and of assertions that ‘all the Border men’ were killed in the battle. Likewise, there is little evidence that the Scottish marches were ‘devastated’ after Flodden. English raiding did take place but it was limited, partly because the Scots were still able to defend themselves. Hawick Common Riding tradition possibly reflects this strength. However, it is admitted that the truth of either tradition will never be known.

The conclusion leads to many further questions. If the Flodden traditions are invention, whether in part or whole, then we must account for their origin and explain their enduring popularity among generations of local people. As we have seen, both traditions were current in the eighteenth century and are probably older. The traditions have been remarkably consistent over time, apart from some superfluous ‘details’. Today, the Flodden traditions are an important raison d’être for the local Common Ridings, and have largely eclipsed the original purpose of the festival. The Flodden traditions are important to Hawick and Selkirk because they are a unique source of local pride and identity. Anyone who questions their validity will receive, at best, polite interest, at worst indifference, even hostility. At this level, it hardly matters if the Flodden traditions are true or not: what matters is that they are believed.

104. Ibid, 7 April 1710.
Plate Section


Plate 3  Cornet Andrew Leyden, with his ‘Right-hand Man’ Andrew Knox, and his ‘Left-hand Man’ John Elliot at Hawick Common Riding, 1857. All three are wearing their green coats and the Cornet wears a scarlet sash of office.

Plate 4  The Jethart Callant, Kelso Laddie and their supporters meet together at Morebattle for the annual ‘tryst’. They are seen performing the traditional eightsome reel. May 1996.

Plate 5  Selkirk Common Riding, June 1994. Selkirk ‘Colonials’, who have returned for the Common Riding, photographed before their annual concert in the Victoria hall. A version of this photograph appears in the local newspapers year after year. The names of the colonials are also listed.

Plate 6  The crowd at the Hawick ‘Snuffing’, 1912.

Plate 7  The procession at the Hawick Common Riding in 1904. Note the town band in front and civic dignitaries in open carriages.

Plate 8  The Fife and Drum Band, Hawick, 1907.
Plate 9  Selkirk Common Riding, June 1995. The Standard Bearer leaves the town to begin the riding of the burgh marches.

Plate 10  Hawick Common Riding, June 1996. The Cornet leads his mounted supporters on the ride around the burgh marches.

Plate 11  Selkirk Common Riding, June 1995. The Casting of the Colours by the Royal Burgh Standard Bearer. The ritual sweeping and weaving patterns of the Casting of the Burgh Standard is said to commemorate the bringing of the news of the disaster of Flodden.

Plate 12  Peebles Beltane Festival, June 1994. The Beltane Queen has been crowned and now leads the procession. Note the Queen’s ‘court’ in the background.

Plate 13  Gala Braw Lads Gathering, June 1994. The Braw Lad dips the Burgh Flag in homage at the Galashiels war memorial.

Plate 14  Dancing on the Hawick Moor, c. 1900.

Plate 15  Gala Braw Lads Gathering, June 1996. The Braw Lad returns the Burgh Flag to the provost ‘unsullied and unstained’, and marking the end of another festival.

Plate 16  Hawick Common Riding, June 1994. Provost Myra Turnbull and her ‘principal guest’ Lady Jane Grosvenor are barred from entering the Hawick ‘hut’ whilst male riders and supporters freely come and go. Similar photographs appeared in national newspapers, highlighting the second-class treatment of women at Hawick Common Riding.
Plate 17 Hawick ‘ride-out’ to Denholm, 1 June 1996. ‘Traditionalist’ women form a human barricade across the street to isolate four women riders from joining the main body of horse.

Plate 18 John Douglas, known as ‘Douglas the Brave’, photographed when he was 82. Douglas ‘cast the colours’ of the Selkirk Incorporation of Hammermen at the Common Riding every year from 1831 to 1885.

Plate 19 In June 1913, Selkirk unveiled a statue to mark the four hundredth anniversary of the battle of Flodden. The statue was based on the local tradition that a lone ‘Souter’ had returned from the battle bearing a captured English banner. The statue was created by Thomas Clapperton, and it was unveiled by Archibald, 5th Earl of Rosebury on 13 June 1913. The granite plinth bears the simple legend ‘O Flodden Field!’, probably taken from the poem Selkirk After Flodden by the local poet James Brown (‘J. B. Selkirk’).

Plate 20 The 1514 Memorial, Hawick (known locally as ‘the Horse’). The statue commemorates the capture of the English flag at Hornshole in 1514. It was unveiled in June 1914 during a special week of ‘Quater Centenary’ events. The sculptor, William F. Beattie, was killed in action in 1918.

Plate 21 Tom Scott’s painting The Return From Hornshole 1514 (1898), which depicts the Callants of Hawick returning home in triumph from the ‘battle’ of Hornshole and the townspeople coming out to meet them. Note the strong use of chivalric imagery. The picture was hugely popular and reproductions sold in large numbers.
Plate 22  Crowning the Beltane Queen, Peebles, c. 1900. The ceremony is taking place at the market cross. It is now staged on the steps of the Old Parish Church.

Plate 23  The first Gala Braw Lad and Braw Lass, Henry Polson and Hazel Gardiner, June 1930.

Plate 24  Thomas Clapperton’s Border Reiver statue in Galashiels. The statue is the local war memorial and also plays an important part in the Braw Lads Gathering.

Plate 25  In 1945, women workers at Pringle knitwear factory in Hawick made a copy of the Common Riding flag and sent it to local men serving in Germany with B Company, 4th Battalion King’s Own Scottish Borderers. On 8 June 1945, the day of the Common Riding, the flag was carried in procession through the streets of Letzlingen (where the Battalion were stationed) and dipped in the River Elbe. This photograph, taken in the early 1980s, shows the ‘Cornet’ of 1945, Jim Reid, and the original ‘Letzlingen flag’. The battle honours of the Company have been embroidered on the flag, ‘H C’ stands for ‘Hawick Callants’.

Plate 26  Langholm Common Riding 1912. Note three of the four ‘emblems’: the Thistle, the Crown of Roses, and the Barley Bannock with a salt herring nailed to it. Visible between the poles supporting the Crown and the Bannock is Christopher Murray Grieve, then aged 19, who later became internationally famous as the writer ‘Hugh MacDiarmid’.
Plate 27  The face of the future? In 1996, Duns was unable to obtain a young man to take-up the position of 'Reiver'. Instead, nineteen-year-old Vicki Rybowski was appointed to the newly-created position of 'Reiver Lass' and carried the burgh standard during the festival as well as representing Duns at other Border ridings. In this photograph, Vicki holds her sash of office. Also note her town rosette.
Plate 6
Chapter Four
Form and Function in
the Eighteenth-Century Ridings
c. 1690 - c. 1800

In the eighteenth-century, accounts of the riding of the marches become more extensive and detailed, and thus provide a clearer picture of the development of the event. Whilst many features of the ridings continued, new themes and challenges were beginning to emerge. This chapter will demonstrate that the eighteenth-century ridings were a complex mix of civic and popular functions. It is also intended to illustrate the form and structure of the ridings at this time. The chapter begins by considering the civic functions of the ridings, and shows how the ridings were used to check encroachment on the common; to consolidate authority and status in the burgh; and to cement social relations and group unity. It is also shown that in the later eighteenth-century, the ridings developed a political dimension. Local and national patriotism became closely associated, whilst the ridings were also linked with radical political opinion. Consideration is given to the popular and recreational functions of the ridings, and there is an examination of the ridings as festive occasions. It is noted that there was much popular support for the ridings, and occasionally this led local inhabitants into conflict with burgh authorities. The chapter then explores the ‘language’ of the eighteenth-century ridings, with particular attention to the use of ‘stage-props’ and other artefacts which underlined the importance of the event and helped to make it memorable. Finally, this chapter examines the decline of the ridings in the eighteenth-century, and the reasons why the event survived in some burghs but not in others.
Civic Functions of the Riding of the Marches

In the eighteenth-century, the primary civic function of the riding of the marches remained the protection of the commonty of the burgh and the prevention of any encroachment upon it by neighbouring landowners. Communities had several ways of dealing with encroachments. Immediate retribution could happen during a riding itself. During the Peebles riding of June 1775, it was discovered that sheep belonging to a neighbouring farmer were being illegally pastured on the Eshiells common. Burgh officials drove the sheep away, and ordered the herd not to pasture them on the common again. Incidents of encroachment were more likely to be resolved after a riding had been completed because riders were expected to provide the town council with a report on the state of the burgh common. Following Hawick Common Riding of 1816, the town council gave due consideration to 'The Report of the Burleymen, the Burleymen having rode round the marches of the Commonty of the Burgh this year as usual'. Those who had ridden the marches recommended that an extension be made to the town's plantation. They also observed 'with great pain' that several encroachments (or 'depredations') had been made on the common, and 'that prominent measures should be taken to destroy these spoilers of the public property'. It was also suggested that individuals should be made to pay for the privilege of keeping dung-hills on the town's property.

Apart from the annual riding, communities sometimes made less formal inspections of their marches to deal with encroachments or disputed boundaries. In 1737, the 'Bailies and Connseill' of Hawick, together with other 'old burgesses' of the town, 'merched that part of the Common haugh adjacent to the Duke of Buccleugh's interest by setting down eight march stones on the east side and one of

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the west side of the water of Slittrigg, where an objection were made'.3 Similarly, in November 1776, Peebles town council appointed the magistrates and dean of guild to inspect a disputed boundary on ‘the Town’s ground .... and fix march stones therein so as to remain the boundary march in all time coming’.4 Neighbouring landowners could request burgh authorities to make a special inspection of the boundary between their land and that of the burgh. In 1713, Walter Paterson of Burnflat (a farm near Hawick) requested Hawick town council to establish ‘distinct meiths and marches’ between his land and the commony of Hawick, which was eventually achieved by the erection of seventeen march stones.5 In 1779, Peebles town council agreed to meet Doctor Hays, a neighbouring landowner, ‘and perambulate the march between town and him’.6 The formal extent of these small-scale inspections is uncertain. Possibly, the burgh officials took with them the burgh flag and a halberdier as a symbol of their authority.

Burghs were sometimes guilty of encroachment upon a neighbouring property. In 1760, Lord Prestongrange, some of whose lands bordered those of Peebles, wrote to Peebles town council complaining about illegal usage of Harthope Moss:

At the riding the marches of Shielgreen this year they have trespassed upon the march of Harthope and takin in a good part of the ground of that farm and ordered their tenant [William] How to possesse it Belonging to Shielgreen and accordingly heis summering lambs on it just now and violently holds the possession and hinders Lord Prestongrange tenants to use it as their property.7

4. Peebles Minute Book, 9 November 1776.
5. Hawick Records, 7 March 1713. Walter Paterson of Burnflat was the father of Robert Paterson, on whom Sir Walter Scott based the character of ‘Old Mortality’.
7. Ibid, 26 June 1760.
It was stressed that Peebles had no rights upon the land and that 'the reiding of the marches will not give them right, the heritor of Harthope was never called to the Reiding of these Marches. The marches are known and can be provon by old people which can be aduced by the heretors on both sides in a friendly way without Gangingster methods.' Fortunately, in this case, the dispute was settled amicably, with Peebles town council agreeing that the burgh had been guilty of encroachment. But this example illustrates that burghs had to be careful when they rode the marches to ensure that riders adhered to the correct route of the boundary, otherwise disputes were likely to arise. For this reason, burgh officials were often sent several days before the formal riding to clearly delineate the boundary of the common. In 1755, Hawick town council decreed that 'the Commons shall be merched some days before the common rideing', and that this informal procession would include four spademen to cut turfs to mark the correct boundary line, thus allowing riders to follow it without confusion or dispute.

Riding the marches was clearly intended to protect the common land of the burgh. The ridings were customary. Historians have recently taken a great interest in customs, which, they argue, were an essential feature of pre-industrial society. It has been argued that custom and folk culture were often used to defend popular or traditional rights, and that customary behaviour was one of the people's basic defences against exploitation and loss. A custom usually involved the assertion and recognition of a popular privilege, such as gaining access to and usage of common land. From this, it can be seen that customs were a weapon of the weak against the strong, one of the ways in which power was disciplined and concessions enjoyed, and a restraint on the propertied classes. The customary rights which the people

8. Ibid.
claimed arose from a fundamental reciprocity of social relations, namely that those who exercised authority were expected to make particular concessions in the interest of the labouring people. As John Stuart Mill wrote:

Custom is the most powerful protector of the weak against the strong; their sole protector where there are no laws or governments adequate to the purpose. Custom is the barrier which, even in the oppressed condition of mankind, tyranny is forced in some degree to respect.11

Likewise, Edward Thompson has observed that in the eighteenth-century, 'custom was the rhetoric of legitimation for almost any practice or demanded right'.12 Privileges were sanctioned by 'time immemorial' and upheld through value system of oral tradition. When people rode the marches, they might refer to documentary evidence to legitimise their actions, but they were more likely to appeal to the testimony of repeated performance. An appeal to the past and historical continuity was implicit in many ridings. In 1706, Hawick Common Riding was described by the town council as an 'ancient custome', which had taken place 'for many generations and hundredths of years past'.13 Viewed from this perspective, the riding of the marches clearly reflected a conservative culture, with its appeals to the past and constant attempts to reinforce traditional usage. But, as we will see, the riding of the marches, like other popular customs, could also be rebellious when tradition was threatened.

Peter Borsay has observed that in the later Stuart and Hanoverian periods public rituals and ceremonies played a major part in the way politics and society operated, both locally and nationally. Borsay writes: 'This role derived from ritual's special capacity, much of it a product of its emotive language, to mobilise

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13. Hawick Records, 1 June 1706.
deep-seated feelings of authority, consensus and conflict. Much civic ritual sought to establish the innate power of corporate institutions and officers. Burgh officials would often try to associate themselves with the church, thus underlining their supernatural authority. The riding of the marches gave burgh officials a chance to show-off their authority and to underline their position in the local community. It was important that the burgh authorities should be seen as one social body: therefore the involvement of all members of the council was considered to be crucial. In 1759, Hawick town council decreed that each councillor was to ride the marches with the magistrates, ‘with certification that if they fail and neglect to do so in times coming without a lawful excuse they are to forfeit their counsellourship’.

It might be argued that the individual was less important than the office itself. Certainly, the symbols of office and local power were sometimes thought to be magically imbued with corporate authority. The most important item of civic regalia involved in the riding of the marches was, of course, the burgh flag. Like a religious banner, the burgh flag was thought to radiate authority and power: consequently, it was treated with feelings of respect and awe. In 1749, Hawick town council issued specific instructions that, ‘in time coming no colour or standard shall be carried on the Common riding days except the Touns Colour’, thus giving complete precedence to the burgh flag and in turn burgh authority.

Contemporaries were well aware of the capacity of the riding of the marches to advertise their status and importance to the community. Consequently, there were recurring arguments between participating groups over their position in the ridings, often resulting in much bitterness. Craft guilds fought amongst themselves to obtain the prime position in the procession, which was in the front near the

burgh flag and the civic dignitaries. No-one wanted to bring up the rear, because this implied inferior social status. These disputes are reminiscent of debates (sometimes violent) which occurred over the ordering of Corpus Christi processions in the Middle Ages and the sixteenth-century. During the Musselburgh riding of 1732, ‘an unlucky difference’ occurred between the incorporations of Weavers and Tailors over their respective positions in the procession. A contemporary report in the *Caledonian Mercury* states:

The Taylors argued, That as the Precedency fain to them by Lot, no Opposition could now be offered in that Respect. 'Twas alledged on the other hand, That they (the Weavers) were Men, and as such, preferable at in all Events to Taylors. This signal Affront could not possibly be digested ..... while the Weaver Squadron were filing off to take the Post of Honour, with Capt. Scot at their Head, Adjutant Fairley (who acted in that Capacity on the Taylor Squadron) directed a blow at our Captain's Snout, which brought him to the Ground. Thus were the two Corps fiercely engaged; and nought was to be seen but heavy Blows, Hats off, broken Heads, bloody Noses and empty Saddles; till at last the Plea of Manhood seemed to go in favour of the Needlemen.17

Captain Scot of the Weavers was taken prisoner, and it was with the utmost difficulty that the Weavers managed to escape from the field without losing their flag. The Weavers tried to excuse their defeat by claiming that the Butchers joined forces with the Tailors, 'and that they did not incline to embark with these Men of Blood'.18 Other burghs experienced similar disputes about the order of their marches day procession. In April 1767, Linlithgow town council noted: 'that of late there have been smal contests betwixt some of the Incorporations as to the parts of the street upon which they arrange themselves at the Cross upon their going and

17. *Caledonian Mercury*, 18 October 1732, p. 3. The full report is given as an appendix to this thesis.

18. *Ibid*.
returning from the Marches. After much debate, the council issued a plan for the next Marches Day procession, which, it was hoped, would prevent any disputes occurring in future. Each of the crafts were to form themselves in 'two ranks' and the Magistrates with the burghs standards would ride 'betwixt the Cordiners and the Weavers being the centre of the Incorp. Crafts', as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crafts</th>
<th>Crafts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smiths</td>
<td>Smiths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailors</td>
<td>Tailors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baxters</td>
<td>Baxters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cordiners</td>
<td>Magistrates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weavers</td>
<td>Burgh Flags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrights</td>
<td>Wrights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coopers</td>
<td>Coopers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleshers</td>
<td>Fleshers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This compromise seems to have been fairly successful because no further incidents were reported in the burgh records.

Although disputes of this kind clearly did occur, the ridings were intended to reinforce social ties and group unity. There was a compelling need for a community to promote social harmony, to cement internal relations and to reinforce a sense of group solidarity. The ridings generally encouraged these aspects, not least because participants were bound together by the very experience of taking part. The ridings were affirmations of common interests and common sentiments, and an opportunity to consolidate group pride. Membership of a community, especially for male burgesses, required participation in the accepted routine of the ridings. An individual had little choice but to join-in and follow a standard code of practice to gain acceptance by the community. Group solidarity was emphasised by music, dancing and other special traditions and customs of the ridings. For locals, these provided an alternative framework of thought and feeling which bridged political

differences. As R. W. Malcolmson has written: 'Most festive occasions which were rooted in the small community served to articulate a vision of the social harmony for which its members wished; festivities celebrated those ideals which transcended self, they reinforced the individual's sense of his social identity.' Group awareness and expectations were strongly reinforced by the frequent practice of eating and drinking together. 'Feasting' encouraged social cohesiveness with an emphasis on fellowship, hospitality and good cheer. During the riding of the marches, several refreshment stops were made for sharing food and drink. Arthur Balbinnie's description of Hawick Common Riding in the late eighteenth-century states:

At the Ca-knowe we halt a little;  
Slack our girths, and ease the cripple;  
Take a glass o' cheerin' whisky,  
Then down o'er Hawick Mossbrow fu' frisky.21

In all burghs, the riding of the marches concluded with a corporate dinner or a feast. Balbinnie's poem states that after the Hawick riding, participants retired to the town-hall for an evening of drinking, singing and other merriment:

In the Town Hall all things are ready,  
Knives and forks we'll ply them steady;  
Push about the flowing glasses -  
Sing and dance and kiss the lasses.22

In Linlithgow, the annual Marches Day dinner was a social highlight of the burgh and involved considerable expenditure on the part of the town council. In

22. Ibid.
1800, for example, the council spent £9 18s. 6d. on entertainments at the Marches Day, as the town treasurer's accounts for 1800 illustrate:\textsuperscript{23}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To the Diken of the Fleshers for 2 lambs and 22 lb. of Beef</td>
<td>£2 16s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the Diken of the Bakers for Tearts, Pyes and Loavs</td>
<td>£2 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 2 Gallons of Double Rum</td>
<td>£1 10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 1 pint of Double Gin</td>
<td>8s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 4lbs of Sugar</td>
<td>4s. 8d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Beer</td>
<td>3s. 8d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Mr Alex. Mitchell</td>
<td>£1 5s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the Standart Bearers at the Brig</td>
<td>2s. 8d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the Millers at the Burgh Mill</td>
<td>2s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the Standart Bearers at Blackness</td>
<td>6s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the Castle (Castal Sogers)</td>
<td>10s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Clelin the hous at Blackness</td>
<td>4s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To John Drummond for furning the hous with tabals</td>
<td>5s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Chirety</td>
<td>2s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To 4 Broakin glesses</td>
<td>1s. 6d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As well as the official town dinner, most ridings also featured social gatherings of the trade and craft guilds. Since their earliest existence, the conviviality of members were one of the most important social functions of the guilds. Guild members were fully involved in the ridings, often the most impressive part of the procession. Unsurprisingly, the riding was an ideal opportunity for members to come together and celebrate their corporate identity. In 1796, the Shoemaker's Guild of Selkirk had an annual expenditure of £7 13s. 5d., of which £1 19s. 2d. (approximately a quarter) was spent on entertainments at the Common Riding. This included £1 on dinner, 10s. 6d. on drink for the dinner, 2s. on the 'Lads' Ale', and 6s. 6d. on fiddler, fifer and drummer.\textsuperscript{24} In the early nineteenth-century, the Shoemakers' Guild of Linlithgow spent £2 on an annual Marches Day dinner,

\textsuperscript{23} Linlithgow Treasurer's Vouchers, 17 June 1800.
\textsuperscript{24} Accounts Book of the Souters of Selkirk 1788-1830. SRO GD1/13/5, p. 6.
plus extra money on musical entertainment. In Selkirk, the member who carried the guild banner at the Common Riding was also obliged to entertain his fellows. In 1721, Archbauld Watt of the Merchant Guild carried the flag and was expected to 'give an entertainment upon the Common-riding day to the value of 20s. Sterling [and] if he fayle in any part either in carrying ye standart or giveing ye entertainment, he shall lose his seat in the loft, his freedome of ye mortecloathe, and be extruded fra ye Companie'. In 1736, it was decreed that any member of the Merchant's Guild who absented himself from the Common Riding and the guild dinner would be fined 14 s. Scots. The Guild treasurer was to go to their shops and homes 'and poind for same in cases of refusal'.

Of course, excessive drinking and feasting did not always create social harmony. Getting drunk in a group might have bound individuals together, but it also risked alienating them in the wider community. In the sixteenth-century, Aberdeen town council tried to curb the 'Lords of Bonaccord' and other young men from making 'mony grit, sumpteous and superfelous banketing', presumably because this was a potential source of social unrest. Moreover, burgh authorities were sensitive to accusations of waste, and sometimes felt obliged to limit their entertainments at the riding of the marches. In 1737, Stirling town council decided not to spend any of 'the toun's revenew' at the riding of the marches, since it was 'ane unnecessary burden on the toun'. In 1816, Hawick town council warned the Cornet 'not to incur any unnecessary expense in entertaining his company at the Common Riding', because the town was expected to pick up the bill.

27. Ibid.
The riding of the marches further encouraged group unity because it allowed communities to direct their hostility externally, by drawing a real and imaginary boundary between the burgh and the 'outside' world. When a community has an external outlet for its fears, it is likely that its feeling of unity will be enhanced. Peter Sahlins has written: 'National identity, like ethnic or communal identity, is contingent and relational: it is defined by the social or territorial boundaries drawn to distinguish the collective self and its implicit negation, the other.'\(^{30}\) Men and women decide who they are by reference to who and what they are not. A crucial part of the Scottish identity was (and is) simply defined by not being English. In the eighteenth-century, as Linda Colley points out, the British nation was an invention forged, above all, by successive wars with France. The fear of a French invasion coupled with the folk-demon of European Catholicism bound together the diverse cultures of the British mainland into a single entity called Great Britain. Likewise, the riding of the marches allowed communities to focus their hostility externally, against neighbouring landowners and other threats of encroachment.

Closely linked here, another civic function of the eighteenth-century ridings was the mutual association and development of local and national patriotism, which, as we will see, reached its culmination in the late Victorian period. Whilst the ridings were primarily concerned with local sentiment, they did not exist in a vacuum and were susceptible to national trends. Linda Colley has observed that the accession of George III to the British throne in 1760 gradually led to the growth of national pride and patriotic feeling throughout Britain, which in turn influenced many aspects of national life. Unlike his father or grandfather, for both of whom the British crown was a new and uncertain acquisition, George III was born and - as he boasted to Parliament - bred in Britain. George III was a skilled royal showman.

who recognised the value of majesty, display and royal mystique. As Linda Colley observes: 'The revival of the monarchy in George III's reign would be very much a matter of renovated and far more assertive nationalistic royal image, not a resurgence of royal power in political terms.' Whilst George III certainly aroused some dislike and hostility, he was also the focus of much patriotic enthusiasm and adulation, especially after 1789 when royal celebration throughout Great Britain increased dramatically in scale and tempo. In part, this resulted from the determination of George III's ministers to reassert rank and to rally public opinion in the wake of the defeat in America and in the face of the French Revolution and the threat of Napoleon and his armies.

However, patriotic sentiment was not just engineered from on high. Local landowners, the clergy, urban authorities and common people were actively enthusiastic in their support for the British cause. Volunteer militia regiments, for example, attracted large-scale popular support, especially from 1798 when a French invasion of Britain was thought to be imminent. By 1804, almost half a million men were under arms. The Scottish Borders provided an enthusiastic response to the crisis. According to government figures compiled by respective Lord Lieutenants, in May 1804, the percentages of males between the ages of 17 and 55 who were in arms and willing to fight were 62% in Roxburghshire and 64% in Selkirkshire, amongst the highest in Scotland and higher than anywhere in England, with the exception of Northumberland and, understandably, the Isle of Wight. It is likely that some Common Riding traditions date from the Volunteer period, in particular the flute bands, which were (and are) a symbol of staunch Protestantism. In 1803, the Drum and Fife band of the Hawick Volunteers obtained the prominent role of leading the Cornet's procession to the burgh land, a tradition which still survives. In the modern Common Riding, the band plays, amongst

others, a tune called *Dumbarton’s Drums*, which, since the early eighteenth-century, has been the regimental tune and march past of the Royal Scots, the oldest regiment in the British army. In 1859, when another French invasion threatened, James Thomson of Hawick wrote a song called *Hawick Volunteers*, which praised local efforts in the defence of the nation. In the late nineteenth-century, when patriotic sentiment was at its height in the ridings, Thomson’s song became a favourite item at Common Riding concerts and functions, although it is rarely heard in the modern event. Thomson’s song is full of patriotic imagery, such as ‘Yon brooding Eagle still must bend/Beneath the Lion’s paw’ (referring to the French eagle and British lion). The final verse concludes:

There’s ae auld toun by Teviot’s side,
That’s famed in days o’ yore,
Her independence is her pride,
And loyal to the core.
There’s ae auld flag maun wave on high,
When Scotland’s foe appears,
And ‘Teribus’ the battle cry
O’ Hawick Volunteers.

Patriotism had both national and local uses. Urban authorities were keen to participate in national celebrations and other royal events because, in Linda Colley’s words, these were a convenient vehicle ‘to advertise their town’s

33. *Hawick News*, 11 June 1897, p. 4. In the late eighteenth-century, the fifes or flutes seem to have replaced the traditional bagpipes in Hawick Common Riding. Arthur Balbrnie’s Common Riding Song, which was written sometimes in the 1790s, states: ‘Now Teriodin blaws the chanter/As rank and file the town we enter’, clearly referring to a bagpiper. In 1797, the town records mention a fifer at the Common Riding, and the following year the town paid seven shillings to buy the fifer a new pair of shoes. On *Dumbarton’s Drums*, see J. W. Kennedy, ‘Our Common Riding Airs’, *THAS* (1915), p. 7.

particular affluence, identity and culture, as an outlet for civic pride as well as British patriotism. One of the most important annual events was the King’s birthday (4 June), which in many Scottish burghs was celebrated by a special church service, a corporate dinner for the urban authorities, and, if they were lucky, a bonfire and fireworks for the plebs. In Hawick, people living on either side of the River Slitrig tried to outdo each other with the size of their respective bonfires. In some burghs, the King’s birthday and the riding of the marches almost coincided, and as a result the two events became closely linked. In Linlithgow, the town council was in the habit of issuing a joint instruction to the treasurer to make preparations for the King’s Birthday and Marches day. In Lauder, the riding of the marches took place on the King’s birthday itself, the day beginning with a church service, where the town council ‘paid allegiance to their Sovereign Lord’, followed by the riding of the marches, and concluding with a grand corporate dinner to celebrate the health of His Majesty and the prosperity of the burgh. The authorities hoped that a formal procession would transmit the subliminal message that British life was ordered and stable compared with the chaos and turmoil of revolutionary Europe. But we should also remember that whilst celebrations of this kind were undeniably popular, individuals often had their own reasons for getting involved. It is not being facetious to say that some of them were probably just looking for a free meal. Indeed, in Hawick, the burgh authorities were publicly censured for their extravagant misuse of public funds when celebrating the King’s birthday (or the ‘King’s ranting’, as it was known locally). James Hogg, a local stocking-maker and radical, satirised the event in his Common Riding Song:

35. Colley, Britons, p. 222.
Sacred was the widow’s portion,
Sacred long from all extortion.
Frugal temperance urged no cesses
Birthday rants, nor Bailies’ messes.\(^3\)8

Interestingly, this satirical attack on the town authorities caused Hogg’s song to be printed in Kelso, because Hawick’s printer at the time, Robert Armstrong, had been a member of the town council and refused to handle the song.

In the later eighteenth-century, the spotlight of political activity was increasingly turning towards the burgh, either as a parliamentary seat or as a forum for county elections. Behind this development lay the intensified struggle for control of the House of Commons, the emergence of party politics and the high frequency of elections and contests. Consequently the towns became the focal point for a good deal of political ritual during election time. In Scotland, Common Riding imagery was used to express political allegiances, especially during the struggle for Parliamentary reform and the passage of the 1832 Reform Act. The growing demand for the reform of Parliament was symptomatic of the rise of an urban middle class and their political aspirations. In 1832, the main concern of the Whig party was to enfranchise the middle class, because, in William Ferguson’s words, ‘the middle-class was well-to-do, responsible, and educated, and only by granting its members representation as allies of the old governing class could the constitution be saved from democratic threats’.\(^3\)9 In Hawick, Robert Wilson, who had been Cornet in 1799, emphasised the need for the security of property and for the ‘middle orders of society’ to enjoy the right of franchise. An enfranchised middle class was the best safeguard against disorder, revolution and ‘the hasty inflammability of the lower orders’.\(^4\)0 As we might expect from an ex-Cornet, ‘Radical Rob’, and others, drew

\(^4\)0. R. Wilson, \textit{The History of Hawick}, 2nd edition (Hawick, 1841), p. 234.
inspiration from the Common Riding, not least because it emphasised liberty and independence from an over-bearing aristocracy. In the election campaign of May 1831, reformers from Hawick marched to Jedburgh (14 miles) to lend their support to the local Whig candidate, Sir William Elliot of Stobs, against the local Tory, the Honourable Francis Scott of Harden. On their march to Jedburgh, the reformers were led by the drum and fife band playing Common Riding airs. Some of the reformers also carried banners, possibly including the Hawick Common Riding flag. Although Elliot was defeated in the ballot by 40 votes to 19, it was widely felt that he had won a moral victory. Elliot was carried shoulder-high through the streets of Jedburgh by the Hawick reformers, who may have celebrated by singing Common Riding songs. The successful passage of the Great Reform Act in 1832 was commemorated in Hawick with scenes reminiscent of medieval times. The day was declared a local holiday; the church bells were rung; local craft incorporations marched in procession with their banners and trade symbols; and there was a huge open-air dinner to conclude the celebrations. The procession through the streets was headed by the Common Riding flute band, and the Common Riding flag was flown defiantly from the town-hall.

It is appropriate here to consider 'the most famous Borderer of all', Sir Walter Scott, and his attitude towards the Common Ridings. It might be thought that Scott had a tremendous pride and enthusiasm for the Common Ridings. After all, here was a man deeply imbued with a sense of Scottish history and traditions, having made regular 'raids' into the Borders to record the popular culture and customs of the area. Scott certainly knew about the Common Ridings: indeed, how

41. A tradition which continued in the twentieth-century. In March 1965, David Steel won a famous by-election victory to take the Parliamentary seat of Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles. The result was announced in Jedburgh town hall, following which Mr Steel was carried shoulder-high down the High street by supporters singing the Hawick Common Riding song The Border Queen. D. Steel, Against Goliath (London, 1989), p. 43.
42. Wilson, History of Hawick, pp. 377-80.
could he not have known about them? Selkirk Common Riding took place almost on his doorstep. However, apart from a brief reference to the Flodden tradition of Selkirk in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Scott wrote nothing about the ridings. This silence is remarkable and, perhaps, revealing. Scott seems to have been rather frightened by the ridings. The local population was on the streets, drinking heavily and in ‘carnival’ mood, and it did not take much to imagine them turning menacing and ugly. Moreover, in the eyes of a traditional Tory like Scott, the ridings also contained an element of political hostility. It has been argued that Scott’s political attitudes were actually very limited, and that there is ‘an unreality in Scott’s political opinions that contrasts strongly with the clarity of imagination displayed in the Waverley novels’. Scott, it seems, had little sympathy for the urban working class, such as the stocking-makers of Hawick. He denied their right to be politically active, arguing that they should only obey their ‘natural’ superiors. Scott identified closely with his ‘clan’ and its ‘chief’, and the Border past he idealised was not that of artisans and tradesmen. He wanted a safe, ordered, deferential society, and, like other Tories, his greatest fear was revolution, almost to the point of paranoia. After his death in 1832, Scott received universal adulation, but he was not quite so popular during his lifetime. Robert Wilson of Hawick had little time for Scott’s romantic notions about the past, and stated that Scott would be better to concentrate on contemporary issues. Wilson believed that his era was a time of progress in contrast to ‘the previous motley annals of mankind’. During the election meeting at Jedburgh in May 1831, Scott was openly vilified and, it was claimed, stones were thrown at his carriage by the


44. Wilson, *History of Hawick*, p. ii. Wilson wrote that Scott ‘has attempted to revive the lifeless remains of feudal chivalry and nonsense; but, fortunately at the present day, the elements out of which the phoenix should have arisen has been too long inanimate. What a pity is it that the original and finely cultivated mind of the Baronet had been been directed to more noble pursuits!’ *History of Hawick*, p. 52.
'blackguards' from Hawick and Jedburgh. According to John Gibson Lockhart, Scott's son-in-law and biographer, 'the town was in a most contempestuous state: it was almost wholly in the hands of a disciplined rabble, chiefly weavers from Hawick, who marched up and down with drums and banners'.45 We can now begin to appreciate why Scott wrote so little about the ridings. It is curious, however, that Scott's friend and protégé James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, wrote nothing about the ridings either. Hogg was certainly not averse to a good drink and a 'rant'. In 1820, he declined an invitation to attend the coronation of George IV because it would have meant missing St Boswells' annual fair. Politically, Hogg was a moderate and a traditionalist, suspicious of both Tories and Whigs.46 Perhaps the ridings were so familiar to Hogg that he thought that they were not worthy of comment.

**Popular and Recreational Functions of the Ridings**

Riding the marches was (and is) a popular event, and not one restricted to the burgh authorities. For local inhabitants, including women and children, it was an occasion of fun and enjoyment, no matter what their level of involvement. A description of Hawick Common Riding in the early nineteenth-century states: 'To the old and middle-aged, the scene re-called early associations, when they themselves, and their fathers before them, took a prominent part in the ceremony, and went through the duties of the day in all light-hearted buoyancy of youth.'47 The most important popular function of the ridings was that they were a temporary liberation from the everyday world of labour, suffering and responsibility. Like other festive occasions, they gave people a sense of excitement and a chance to

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offset their boredom and weariness. As Edward Thompson has observed, 'many weeks of heavy labour and scanty diet were compensated for by the expectation (or reminiscence) of these occasions, when food and drink were abundant, courtship and every kind of social intercourse flourished, and the hardship of life was forgotten. For the young, the sexual cycle of the year turned on these festivals. These occasions were, in an important sense, what men and women lived for.'

During festive periods, normal restraints were lowered, and sanction given to what at other times would be impermissible. An essential component of this temporary culture of licentiousness was drink. R. W. Malcolmson has written that 'drunkenness was a regular and more or less tolerated feature of a large number of festive occasions. Heavy drinking was often reserved for holidays, and it was indulged in by many men who were ordinarily temperate.'

Moderation and restraint were cast aside in the general holiday atmosphere. It has been noted that burghs usually concluded their ridings with an official corporate dinner or a feast. However, the excessive consumption of food and drink at the ridings was not confined to the burgh authorities. Moreover, because normal inhibitions had been temporarily lowered or suspended, popular festive occasions also had an important element of sexual licence. On these occasions, the most active participants were men and women in their teens and early twenties. Festival assemblies offered young people some of the best opportunities for encountering the opposite sex. As R. W. Malcolmson has observed, 'many fairs provided for the common people what masquerades afforded to the gentry and the nobility.' Freed from their normal restraints, young people could use the occasion to establish new contacts or pursue those already made. Festive occasions widened the range of potential partners, and because of their free and easy atmosphere, 'they encouraged the kind of gallantries and personal displays which were not usually available in everyday life'.

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51. *Ibid*. 

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Undoubtedly, the most important recreational feature of the ridings was horse racing. In the eighteenth-century, horse racing in Britain was transformed. The Jockey Club was formed in 1752 to regulate racing, courses were properly laid out and the classic races were established, such as the St Ledger in 1776 and the Derby in 1780. Horse racing had a long and perhaps inevitable association with the riding of the marches, although local meetings of this kind were small-scale and limited in quality. They involved an assortment of horses, many of which had taken part in the actual riding. Few local people could afford to maintain a thoroughbred, but instead raced on work-horses, ponies and even donkeys. Until the development of the railway system in the mid-nineteenth century, owners tended to be local, who raced more for social prestige than the prize money. As Wray Vamplew has written: ‘What greater ambition could there be than to ride one’s own horse to victory at one’s local meeting?52 In general, horses were of modest ability, and races were often run in heats to make the best of a small entry. In 1736, Peebles provided a purse of five guineas, ‘and one given in compliments by the provost’, for a race to be run in heats, the best of three races, twice round.53 Race meetings were encouraged by the burgh authorities, who often supplied prizes or ‘the plate’ for the day’s sport. In 1725, Hawick town council gave £2 for the years plate at the Common Riding. Similarly, in 1824, the council resolved ‘to allow the usual sum of Ten pounds to be paid from the Town’s funds as the principal Prize at the Races on Hawick Muir on the Common Riding Day’.54 The council also paid for stewards and other officials at the races. In Peebles, the principal races were connected with the Beltane Fair at the beginning of May, although some races may also have taken place at the riding of the marches. In 1728, Peebles town council provided a china bowl and fifteen guineas prize money, and three years later the

53. Peebles Minute Book, 10 March 1736.
54. Hawick Records, 14 May 1824.
burgh treasurer was ordered to provide ‘a piece of silver plate not exceeding £15 to be run Belten next’. In 1755, the prize was a pair of silver spurs and a ‘good sadel’.55

Horse racing was an important attraction, which drew people into towns. In the early eighteenth-century, Selkirk town council sanctioned a local race meeting, ‘considering the advantage a race would be to the burgh by the great confluence of gentlemen that would resort thereto’.56 In 1825, Robert Wilson of Hawick, stated: ‘Of late, the assemblage of people upon this occasion [the Common Riding] has been very numerous; principally, no doubt, on account of the excellent races which for these several years past have taken place upon the common.’57 Burghs promoted their race meeting in a deliberate attempt to attract a wider audience. In 1736, Peebles town council agreed to stage a race meeting and decreed that: ‘the clerk to make ready the articles and send them to Edinburgh to be insert in the publick news’.58 Prizes for race meetings were supplied by the local community, especially publicans, hoteliers and shopkeepers, all of whom supported local meetings because they could anticipate increased profits by catering for the needs of spectators. People enjoyed horse racing because it was an opportunity to escape the dull routine of daily work. In addition, horse racing involved betting and gambling, and offered the illusion of enrichment and escape. Race meetings were important social gatherings, and involved a large element of ‘carnival’ and festive licence. In 1802,

56. Craig-Brown, History of Selkirkshire, vol. ii, p. 90. In 1802, James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, visited Leith races. Hogg stated that the crowd was ‘prodigious’. ‘I never expected to see so many people together in this world, and many of them, I am sure, knew not for what they were come together, there being thousands on the sands betwixt the carriages and the scaffolds that could not see the heads of the riders.’ Hogg also notes some of the ‘carnival’ element of the races, including a circus, ballad singers, itinerant musicians, and even what-appeared-to-be peddlers of pornography. James Hogg, Highland Tours, ed. W. Laughland (Hawick, 1981), pp. 20-1.
57. Wilson, History of Hawick, p. 38.
58. Peebles Minute Book, 10 March 1736.

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James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, stumbled across a race meeting taking place near Penicuik. Hogg observed a 'multitude' of people, some of whom had 'strange dresses'. Enquiring about the origins of this meeting, Hogg was informed that the meeting was organised by 'a club of boys':

This was a holiday with them, that they would spend the evening in foot races and dancing, that these were the members so fantastically dressed with ribbons which they had got from neighbouring girls whom they, in return, would treat at their ball in the evening.59

Race meetings were not just restricted to horse racing but also included athletic events, such as sprinting, leaping, wrestling and other tests of strength and endurance, all of which were accessible to the poorer sections of the community. In 1707, Stirling races included 'a mans foot race for ane pare of stockings, ane pare of shoes, and a pare of gloves, with ane bonnett ..... and appoynts all thir races to be putt in the Gazett for six weeks to come.'60 Country sports also made use of animals other than horses. In 1707, the maltmen of Stirling were ordered to prepare a 'goose race' (although, in this case, the race may have been a human 'chase').61

However, popular support for the riding of the marches amounted to more than just an enthusiasm for feasts and horse racing, important though these factors were. The ridings were the product of a conservative culture, which in its forms and appeals to the past sought to reinforce traditional usage and support popular privileges. In some burghs, the popular privileges associated with the ridings, such as the appointment of a young man as leader, were zealously protected, which, in turn, meant that the ridings always had the potential to be subversive.

Communities generally believed that they had certain rights and privileges, and

59. Hogg, Highland Tours, p. 17.
61. Ibid, p. 111.
when someone tried to meddle in these, then the community was entitled to rebel. As Edward Thompson puts it, ‘plebeian culture is rebellious, but rebellious in defence of custom’.  

One of the most important privileges associated with the ridings was the appointment of a young man as symbolic leader of the event. As we have seen, the appointment had parallels with the pre-Reformation custom of selecting a young man (or men) to act as ‘Abbot of Misrule’, ‘Lord of Bonaccord’, or even ‘Robin Hood’. In some ways, this was a potentially subversive act because it inverted normal behaviour and status, although it occurred in a controlled and temporary manner. In the eighteenth-century, the appointment of an individual to carry the burgh flag at the riding was seen as an important privilege of the community. The endorsement of the burgh authorities was usually sought, but the privilege was never wholly theirs. In Lanark, the town council nominated the Lord Cornet in all years ending in odd numbers whilst the deacons of the crafts made the nomination when it was an even number. In Linlithgow, the privilege of carrying the burgh flag on the Marches day went in an eight year rotation amongst the deacons of the various crafts (who would have been married men). In 1710, the deacon of the Hammermen was nominated ‘to carry the pinsall against the Marches Day’. He was followed by:

1711 - Deacon of the Tailors;
1712 - Deacon of the Baxters;
1713 - Deacon of the Cordiners;
1714 - Deacon of the Weavers;
1715 - Deacon of the Wrights;
1716 - Deacon of the Coopers;
1717 - Deacon of the Fleshers;
1718 - Deacon of the Hammermen.

62. Thompson, Customs in Common, p. 9.
64. Linlithgow Records, 29 April 1710 and passim.
In Hawick, the appointment of the Cornet was made by the town council, but the nominees for the post were chosen by the community, or, more correctly, the young, unmarried men of the town. There was competition to attain the Cornetship because the town council usually had to elect a Cornet from a short-leet of different candidates. The earliest reference to the Cornet dates from May 1703 when ‘James Scott called laird was voted to carry the pennsell’.65 It is clear that the young men of Hawick considered the Cornetship to be their prerogative, and it was this attitude which occasionally brought them into conflict with the burgh authorities. According to the burgh records of Hawick, a major dispute over the Cornetship occurred in June 1706. The dispute centred on the Cornet-elect, Thomas Hardie, who had been chosen ‘to be ensigne and to carrie the colour’, but who, for unknown reasons, failed to appear at the Common Riding:

[Hardie] did wilfully desert and absent himself from carreing the said colour the said day, which did without ony stoppe or let occasione ane great disturbance, confussione, and mutinie amongst the other civil inhabitants of the said towne, even to the comitting of some ryott, abusing of Magistracie, and almost to the effusione of blood .... the eldest present Baylyea should carie the said colour the forsaid day through and out of the towne, and the other younger present Baylyea to car ye same backe againe, appoynting any other person whom they thought fitt to carry it amongst the Common Muir, and lykewayes enacted the young unmaried men should not carie the same in futur.66

The attempt by the town council to appropriate the Cornetship led to immediate resistance from the young men of the town, who believed that their

65. Hawick Records, 17 May 1703. It is uncertain why James Scott was called ‘laird’, or if this name had any wider significance. In the sixteenth-century, young men appointed to lead the revels were often given mock titles, such as ‘lord’ or ‘abbot’. Another possible explanation is that James Scott was in the habit of dressing richly, and exuded an air of wealth and status.

traditional privilege was under threat. Consequently, they made a flag of their own and carried it at the Common Riding, much to the disgust of the town council:

Annent the confusione, tumults, disorders, and ryotts, even to the effusione of blood and high contempt of Magistracie, made and occasioned by the youne unmarried men and lads of the said town, who drew in ane factione by themselves, and contrair to all ancient custome and practicke of the said town for many generations and hundreths of years past, made and patched up ane mocke Colour of their own, caried the same amongst the hail Common and through the hail toune, deriding, mockeing, scoffing, and laughing at the old pencill, and bearers and cariers thereof, menacing, threatning, and with many intollerable, injurious, and opproprious words, speeches, and carages publickly abusing the present towne Counsell.67

Moreover, when ‘Baylyea Hardie was to mount upon horsebacke and carry the said pencill’, the rebellious young men approached ‘in ane threatening manner’, and tried, unsuccessfully, to steal the ‘official’ town flag. It seems that the rebels had some popular support, because ‘upon the morrow’ (the day after the Common Riding) inhabitants did ‘holow out at windows, and to hoot the bailies, when passing by in the streets’.68 In May 1707, the town council agreed to obtain a new flag, ‘the old ane was altogidder torn and useless’. It was also decreed that no-one was ‘to transport or cary any other colour, pencell or standard, either within the toune or through and about the meiths and marches of the Common Muir at the Common ryding’, under the pain of £20 Scots. However, the town council, clearly shaken by the previous year’s events, backed down over the proposal to discontinue the appointment of a Cornet.69

Popular dissatisfaction with the burgh authorities was also prevalent in 1809, which became known as the year of ‘the disputed Common Riding’. The

67. Ibid, 1 June 1706.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid, 9 May 1707.
controversy seems to have caused by the town council's attempts to restrict the Common Riding, and in particular the amount of entertaining and celebration. On 16 May 1809, the town council decreed that in future many of the celebratory meetings leading up to the Common Riding, including ‘the clothes making’, were to be abandoned. The Cornet could retain the privilege of holding a dinner on the day of the Common Riding, but ‘none but Burgesses and Burgesses sons above the age of eighteen were to be invited’ (plus the Cornet’s relations).70 People who wished to dine with the Cornet were expected to pay five shillings. These changes engendered much opposition in Hawick, where it was felt that the council had been interfering in the ‘ancient’ traditions of the Common Riding. There may, of course, have been other motives on the part of the opposition, many of whom were known to have radical political sympathies. In any case, a petition was laid before the town council requesting that the changes be rescinded, but, as the petition was ‘conceived in language highly disrespectful and improper’, the council rejected it, thus arousing further opposition.71 In *An Address to the Inhabitants of Hawick*, which was based on a Common Riding song, James Hogg urged townspeople to stand up for their traditional rights:

Shades of heroes slain at Flodden!
Shall your rights ‘mong feet be trodden?
Never! while a Border bowman
Has a horse to ride the common.

Hogg claimed that the town council had appointed a Cornet at a secret meeting held early one morning outside the town ('where the Pipelheugh fountain bubbles'):

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70. *Ibid*, 16 May 1809.
There our customs are arranged,
Ancient modes for modern changed;
If 'tis true as we've been told it,
Their new Cornet here was moulded.

Hogg thought that this was disgraceful behaviour and urged his fellows to take matters into their own hands:

If you love your ancient freedom,
Their new Cornet never heed him;
From among you chose a Cornet,
Hand it down to sons unborn yet.72

With Hogg's song as an anthem, an opposition Cornet was duly elected, which meant that Hawick had two Cornets: the 'loyalist' John Tuly, a stonemason, and the 'rebels' John Kyle, a merchant. Both Cornets and their respective sets of supporters rode the marches on the day of the Common Riding, and when the two parties met at the race course, there was 'some disorder'.

The Language of the Ridings

Now let us examine some of the 'language' of the eighteenth-century ridings. Language in this case means the conventional symbols which were used to express certain ideas and values in the course of the ridings. Peter Borsay has written: 'All rituals and ceremonies were a piece of theatre in which the participants conjured a drama around themselves. Critical to the performance, and our interpretation of it, was the complex language and dramatic devices employed, which not only exploited words, but the full range of human sensations, appealing to the eye, the ear, the mouth and the body.'73 Some of the 'stage-props' which were used in the

73. Borsay, 'All the Town's a Stage', p. 237.
ridings have already been mentioned in chapter two. To examine the language of the ridings in the eighteenth-century, we will make use of contemporary records and also two unique period sources which deserve special attention. The Grand Procession of Musselburgh Fair or Marches Riding is a mock epic poem which describes the Musselburgh riding of 2 November 1764. It was written by an anonymous 'Member of One of the Incorporations', and published in 1766.74 The Marches Day. A Dramatic Entertainment of Three Acts is a play about Linlithgow Marches written by John Finlayson and published in Edinburgh in 1771.75 It is not known when or how often the play was performed, but it is clear that the characters, who have such names as 'Timothy Quotewell', 'Saunders Shrillpipe' and 'Needy Strap', were based on real people. The Musselburgh poem and the Linlithgow play provide a fascinating insight into the riding of the marches in the eighteenth-century. They also suggest that at least some of the participants in the ridings had a good sense of humour.

The most important stage-props used in the ridings were the visual. Clothing, for instance, played a key part. The main participants in the ridings, such as the

74. The Grand Procession of the Musselburgh Fair or Marches Riding: Delineated in a Poem by a Member of One of the Incorporations (Place of publication not given [Musselburgh?], 1766). The poem is dedicated to: 'The Honourable the Magistrates of Musselburgh and Fisher-Row, and the Several Incorporations of that Ancient Burgh'. The introduction to the poem states:

When ye were riding, others did you view,
To better purpose, than yourselves could do;
But in the Poem that before you lies,
The scene is all presented to your eyes.
These lines may serve you as a looking-glass.
The image of your March for to express.

75. [John Finlayson], The Marches Day: A Dramatic Entertainment of Three Acts. As Performed by the Originals at XXXXXXXXXX [Linlithgow] (Edinburgh, 1771). A second edition of the play was published in Falkirk in 1814.
provost, bailies, standard bearer and others, wore special costumes to emphasise their importance in the proceedings. In May 1703, Hawick town council decreed that: 'the officers, pyper and drummers to have new coats at the Common ryding.' Similarly, in 1726, the town council bought a pair of new shoes for William Donaldson (a town official), 'and ordanis the officers and drumm to gett ribbons'.

In Musselburgh, the procession was headed by 'five fine musicians', who were 'delightful to the eye/In red and scarlet shine'. In Linlithgow, the town council issued instructions prior to every Marches day in the eighteenth-century 'to make ready the officers coats'. In May 1706, Linlithgow town council purchased 'six coats for the officers, drummer and pyper', whilst in 1800 the town council paid £3 to a local tailor for 'making Town's Servants coats' and 3s. 4d. for 'trimming the hatts'. Council members were entitled to wear certain badges of office on formal occasions. The burgh provost, for example, had a chain of office and special robes or gowns. In Musselburgh, the town officer was noted for his fine clothes:

White gloves he wore fringed fine,
With silk like to a crow,
Black boots with ancient spurs did shine,
No little pomp did show.

Occasionally, burgh authorities were parsimonious about purchasing special clothes for their officials, no doubt being anxious to avoid charges of extravagance or perhaps just out of genuine poverty. In May 1712, Hawick town council 'ordained the toune treasurer to furnish and provyd, as cheape as he can, als much cloath of ane colour as will be four coats for the two officers, pyper, and drummer'.

76. Hawick Records, 17 May 1703 and 7 May 1726.
77. Musselburgh Fair, p. 3.
78. Linlithgow Records, 4 May 1706. Linlithgow Treasurer’s Vouchers, 3 June 1800.
79. Musselburgh Fair, p. 3.
80. Hawick Records, 13 May 1712.
Anyone who participated in the ridings was expected to dress smartly and to wear their ‘best apparel’. In 1727, the burgesses of Peebles were to report ‘in their best equipage for the riding the commonties’.81 John Finlayson’s satirical play about Linlithgow Marches opens with the characters preparing their clothes for the big day. Tom Cockerwell, a shoemaker, states: ‘Weel faith, this is ae day o’ the year, on which ev’ry body pits on their best.’ Cockerwell states that he intends to wear ‘a brown coat, breeks o’ the same, a scarlet waistcoat double-breasted, and a weel-powder’d wig, wi’ thir boots ye see’. Another character sports a brightly-coloured vest, ‘remarkable for being on alike at funerals, fairs and weddings’.

Sawnuck, an apprentice hammerman, is ashamed because he only has an old coat to wear and thinks that everyone in the town will laugh at him.82 Because the riding of the marches was clearly a special day, it is likely that others in the community also made the effort to dress up, including women and children. Dressing-up for a festive occasion was significant, because it enhanced an individual’s experience of the event and allowed them the feeling of being important and, in some cases, powerful. Prestige and honour could be gained at occasions which required special dress. As R. W. Malcolmson states, festivals and other recreational events, ‘were the plebeian occasions for cutting a figure: they catered to basic desires for personal display, for indulgence in finery, for an escape from the customary drabness’.83 Dressing-up for a holiday was a test of an individual’s ability and a relatively accessible means of winning social approval. It was also a standard means of appealing to the opposite sex. In The Marches Day, the character of Tom Cockerwell states that he will wear his best clothes in the procession, ‘and as we gang east to the cross, I’ll glee frae this side to that side, keep the lasses een, and smile i’ their faces’.84 People made great efforts to prepare for festivals, often

81. Peebles Minute Book, 22 May 1727.
82. Finlayson, Marches Day, pp. 2-4 and 22.
83. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations, p. 86.
84. Finlayson, Marches Day, p. 4.
saving money over long periods to buy extravagant clothes and other luxuries to wear on a special day. R. W. Malcolmson correctly points out that on this issue there was a clear clash between popular and middle class norms. Personal display was one of the rare opportunities for people to gain social status, many other channels being effectively blocked off by the unrealistic economic capabilities they assumed. Hence, there was a willingness to spend freely on fancy clothes and other items, which to middle class observers seemed reckless and irresponsible.85

The ridings also employed a wide range of moveable artefacts, the most important being flags and banners. In the Musselburgh riding, each of the guilds followed their craft banner, upon which were the symbols of their profession. The banner of the Flesher's, for instance, bore the cross of St. Andrew and a bullock's head, whilst the Weaver's banner had a leopard's head with a shuttle in its mouth. In some cases, the members of the craft guilds carried the tools of their profession. One of the Bakers carried a sheath of wheat, the Tailors carried pairs of scissors, and the Gardeners decked themselves in green leaves and foliage. All of the participants in the Musselburgh riding carried swords, which they held high as they passed through the town:

A sword most clear at this Town-end,
Each from his scabbard drew,
And with it, naked in his hand,
The Town he marched through.86

Civic architecture might also be described as a 'stage-prop' of the ridings. The tolbooth provided an impressive background to events, whilst the ridings usually began from the market cross. It was not only the eyes which were exercised in ceremony and ritual. As we have seen, music was an important element of the

85. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations, p. 87.
86. Musselburgh Fair, p. 10.
ridings. Drums, pipes, trumpets, flutes and, occasionally, violins were used to draw attention to the procession and to seduce or jostle the senses. Ridings may have been announced or celebrated by the ringing of bells, perhaps on the burgh church or the town-hall. It seems that the craft guilds had their own songs, which they may have sung as they marched in procession through the town. These songs praised the craft and emphasised its importance to wider society. The Musselburgh Shoemakers, for instance, sang the following song:

This Trade is of great usefulness,  
For none are cloth'd complete,  
However richly they do dress,  
Without shoes on their feet.\textsuperscript{87}

Similarly, craft guilds were keen to stress the antiquity (real or imagined) of their trade. The Linlithgow Hammermen sang:

When Adam first ate of the tree,  
And thence knew the good and the bad,  
Uncover'd himself he did see,  
Which caus'd him grow laguid and sad.  
But he soon found the secret of clothes,  
(Possessing an excellent head),  
With hammer to work then he goes,  
And - a needle is instantly made!\textsuperscript{88}

Oral stimulants also played their part in the ridings, with sumptuous feasts and plentiful supplies of alcohol. At the conclusion of the Musselburgh riding, it was noted:

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, p. 7.  
\textsuperscript{88} Finlayson, Marches Day, p. 28-9.
Then off the field did march, that they
Might dine, and after spend,
What time remained of the day,
With pleasure to the end.89

Many of stage-props employed in the ridings also engaged the mind, since they often carried coded messages. Edward Thompson has reminded us of popular politics, that ‘as we move back from 1760 we enter a world of theatrical symbolism which is the more difficult to interpret’.90 People expressed their allegiances and group loyalties by symbols and visual language. The use of coloured ribbons, rosettes, certain foods, oak leaves and other flowers could give an unequivocal declaration of political affiliation or social ties. In the Musselburgh riding, the members of the craft guilds wore different coloured cockades on their hats to signify their guild. The Wrights, for instance, wore red and white, the Shoemakers light blue, the Bakers orange, and the Gardeners, predictably, green. Burghs may also have had their symbols or colours, as they do in the modern ridings. At the Carterhaugh ball game played near Selkirk in 1815, the men of Yarrow wore sprigs of heather whilst the Souters of Selkirk sported fir twigs.91

The Decline of the Ridings

The eighteenth-century saw the gradual decline of the riding of the marches in Scotland. Many burghs discontinued their riding, although, as we will see, some revived the tradition in the later nineteenth or twentieth-centuries. Edinburgh held its last riding in 1718, and did not stage another one until a special ‘peace riding’ in 1946. Aberdeen held only two ridings in the eighteenth-century, in 1754

89. Musselburgh Fair, p. 13.
90. Thompson, Customs in Common, pp. 67-8.
and 1790, although the tradition lingered on until 1889. In the early nineteenth-century, ridings were discontinued at, amongst others, Lauder, Peebles, and Haddington. However, it is misleading to think of the eighteenth-century as just a period of decline for the ridings. The event continued to take place annually in Hawick, Selkirk, Lanark and Linlithgow, whilst Musselburgh maintained its riding at regular intervals. The obvious question to ask here is why did the ridings decline in some burghs but survive in others?

The decline of the ridings is closely linked with the agricultural changes of the eighteenth-century and in particular the enclosure movement, which peaked in the 1760s and again around 1810. By its nature, enclosure involved fences, dikes and walls, which inevitably led to fewer incidents of encroachment. Consequently, there was less of a practical need for communities to ride the marches, which relieved burgesses of the tiresome duty of undertaking a riding. Moreover, the eighteenth-century saw the gradual improvement of detailed maps and plans which could be copied and retained by burgh officials, which meant that communities no longer had to make a regular physical inspection of their marches to confirm their boundaries. Maps and plans were also an easier and more effective method of passing knowledge of the marches to the next generation. The increasing use of maps and plans is symptomatic of the ‘age of reason’, when people began to use rational and intellectual means to conduct their affairs.

Closely linked with these changes went mounting pressure on the space that had been used to accommodate the ridings and their associated traditions. Processions were increasingly restricted by fences, hedges and fields of crops. In 1764, Peebles race course was ploughed up and planted, which led to the abandonment of the traditional Beltane races. In Hawick, the ‘greatest blow’ ever suffered by the Common Riding was the sale of the common haugh, the site of

92. Peebles Minute Book, 17 February 1764.
the races, to the North British Railway Company in 1847 for a new station.93 (In this case, locals were resourceful and established a new race course on a different site.) In addition, increasing urban development undermined those customs which were essentially rural in nature. Obviously, the survival of the ridings depended on participants having access to a horse and to the countryside, something which was not easily achieved in large urban centres. A description of Hawick Common Riding in the early nineteenth-century states that participants took part 'on every kind of horse, from small Highland shelty to the ponderous cart nag, in groups of five to six, without any regard as to equality in speed, scores of horses and riders careering round'.94 The scene would have been difficult to recreate in a large urban area, where there was a general lack of space and the countryside was less accessible, thus making it awkward and expensive to obtain horses.

Despite the changing nature of burgh land, some communities maintained the tradition of riding their marches. The survival of the ridings in burghs like Hawick, Selkirk and Lanark may in part be a reflection of the close, homogeneous nature of these communities. R. W. Malcolmson has written: 'Custom is particularly the mark of the small, close-knit community, and it tends to lose its force in a larger, more mobile, and more impersonal world.95 In the eighteenth-century, burghs such as Edinburgh or Glasgow became increasingly impersonal and diverse, partly because of their ever-changing populations. Consequently, there were fewer possibilities for the imposition of custom and more options for the exercise of individual will. In a smaller burgh however, where the population was more stable and interdependent, it was much easier to enforce social norms. In the riding of the marches, the authorities could ascertain, punish and ostracise absentees, but this was harder to achieve in a large, anonymous urban area.

Whilst Hawick and Selkirk were assiduous in maintaining their ridings, other Border burghs were rather less enthusiastic. Throughout the eighteenth-century, and perhaps earlier, Peebles town council had great difficulty getting inhabitants to take part in the local ridings (the town having more than one common). In April 1702, the council noted that 'many of the burgesses are necessarily absent fra the riding of commons, through Pash fair at Lanark and Whitsunday fair at Dumblane'. The council decided to alter the day of the riding of the 'Eschellie' common to the third Monday in April, whilst 'the dyet of ryding Winkstoun and Hommilltoun commons' was altered from the Monday after Whitsunday to the third Monday of May. The 'haill maisters of familyes' were to ride the commons on these dates, 'under the paine of fyve merks'. The threat of a fine seems to have been ineffective, because in May 1727 the town council admitted that the new dates were 'very inconvenient and troublesome to the inhabitants being the time of labour and seed'. The ridings would subsequently take place on the first Monday in June. This alteration also seems to have been unsuccessful because in June 1774 the council admitted: 'the usual mode in riding their Commontie by calling out the whole inhabitants created not only a good deal of trouble, beside expense to them, and many could not get horses on that occasion'. In future, the council would select 'a few persons out of each quarter to ride along with the Magistrates, and not put the bulk of the inhabitants to trouble and charges. They therefore resolve to chuse one person well advanced in years, and two young persons out of each quarter by rotation annually on the first Monday of June old style.' Consequently, in 1775, only fifteen 'ordinary' inhabitants of Peebles took part in the riding with the burgh magistrates. By the early nineteenth-century, the Peebles riding had fallen into

98. *Ibid*, 13 June 1774. 'Quarter' refers to four areas of the old burgh: east, south-west, north-west and northgate.

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abeyance. It was revived in a different form in 1897 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Clearly, Peebles did not have a traditional period when the local riding took place, and this may have lessened the riding’s impact amongst the inhabitants, who, as the town records indicate, seem to have been more attracted to events in other towns. It is possible that Peebles was a less homogeneous community than Hawick and Selkirk, and had a higher rate of population mobility because Edinburgh and the central lowlands were easily accessible from Peebles but remote from Hawick and Selkirk. Of course, the opposite was true of Musselburgh and Linlithgow where the closeness of Edinburgh may have assisted in the survival of the local ridings. There was a fear in these burghs that the smaller community would be subsumed by its larger neighbour, arguably like Scotland lives in fear of England. Local loyalties and identities were intensified because of this, and the riding of the marches was the ideal platform to express local affiliations. When the Musselburgh marches were ridden in 1764, the opportunity was taken to cock-a-snook at the big city:

What town can now with Musselburgh compare,
Or show such grandeur, riding at a fair.
Evin Edinburgh, our grand metropolis,
Has no procession in the form of this.99

The survival of the riding of the marches was closely associated with the survival of a craft or guild culture, which remained powerful and influential in some burghs until the mid-nineteenth century. In the Borders, industrial development was still in its infancy in 1800. Although the hosiery and tweed industries were beginning to emerge, burghs such as Hawick and Selkirk were essentially unaffected by industrial developments at this time. In 1791, less than

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one hundred people in Hawick were involved in cloth and hosiery manufacture.\textsuperscript{100} Moreover, when the local hosiery trade finally did take-off in the early nineteenth-century, manufacture was concentrated in 'shop' units rather than factories, which permitted the survival of aspects of traditional guild culture. There is no doubt that the craft guilds and the riding of the marches were inextricably linked, and that the guilds were the backbone of the event. Guild or trade culture had certain characteristics which were paralleled in the ridings. These were a world of adult males, to which women were rarely admitted and where drink underpinned much of the group activity. Guild culture had a certain intellectuality, and members delighted in hearing stories about their guild from the past. In addition, guild culture was instinctively radical, and, whilst lacking in missionary zeal, emphasis was given to group identity and independence. In the nineteenth-century, this often led to conflict with manufacturers over the 'pre-industrial' work habits, which survived in the Borders hosiery trade until as late as the 1890s. Moreover, because of its radical tendencies, guild culture had an innate distrust of the aristocratic landowners. In 1777, Hawick lost around a third of its common land (465 out of 1549 acres) to the Buccleuch family, who, as neighbouring landowners, could lay claim to a share in the division of Hawick's common. Over thirty years later, the loss of the common still rankled in the minds of radicals and craftsmen in Hawick, and there was an awareness that an 'ancient' right and privilege had been lost. James Hogg, a stocking-maker, radical and archetypal artisan, used his Common Riding Song (Teribus) to make a thinly-veiled attack on the Buccleuch family:

Magistrates! Be faithful trustees,  
Equal poise the scales of justice,  
See our Common rightly guidit,  
Quirky lairds nae mair divide it.101

In this sense, Hogg's Common Riding Song was a political song which expressed defiance towards the local (Tory) aristocracy. The riding of the marches was a vehicle for artisans and craftsmen to express their independence and group identity.

Clearly, the riding of the marches was firmly rooted in some burghs. Local inhabitants wanted to continue the tradition, even when its original purpose was increasingly irrelevant. On 17 May 1794, Hawick burgh council debated whether to continue the Common Riding, ultimately deciding 'by a majority to have none in future'.102 The official explanation was that the common had been enclosed and the riding was no longer necessary, but there may also have been fears that the Common Riding would be hijacked as a vehicle for revolutionary agitation. Two days after the town council's decision to discontinue the event, a petition from local inhabitants was laid before the council 'praying that there should be a common riding this year'.103 It was reported that special meetings had been called of the respective trades, 'and they are of the opinion that the Common riding should be continued'.104 In the face of public opinion, the town council quickly backed-down and reversed its decision. Archibauld Dickson was appointed to carry the town's standard, and all burgesses were to ride or appear at the Common Riding as usual.

101. Quoted in Landles, 'James Hogg', p. 34. Many bowdlerised versions of Hogg's song were produced in the later nineteenth and twentieth-centuries which omitted this verse. See, for instance, R. Murray, Hawick Songs and Song Writers, 3rd edition (Hawick, 1897).
102. Hawick Records, 17 May 1794.
103. Ibid, 19 May 1794.
104. Ibid.
However, in Hawick and other burghs, the struggle for the ridings was not over. Throughout the nineteenth-century, the ridings had to adapt to changing social attitudes and conditions, which, as chapter five will show, led to further controversy and dispute.
The story of the Common Riding in the nineteenth-century is one of change and continuity. We all live in changing times, but occasionally there is a clear watershed from one kind of society to another, and it is obvious to contemporaries that theirs is an age of transition. From the mid-eighteenth century, Britain underwent unprecedented change in the wake of industrialisation, population rise and urbanisation. Popular customs and traditions were not immune to these upheavals, and people were certainly aware that many of the old ways were changing and under threat. What became the traditional image of the period was expressed by the ‘folklore’ collector, William Henderson, who in 1866 wrote:

The age we live in is remarkable, as in other points of view, so in this, that old habits and customs, old laws and sayings, old beliefs and superstitions, which have held their ground in the universal mind from the remotest antiquity, are fast fading away and perishing.¹

The notion of the decline of popular customs has been handed down to us, and until recently it was generally accepted as being correct. At least one historian has argued that between the mid-eighteenth-century and the mid-nineteenth-century, the foundations of many traditional customs were swept away leaving a ‘vacuum’,

which was only filled with the rise of organised sports and leisure in the later nineteenth-century.²

Other historians have recently challenged this view. Whilst change certainly occurred, especially in rural customs, there is now much greater stress on the continuity and ongoing development of traditional custom. It is misleading to think that custom was in decline between 1750 and 1850. Hugh Cunningham has written: 'There is no longer much support for the view that the industrial revolution was a cataclysmic force which destroyed in its entirety a self-contained world of pre-industrial leisure and replaced it with new recreations more suited to an urban and industrial society.'³ The old customs flourished because they catered for real needs, whether economic or social, and there was no sharp break with the past.

However, this does not mean that traditional customs were static and unchanging. The nineteenth-century saw the gradual 'taming' and control of custom. In the early years of the century, the salient features of popular custom were disorder and unrest, often with an undercurrent of violence, but as the century progressed, there was a general trend for custom to become more orderly and 'civilised'. There are complex reasons for the transition, as this chapter will examine. Predictably, the transition was not smooth or without controversy. The history of the Common Riding in the nineteenth-century reflects the wider developments in popular custom. The Common Riding had to adapt to a changing social environment, so that, like other customs at this time, it was increasingly restricted and regularised, and less violent and unruly. By the end of the

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nineteenth-century, the Common Riding had shed much of its threatening and
subversive image, and taken on a new guise of conservatism and deference.

This chapter traces the history and development of the Common Riding in
the nineteenth-century. Particular attention is given to Hawick Common Riding
because the changing nature of the event exemplifies wider developments occurring
in popular custom at this time. The chapter is divided into five sections. First,
there is consideration of the social and economic change in the nineteenth-century,
followed by the effect of these changes on the status of the Common Riding. There
is an examination of different attempts to undermine the Common Riding, and also
of the reasons for its survival. Finally, there is consideration of how the Common
Riding changed in response to wider social movements.

Socio-Economic Change and Popular Custom

Popular festivals and amusements like the Common Riding have always aroused
opposition. Street football had been regularly attacked since the Middle Ages
because it brought disorder and unrest, and was potentially uncontrollable.
Likewise, the Common Riding, although officially sanctioned by burgh
authorities, was sometimes thought to be immoral and harmful, because of the
heavy drinking and other debauchery which was believed to accompany it. Until
the nineteenth-century, the critics of popular customs were generally isolated and
powerless. After all, there was nothing much they could do except utter complaints
or turn a blind-eye. Gradually however, an increasing number of people withdrew
from popular custom. Attitudes hardened and became more unsympathetic as
previous toleration was replaced by questions. In 1847, the Hawick Monthly
Advertiser blamed the apparent decline of the local Common Riding on the
withdrawal of middle class support: For some years back, the Common Riding has
considerably fallen off, partly owing to the higher classes not taking the interest that they used to do.\textsuperscript{4}

There are complex reasons for the changing attitudes towards the Common Riding. In Hawick's case, they are rooted in dynamic social and economic changes which were taking place in the early nineteenth-century, and in particular with the development of the local hosiery (later knitwear) industry. Any history of the Common Riding in the nineteenth-century cannot be divorced from these changes. Commercial frame-knitting is believed to have started in Hawick in 1771 when Bailie John Hardy, a general and spirit merchant, introduced four knitting 'frames' into the town and began to manufacture full hose (stockings) of linen and coarse worsted.\textsuperscript{5} Although Hardy soon gave up the trade, he influenced other entrepreneurs to set-up similar schemes. At first, the industry made slow progress. In 1791, there were only eight frames in Hawick, and in 1800 hosiery manufacture was still insignificant. But in the early years of the nineteenth-century, the industry went through a sudden and dramatic expansion. By 1812 about 500 of Scotland's estimated 1450 frames were located in Hawick and the surrounding area, and by 1816 the annual production of frame-made stockings in the town had risen to about 328,000 pairs.\textsuperscript{6} The growth of the trade can be partly explained through fashion changes, the revival of exports, and, most importantly, the steady increase in population throughout the country. It has been estimated that from a level of 1.2 million people in 1755, the Scottish population had grown to 1.6 million in 1801. Thereafter, the pace of growth was quickened to 2.1 million in 1821 and 2.6 million

\textsuperscript{4} Hawick Monthly Advertiser, no. iii (June 1847), p. 5.
by 1841. This was accompanied by a marked shift of the Scottish population from the countryside into towns. The rising population created greater markets for manufacturers of all kinds, and the general concentration of the population in the central lowlands meant that these were easily accessible to hosiers of the Southern Uplands. It was a feature of the hosiery industry to be concentrated in certain geographical areas, of which Hawick was pre-eminent. By 1844, out of 2605 frames in Scotland, 1200 were located in Hawick. Robert Chambers appropriately described Hawick in the 1830s as ‘a sort of Glasgow in miniature’. The success of the hosiery industry made Hawick an attractive location, and migrants came into the town from other parts of Scotland, and also from Ireland and the textile districts of England. In March 1851, there were forty-six English people living in one street alone. The influx of strangers into Hawick at this time doubtless acted as a spur to intensify local identity.

Many of the early pioneers in the hosiery industry had humble origins, often learning their trade on the stocking-frame itself. For example, William Wilson, the co-founder of one of the largest hosiers in early nineteenth-century Scotland, started his working life as an apprentice frame-knitter in Glasgow. Some of these early manufacturers gave their support to the Common Riding. John Nixon was one of the most significant figures in the development of the hosiery trade in Hawick. Nixon’s son, William, became Cornet in 1813, which was slightly ironic in view of the Hawick tradition because the family had originated in Hexham. William Beck was another Englishman who settled in Hawick and set up as a master hosier. Beck’s son, William, was Cornet in 1808. However, this initial

7. In Roxburghshire, between 1755 and 1801 the population remained constant at c. 34000. By 1851, the population had risen to 51642. See J. Gray (ed.), *Scottish Population Statistics* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1952), passim.
enthusiasm for the Common Riding quickly waned. The development of the hosiery industry in the nineteenth-century created considerable personal wealth for manufacturers (although, of course, there were also some bankrupts). When William Wilson died of cholera in 1832, he left an estate valued at £8,929.12. The steady accumulation of wealth intensified social divisions between capital and labour, even in a small town like Hawick, and manufacturers became increasingly remote from their workers. They built mansion houses away from the crampt, unsanitary conditions of the town, and began to move in restricted social spheres. The rise of a manufacturing class was accompanied by growing numbers of people who catered for their needs, including such typical bourgeois figures as church ministers, doctors, solicitors, bankers and shop-owners.

Groups such as these preferred to live and mix with their own kind, and developed their own codes of behaviour and social attitudes. In particular, they were deeply influenced by a long-term shift in values and behaviour which was taking place throughout society, a phenomenon which has been termed ‘the civilising process’.13 This means the gradual shift in the thresholds of shame and embarrassment coupled with changing manners and social habits. The process spanned several centuries, beginning in the later Middle Ages among the social elite and then spreading slowly through the rest of society. It dealt with a host of changes in manners that underpin what we now call ‘decent’ behaviour, such as using a knife and fork when eating or not picking one’s nose or urinating in public. By the late eighteenth-century, middle class people had become the principal superintendents of this social reformation. Indeed, the rise of a powerful, literate and expanding elite of commercial, industrial and professional men was central to the entire civilising process. It was inevitable that the new standards of social behaviour should clash with the rough old world of popular custom.

Attitudes were further shaped by the moral revolution of evangelicalism, which had a profound impact in Scotland, especially in the first third of the nineteenth-century. The core of evangelical faith was the conviction of personal salvation through Jesus Christ, but there was also stress on the importance of being active and strenuously religious and of bringing others to God. It was no coincidence that many evangelicals looked back to the Covenanters of the seventeenth-century. Both groups were fervent, puritanical and anxious to see their ideals adopted by society as a whole. It was the duty of upper and middle class people to dedicate themselves to the service of their fellows, especially the working class, in the hope of reforming them, and for everyone to practise the traditional values of thrift, sobriety, continence and self-help. Some of the early founders of the hosiery industry in Hawick had strong evangelical and religious leanings. A travelling evangelist from Haddington named James Haldane set up one of the earliest frame 'shops', which became known as the 'Tabernacle' because of Haldane's religious opinions. Likewise, William Wilson and his partner William Watson, who co-founded one of the most successful of the early hosiery firms, were both fervent Quakers. In the nineteenth-century, many evangelical attitudes became common currency, creating a new consciousness and entering the thinking of those who might not consider themselves allies of the movement. We must remember that in the nineteenth-century religion was a major leisure pursuit for millions of people and the dominant feature of their lives. Religious thought, especially the evangelical, was clearly at odds with popular custom and diversion. The former was concerned with social and self-discipline, whilst the latter was 'worldly' and a distraction from the spiritual. Consequently, popular custom was treated with suspicion and distaste.

Closely linked with rise of evangelicalism, and often working hand-in-hand with it, was the increasing desire to obtain labour discipline. In Eric Hobsbawm's words, industry brought with it:

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the tyranny of the clock, the pace-setting machine, and the complex and carefully-timed interaction of processes: the measurement of life not in seasons .... or even in weeks and days, but in minutes, and above all a mechanised regularity of work which conflicts not only with tradition, but with all the inclinations of a humanity as yet unconditioned into it.14

Investors wanted to maximise their profits and this meant instilling regular work patterns among their employees. Here, we must consider the specific nature of the hosiery trade in Hawick and the Borders, not least because it had a crucial bearing on popular support for the Common Riding. Although the production of hosiery had expanded in the first half of the nineteenth-century, the modern factory system had barely arrived by the 1850s, and it did not become the norm until the 1890s. Instead, the early hosiery industry was centred on the manufacturers warehouse and on the stocking ‘shop’, where the hand-frames were situated and where the garments were actually made. These shops were sometimes owned by an individual stocking-maker or by a group of them, although it was more common for space to be rented out by hoteliers or publicans. The organisation of the hosiery trade maintained the dignity and independence of the framework knitter as an skilled artisan, because, as a result of his physical separation from the manufacturer, the stocking-maker was largely in control of the rhythm of his work and, to a degree, his environmental conditions. ‘Whatever his true economic and social circumstances,’ writes Clifford Gulvin, ‘[the stocking-maker] saw himself as an independent artisan who sold garments rather than his time.’15 Consequently, there was a strong tendency to work highly irregular hours. Little work was done at the beginning of the week, when ‘St. Monday’ was the traditional recovery period from the weekend. Moreover, stocking-makers stopped work when they felt like it, and they were notorious for using any occasion as an excuse for revelry. Common

celebrations included births and marriages, the purchase of new clothes, the arrival of a new entrant into the shop, and the twice yearly ritual of 'lighting up' and 'blowing out' the fires in the frameshops. In 1857, a Hawick employer Thomas Laidlaw bemoaned the lack of discipline amongst his frameworkers, stating that his men were 'scarcely yet so regular at their work as I should like'. In 1869, David Bremner, a reporter on The Scotsman, wrote that some Hawick stocking-makers: 'idle away all their time except what is absolutely necessary they should devote to labour, if they would keep the wolf from the door'. Frame-knitting of this kind was traditionally a man's occupation. The work was rigorous and demanding, and it was with good reason that the hand-frame was known as the 'four posts of misery'. The trade was also highly skilled. It took years of experience to become a first class knitter of fancy goods, thereby gaining access to the highest wages. Drink was a basic element in the culture, although, as we will see, some individuals were members of abstinence societies. David Bremner stated that the Hawick stocking-makers: 'prefer game-trapping, salmon-poaching and the excitement of the public-house to the "whirr" of a frame'. Stocking-makers were very traditional and obstinate, and they were staunch supporters of the Common Riding because it was a traditional holiday period. For employers however, popular custom of this kind was seen as a major impediment to steady and productive labour. They deplored its irregular work patterns and traditional holiday cycle. The pursuit of profit called for the elimination of such atavistic habits, although working people naturally retained their preference for free time and traditional pursuits. Clearly, the turbulence, violence and unpredictability of traditional festival life was at variance with the needs of a society which demanded collective restraint.

16. Hawick Advertiser, 3 January 1857, p. 3.
18. Ibid.
The Common Riding was inevitably caught up in this deluge of cultural change. Contemporaries were aware that changing social attitudes threatened to undermine their festival. In 1868, the *Hawick Advertiser* commented:

There is no doubt that the gradual withdrawal by the middle class from any participation in the festival has lowered the status of the Common Riding and its supporters .... that sympathy and confidence between the classes which tends to soften the inequalities of social position, and develop the kindly side of human nature, used to exist at the Common Riding to a very marked extent. But, with the rise of a new generation, accustomed from their youth to move in a more restricted circle, this feeling is rapidly disappearing, and this is the real cause of that falling off in respectability which is used as an argument for withholding support for this ancient custom.¹⁹

Why was this? Why did some sections of the middle class withdraw from the Common Riding and why did it frighten some of them enough to want to see it abandoned? We have examined changing attitudes towards popular customs in general. It is now time to investigate the controversy over the Common Riding.

*Respectable Fears and the Common Riding*

The first problem with the Common Riding was that it was difficult to control. Crowds of people were on the streets, many of whom had been drinking heavily. Everyone was excited and in high spirits, and normal inhibitions had been temporarily suspended. Inevitably, the crowd was rowdy and boisterous. A description of Hawick fair in 1857 stated that: 'The public houses enjoyed very fair patronage and there was a good deal of noise in the streets during the night, a little fighting and rather more swearing and blustering.'²⁰ Whilst the threat was

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¹⁹. *Hawick Advertiser*, 2 May 1868, p. 3.
certainly exaggerated, it was easy to imagine a drunken, excited crowd turning ugly and menacing. Crowds of any kind had long been viewed as a potential source of mischief and as harbingers of destruction and chaos. Everyone knew the horror stories of mobs running wild in the French Revolution.

Being involved in the Common Riding certainly had an element of personal risk. There was always the chance of being involved in a fight or a punch-up. There was no attempt at crowd control, and until the later nineteenth-century, horses were galloped through the streets of the town which were thronged with people. In 1868 and 1876, this had fatal consequences at Hawick Common Riding. For most people however, the greatest injury they were likely to suffer was to their personal dignity. The rough and tumble of traditional custom was incompatible with dignified reserve, and respectable opinion blanched at the thought of getting involved. In Lanark Lanimer Day, it was customary to throw hot rolls or cakes from the roof of the Provost's house, 'in the scramble for which there is often much of the ludicrous'. Also in Lanark, there were duckings in the River Mouss near where one of the march stones was placed. In 1828, William Davidson, a local historian, described the indignity of the 'ducking hole':

Those who for the first time have enrolled themselves under the banners of the procession, must wade in, and grope for the stone, during which act they are tumbled over and immersed. There is no distinction of rank, - and were the greatest potentate to appear, he would share the fate of the most humble plebeian.

Likewise, in Aberdeen, those riding the marches for the first time had to endure the 'doupin' ceremony:

23. Ibid, p. 82.
Two of the company, who are already ‘doup-free burgesses’, will then take the novice by the shoulders, and two others will lay hold of his legs, lifting him breast-high above the point of a rock, to which they will return his posteriors with a velocity proportioned to their respect for his character.24

To some, these traditions were little more than high-spirits, but for others they threatened a serious affront on their dignity, self-respect and social status. Quite simply, it was beneath them to get involved. Moreover, for evangelicals and other fervent Christians, there was a suspicion of ‘paganism’ and ‘druidism’ about the Common Riding. Participants wore oak leaves, dressed themselves in green, carried branches of trees in procession and went dancing at sunrise: all of which was very suspect to the religious mind. The notion that paganism lingered in the Common Riding was largely fanciful, and owed much to evangelical paranoia which saw the Devil’s influence in everything. Nevertheless, it is indicative that the wearing of oak leaves in Hawick Common Riding was prohibited between 1855 and 1886.

The Common Riding also had the unfortunate effect of attracting ‘undesirable’ people into an already overcrowded town. Describing preparations for Hawick Common Riding in 1858, the Border Advertiser noted: ‘Tawdry looking women and convict looking men are pouring into the town from all quarters’.25 These included blind and lame beggars, and ‘a swarm of vagrants and blacklegs’ (meaning those who cheat at gambling). It was inevitable that the Common Riding should attract, in the Advertiser’s words, ‘a large sprinkling of that wandering class who gain a precarious existence in attending such occasions as this’.26 Popular festivals like the Common Riding presented ideal opportunities for the

25. Border Advertiser, 11 June 1858, p. 3.
26. Ibid.
unscrupulous and the unabashed. Locals were in festival mood and the normal restraints on their behaviour had been temporarily suspended. There were rich pickings to be had for anyone forthright enough to look for them. Money which had been carefully hoarded for the festival was now liberally exchanged, almost given away. Locals were willing to spend on almost anything, regardless of quality or expense. And no-one really worried about it, at least not until the Common Riding had passed. It was also feared, perhaps rightly, that the Common Riding attracted criminals into the town. It was well-known that pickpockets (who were described in the *Hawick Advertiser* of 1857 as ‘the clever-handed ones’

operated amongst crowds, and that race-meetings, with all their excitement and distraction, were one of their favourite haunts.

Of all the strangers who invaded the town for the Common Riding, it was the travelling showmen and women who aroused most suspicion. In part, there was nothing new about this. The itinerant lifestyle of the showpeople had always created hostility (and envy) amongst the settled population. In the nineteenth-century, the fairground offended many sensibilities, not least because it seemed to encourage frivolity and wantonness in an age of dignity and restraint. Like the race-course, the staple attraction of the fairground was betting, which was an anathema to some sections of respectable society. Describing the Hawick Common Riding fair in 1856, the *Hawick Advertiser* noted: ‘Showmen and fighting men were present in plenty. Dice men and knaves of every description reaped an abundant harvest, the cardsharpers as usual getting their livelihoods out of the pockets of the shrewdest.’

Part of the objection was that people were stupidly wasting their money on trivialities, and allowing themselves to be taken-in. Of course, those involved thought of themselves as having good fun.

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Critics also believed that the fairground was 'lewd and sinful'. In 1883, the *Hawick News* noted that the fairground featured 'gaudily attired dancing girls of all ages'.\(^{29}\) Stall-holders used women (often the stall-holders themselves) to lure customers and encourage them to part with their money. In 1875, the *Hawick Express* noted that: 'Shooting saloons mustered strongly, in charge of which young ladies whose bewitching smiles induced many to try a shot'.\(^{30}\) Until the introduction of large, mechanically-driven rides in 1880s, which effectively advertised themselves, the fairground was an assortment of tents and booths, each competing against the other. Some of these booths were completely enclosed, like small theatres, and customers had to be drawn in. 'Parade girls', perhaps dressed in circus leotard and tights, were sometimes used to gain public attention and in particular to attract male clientele with the promise of seeing more inside the tent.\(^{31}\) For some critics, the display was tantamount to prostitution (which in some cases it may have been).

Fairground booths were certainly no place for the serious-minded or the squeamish. The gypsy origins of many of the travellers was revealed with the presence of fortune-tellers and astrologists, something which inevitably rankled evangelicals and scientific rationalists. Another common feature of the fairground was the presence of human curiosities, described in the *Hawick Advertiser* of 1858 as 'specimens of nature's freaks in caravans'.\(^{32}\) Whilst some of these 'freak shows' were probably fairly innocent, such as displays of Zulu warriors and 'Red Indians', others were base and repellent, at least by modern standards. At Hawick Common Riding in 1871, it was possible to see amputees and people who had been deformed

\(^{29}\) *Hawick News*, 9 June 1883, p. 3.

\(^{30}\) *Hawick Express*, 12 June 1875, p. 3.


\(^{32}\) *Hawick Advertiser*, 19 June 1858, p. 3.
in accidents, 'one with his arm burned to the bone by the latest colliery explosion'. Respectable opinion regarded these displays as distasteful and degrading, although, as R. D. Sexton has argued, the fairground did provide some sort of living for the unfortunates displayed there, who might otherwise have been forced to beg. Freak shows of this kind gradually declined, thanks to improved social provision and a widespread change in public sensibilities. However, it was still possible to see 'giants' and bearded ladies at fairgrounds until the 1970s.

Another objectionable feature of the fairground was the 'boxing-booth'. Describing the Common Riding fairground of 1858, the Hawick Advertiser said: 'Mr Mickey Bent, a professor of the true British art of self-defence, accompanied by a staff of assistants, juvenile and adult, issued most pressing invitations to the public and offered free admission and a glass of brandy to any gentleman who would make a choice of and vanquish any member of his company.' Until the early nineteenth-century, bare-knuckle fights were a common feature of the fairground. Although regulated contests with gloves were introduced, boxing-booths were dire places, the epitome of fairground degradation. Contests were often extremely violent, more like modern wrestling than pugilism. The professional staff, which sometimes included female boxers, knew that money and their livelihoods were at stake and were ready to resort to any 'mean tricks' to win. Boxing had little appeal to the respectable middle class, but it was extremely popular amongst working people. (It also had its upper-class adherents.) Crowds gathered to watch contests, especially when a local champion was matched against one of the travellers. Tempered by drink and violent excitement, it was easy to imagine the crowd getting out of control.

Respectable opinion was also perturbed by the use of animals in the

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33. *Hawick Express*, 10 June 1871, p. 3.
34. Sexton, 'Travelling People', p. 65.
35. *Hawick Advertiser*, 19 June 1858, p. 3.
fairground. Animal welfare was one of the great 'causes' of the nineteenth-century, and its development is a perfect illustration of the 'civilising process' in action. For centuries, ill-treatment of animals was commonplace and unremarkable. All levels of society, including royalty, accepted, even delighted, in it. Gradually however, attitudes began to change. In his book on the development of modern sport in Britain, Richard Holt has written: 'From the sixteenth century through to the late eighteenth century the ancient notion that animals existed only for their usefulness to man or for the pleasure they might afford was increasingly called into question.'

Scientific advance showed that man was only part of creation, and as a result all of God's creatures had an equal right to exist. By the late eighteenth-century, concern for animal welfare was one of the most distinctive features of middle class life. In 1824, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was formed, followed by its Scottish equivalent in 1839. The inspiration behind the Society was predominantly evangelical and aimed at reforming the behaviour of the lower orders. As F. M. L. Thomson summarises: 'The idea was to civilize the rough and brutish manners of the lower classes by forcing them to think about and deal kindly with creatures even lower than themselves, as a step towards showing consideration for others and thus coming to religion.'

The use, and abuse, of animals was an ancient feature of festival life. Traditional fairs had vicious animal 'entertainments', such as bull-baiting and cock-fighting. Part of the problem was, like boxing, these sports excited the blood-lust of crowds. Numerous efforts were made to stamp out animal sports, but they

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were hugely popular and very persistent. According to the *Hawick Express*, organised cock-fighting ‘witnessed by 4-500 people’ took place on the burgh lands as late as 1860. Less barbaric, the fairground also exploited animals as performers. A staple attraction was the presence of ‘intelligent’ animals, such as dogs, cats and farm animals, which appeared to tell the time or count by pawing the ground. ‘Toby the Learned Pig’, who supposedly was skilled in basic arithmetic, was a feature at Hawick Common Riding fair in the 1850s. Like the fairground itself, performing animals could be viewed two ways. For some, they were just light-hearted diversion, but for others they were a serious abuse of God’s creation.

The animals which suffered most in the Common Riding were horses. There is no doubt that some riders were ignorant of basic horsemanship and caused distress to their mounts. But of greater concern to respectable opinion was horse racing. As we have seen, racing has probably always been a key feature of the Common Riding. In the mid-nineteenth century, critics argued that the Common Riding was just an excuse to hold a race meeting. In 1871, the *Hawick Express*, whilst generally supportive of the Common Riding, admitted that the ceremonial aspects of the festival had been overshadowed by the racing:

The want of sympathy and support which used to be given by the authorities and wealthier citizens to the Cornet, together with the great influx of strangers, have all combined to render the Common Riding less the centre of attraction and less participated in by the bulk of the inhabitants and make the occasion more of a turf speculation.

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38. In July 1996, *The Scotsman* reported that three men had been jailed for being involved in organised cockfighting in the North-East of England. The magistrate stated that it was ‘quite incredible that on the eve of the twenty-first century, I should be dealing with such illegal and barbaric practices’. *The Scotsman*, 6 July 1996, p. 9.

39. *Hawick Express*, 12 June 1875, p. 3.

40. *Ibid*, 10 June 1871, p. 3.
In 1872, Reverend James McEwan delivered a lecture to Hawick Total Abstinence Society entitled *Abominations: Local and General* in which he claimed that the Common Riding was innocuous, apart from the horse racing and its ‘sordid accompaniments’. McEwan went on: ‘the Common Riding would die out in three years were it not for these horse races, and the horse racing would die out throughout the country were it not for gambling and drinking.’ Other critics were even less accommodating or sympathetic. In a letter to the *Hawick Express* in 1872, ‘Minister’ expressed his disgust that the town council subscription to the race fund had been raised to £20. He added: ‘I look upon the Common Riding as a relic of a semi-barbarous age, degrading to those who engage in it, and demoralising to the general community.’ Part of the problem was that horse racing was incompatible with animal welfare, and that the horses used in racing were clearly seen to suffer. In 1802, James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, visited Leith races and found the event disturbing and disagreeable: ‘the only sensations I felt were rather unpleasant. I pitied the poor animals that were strained at such a rate and trembled for the riders, who were cleaving the atmosphere with a velocity I had never before witnessed.’ However, the main objection for critics was that horse racing was principally a country sport, and they disliked it because it appealed to the idle rich and idle poor. Horse racing broke the cardinal rule that recreation should be serious, not sensual. It was widely believed that race meetings, like modern football matches, were scenes of indulgence, rowdism, drunkenness and vulgarity. As with football, this opinion was based largely on prejudice and rumour, although it also contained an element of truth. Race meetings were important social gatherings, which featured open-air dancing, amusements, side-stalls and a large dose of ‘carnival’. Consequently, many social evils were to be found at the race course, or so it was feared. It was also widely believed that race meetings, like football, held a latent threat to public order. Violence and crowd trouble were

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42. *Ibid*, 11 May 1872, p. 3.

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known to erupt at meetings, especially when a bookmaker ‘welshed’ on his debts.

The Common Riding races attracted particular criticism because, although prizes were awarded, the level of sport was poor when compared with the more famous national meetings. The jockeys were generally local amateurs. In 1858, only three riders entered for the ‘Farmers’ Steeplechase’ at Hawick, during which the horses refused to jump a stone fence until it was lowered by spectators.44 Local race courses were crude and makeshift. Tracks were roughly marked out and there were no barriers or fences to protect the public from the galloping horses. In 1858, the Hawick Advertiser noted that children and ‘foolish people’ put themselves at risk by wandering over the course when races were in progress, ‘and the inevitable dogs appearing at a critical moment’.45 It was not just spectators (or dogs) who were in jeopardy. The old race course at Hawick was shaped in a figure ‘8’, which increased the likelihood of collisions between horses. Criticisms were also made of the athletic events (‘the gymnastics’), which accompanied the horse racing. In 1859, it was claimed that people took part in the wrestling competitions at Hawick ‘only to get themselves laughed at’, whilst the sack race was dismissed as ‘an absurdity’.46

For respectable society, one of the most depressing feature of the Common Riding races and games was betting and gambling. The problem was compounded at the Common Riding because betting was open and obvious. No-one could ignore it, even if they wanted to. A description of Hawick Common Riding in 1883 noted that ‘bookmakers had fantastic dresses and powerful lungs and kept bawling and

44. Hawick Advertiser, 19 June 1858, p. 3.
45. During his visit to Leith races in 1802, James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, was shocked to see a ‘poor boy’ knocked over by a horse and sustain serious injuries. ‘I saw him carried by me in the greatest agony and, as I believed, on the borders of eternity; I felt extremely for him and wished for his sake that there had been no races that day.’ Hogg, Highland Tours, p. 20.
46. Border Advertiser, 17 June 1859, p. 3.

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shouting to the terror and alarm of those who were not betting inclined'.

There was an enormous social gulf over betting. To some, the whole culture of betting, with its ill-gotten gains, hopeless addictions and material lusts, was the ultimate symbol of human sinfulness and folly. Respectable opinion was deeply offended by the sight of working class betting. In 1855, the *Hawick Advertiser*, although like other local newspapers supportive of the Common Riding, stated: 'That festivals like the Common Riding are calculated to bring out and show off in their native colour the worst and most degraded of our species is but true. Of the many strange sights that met the eye of the observer at our annual festival, that of tossing for money was the worst.'

Betting, it was thought, led naturally to cheating and dishonesty, and hence to the moral corruption of the soul. There was a strong suspicion, perhaps partly justified, that some of the Common Riding races were rigged. In 1858, the *Hawick Advertiser* stated: 'The footraces were well contested but there was a most shameful attempt to deprive one of the winners of his place by knocking him down as he was nearing the post.' But for many working class people, betting was a way-of-life. In George Orwell's words, it was 'the cheapest of luxuries', because it offered the chance of instant enrichment and escape. Like alcohol, it was hope for the desperate.

At the root of all the problems with the Common Riding there was drink. Drink was the greatest social demon of the nineteenth-century. In the words of Christopher Smout, it was 'an ubiquitous permeation of Scottish society'. Smout quotes the statistic that in the 1830s the population aged fifteen years and over

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48. *Hawick Advertiser*, 7 July 1855, p. 3.
49. *Ibid*, 19 June 1858, p. 3.
was drinking, on average, the equivalent of a little under a pint each of duty-charged whisky a week. Smout adds: ‘One might imagine that consumption was very unevenly divided, and that many men were drank several bottles of whisky a week whilst many women drank little or nothing.'

52 Drink was consumed in enormous quantities by all social classes in Scotland. There were no legal restrictions who might buy drink. In the eighteenth-century, the Scots were renowned as drinkers of claret, but in the nineteenth-century there was a switch to drinking whisky, mainly because it was cheap and readily available. Whisky had important associations with courtesy and hospitality throughout Scotland. Daniel Patton, the historian of temperance in Scotland, has written: ‘Whisky was intimately associated with many of the things most dear to Scots, with hospitality, with expressions of equality among men of similar standing, with the great occasions of family life and the enjoyment of what brief recreations existed.'

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Any occasion was used as an excuse to drink. Drinking to the point of intoxication was condoned at fairs, holidays, funerals and festivals. Recalling the eighteenth-century of his youth, the Reverend Thomas Somerville of Jedburgh wrote: ‘Intemperance in drinking was frequent .... At public festive meetings, there was indeed a wanton rivalry in drinking to excess, and a species of merit ascribed to the person who held out longest’. Drinking was central to leisure, and for working men the pub or alehouse was at the heart of their cultural and social life. ‘Drink was the cement of social fabric at the lower reaches of society,’ writes James Walvin. ‘To take a man away from his beer [or whisky] was to isolate him, to maroon him from friends and from the familiar and often vital cultural forms.’

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52. Ibid, p. 133.
Hawick, the stocking-makers and other working men were notorious for their consumption of alcohol. In part, this was because stocking-makers worked in damp, airless conditions. Over-crowding in homes also drove men into the pubs. In 1851, there was an average of six persons to every dwelling in the parish of Wilton, Hawick. As Clifford Gulvin states: ‘Such homes were poor competitors against the warmth and the brightness of the local hostelry.’ In fact, it was extremely difficult for a working man not to drink. Drinking was seen as ‘manly’, and hard for an individual to refuse. As Thomas Somerville wrote: ‘A profusion of wine and spirits was placed to the account of hospitality and kindness, and an inflexible abstinence from customary indulgence censured as a certain indication of a sullen and niggardly disposition.’

Drink has always been an integral part of the Common Riding, which on occasion has brought the event into disrepute. In 1725, the Hawick town council complained of ‘several enormities, debates, and revellings committed at the riding of the marches .... both by old and young men, who were overtaken by excess in drunkenness’. Huge quantities of drink were consumed during the Common Riding. Riders were given ‘ale or brandie’ when they went out to ride the marches and also on their return. In 1815, well over half of James Henderson’s expenditure as Cornet of Hawick went on drink. His total bill for drink was £81 4s. 11d. (out of £138 9s. 10d.), which included £29 18s. 5d. on whisky, £18 9s. on rum, £16 8s. 3d. on ale, £16 3d. on wine, and 6s. on ‘shrub’ (sweetened rum - apparently not very popular because half a gallon was returned to the supplier). In 1884, Mr McKenzie of the Spread Eagle hotel in Kelso, was awarded the contract to supply drink at the Hawick races. As locals looked on in amazement, two wagons were loaded with ‘fully 1000

bottles of beer and aerated waters', and a steam traction engine had to be attached to assist in pulling the wagons, which weighed 14 tons, overnight by road to Hawick.60 Publicans, brewers and others working in the drink trade were eager supporters of the Common Riding, because they could use the occasion to maximise their profits. Publicans and hoteliers often supplied the plate for the Common Riding races, although, like all commercial sponsorship, this was calculated in their long-term advantage. Drink lubricated and financed the Common Riding. Until 1865, the Hawick Cornet raised the bulk of his expenses by selling drink. From his election to the day of the Common Riding, the Cornet was granted the right to sell spirits from his house without a licence, 'and a lucrative trade some of the Cornet's did. The town's herd also had the privilege of having a tent on the Moor, and there the colour was stationed.'61 It was hardly a coincidence that when Hawick town council withdrew their countenance of the Common Riding in the mid-nineteenth century, the 'bussing' of the town flag took place in the Cornet's favourite pub.

It is easy to find humour in the excesses of the Common Riding, but this is to ignore the fact that alcohol abuse was a serious social problem which caused suffering and distress, often to the innocent. Heavy drinking bred sporadic, casual violence. In 1862, it was observed that hiring fairs in the Borders, 'are not infrequently the scenes of hot encounters when the whisky begins to tell and the blood of the revellers gets warmed.'62 Drink was the cause (and the symptom) of much of the social misery of the nineteenth-century, especially to married women, who were the unfortunate victims of their husband's excesses. Isolated and vulnerable, most women had little choice but to suffer in silence. In 1894, Reverend J. W. Shannon of Hawick probably spoke a great deal of truth when he said:

60. Quoted in Scott, 'Tradesman's Handicap', p. 13.
61. Hawick Express, 12 June 1875, p. 3.
62. Hawick Advertiser, 24 May 1862, p. 3.
Some women in the town looked back upon that festival as one of the most dreadful experiences of their lives. At that time their husbands seemed to be unlike themselves. It seemed utterly wicked that women were almost maddened by the want and difficulties they had to suffer. To those who wished the real good of the town, it might be a good thing to stop the observation of the Common Riding.63

Drinking habits in the nineteenth-century were a mirror of social change. Traditionally, heavy drinking had been the mark of rank and wealth. 'In pre-industrial Scotland,' writes Daniel Patton, 'wealth, leisure and education removed constraints on drunkenness rather than strengthened them. In the nineteenth-century, the reverse came to be true.'64 The leaders of society gradually became more restrained in their drinking habits, and, despite the rise of the temperance movement, indulgence was largely identified with working class life. Greater moderation in the use of alcohol was only one aspect of fundamental changes in conventional behaviour, some of which we have already examined. By 1850, it was a basic rule of middle class life to exercise discretion and restraint in drinking. 'Dignity and self-control, highly valued by the middle class, were incompatible with being drunk.'65 This does not mean that middle class people ceased consuming alcohol, but they were less willing to get drunk in public, and more likely to drink in private at home and at mealtimes. Patton writes: 'To be drunk in public was more than a minor misdemeanour, it was to reject in an open and dramatic way the idea of respectability and the middle class way of life.'66 By the 1850s, few respectable gentlemen entered a public house. Middle class people still liked to drink, and there were plenty of middle (and upper) class drunks. The difference was that working class drunkenness was open and visual, whilst that of the middle class was less conspicuous and more easily hidden. Popular festivals like the Common Riding

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63. Ibid, 22 June 1894, p. 4.
64. Paton, 'Drink and Temperance', p. 44.
66. Ibid.
only exacerbated the problem. In 1877, the Hawick Advertiser noted: 'The refreshment tents both at the Muir and the Haugh, as usual, did a roaring trade, of which the evidences unfortunately were not far to seek.' The sight of inebriated working men (and the occasional woman) offended respectable opinion. Drunkenness was often witnessed during the Common Riding, and it was the strongest reason to abandon the festival.

The Abolitionists

It has been shown that between around 1820 and 1870 many people withdrew from the Common Riding and refused to support it. The Common Riding brought upheaval to the town, and, it was believed, encouraged widespread drunkenness, gambling, extravagance and debauchery. It was irrelevant that their fears were greatly exaggerated and owed much to ignorance and prejudiced gossip. The Common Riding was seen as a threat to public morality, and therefore it was right to try to abolish it. The next section will demonstrate some of the attempts to curtail the event and also why these attempts were unsuccessful. Particular reference is made again to Hawick Common Riding, largely because of the existence of a detailed local press, which gave extensive coverage to the controversy. The dispute over Hawick Common Riding was only part of a much wider debate about traditions and local customs which was taking place throughout Britain at this time.

Throughout the nineteenth-century (and previously), Hawick Common Riding had attracted criticism. In 1817, the town council stated that, 'the Common Riding has been very hurtful to the morals of the young people in the town'.

67. Hawick Advertiser, 9 June 1877, p. 3.
68. Hawick Records, 17 May 1817.
Similarly, in 1833, meetings of the Comet and his supporters were described as ‘corrupt to the morals of youth’. Increasingly, the town council tried to distance itself from the Common Riding, in the hope that without council support the event would wither away and die. Until its reform in 1861, the town council was dominated by a self-perpetuating clique of local businessmen and manufacturers. The council had thirty-one members, of whom fifteen were permanent councillors elected by the sitting body of the council (in other words, by themselves), thus earning the council the nickname of the ‘eternal council’. There were also fourteen trades-councillors who were chosen by the seven incorporated trades, and two magistrates elected annually by burgesses. Whilst some members of the council undoubtedly supported the Common Riding, those representing local manufacturing interests were generally opposed to it, for reasons we have already explored. Thus, in the 1850s, civic countenance of the Common Riding was largely withdrawn. It had, for instance, been customary for the council to elect twelve ‘burleymen’ from the burgess community to accompany the bailies or the junior bailie in the riding of the marches. In 1857, this practice was abandoned and it was never reinstated. Likewise, the Common Riding flag had traditionally been ‘bussed’ in the home of either the senior or junior magistrate and then displayed from their window. Between 1862 and 1887, the flag was bussed in a pub or hotel chosen by the Comet and then displayed from the pub window.

There was one exception to the withdrawal of civic countenance by the town council: the annual election of the Comet. Between 1856 and 1878, this became the subject of great controversy. Traditionally, the town council had elected a Comet from a short-list of names provided by Common Riding supporters (or, more specifically, the ‘Comet’s lads’). In 1856, the Comet-elect, David Patterson, declined to take his post because of the expense involved. This was the opportunity which some members of the council had been waiting for. The council refused to

69. Ibid, 15 May 1833.
elect a replacement and resolved that in future it was up to the ‘lads’ to choose their own Cornet. Clearly, it was felt that by electing a Cornet, the council were condoning the excesses of the Common Riding. It is interesting that there was an immediate reaction to the council’s decision. A new Cornet, Adam Knox, was chosen at a public meeting, and the Common Riding went ahead as usual. But the incident left a sour taste. The town council was seen to have failed in one of its most important public duties. Twelve months later, in 1857, the issue resurfaced. On this occasion, public pressure forced the council to rescind its position of the previous year and elect a Cornet as usual. A petition was circulated through the town which requested the Council to undertake the election. Grudgingly, the Council accepted and agreed to make the appointment.

The question was not, however, allowed to rest. In 1860, Bailie Thomas Purdom, a local solicitor and council magistrate, refused to take part in the Cornet’s election, ‘as he considered the acceptance of the office was the worst thing that a young man could do’. Purdom’s attitude demonstrated a remarkable turn-around for the Purdom family, because his father, Robert, a farmer, had been Cornet in 1803. Although a Cornet was chosen, the majority of town council members followed Thomas Purdom’s example and refused to vote. Two years later, in 1862, the issue was raised again. By this time, the town council had been reformed (after much debate), and now consisted of fifteen members elected by (male) voters on a £5 franchise. The new council was composed of seven manufacturers, three solicitors, a builder, a draper, a tailor, a millwright and a grocer. At a stormy public meeting, the council sharply divided over the election. Speaking against the election, Peter Laidlaw, a local factory-owner and manufacturer, made it clear that the debate was really about the future, if any, of the Common Riding:

70. See page 259.
71. Hawick Advertiser, 12 May 1860, p. 3
It was no good reason that a custom should continue simply because it had hitherto been observed, and there was no benefit accruing to the public from its observation. Besides, the Common Riding was the remnant of a barbarous age, a custom verging into dotage, a mere shadow of what it once was, a mere burlesque, a mock pageantry. The election to the Cornetship had been the means of bringing many young men to a premature grave.72

However, not all the manufacturers on the council subscribed to Peter Laidlaw's opinions. In a portent of things to come, Walter Laing, director of one of Hawick's largest companies at the time, argued that it was best for the council to organise and control the Common Riding:

The more countenance given to [the Common Riding] by the authorities, the more likely [it] would be conducted in an orderly and decorous manner. It was quite proper that there should be a certain number of holidays in the year for the working classes, and working men should have the opportunity of enjoying their holidays in a proper and reasonable manner.73

Significantly, in the 1860s, Walter Laing’s company, Dicksons and Laings, was at the forefront of new developments in the hosiery trade. The company had introduced steam-driven machinery which meant that the majority of the workforce were based in a factory unit and, unlike the traditional stocking-makers, were subject to factory legislation and controls.74 The final outcome of the Common Riding dispute of 1862 was that the council decided by one vote to continue the election of the Cornet, 'a result which was received with much applause by a large

72. Ibid, 17 May 1862, p. 3.
73. Ibid.
74. Walter Laing was also the founder of the Hawick Working Men’s Building Society, a director of the Hawick dairy, instigator of the local hospital and free library, and a champion of free trade and Gladstonian liberalism. The introduction of power looms in the hosiery trade led to the increasing employment of girls and unmarried women, who were cheaper to employ. See C. Gulvin, 'The Rise and Fall of Dicksons and Laings, Hosiery and Tweed Manufacturers 1802-1908', THAS (1975), pp. 29-40.

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number of the public who had been present at the meeting and who had followed the discussion with keen and lively interest. But the dispute still was not over. In 1876, the Council again demurred over the election. Writing to the *Hawick Express*, the self-styled ‘Progress’ said that if the council elected a Cornet, ‘they are giving their countenance to a great deal of drinking, promiscuous dancing, late hours and all their concomitant evils’. In 1877, the town council refused to elect a Cornet, and the duty fell again to a public meeting.

Other attempts were made to undermine the Common Riding. Counter-attractions were organised to entice people, especially children, away from the race course and its many temptations. Taking advantage of the new railway system, local churches and other religious groups organised excursions and outings on the day of the Common Riding, and these were deliberately stage-managed as an alternative to the festival. In 1874, Hawick Sabbath Schools organised an outing to Shankend, a farm several miles from Hawick. Shortly after the Cornet and his supporters had passed along the High Street on their way to riding the marches, a huge procession of adults and children, some carrying religious banners, went the opposite way to the railway station. The choice between salvation and damnation could not have been made more explicit. If local newspapers are to be believed, these day-trips were popular and well-supported. In 1875, it was estimated that 1453 children and 670 adults took part in the Hawick Sabbath Schools excursion to Langholm. Excursions of this kind gave locals a rare opportunity for pleasure and enjoyment, even if in the circumstances some of it was rather forced. Trippers experienced new sights, played games, listened to the band who accompanied them, and sang hymns. Indeed, there was probably lots of fun to be had. Reporting the Hawick excursion of 1875, the local newspaper noted: ‘music

75. J. Edgar, *Hawick in the Early Sixties* (Hawick, 1913), p. 120.
76. *Hawick Express*, 6 May 1876, p. 3.
77. *Ibid*, 6 June 1874, p. 3.
78. *Hawick Advertiser*, 12 June 1875, p. 3.
[was not] wanting, one fellow performing with rare skill on a coffee-pot made into an instrument played like a flute, while violin and banjo gave harmonious accompaniment.\textsuperscript{79} The muscular and energetic organised mini-sports tournaments, often between married and unmarried men, thus imitating a traditional division of festival life. Above all, there was always a large picnic, which was probably why many children went in the first place. Lemonade and sweets were more eagerly consumed than the underlying religious message of the day. Occasionally, religious groups tackled the Common Riding head on. At Hawick Common Riding of 1873, a group of evangelicals from Carlisle, assisted by ‘several townspeople’, distributed tracts and informed locals that the road to the race course was ‘the way to Hell’. According to the local newspaper however, there were no converts.\textsuperscript{80}

The failure of these evangelicals was, in many ways, symbolic. It has been shown that the Common Riding attracted a great deal of criticism and hostility during the nineteenth-century. Critics believed that the event was detrimental to public morality and that it should be abandoned. And yet the abolitionists were completely unsuccessful in their aim. Tradition was firmly established, and the Common Riding continued in its familiar venues, although it did not survive unaltered. As we will see, change and adaptation were necessary for the festival to endure. The next section will examine why, despite pressures to the contrary, the Common Riding survived and continued to flourish.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Hawick Express, 26 May 1893, p. 3.
The Supporters

There is no doubt that criticisms of the Common Riding were often counter-productive. Reviewing the Common Riding of 1872, the *Hawick Express* noted that there had been an impressively large turn-out of 'married men and burleymen' and 'Comet's lads', and concluded that the opponents of the Common Riding 'more than all the other considerations combined have helped to revive the festival. Opposition is sometimes productive of remits not quite in keeping with the objects aimed at.'81 Critics failed to realise that local support for the Common Riding was deeply entrenched. In 1886, it was written about Hawick Common Riding: 'Of late years attempts have occasionally been made to throw discredit upon the proceedings and uproot the time-honoured institution, but instead of having the desired effect, they have only served to demonstrate the tenacious hold it has in the hearts of the people.'82

Supporters of the Common Riding were always ready to defend it and to promote its best features. In 1858, the *Hawick Advertiser* claimed: 'Surely men of the very strictest sense of propriety must admit that there cannot but be something excellent in an occasion which, ever for two days, drives care and sadness away from to give place to merry making and gaiety and joy.'83 No-one denied that there were problems with the Common Riding, but these should not obscure the positive aspects of the festival. It was argued that only a small minority of people caused trouble at the Common Riding. In 1862, the *Hawick Advertiser* commented: 'It is wrong to deprive the many of the means of enjoyment because a few worthless, thoughtless people choose to abuse them.'84 Three years later, the *Border Advertiser* had similar sentiments: 'Such occasions are sadly abused by some, but

81. Ibid, 4 June 1872, p. 3.
83. *Hawick Advertiser*, 19 June 1858, p. 3.
84. Ibid, 14 June 1862, p. 3.
they are enjoyed in a rational way by many more.'85 Supporters of the Common Riding stressed that the problems were exaggerated and the festival had much to recommend it. In 1848, the Border Advertiser reported the annual dinner at Hawick Common Riding, and noted with approval that the occasion was dignified and restrained. Toasts were drunk 'with rapturous enthusiasm' to the Queen, Prince Albert and Her Majesty's Ministers. The Advertiser concluded:

We would solicit to those sentimentalists who are hostile to our annual festival to take a glance at the dinner party who annually assemble at Mr Fenwick's [the local hotelier] and say if they can decry anything at variance with the rule of etiquette or morality. The meetings are quite as decorous and well-conducted as a soiree.86

Clearly then, the Common Riding had its supporters as well as its critics. Throughout the nineteenth-century, the event continued to attract a wide spectrum of support. It is far too simplistic to argue that respectable society shunned the Common Riding until the disagreeable aspects of the festival had been purged. Some people certainly withdrew, as we have seen, but others remained loyal and supportive. Those features which appalled some individuals, undoubtedly appealed to others. Horse racing, for example, had its middle class enthusiasts. Part of the attraction was that racing was popular among the aristocracy, including royalty, and gave middle class people an opportunity to ape their social superiors. Even at a minor meeting like Hawick, there was a degree of social snobbery in operation. Until the 1880s, entry to the race course was free, but the socially pretentious could pay to sit in a temporary grandstand which had been specially erected for the event. In 1848, it was reported that the grandstand was 'well filled with the paragons of excellence', who also had exclusive access to a refreshment bar situated underneath the stand, which kept the gentle from the unwashed. The bar was hosted by the enterprising Mrs Hay, landlady of the Crown hotel, who

85. Border Advertiser, 16 June 1865, p. 3.
86. Ibid, 16 June 1848, p. 3.
exemplified the commercial aspect of the Common Riding and also the close association which has always existed between organised sports and the drink trade. The Common Riding races attracted some aristocratic support and patronage. Horse racing was an important feature of upper class life and members of the aristocracy were often keen to support local meetings. Whilst riding the marches in 1848, the Selkirk principals were given a 'generous donation' for the races by the family of the late MP, Andrew Pringle. Aristocratic visitors to the races were not unknown, and their graceful presence was fawningly reported in the local newspapers, even though most of the visitors were fairly minor aristocracy. In 1857, the Hawick Advertiser fawningly reported that Lord Hay, brother of the Duchess of Wellington, had been seen in the paddock at Hawick. Whilst upper class visitors of this kind were rare, they were generally welcomed because they leant the Common Riding an air of respectable approval, and, it was also hoped, their financial support.

However, supporters of the Common Riding were wary of outsiders exerting too much influence on their event. In 1877, the Hawick Express commented:

Many attempts to destroy the local part of the amusements are to make the meeting more aristocratic. Those imbued with aristocratic notions desire no exhibition of common persons contesting on horseback for whips. The idea of weavers and stocking-makers indulging in the exhilarating pastime of horsemanship is painful to their notions of dignity.

There is no doubt that anyone seeking to influence or divert the Common Riding encountered fierce resistance, especially from working people who wished to

87. Ibid. See also J. Edgar, 'Common Riding Finances 85 Years Ago: The Festival of 1846', THAS (1932), pp. 1-7.
88. Ibid, 23 June 1848, p. 3.
89. Hawick Advertiser, 13 June 1857, p. 3.
90. Hawick Express, 24 February 1877, p. 4.
protect their traditional rights and customs. The working classes in the nineteenth-century, argues F. M. L. Thomson, were not ‘putty in the hands of a masterful and scheming bourgeoisie, a remote and powerful state, and a set of technological alternatives’.\textsuperscript{91} As we have seen, reformers and others wanted to change (or abolish) the Common Riding, but they were not given free reign to do so. Working class people resisted their interference. As late as the 1870s, Hawick stocking-makers maintained traditional patterns of work and established holiday periods and customs. In his book \textit{Leisure in the Industrial Revolution}, Hugh Cunningham summarises the importance of custom to working class people: ‘What was significant to the worker was not to be able to trace deep historical roots for his customs, rather his sense that those customs were somehow natural, rightly and properly interconnected with work, and, most importantly a fixed and stable point in a threatened world. The defence of custom linked one generation to another, gave a known rhythm to the work week and the work year, and provided moments of community when community was under stress.’\textsuperscript{92}

The readiness of working people to defend their traditional rights and customs was demonstrated in 1857 when Hawick Town Council refused to elect a Cornet. The reaction of local people to the Council’s decision was immediate and decisive. Within a week, a petition was drawn-up and signed by ‘an immense number of the inhabitants’ requesting the Council to rescind their decision. The petition stated that the Common Riding was, ‘a festival which has been the delight of the people of Hawick for a long series of years, and is still welcomed with pleasure and enthusiasm by the present generation.’ The petition went on to describe the Cornet as ‘the keystone of the arch’. The Cornet had the practical value of collecting money for the races, and also a ‘vast amount of romantic associations’. It is interesting that the petitioners were deferential towards the


Council and were anxious to gain their approval for the Common Riding: ‘the Council, as the representatives of the inhabitants, the seat of honour, influence and authority carries a force, a momentum which cannot be equalled’. The petition was certainly effective because the following year the Council agreed without demur to elect a Cornet as usual.93

We should not be surprised that working people were ready to defend the Common Riding so vigilantly. The Common Riding relieved the monotony and drudgery of their daily lives. It was something for them to look forward to each year, something to recall with fondness, a chance for temporary escape. In 1845, it was stated that Hawick Common Riding, ‘is considered by more than the youthful portion of the population as one of the most important days of the year .... [It] is kept up with much spirit by the great body of the people, as well from the influence of ancient associations, as from the holiday amusements with which it is invariably attended.’94 The Common Riding brought a welcome splash of colour to a drab landscape. Descriptions of the fairground, for instance, capture the wonder and spectacle which locals enjoyed at the Common Riding. Describing the fairground in 1857, the Hawick Advertiser noted:

Two wizards unblushingly advertised themselves as practisers of necromancy [the art of supposedly conjuring up the dead]. There was a panorama of the famed siege of Sebastopol. More than one opportunity of perfecting oneself for the Rifle Brigade was offered in the shape of patent safety shooting galleries; boxing rings and caravans where clowns rehearsed the stale jokes of long ago.95

Similarly, in 1858: ‘Tempting teetotal liquors of all hues of the rainbow dazzled the eyes of the sober thirsty, and there was gingerbread and confectionery enough

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93. Hawick Advertiser, 16 May 1857, p. 3.
94. NSAS, vol. iii, p. 399.
95. Hawick Advertiser, 13 June 1857, p. 3.
to keep all the children on the Border sick for twelve months."96 And in 1883:
'Almost every caravan rivalling with its neighbour in conspicuous paintings of
"Joseph and his Brethren", "Mary Over the Dying Douglas" and "Napoleon on the
Alps"."97

Like all popular festivals, the Common Riding was memorable because it
presented such a sharp contrast with the ordinary and the mundane. For locals, it
was one of the most important days of the year, an annual ritual which was widely
enjoyed. People made every effort to ensure that their day was special: for
example, by purchasing new clothes. In 1841, it was observed of Hawick Common
Riding: 'On this occasion are assembled perhaps five sixths of the inhabitants for
several miles around, male and female, perambulating the green, all with their
new Sunday suits on.'98 In 1858, the Hawick Advertiser noted: 'The hill-side never
presented a more animated or a gayer appearance, all were clad in their best, and
many ladies scarcely required the finishing touch to enter a ball-room.'99 Part of
the reason for dressing-up was, of course, to attract the attention of a potential
mate. For young people, this was (and is) the special appeal of festival life. The
usual close controls on their behaviour were temporarily suspended, leaving ample
opportunity for encounters - innocent or otherwise - with the opposite sex. It would
be easy to underestimate sexual licence as a factor in the survival of the Common
Ridings. In 1876, the Hawick Express suggested that for the young and unattached
this was the most important aspect of the festival:

96. Ibid, 19 June 1858, p. 4.
97. Ibid, 9 June 1883, p. 3.
When the racing was at the Haugh, on both days the lads and lasses enjoyed themselves in promenading arm in arm in long processions. To secure a partner to 'link' at the Common Riding was indispensable, and called for earnest attention weeks before the time, and who can describe the 'bliss beyond compare' which filled the minds of both sexes in anticipation of sharing the pleasures with the favoured one. This method of enjoyment was much more attractive to the parties engaged than whether the black or the brown horse would win.100

Clearly, for many people, the Common Riding was one of the highlights of their lives. Indeed, for some individuals, the Common Riding was their life. Every festival had (and has) its stalwarts who seemed to exist for nothing else. Take, for example, Walter Ballantyne of Hawick. 'Wat the Drummer', as he was known, joined the Hawick Common Riding band in 1822. His father and his grandfather had been members before him, and his nephew, Andrew, would follow him. Ballantyne played the drum at Hawick Common Riding for fifty nine years in a row, his last being in 1881 when he was eighty one years old.101 Likewise, in Selkirk, John Douglas earned the title of 'a Common Riding hero'. (See plate 18.) 'Douglas the Brave' cast the flag of the Selkirk Corporation of Hammermen every Common Riding for 55 years. In 1887, he cast the flag for the last time in front of an enormous crowd: 'For it was a Gala holiday and the crowd was greatly augmented by excursionists from the town.'102 Common Riding worthies such as Ballantyne and Douglas provided an essential continuity in the festival. Whilst few people could match their dedication or commitment, the Common Riding occupied a similar position in the lives of many locals.

100. Hawick Express, 10 June 1876, p. 3.
The Reform of the Common Riding

Whilst the majority of local people were strongly in favour of the Common Riding, it would be wrong to assume that the festival was static and permanently inflexible. It has been shown that standards of taste and behaviour were changing in nineteenth-century Britain, and working people and their institutions were not immune to these changes. 'The civilising process' gradually permeated all levels of society, and popular culture increasingly reflected the rising standards of personal conduct and public behaviour. At the forefront of these changes among working people were artisans and the skilled working class, who, as we have seen, were also the mainstay of the Common Riding. One of the characteristics of artisan culture was rationality and reason, and there was no greater testament to social change than the steady growth of intellectualism and the pursuit of knowledge. A good example here is Robert Wilson of Hawick, who personified all the values of the self-educated artisan. 'Lurgie' Wilson, as he was known, was a shoemaker, political radical, historian and Cornet of Hawick in 1799. In his History of Hawick, which was first published in 1825 and itself the product of a literary environment, Wilson commented on 'the changes that are in progress on the habits and enjoyments of the people, by the steady operation of education or intellectual culture'. Wilson and other radicals assumed that there was an automatic correlation between intellectual and moral improvement. Certainly, there is no mistaking the steady rise of an intellectual culture amongst working people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries. To give one statistic: in 1790, there were only two lending libraries in Roxburghshire, but in 1830 there was thirty-

103. Wilson, History of Hawick, p. 181. The Scotsman commented on the publication of Wilson's History that: 'We have not seen so resolute and fearless a thinker start from the ranks of the Scottish peasantry since the time of Burns.' Quoted in ibid, p. 400.
There was also a huge expansion in learned societies specifically designed for the intellectual elevation of working people. In the 1850s, Hawick could boast, amongst others, a Mutual Improvement Society, a Literary Club, an Archaeological Society, Music Club and Horticulture Society. In May 1854, in the month before the Common Riding, locals were invited to the Literary and Scientific Institution to hear lectures on the 'Wonders of the Steam Engine', 'The Crystal Palace' and 'Popular Illusions Explained by Science'.

What we are seeing here is the rise of that typical Victorian figure, the respectable working-man. Changes were sometimes slow to happen, but working lives were becoming increasingly structured, tolerant and peaceable. There was no doubt about it: civilisation was becoming more civil. New standards of behaviour had reduced much of the violence of everyday life. It has already been shown that society had growing intolerance of cruelty to animals. In 1825, John Mason noted on his tour of the Borders that: 'It is gratifying to remark, how much rural sports are now divested of that cruelty, which, in former times, seems to have given them all their piquancy.' In 1875, the Hawick Express argued that times had improved and that deliberate cruelty to animals was no longer a feature the Common Riding: 'We hear a vast amount of talk in these our days about the increase of gambling sports in connection with the Common Riding. But these bewailers never seem to think that the sporting proclivities of our townsfolk have of late been guided into better channels than before.' Similarly, drinking habits were also beginning to change. It has been noted that middle class people were adopting new attitudes to drink and emphasising the controlled use of alcohol. Developing with these...

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107. Hawick Express, 12 June 1875, p. 3.
changes amongst the middle class, but quite separate from them, was rise of the temperance movement. Temperance began in Scotland in the 1820s, before there was any equivalent in England. The first wave of temperance, which was specifically anti-spirits, was short-lived and made little impact, but in the 1830s a new movement for 'total abstinence' swept into Scotland. Between 1838 and 1840, the movement attracted huge support, especially among skilled labour. It has been estimated that in 1838-9, about 29% of the total population of Hawick signed the 'pledge', although many later withdrew or were expelled. In its early years, total abstinence had a strong radical link, and only later developed a religious slant. Many of the leading figures in the early movement were working men, especially artisans and skilled labour. Abstinence, they believed, was very closely bound with the social, political and moral elevation of the working class, and self-improvement was incompatible with being drunk. Interestingly, many supporters of temperance had Chartist sympathies, a movement which attracted widespread support in the Border burghs. One of several initiatives which local Chartists took was to form co-operative stores. The Hawick Chartist Provision Store was opened on 9 November 1839, the first of its kind in Scotland. One of the rules of the store was that no intoxicating drinks were to be kept on the premises.

How were these changes in working class life reflected in the Common Riding? For reasons we have already explored, most working class people supported the festival, and few of them would have joined forces with the abolitionists for its curtailment. Instead, there was a gradual awareness that attitudes and patterns of behaviour were changing. In 1857, the *Hawick Advertiser* noted that there was, 'none of that brawling which has sometimes afforded the

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enemies of the Common Riding a chance of declaiming against it. In 1863, the same newspaper stated:

The occasion passed off on the whole most creditably. There were few brawls of any kind, and none resulting in serious or permanent injury, and the good conduct of the people was generally never surpassed even in the memory of one gentleman who remembers seventy three Common Ridings and has witnessed the fun and frolics of them all.

One of the major causes of these improvements was the changing attitude to drink. Like all popular festivals, the Common Riding was a time of heavy drinking and indulgence. But although heavy drinking persisted and could not be eliminated, there was less tolerance of drunkenness in public. In 1883, the *Hawick News* commented on the Common Riding:

It was a noteworthy circumstance that very few people were observed the worse for liquor; and we understand both the burgh and county superintendents of the police concur in stating that they never on any similar occasion had less reason to interfere.

However, although patterns of behaviour were changing, the nineteenth-century Common Riding could still be pretty rough. In 1868 and 1876, the worst fears of the critics were realised when two fatalities occurred at Hawick. In 1868, a nine-year-old boy named George Marriot was knocked down and killed by a horse during one of the Cornet’s practice rides. Eight years later, Edward Dearden, a 73-year-old watchman, was fatally injured when a horse ridden by Thomas Kennaway (‘who acted as the Cornet’s father’) bolted into a crowd, also during a practice ride. In the latter case, the Cornet (Robert Edmond) and seven of his supporters,

111. *Ibid*, 13 June 1863, p. 3.
113. *Hawick Express*, 3 June 1876, p. 3.
including Kennaway, were arrested on a charge of furious and reckless riding, although all were released on bail. Kennaway was later cleared of a charge of culpable homicide, whilst the others were fined. Both cases appear to have been tragic accidents. George Marriot was said to have run into the street in front of the horses, whilst a relative of Edward Dearden wrote to the Cornet absolving him and his supporters of all blame. Two facts are worthy of note here: first, very few people used either death as a stick to beat the Common Riding or as evidence in support of its abolition. Indeed, whilst acknowledging his sadness over the second tragedy, one town councillor said that it was now ‘very hackneyed’ to accuse the Common Riding of being a threat to public morals. Secondly, there was agreement among Common Riding supporters and locals that such accidents must not be repeated and that changes had to be introduced to make the festival safer. Galloping in the streets, or ‘within the bounds’, was subsequently prohibited, and although this had been one of the most thrilling sights of the Common Riding, no one sought to question the ban.

The prohibition on galloping was just one example of the increasing regulation of the Common Riding in the later nineteenth-century. The old turbulent expression of local pride was increasingly out-of-place, and new structures had to be evolved, otherwise the event was likely to collapse. These changes were a reflection of rising standards in working class life, but they were also linked to the development of new working practices which required discipline, time-management and organisation. In Hawick, the early hosiery industry was centred around the ‘shop’ system, which, as we have seen, allowed workers a great deal of flexibility in their work patterns. This system survived relatively late in Hawick, but in the second half of the nineteenth-century, it gradually gave way to centralised production in factories, largely because of technological changes and

the introduction of steam-driven machinery. Although these changes did not become the norm in Hawick until the 1890s, they meant that increasing numbers of people worked in factory units and were subject to much stricter control regarding their working patterns and behaviour. One consequence was that there was a rigid division between 'work' and 'leisure', and time which was spent away from the workplace became highly valued. In addition, working people became more accustomed to stricter controls, rules and discipline, and to more organisation in their lives. Another factor which cannot be ignored here was the development of the police force, which was an obvious encouragement to law and order. In Hawick, a police force was introduced on 26 May 1846, which consisted of a superintendent and five constables. In its early years, the Hawick police force carried out its duties 'in a very easy and perfunctory manner', but gradually it became an effective deterrent to anti-social behaviour.

Organisation and control is discernible in all aspects of popular custom and leisure in the later nineteenth-century. A good example in the Borders is the development of rugby football, which by the mid-1880s had become one of the staple aspects of Borders' culture. Some kind of ball (or ba') game had been played in the Borders for centuries, possibly since Roman times. In the towns and villages, these games sometimes had ritual significance, although to neutral observers they appeared to be little more than undisciplined mobs of boys and yokels hacking and fighting each other and generally running amok. In the 1870s, the situation changed quite suddenly. Although street games continued, organised 'football' was introduced, often by former public-school boys connected with the hosiery trade. Within ten years, the game had obtained cult status in Borders towns. The new game had 'players' (who trained), uniform dress code, a restricted playing field, and, most importantly, a rule book. Like other organised sports, rugby matches were carefully timed to meet the weekly pattern of work and leisure.

This process can also be seen in the Common Riding. Although much of the festival was impulsive and relied on precedent, there was an increasing tendency towards stricter organisation and control. Hawick Common Riding of 1877 was considered particularly memorable because galloping on the streets was prohibited and the whole event was carried out with much greater dignity and decorum than previously. As the Hawick Express noted:

The dangerous riding on the public streets of a few headstrong youths, the nocturnal abominations attending the Ball, and some of the other proceedings were disgraceful ..... This year there is a wonderful change for the better.117

Likewise, Common Riding timetables and programmes were produced for the first time, although, of course, they were not always strictly adhered to. In Hawick, the town council restored civic patronage to the Common Riding in 1885, and started to take a much greater role in proceedings. For instance, the council were entertained to breakfast on the morning of the Common Riding ('the Provost's breakfast'), and, after an absence of around 30 years, they began to take part in the Common Riding procession, although usually in carriages rather than on horseback. In 1887, a 'Ceremonial Committee' was formed, which was given the responsibility to organise and administer the festival. Also in 1887, the 'bussing' of the burgh flag, which since 1862 had taken place in a local pub or hotel, was transferred back to the council chambers, where it was performed in the presence of the provost and magistrates 'and a very large company of leading citizens'.118 In 1896, the 'Colour Bussing' was moved to the town hall, and subsequently became a public event, complete with a printed programme, formal invitations and guest speakers. Thanks to the influence of the Ceremonial Committee, the status of the burgh flag was

117. Hawick Express, 16 June 1877, p. 4.
118. Ibid, 2 June 1893, p. 3.
greatly elevated. At the Common Riding races, the display of the flag was moved from the Cornet’s beer tent to the steward’s stand. It was also in the late nineteenth-century that a religious element was introduced into the Common Riding, testifying to respectable influences at work. In 1887, the ‘Kirkin’ of the Cornet was instituted, whereby the Cornet and his supporters visited a local church and a blessing was given on the event. The presiding clergyman, who was known for the festival as the ‘Cornet’s chaplain’, offered spiritual guidance to the principals and stressed their responsibilities to the community. The role of the Cornet, and other principals, had clearly evolved. As well as being the leader of the festival, the Cornet was now expected to act as a role model for young people and to demonstrate high standards of behaviour. At the Kirking of 1890, the Reverend Dr MacRae of Hawick Old Parish Church selected the text of his sermon carefully: ‘Young men, likewise, exhort to be sober-minded’ (Titus 2, 6).

In 1906, the Reverend Wilson, a strong supporter of the Common Riding, spoke against betting, alcohol and other evils, and stated that the Cornet, because of his position, had moral duties:

The enemy of today was not Lord Dacre or the Earl of Surrey. The call today was not to lay down their lives, but to live and stand firm against those social forces of the Devil which broke hearts and destroyed the peace of homes. Young men were counselled to band together around their Cornet on these lines, and let every man be true to the best that was in him.

In the later nineteenth-century, change was also apparent in the Common Riding races, where stricter rules were introduced to control meetings. In 1883, Hawick abandoned the Grand National Hunt rules, which were too expensive for a minor meeting, and instead introduced local rules. The race course was properly laid out with protective fencing, and a new enclosure was erected, thus underlining social exclusivity.

119. *Hawick Advertiser*, 7 June 1890, p. 3.
By 1880, a new form of Common Riding had emerged. It had become more structured and orderly, and as a result attracted growing middle class support and encouragement. The next chapter will demonstrate that from the 1880s the Common Riding was utilised as a vehicle for promoting contemporary social values and ideals. This did not mean however that the debate about the Common Riding came to an end. Far from it. The Common Riding remained controversial well into the twentieth-century. But it is noticeable that the attitude of critics underwent a profound and subtle shift. Up to the 1870s, most opponents argued that the Common Riding was dangerously outmoded and that the only option was to abandon the festival. As the century progressed however, and as it became clear that the Common Riding was not going to die a natural death, there was a growing emphasis on reforming the event rather than abandoning it. Simple repression gave way to subtle reformation. Critics increasingly emphasised the need to ‘purify’ the Common Riding, meaning that the event itself was harmless enough but that it had been corrupted by drink, gambling and other evils which accompanied it. If one could eliminate these aspects, then the Common Riding would survive and possibly flourish. It was felt that there was a moral duty to ‘cleanse’ the event and to remodel it based on sobriety, dignity and restraint. It could then be conducted in a civilised and rational manner, and would become a symbol of these values. Significantly, by 1890, very few people argued for the abandonment of the Common Riding itself.

At the root of this change was an increasing tolerance of working people and their institutions. As the Great Exhibition of 1851 had shown, working people were capable of conducting themselves with decorum, dignity and restraint. Crowds were no longer seen as dangerous or inevitably threatening. This in turn led to the rise of a ‘paternalist’ attitude towards popular festivals like the Common Riding, where the respectable tried to control and influence the event rather than ignoring it or
turning a blind-eye. In 1875, ‘Per Contra’ argued in a letter to the Hawick Express that: ‘The town council are greatly to blame for countenancing the matter by electing a Comet and then leaving the whole affair to be carried out by a few boys, many of whom never recovered from the drinking and other customs incident to the occasion, but go on from bad to worse until they become confirmed drunkards.’ By taking control of the festival, the town council could act as a restraining influence and a counter-balance on excessive behaviour. In general, this attitude had prevailed by 1890. In Hawick, at least, the Common Riding of 1890 was considered an outstanding display of order and restraint. The Hawick Advertiser believed that this was largely because of the countenance of the provost and magistrates. ‘They acted as a dignifying and restraining presence. Their personal attendance among the masses proving certainly a definite source of control amongst them.’

But, as we have seen, this was only part of the story. Almost all sections of society had become more ordered and restrained in their behaviour.

As the nineteenth-century progressed, a decreasing number of people argued for the abolition of the Common Riding. Instead, attempts were made to reform the festival from within. Temperance campaigners organised special refreshment tents at the race course in the hope of luring people away from alcohol. But old habits died hard, and campaigners had only partial success. Reporting the Common Riding of 1863, the Hawick Advertiser observed that: ‘the neat temperance tent of Mr Murray appeared to have a fair share of visitors. It was quite evident, however, that all did not content themselves with the refreshments provided, and some too heavily could here and there be seen in considerable distress.’

Interestingly, for some people, the temperance cause was not incompatible with their love of the Common Riding. Some of the festival’s strongest supporters in the nineteenth-century also recognised the need to reform drinking habits. Robert

121. Hawick Express, 5 June 1875, p. 3.
122. Hawick Advertiser, 7 June 1890, p. 2.
123. Ibid, 13 June 1863, p. 4.
Hunter of Hawick was a Common Riding enthusiast and the author of The Auld Man's Common Riding and Oor Bonnie Border Toon, the latter of which was put to music by the eminent composer Francis George Scott. But Hunter was also a life-long abstainer who was active in temperance work, 'knowing how many bright hopes and lives had been spoiled from want of it'.124 As well as his Common Riding poetry, Hunter wrote such gems as Alcohol and Hoo Tamie Turned Teetotal, which set out to promote the temperance cause. Evangelicals and other religious groups also tried to influence events. On the Sunday after the Common Riding of 1897, the Hawick branch of the British Women's Temperance Association entertained the travelling showmen and their families to tea, which was followed by a concert of sacred music given by the Hawick Home Mission.125

However, this kind of open attempt to remodel the Common Riding had limited success, and there was widespread suspicion of the reformers' true motives. Supporters of the Common Riding were highly defensive of the event, and any attempt to interfere in it was usually counter-productive. The opinion was that 'traditional rights' of whatever kind should not be tampered with. This was clearly demonstrated in April 1891 when Hawick town council refused to grant the race committee the usual privilege of having a licensed tent near the fairground. The tent was described by the council as 'a perfect nuisance'. Provost Hogg said: 'The sights so often witnessed [at the tent] were not fit for ladies or children to see. They beheld men sitting in an intoxicated condition saying and doing things of which he, as Provost of Hawick, was ashamed.'126 The council's decision not to grant the licence led to an immediate 'Common Riding crisis', and unleashed 'a wave of indignation abnormal even for hot-headed Common Riding

126. Hawick Express, 17 April 1891, p. 3.
Supporters of the festival immediately went on the offensive to defend their traditional rights. The editorial of the *Hawick Express* stated that the council were guilty of over-reaction: ‘There is an aggressive spirit among teetotallers which practical people claiming to be free subjects cannot fail to deplore.’

A public meeting was hastily organised and strong objections were raised against the interference of the council. ‘It was not a matter of a licence so much as a matter of privilege,’ said William Park, chairman of the race committee. ‘If they allowed the thin end of the wedge to be inserted as the Council proposed to do, then it would be the commencement of the downfall of the Common Riding.’

A handful of council supporters were present at the meeting, who argued that they were doing their moral duty and attempting to purify the Common Riding. Thomas Scott, for example, said: ‘The purer the annual festival was kept the better it would be supported by right thinking people. (Booing.)’

Likewise, the Reverend William Johnman stated: ‘The Town Council resolved strenuously to purify the Common Riding with the intention of perpetuating it. He warned the promoters of the meeting that if they doomed the Common Riding through carrying it on drinking lines, it was themselves who were dooming it not him. (Uproar.)’

No-one dared to argue that the Common Riding should be abolished, although some may have been privately thinking this. The popular view was expressed by Robert Scott, Common Riding supporter and local auctioneer: ‘The public should let the town council see that they were neither to be trampled on nor made fools of! (Cheers and applause.)’

The meeting finally passed a vote of censure on the council, decrying the decision not to grant the licence. It was

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127. Ibid.
129. Ibid, p. 3.
130. Ibid.
131. Ibid.
132. Ibid.
concluded that it was not the council's right to interfere with 'the representatives of the public, namely the Common Riding committee'.

The controversy rumbled on for several weeks, and reached the pages of the national press. The *Evening Dispatch* stated that: 'Hawick town council have committed a foolish blunder. The people of Hawick resent this grandmotherly interference, but the world will not stand still simply because the town council of Hawick have taken the huff and rendered themselves ridiculous.' Eventually, after much discussion, a reconciliation was reached and the council agreed to grant a licence. The incident revealed that reformers were unable to dictate change, and that a large section of the community would fight to protect established rights and privileges. And yet the traditionalist's victory may not have been as complete as first appeared. By defending the right to have a beer tent, they were by implication also defending the right to get drunk. Across Britain, supporters of traditional rights and customs, and also working class politicians, faced similar dilemmas and ambiguities. The defence of custom sometimes meant protecting unacceptable or anti-social behaviour.

The only solution for traditionalists was to assume that people were capable of acting in a restrained, responsible manner. This attitude was prevalent in 1900 when Hawick Common Riding was again the centre of controversy. A dispute occurred in that year over the true nature of the festival. It is worth examining this dispute in detail because, in many ways, it summarises the debate over the Common Riding in the later nineteenth-century. The two main protagonists in this dispute were James Murray and W. A. P. Johnman.

The Reverend William Andrew Patton Johnman was the archetypal Victorian evangelical. A product of Edinburgh University and the Free Church, Johnman was a bachelor, antiquarian, traveller, Liberal-Unionist, public speaker and firebrand preacher. He was called as pastor to Hawick Free Church in April 1880 and remained in the town until his death in 1923. According to one biographer: 'He early made his personality felt in the town and became an outstanding figure in public and religious work.' In a typical evangelical gesture, Johnman was instrumental in bringing to an end rabbit coursing in the Borders through the publication of his pamphlet *The Cruelty of the Brutes to the Animals*.136

Johnman was involved in the licensing dispute of 1889, inevitably taking the view that it was wrong for the town council to grant a licence. Ten years later, Johnman’s personal crusade to reform the Common Riding continued. In May 1899, as another festival drew near, Johnman preached in church about the evils of the Common Riding. He produced an old argument. By supporting the Common Riding, he said, the provost and magistrates of Hawick were giving their approval to horse racing, gambling, drinking and other wrongdoings:

If the Common Riding continued to be a vehicle, the result of which was to prominently and publicly have associated with it horse races and all the unsavoury accompaniments of gambling and betting, it was a degradation of the Magistracy of this community. Would Hawick stand for one day that the Provost and Magistrates, all honourable men, should be patrons of horse races if it had not the Common Riding with it? The Christianity of the community would rise against it and terminate it.137

The following year, Johnman continued in the same vein. In a letter to the *Hawick Advertiser*, which also appeared in the national press, Johnman wrote:

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Gambling in my judgment is more widespread than ever. If the Christian community has the honest desire to give it a severe blow it will never rest till the Magistrates and the Town Council are interdicted from patronising it, at the annual horse races on the Moor. I ask the church of Christ to treat the Common Riding as the devil's annual pandemonium until the Council separates it from the horse races and gambling and other filth which are the habitual concomitants.

To Johnman, the Common Riding had become just an excuse for excessive behaviour. The original meaning of the festival had been forgotten, and the only important aspects were drinking, gambling, racing and other immoralties. The Common Riding, in his own words, was 'like a dead oak upheld in the embrace of parasitic ivy'. As a guardian of public morality, it was his sacred duty not to tolerate or encourage imperfections. It is noticeable, however, that Johnman's attitude towards the Common Riding was different from that of earlier critics. Rather than arguing for the abolition of the event, Johnman, at least in his public pronouncements, favoured its reform:

If our annual celebration should be attended with customs or characteristics, the result of which is decidedly and distinctively hurtful to the public weal, the institution should be certainly reformed, if reformation be practicable, and if not it should be mercilessly put down. With heart and soul I would like to rescue the Common Riding, to keep it worthy as an annual attraction ..... as a restful delight to be enjoyed by poor and rich, and to be looked back upon without compunction and without regret.

Johnman's attitude typified the new approach to popular customs and leisure taken by evangelicals and other reformers in the late nineteenth-century. Few people now argued for the suppression of popular customs, as they might have done, say, forty years earlier. Whilst Johnman and others objected to certain features of

140. *Ibid*. 

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the Common Riding, they were less concerned with the event itself. In their opinion, the rot was deeply entrenched, and it would be a challenge to save the event. But with God’s help, nothing was beyond redemption.

In the opposite corner from Johnman was the redoubtable John Edward Dodd Murray. ‘JED’ Murray, as he was known locally, was one of the great Common Riding characters. A professional photographer, Murray was a Freemason, opera lover, local historian and poet. His first love, however, was the Common Riding. Murray was Cornet of Hawick in 1890, Acting Father on four separate occasions, and had a life-long association with the event. Predictably, Murray was furious at Johnman’s attack on his beloved festival. His reply to Johnman’s criticism was that he had attended the Common Riding for many years, ‘and he had yet to learn that they had done anything for which they could not look the world straight in the face. As this age of civilisation went on, it was the more necessary to cling together in their clannishness and encourage those feelings of courage and patriotism.’

The majority of locals seem to have agreed with Murray’s argument. A letter from ‘Teri Correspondent’ concluded: ‘Clerical intolerance will not destroy the Common Riding.’ Murray had to admit that betting and heavy drinking were present in the Common Riding, but, he argued, these were not confined to the event alone. Besides, did it really matter if locals let their hair down for a day or two? Most people, he claimed, had enough sense to ‘limit their indiscretions to the two days of our June Carnival, a shilling or so here and there, put on as they call it “for just a bit of interest”’. The crux of Murray’s argument was that people were quite capable of looking after themselves and of behaving in a sensible, rational manner. This attitude typified the new approach to popular custom and leisure which had prevailed by

141. *Hawick News*, 4 May 1900, p. 3.
the end of the nineteenth-century. The Common Riding did not threaten anyone and it was good for people to enjoy themselves. In 1896, the pseudonymous ‘Kirsty Tamson’ wrote in the *Hawick Advertiser*:

> It’s a michty pity if folk canna take a bit glass or twae for ‘auld lang syne’ without a wheen haiverin’ teetotal bodies stickin’ their noses in’t. How can they expeck anybody tae dae justice tae the Common Riding oFF ginger-pop an’ fizzy drinks?144

Drink could still cause problems, as the writer acknowledged. But it was only a minority of selfish people who caused trouble:

> It’s when fuddlin fools get their speerits raised tae sic an extent that they cann’a distinguish between a gless an a gallon or tell the difference between a bottle an’ a barrel - tha is the senseless idiots that bring discredit on the whole affair.145

Most people were sober-mined and knew that it was their responsibility to retain an element of self-control. For most people, taking part in the Common Riding was by no means incompatible with widely held social values and accepted standards of behaviour. As JED Murray stated in 1890: ‘It is the God-loving, church-going, religious people who are today the bulwark of our carnival.’146

The Common Riding had clearly undergone considerable development in the nineteenth-century. Changing patterns of behaviour and different social attitudes meant that the old rumbustious festival was increasingly at odds with society. Many people withdrew their support from the event and wanted to see its abolition. But the tradition was very resilient, especially among working people, and many continued to participate in the festival, even when ‘official’ sanction was

145. *Ibid*.
146. *Ibid*, 21 June 1890, p. 3.
lacking. Gradually however, a new form of Common Riding emerged, reflecting wider changes in society. Criticisms certainly continued, but as the century progressed, there was less to find objectionable. In 1893, it was written of Hawick Common Riding that, 'the order, sobriety, and general tone of the whole proceedings, as now carried out, have stopped to a very large extent the pulpit tirades which used to be so frequent at this season of the year.' Two years later, a Hawick minister summarised the nineteenth-century event: 'Several years ago, the Common Riding was often spoken of in an apologetic manner. It was a matter of sincere congratulation that these troubles had almost entirely passed away.'

147. *Hawick Express*, 2 June 1893, p. 3.
Chapter Six
‘Follow the Flag!’
The Twentieth-Century Ridings
1880 - 1996

So now, when’er the Teri heart there sounds high honours call
Of duty for the town we love, and cherish over all.
We’ll lift our spears of service, where’er our feet may roam,
To the vision of the Pennon on the dear old hills of home.
Follow the Flag!

John Y. Hunter

The subject of John Hunter’s Common Riding poem *Follow the Flag!* is the Hawick tradition of 1514, but for the attentive reader, the real message is clear.¹ Written in the early twentieth-century, the poem stresses the virtues of duty, service and honour, and makes it plain that these attributes are innate to the Common Riding. John Hunter’s poem reflects the remarkable transformation which had taken place in the status of the Common Riding during the nineteenth-century. The old turbulent festival, with its boisterous expression of local pride, had become more controlled and formalised, reflecting the growing discipline of urbanised people and the increasingly ‘civilised’ nature of British society.² Local rivalries, for instance, were less physical and aggressive, whilst new forms emerged which emphasised dignity, rationality and restraint. The Common Riding was heavily influenced by this process. By the 1880s, after a period of uncertainty, the festival had been

2. Harold Perkin has written that between 1780 and 1850 England (and presumably Scotland) underwent a ‘Moral Revolution’, and ‘ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical’. H. Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London, 1969), p. 280.

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largely remodelled and re-established. Consequently, the period between 1880 and 1914 might be thought of as being the ‘golden age’ of the Common Riding. In 1910, it was written of Lanark Lanimer Day that ‘at no time has it been more vigorously conducted, more picturesquely and tastefully arranged, and more numerously attended by interested spectators than within the last ten years.’

This chapter examines the survival and success of the Common Riding in the late nineteenth and twentieth-centuries. It has been a remarkable period for the festival. First, we will examine the reasons for the popularity of the Common Riding up to 1914, including contemporary social values which were promoted through the festival, the impact of local emigration, and the age of ‘invented tradition’. The chapter then considers the challenge and influence of the two world wars on the festival, and looks at the unique intellectual enthusiasm which Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid had for Langholm Common Riding. Finally, there is an assessment of the current state of the ridings.

'Respectable' Involvement in the Common Riding

The previous chapter demonstrated that important changes had taken place in popular recreations and leisure in the nineteenth-century, so that by the 1880s it was increasingly difficult to find an event like the Common Riding objectionable or offensive. This does not mean that criticism of the Common Riding suddenly ceased: ‘high-minded’ men and women continued to find fault with it well into the twentieth-century. But the critics were a decreasing minority, albeit at times a vociferous one. In 1890, Robert Milligan, the Provost of Hawick and a man noted for his ‘outspoken utterances’, dismissed local opponents of the Common Riding as a

'narrow-minded section of the officious parson element'.4 The following year, the Hawick Express stated that the majority of local people supported the Common Riding, and issued a warning to critics of the festival:

The more 'goody-goody' section of the powers that be, who can see nothing but evil in the ancient festival and its associations, have ..... either to pocket their pride ..... or decide to sacrifice their popularity as public personages, and make arrangements for a speedy retirial to the obscurity of private life.5

However, no-one denied that there were still problems with the Common Riding. Old habits died hard, sometimes not at all. There was much going on which a respectable person might find offensive or misinterpret. Heavy drinking persisted, despite the presence of temperance booths, which meant that inebriates and incapables were never far away. Gambling and betting were also prevalent, the inevitable accompaniments of horse racing and professional athletics. No doubt what lay behind many complaints was a distaste for a (temporary) relaxation of inhibitions and social restraints. Nevertheless, by 1890, it was generally accepted that the Common Riding had much to recommend it, and that 'progress' would eventually eliminate anything in the festival which was disagreeable or unrefined. 'Efforts are made year by year to have the celebrations purified in a rational way,' said the Hawick Express in 1891. 'The best friends of the fine old festival are those who aim to have it carried through with the maximum of enjoyment and the minimum of excess.'6 There was also the realisation that as long as people were harming themselves and not others (or their property), then the event was innocuous. Indeed, there was the old argument that it was beneficial for society to have controlled periods when tensions and frustrations could be released.

4. Hawick Express, 14 June 1890, p. 2.
5. Ibid, 5 June 1891, p. 3.
6. Ibid.
The changing nature of the Common Riding is one explanation for the survival and success of the festival in the late nineteenth-century. The next section of this chapter will consider other factors which contributed towards its increasing popularity at this time. One of the most important of these was the growth of a new form of local pride, which was essentially Victorian and which gave a significant boost to many traditional local festivals. The origins of this new local pride lay in industrialisation, which had created a new class of self-made men, whose wealth, status and future were rooted in the local community. In the words of John Kenneth Galbraith, 'there was something seemingly distinctive about the new industrial capitalists. As compared with the ancient landed classes or the merchants, they were parvenus - new to the scene, economically committed, socially crude.7 Galbraith points out that until 1914 national government was firmly in the hands of the old landed classes, and that it was a serious social and political disqualification to be 'in trade'. Consequently, businessmen and financiers were forced to go their own way and were drawn to local politics and urban government, something which society's older elites, and eminent individuals, usually preferred to ignore. The result was that in the nineteenth-century urban government increasingly fell under the control and influence of local business interests, and men whose political horizons did not stretch much beyond the town limits.

The town and city fathers of late Victorian Britain were very proud of their community, and their own place at the head of it. These new urban elites were wealthy and confident, and as a result municipal councils became instruments of vision, progress and expansion. The Victorian period saw great emphasis on community projects, buildings and celebrations. Civic buildings were the most obvious and dramatic expression of the new local pride. In Selkirk, a new public library was opened in 1889, and it was followed ten years later by a new public meeting hall, predictably named the 'Victoria hall' in commemoration of Queen

Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. Hawick erected a new town hall between 1884 and 1886, which, like town halls built all over Britain at this time, was a monument to local enterprise and attachment. To accompany these buildings, there developed a parallel enthusiasm for civic pageantry and display. Every opportunity was taken to exhibit local power, and to enhance the new men of local government and promote their achievements in the community. Of course, to some extent, this was nothing new: the exercise of local power had long made use of display and ritual. ‘All elites buttress their rule with theatre,’ as Linda Colley puts it. But in late Victorian Britain, the display of local power was intense, large-scale and elaborate. Huge delight was taken in colourful processions and pageantry, partly designed to impress on the public the legitimacy of the law and local government.

Traditional festivals, newly cleansed of their rough aspects, were the perfect vehicle for the local elites to promote themselves and to express their local pride and origins. In England, many traditional festivals, such as ‘rush bearing’ or ‘beating the bounds’, were taken over or revived by the urban middle-class for their own amusement and benefit. David Cannadine has shown that the city fathers of Colchester appropriated the local ‘Oyster Festival’, and deliberately and self-consciously remodelled it for new and public purposes. In Scotland, the Common Ridings presented excellent opportunities for the wealthy manufacturing and professional classes to show themselves off. Common Riding processions were strictly ordered to make it abundantly clear where local power lay. In 1840, the Aberdeen Riding began with a formal procession along Union Street, with prominence given to the Burgh Provost, Town Council and local magistrates. It was

described as ‘a procession which ought to be calculated, in all respects, to impress the Town’s vassals with a feeling of reverence and awe’.  

In the late nineteenth-century, the Common Riding, like organised sports, became a great entertainment and display. The town was decorated for the occasion with bunting and flags, and special prominence being given to the Union Jack, which was flown from the town hall and other public buildings. Local bands played, and huge processions and parades were organised to represent almost all aspects of life in the town. In 1899, the procession at Lanark Lanimer Day featured local friendly societies, the Burns Club, a comic cycle parade (‘with men dressed as bears, tigers, clowns and comic policemen’), plus ‘daintily dressed children, attired to represent flowers and fairies’, and even a troupe of Morris dancers. In 1893, the procession at Musselburgh Riding of the Marches was said to have been a mile and a half in length. A local capitalist, Mr Brough of Inveresk paper mill, was instrumental in organising the heavy industry of Musselburgh into the procession. A popular feature of many Common Riding processions at this time was the use of ‘dramatic tableaux’, which involved local school children dressed in costume and modelling scenes from history, literature or the contemporary world. Great delight was taken in recalling past glories, and linking them with present or future endeavours. In 1914, Peebles Beltane Festival marked the six hundredth anniversary of the battle of Bannockburn with a tableau, ‘which was at once

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11. The Scotsman, 9 June 1899, p. 5. ‘The comic element, too, was not forgotten. A mounted troop of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry made a striking appearance as Lord Kitchener and the Khalifa and his followers. The representative of the hero of Omdurman was enthusiastically received and the followers of Mahdism, whose faces were blackened, and who wore black hose and the flowing robes of the Soudan, were subjected to much good-humoured banter.’
pleasing to the eye of the native and inoffensive to the visitor from across the Border'. Common Riding processions were also used to project imperial themes and underline the British achievement. Dramatic tableaux often featured ‘scenes from the Empire’, where local children, some with blackened faces, were dressed-up as the natives and creatures of other lands, especially those under British control.

The involvement of the respectable middle-class in the Common Riding was also apparent in the appointment of the principals. Public display had always been expensive, but in the late nineteenth-century the local middle class came to appropriate the most important positions for themselves. In Hawick, the Cornet of 1891 was Andrew Haddon, a solicitor and ‘a rising man of good standing’. In 1893, he was followed by William Porteous Scott, the son of a wealthy hosiery manufacturer. Scott was described in the Hawick Express as ‘a young man of gentlemanly bearing and genial disposition’. Similarly, the Cornet of 1896, Robert Mair, was a medical doctor. It is hardly surprising that wealthier people should occupy these positions. Being one of the principals was (and is) an expensive undertaking. In 1911, John Lockie Thorburn, a commercial traveller, was left £28 out-of-pocket after his Cornetship of Hawick, despite having sold his horse at the end of the festival to recoup some of his original outlay.

Industrialisation had created some wealthy local families, not just individuals, and it was in the 1890s that women began to take part in the ridings for the first time as mounted supporters. Like their male equivalents, these women

14. Hawick Express, 8 May 1891, p. 3.
15. Ibid, 5 May 1893, p. 3.
16. Thorburn’s papers and accounts are held in Wilton Lodge Park Museum, Hawick.
came from wealthy professional backgrounds, and because of their position, they had easy access to a horse. Their involvement was a local reflection of the growing emancipation of women, a movement which was firmly rooted in middle class society. In 1893, Miss Craig-Brown, daughter of local manufacturer and Burgh Provost Thomas Craig-Brown, rode at Selkirk Common Riding, probably the first woman ever to have done so. Male riders were impressed when Miss Craig-Brown reached the Three Brethren Cairns ahead of them, 'and right gallantly was it done'. However, wealthy men and women did not have it all their own way.

Taking part in the Common Riding sometimes involved a loss of dignity, and social status could not hide an inadequate rider or a frisky mount. Describing the Aberdeen riding of 1889, the pseudonymous 'DOT' (and crowds of spectators) enjoyed the sight of prominent citizens falling from grace:

Oh, what a motley crew they were -
The fat, the small, the tall,
And here and there a woeful wail,
Told truly when a Councillor fell,
And the people raised a joyful yell
To see the Bailies fall.

For they ne’er had been on horseback
In all their lives, ’twas plain,
And from the tears which dimmed their eyes,
One truly could right well surmise
They’d never do’t again.

It was also at the Aberdeen Riding of 1889 that Maitland Moir, a local doctor, sustained a broken pelvis when he was ‘douped’ at ‘the doupin steen', and

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18. ‘DOT’, The Riding of the Marches (Aberdeen, 1889), pp. 13-14. This is a humorous skit on the Aberdeen Riding, especially at the expense of the Aberdeen Town Council.

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later died as a result of his injuries. Fortunately, serious accidents of this kind were rare.19

We have noted the involvement of local business and professional people in the Common Riding, and how this was an important factor in the survival of the festival. Two consequences of their interest and patronage will now be recorded. The first was the presence of distinguished guests and visitors at the Common Riding, who brought a stamp of social approval to this once renegade event. In Hawick, Austen Chamberlain, the future Chancellor of the Exchequer, took part in the Common Riding of 1888, ‘who mounted on one of Provost Watson’s horses did the chase in gallant style’.20 In 1897, Keir Hardie, ‘the celebrated socialist’, attended the Hawick Colour Bussing.21 The main reason for these visits was, of course, political opportunism. National figures could promote themselves locally, whilst local politicians could mingle with the famous. The Reform Acts of 1868 and 1884-5 had widened the franchise, and it was imperative for ambitious politicians to ingratiate themselves with the electors. In 1904, Arthur Conan Doyle made himself conspicuous at Hawick Common Riding, which, in his own words, was ‘an endeavour to get into comradeship with the people’. Conan Doyle had just won the

20. Hawick Express, 2 June 1893, p. 3.
nomination as Unionist candidate for the Border Burghs constituency.  

Further evidence of the growing popularity of the Common Riding amongst the business and professional class can be seen in local newspapers, which began to devote increasing attention and space to the local festival. Until the 1880s, reports of the ridings were often surprisingly slight, and tended to concentrate on the results of the horse-racing rather than the traditional festive elements. By 1900, the coverage of the ridings was extensive, including lengthy reports and spreads of photographs or sketches, one of which was guaranteed to show the principals of the event alongside the local Provost. Reports on the ridings also began to feature in national newspapers, such as *The Scotsman*, which were aimed at an urban middle class readership.

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22. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stood in the General Election of 1906 as Unionist candidate for the Border Burghs constituency, which included Hawick. His participation in the Hawick Common Riding of 1904 was political opportunism which backfired, as Doyle admitted in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures*: 'I might have added my neck to the other things which I risked, for in an endeavour to get into comradeship with the people I joined in what is known as “common-riding” at Hawick, where a general holiday is proclaimed while the bounds of the common are ridden over and defined ..... an interminable ballad [*Teribus*] was recited with a sort of jingling chorus, to which all who are near the reciter keep time with their feet. As it would seem unsympathetic not to join in, I also kept time with the rhythm, and was amused and annoyed when I got back to London to see in the papers that I had danced a hornpipe in public before the electors. Altogether, I had no desire to face another Hawick common riding.' Conan Doyle's election candidature was not successful. *Memories and Adventures* (London, 1924), pp. 205-6. In the early 1960s, a young parliamentary hopeful called David Steel, 'made a point of joining in these festivities, though I was far from an accomplished horseman. It was an easy, informal way of meeting people and the local press reported my completion of those longer rides.' David Steel was elected MP for Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles in a famous by-election win in March 1965. *Against Goliath* (London, 1989), p. 162.
An important factor in the popularity and survival of the Common Ridings in the second half of nineteenth-century was the development of the railway. Between 1847 and 1864, the 'Waverley' line was constructed between Edinburgh and Carlisle, running through the heart of the Scottish Borders. For Border burghs like Selkirk and Hawick, the development of the railway brought to an end a history of isolation and self-dependence. Gradually, as the railway system developed, it was possible to travel almost anywhere in the country cheaply and quickly. Railways dazzled the early Victorians. On 1 September 1855, 1100 people made one of the first public railway journeys between Hawick and Galashiels, a distance of 18 miles. They were greeted on their arrival by the Galashiels brass band.23 Railways had a paradoxical effect on the ridings. Cheap travel created heightened aspirations, and fed the popular desire for a better quality of life. Some people took advantage of the annual holiday to 'get away' for the day and visit other places. It has been noted that religious and evangelical groups organised excursions by train to draw people away from the supposed evils of the Common Riding.24 But the railway also benefited the festival because it brought people into the town. It was increasingly easy for 'exiles' to return home for the Common Riding, whilst casual visitors from neighbouring towns were also attracted, perhaps to watch the horse-racing or just out of curiousity. The railway brought in a captive audience and the Common Riding was an ideal opportunity for the town to show itself off. After the development of the local railway in 1850s, Selkirk town council made an annual request to the railway company to run special trains from Galashiels on the day of Selkirk Common Riding. For the unveiling of the

23. *Hawick Monthly Advertiser*, 1 September 1855, p. 3.
'Fletcher' statue in 1913, the town council chartered a train to bring visitors and spectators from Galashiels and other parts of the Borders.25

The influx of people into the town for the festival was welcomed by local businesses, who catered for their needs and requirements. The second half of the nineteenth-century was a period of rising standards of living in Britain. Deep layers of deprivation continued to exist, but generally people had more consumer power than ever before. Real wages showed a remarkable 80 per cent rise between 1850 and 1914, which in turn led to an increased demand for consumer durables, products and services.26 People had more money to spend, and festivals and holidays were traditional periods of consumption. Local businesses welcomed and encouraged the Common Riding because it was an annual boost to their profits and they were delighted to cash-in as people made preparations for the big day. The following advertisement appeared in the Hawick News in June 1906, and it is typical of many which appeared in the local newspapers around this time encouraging locals to prepare for the festival:

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For the COMMON RIDING!

A Special show is now being made in all the latest Novelties in MEN'S WEAR for the ANCIENT FESTIVAL. A TRUE TERI should be at the Front at this time, and T. SWINTON IS SECOND TO NONE in his excellent display of COMMON-RIDING TIES, CAPS, HATS, etc.

T. Swinton, Cap and Scarf Emporium, 6 Howegate.27

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With the exception of publicans and bookmakers, local businesses made their profits in the lead-up to the Common Riding rather than at the event itself, when

most shops closed down. However, local businesses were not the only ones to prosper from the event. Another group who were particularly keen to support the Common Riding were the travelling showpeople, whose livelihood depended on continuing success of the festival. The later nineteenth-century saw a significant change in the fairground with the introduction of large, mechanised rides, driven at first by steam and later by electricity. ‘Roundabouts’ and other rides first appeared in the early nineteenth-century. Originally, they were driven by animal or human power, but in the 1860s mechanically-driven rides were introduced, which quickly became a staple attraction of the fairground. In 1875, the *Hawick Express* commented on the Common Riding fairground: 'The old “hobby-horse”, driven by willing hands, has given place to the latest novelty of steam driven hunters and gilded omnibuses.' It was during this period that the fairground took on its modern guise. The older and simpler ‘shows’ were gradually pushed to the side (hence the ‘side-stalls’), whilst the new mechanical rides took over the central ground and became the star attractions. The point about these new rides was that they were expensive to develop and required large capital investment. Entrepreneurs had to ensure maximum return for their investment, and festivals like the Common Riding were a proven source of income. Here was a group of businessmen and women from outside the town who wanted to keep the festival alive.

A further technological development in the fairground was the introduction of moving films and images. At the beginning of the nineteenth-century, the fairground had an arrangement called ‘umbries’, whereby a showman with the aid of a light of a candle or a lamp threw shadows upon a screen with his hands. This was later replaced by the ‘magic lantern’, which projected images painted on

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29. For more information on the early fairground, see R. D. Sexton, ‘Travelling People In Britain’ (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Southampton, 1989), passim.

29. *Hawick Express*, 12 June 1875, p. 3.
The moving ‘film’ was introduced at the end of the nineteenth-century, and proved an immediate sensation, although new technology occasionally raised old problems. In 1898, the Hawick Advertiser received complaints that the Common Riding fairground had entertainments which were ‘vulgar or obscene in character’. These included pornographic film-shows and ‘stereoscopic photographs calculated to excite the basest passions’. More innocently, the fairground also had ‘While-You-Wait’ photographers. These were hugely popular with local people, many of whom were having their photograph taken for the first time in their lives. By the early twentieth-century, most towns had a permanent ‘picture house’ (which often originated and doubled as a ‘music hall’). Proprietors hired equipment to make short films about the Common Riding, and other local events, and these were a great attraction for locals.

Clearly, many people supported and encouraged the Common Riding because they could anticipate material benefits from doing so. There was money to be made, both for local and travelling businesses, and this was a crucial factor in the survival of the event. But we should be wary of pushing the material explanation too far, particularly when we consider local interests. The expectation of higher profits was certainly important, but for contemporaries, the ridings also expressed important social values and ideals. To explain the popularity and success of the ridings in the later nineteenth-century, we must examine the social values which they were believed to promote.

31. ‘I saw science in the shape of the cinematograph prostituted to show a woman undressing and going to bed, while a man stood behind a screen watching her, and manoeuvring in a most unbecoming way.’ Hawick Advertiser, 24 June 1898, p. 5.
Undoubtedly, the most important value of the Common Riding was patriotism, the devotion to one’s town or country and the concern for its defence. Taking pride in one’s town and country was nothing new: it had been a feature of British life for centuries. Interestingly, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, patriotism was often ‘radical’ in sentiment. The Chartists and other radical groups emphasised their patriotism by appealing to ‘ancient’ British liberties. But in the 1870s, patriotism became increasingly identified with right wing politics.³² The call for loyalty to the state was seen as an infallible method of reducing class conflict. People were exhorted to be loyal to the state, resolute in its defence, and to be above class differences. They faced a barrage of patriotic propaganda in their everyday lives, encouraging them to take pride in British achievement. Pride of place was given to the British armed forces, which, since the Crimean War, had been seen as the embodiment of Christian heroism. The military were not just guardians of the state, but also a source of spiritual and social values which were inalienable and unchallengeable. The military structure by rank was thought to provide a model for social organisation, with discipline and authority coming from the top down. It was, therefore, correct to eulogise the sovereign and the ‘born’ leadership of the aristocracy. The Church was also important in promoting patriotic ideals. Youth movements such as the Scouts or the Boys Brigade had their own padres or chaplains, and the Sunday School often encouraged membership.

Nineteenth-century Scotland has been described as a melting-pot of different, overlapping identities. As Michael Lynch states: ‘The concentric loyalties of Victorian Scotland - a new Scottishness, a new Britishness and a revived sense of local pride - were held together by a phenomenon bigger than all of them - a

Greater Britain whose prosperity and stability rested on the Empire.\textsuperscript{33}
Patriotism, like charity, began at home. The cultivation of local attachment was positively encouraged because local loyalties were thought to be the building-blocks out of which a wider patriotic sentiment was constructed. In the later nineteenth-century, a sense of community was fostered by the growth of the local press, whilst school children were taught the virtues of taking pride in their community as well as their country. The foremost expression of local identity in several Scottish towns was, of course, the Common Riding. In the late nineteenth-century, the Common Riding was recognised as an outstanding vehicle for promoting patriotic sentiment and values. The event expressed a deep love and respect for home, and this could be the nation as well as the town. Linda Colley has written: ‘Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time.’\textsuperscript{34}

In the Common Riding, local and national identities were allowed to overlap and bolster each other. Reporting the unveiling of the ‘1514 Memorial’ in Hawick in June 1914, \textit{The Border Magazine} stated:

There are great cities which would almost sell their souls - if souls they have - to have a chain of sentiment or home love that could weld their segregated units into a homogeneous whole in such a link as Hawick has - and Selkirk - and create a local patriotism that would form a feeder to the greater patriotism which is today demanded, and tomorrow may be needed.\textsuperscript{35}

One of the basic rules of patriotism was the willingness to fight and, if necessary, to give one's life for one's town or country. Common Riding tradition, like British history, provided some outstanding examples of patriotic endeavour, loyalty and self-sacrifice for the greater good, as the following extract on Selkirk Common Riding made clear:

\textsuperscript{34} Colley, \textit{Britons}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{The Border Magazine}, vol. xix, no. 223 (July 1914), p. 145.
Selkirk has many traditions, all of them glorious and inspiring, and the central truth of each is that the burgh has had throughout her long career a spotless record of intense loyalty. Falkirk, Bannockburn and Flodden over matches by the Crimea, Soudan, and South Africa, of late times. The old spirit is still alive, and so much has the great tradition to do in the way of inspiring and stimulating the young men of today.\textsuperscript{36}

The period between 1870 and 1918 has been defined as ‘the age of imperialism’, meaning the era when nation states tried to extend their rule over other territories, usually through aggressive expansionism. The British, or more correctly the British upper and middle classes, believed that they were a morally superior race and therefore fit to rule those who could not rule themselves. There was a pressing need to send Britons overseas to inhabit new lands and help to build an Empire based on justice and the rule of law. Common Riding tradition, with its stress on liberty and vigilance, was seen as part of the British story and therefore an inspiration to new endeavours. At the Hawick Colour Bussing of 1897, after a lengthy speech congratulating Queen Victoria on achieving her Diamond Jubilee, ex-Cornet Andrew Haddon stated:

I think it is very proper that Hawick should talk about patriotism. We are members of a great and magnificent Empire, of which we all feel very proud. It has been built up by the various deeds of our ancestors, and as the Common Riding comes round, we meet together and one of our purposes is to commemorate the valorous deeds of our ancestors who captured the flag from the English at Hornshole and preserved their rights after Flodden.\textsuperscript{37}

Speakers at Common Riding functions linked the tradition of the Common Riding with the great imperial mission. Addressing an audience of ‘exiles’ who

\textsuperscript{36.} The Flodden Tradition (Selkirk, 1913), p. 21.
\textsuperscript{37.} Hawick Express, 18 June 1897, p. 4.
had returned to Hawick for the Common Riding of June 1914, the Reverend J. Rudge Wilson, a local minister, stated:

The links of the [British] Empire are not fleets and armies, not laws, and treaties, and statues, but the affections and the inspirations which cluster round the home. (Cheers.) They go out from us to Vancouver, to South Africa, to Australia, and wherever they go they carry with them the ideas of just government, and religious freedom, and happy family life, which they have inherited here. The true Teri [native of Hawick] is thus bound to be an Empire builder. (Applause.)38

Closely associated with patriotism, another significant influence on nineteenth-century thought and behaviour was the revival of medieval chivalry. In his book The Return to Camelot, Mark Girouard has examined the popularity of chivalry from the late eighteenth-century to the First World War.39 At its simplest, chivalry is defined as the code of behaviour evolved for the knights of the Middle Ages. Girouard suggests that a revival of chivalry began in the eighteenth-century when new ‘scientific’ methods were developed for the study of history. This created a fashionable interest in the Middle Ages, and led to a widespread sympathy for chivalric ideals. The revival was given further impetus by the French Revolution. For conservative thinkers, the Revolutionary period, with its social chaos and upheaval, presented a stark contrast to the seemingly safe, ordered loyalties of the past. The Scottish Borders played an important part in the chivalric revival, having nurtured Sir Walter Scott. Scott, more than anyone, encouraged and popularised the chivalric movement. His poetic and prose works, which were publishing sensations, were full of chivalric imagery and romance. As we have seen, not everyone was so enamoured with Scott’s enthusiasm for chivalry. Robert Wilson, radical and ex-Cornet of Hawick, took Scott to task for

38. ibid, 5 June 1914, p. 4.
his obsession with the past, arguing that cruder times were best forgotten and that people should concentrate on present-day problems. Wilson rather misinterpreted Scott, who saw chivalry as a medieval phenomenon which had subsequently evolved. However, many of Scott's imitators and followers saw no such development. The world, they believed, was still a battleground between good and evil. By the Victorian period, chivalric ideals and imagery were a significant aspect of national culture. As Girouard's book illustrates, chivalric imagery was omnipresent, appearing in paintings, literature, poetry and songs. In addition, chivalric ideals provided a basic code of behaviour for 'respectable' society, especially for upper and middle class gentlemen. Chivalry encapsulated some important Victorian values: bravery, loyalty, generosity, the ability to be merciful, trust in God, honour, independence, modesty, and respect for women. It also stressed that fighting was honourable, 'the real business of man', and urged the necessity of preparing for war.

The Common Riding was influenced by the popular revival of chivalry. First, the tradition of riding the marches seemed to have close affinity with the chivalric world. Victorian gentlemen identified with the knights of old, seeing themselves as their direct and natural successors. In Musselburgh, the 'Town Champion', who was played by a prominent local citizen, wore an antique suit of armour on the day of the riding. In 1861, participants in the Aberdeen 'Riding o' the Landimyres' identified themselves as latter-day followers of King Robert the Bruce, as the following extract demonstrates:

All that broad district wis the reward o' the capture o' the Castle o' Aberdeen from the soldiers o' English Edward, when 'Bon-Accord' wis the slogan o' the nicht's work. Aye faithful to the braif King Robert in his blackest days! The tradition remains, and the belief remains; and we shall hold fast by them baith as lang as the castles are on our city shield, and the auld slogan on its escroll.40

Riding the marches has always involved an element of play-acting. When Victorian gentlemen took part in a riding, they probably enjoyed some form of chivalric fantasy, imaging themselves riding into battle to defend the honour of their town.

Common Riding tradition provided some excellent role models for the new chivalric age. Fortunately, one might say, because Saint George, the patron saint of chivalry, was strongly associated with England. In Lanark, the statue of Sir William Wallace, which was erected in 1822 on the wall of the Old Parish Church, provided an impressive backdrop for Lanimer Day. Wallace was (and is) a local and national folk-hero whose legend represented the universal struggle for freedom. In the Borders, people enjoyed stories of the Border 'Reivers', albeit the sanitised and romantic versions of Sir Walter Scott and John Mackay Wilson, whose Tales of the Borders were first published in book form in 1840 and delighted a huge audience. Common Riding traditions about the battle of Flodden Field also had a strong appeal. The entire Flodden story was shrouded in romance, especially after Sir Walter Scott had popularised the battle in his epic poem Marmion, which was first published in 1808. Those killed at Flodden epitomised some important chivalric ideals: honour, bravery, truthfulness, self-sacrifice and loyalty to one's superiors, even when it led to disaster.

41. 'In 1834 John Mackay Wilson at the age of twenty-eight published the first of his Tales of the Borders in the Berwick Advertiser. He died within a year of the first weekly copy, but had the satisfaction of seeing the circulation rise from 2000 to 16000 - a phenomenal figure in those days. The Tales were then published in book form in 1840, edited by Alexander Leighton, and went into numerous editions, the last of which was published in the mid-1930s. They sold remarkably well all around the world.' M. Brander, Tales of the Borders (Edinburgh, 1991), p. 9.
Popular enthusiasm for chivalry left some tangible remains in the Common Riding. In June 1913, Selkirk unveiled a statue to mark the four hundredth anniversary of the battle of Flodden. The suggestion to commemorate the battle was made by the Selkirk ‘Colonial Society’, which, in the words of one contemporary, ‘proves, surely, that the same old feeling that sent the Souters to Flodden in support of their King still survives in a wider imperialism than Scotland ever dreamt of four hundred years ago’.\(^4\) The statue was based on the local tradition that a lone ‘Souter’ had returned from the battle bearing a captured English banner. (See plate 19.) The granite plinth bore the simple legend ‘O Flodden Field!’; probably taken from the poem Selkirk After Flodden by the local poet James Brown (‘J. B. Selkirk’). The statue was created by Thomas Clapperton, a sculptor who designed many works in the Borders, and it was unveiled by Archibald, 5th Earl of Rosebery on 13 June 1913.\(^3\) Rosebery was described at the unveiling ceremony as ‘one of the foremost men of this country’, and for his services he was made an honorary burgess of Selkirk. The statue soon became known as ‘Fletcher’ after the man who was supposed to have returned from the battle. Although a commemorative work, the statue also expressed contemporary values and ideals, notably dignity and self-control in the face of defeat. Fletcher accepts his fate with stoicism, like any respectable gentlemen would do. In 1914, Hawick marked the anniversary of the Callants’ victory at Hornshole with the unveiling of the ‘1514 Memorial’. The original proposal for the monument was a Scottish mercat cross, but public opinion favoured a horse and rider theme. (See plate 20.) Like Fletcher, the monument was paid for out of public subscription. The monument was unveiled to a huge crowd on 4 June 1914, the highlight of a week of special ‘Quater-Centenary’ events, which included a ‘Grand Historical Pageant’ and an ‘Exiles’

\(^4\) Selkirk and Flodden. Quater-Centenary of Flodden 1513-1913 (Selkirk, 1913), p. 4.

Homecoming. The new monument, which became known as ‘the Horse’, was quickly adopted as an unofficial symbol of Hawick, a tangible link between past and present endeavours. Subtly, the monument captures emotional extremes: the ‘callant’ is elated and triumphant but his mount is weary and resigned. The freestone base of the monument bore the legend, ‘MERSES PROFUNDO PULCHRIOR EVENIT’ (‘From the depths, the Borders emerged more beautiful’). Again the message was clear (at least, to the well-educated). Struggle through and victory would come, even against the odds. These statues became doubly poignant after 1914.

Further evidence of the contemporary fashion for chivalry, and its influence on the Common Riding, can be found in the work of the Borders artist, Tom Scott. Scott was born in Selkirk on 12 October 1854, the eldest son of a tailor. After artistic training in Edinburgh and several trips abroad, Scott returned to the Borders, where he concentrated on producing water-colour paintings of the Border countryside and scenes from Border legend, including such works as The Return to Selkirk from Flodden and The Legend of Ladywood, which was also about Flodden. In 1897, Scott was commissioned by the town of Hawick to produce a painting commemorating the Callants’ victory at Hornshole in 1514. The picture was financed by public subscription. The completed work, which was presented to the town at the Colour Bussing of 1898 and received with ‘rapturous applause’, depicted the Callants of Hawick returning home in triumph from the ‘battle’ of Hornshole and the townspeople coming out to meet them. (See plate 21.) The painting contains all the classic elements of chivalric imagery. There are knights in armour, blonde-haired maids, hunting horns, deerhounds, and, in the midst of it all, Hawick’s first Cornet carrying the captured banner. In 1898, the painting was exhibited at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh. One review stated that: ‘Mr Scott has thrown over the scene an allowable glamour of historical romance’, and added that the painting
had been produced 'with all the patriotic fervour of a Border man'.

Unsurprisingly, the painting was very popular with the public: reproductions were made and these were sold in large numbers, many being sent overseas. Indeed, the sale of reproductions was so successful that enough money was raised to build a memorial at the supposed site of the incident at Hornshole (two miles down river from Hawick). The new memorial was unveiled on 1 June 1901, and the occasion was fully exploited by the leading citizens of Hawick for ostentatious display. The procession to Hornshole included the Cornet of 1901 (James Sutherland), the Provost, Magistrates and Town Council. Hundreds of cheering townspeople lined the route. Provost Mitchell accepted the monument on behalf of the town, stating that it 'would for ever keep green the heroic conduct of our ancestors'. The eleven foot high monument was in the form of a simple stone column and bore the inscription 'Lest We Forget'.

'Lest We Forget' is interesting. It comes from Rudyard Kipling's poem *Recessional*, and its appearance on the Hawick memorial pre-dates its widespread usage on many British memorials to the First World War. In his book *The Missing of the Somme*, Geoff Dyer considers the meaning of the phrase in relation to memorial art. As Dyer asks: lest we forget what? And what will befall us if we do forget? In Hawick's case, the answer was provided in a poem, *Lest We Forget*, which was written by James ('JED') Murray, the Acting Father of 1901, and read to the audience at the unveiling of the Hornshole memorial. Murray made it clear that Hawick (and, by implication, the rest of the country) owed a huge debt to the Callants of 1514:

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To them we owe our life and light,
Our liberty, our land,
Our strength of will, our love of right,
Our linking heart and hand.47

Whilst people no longer had to physically fight (at least for the moment), they had a moral duty to uphold certain values and ideals in their everyday lives. Murray argued that the modern-day descendants of the Callants were still warriors, fighting for the eternal values of liberty, truth and righteousness, both within themselves and throughout the world:

‘Lest we forget’ that they bequeathed
The privilege of peace;
‘Lest we forget,’ though sword be sheathed,
The battling must not cease.

Ours ‘tis to tread the broader way,
To live the sweeter life;
Ours just as real in modern day
The waging of the strife.

‘Gainst odds that grind the weak to earth
‘Gainst vice that wears the strong.
‘Gainst sland’rous speech that smirches worth,
‘Gainst every coward wrong.48

The Common Riding was interpreted in similar vein. The Cornet and his supporters were representatives of the community, and as such were seen as the forces of good in the age-old struggle against evil. They were moral warriors, fighting the good fight. Contemporaries might have been unable to give a precise

47. Hawick Express, 7 June 1901, p. 3.
48. Ibid.
definition of their values and ideals, but, as the true Christian knight recognised, they were worth fighting for all the same.

Organisation, Music and Emigration

So far, we have examined the reasons why the Common Riding was attractive to ‘respectable society’ by the end of the nineteenth-century. It was the ideal platform to express many of the values of late Victorian Britain, such as honour, devotion, loyalty and patriotic endeavour. As the educated and respectable were drawn to the Common Riding, their influence upon the event was increasingly manifest. Since its earliest times, the ridings had taken place largely by precedent. There were rarely formal instructions or codes of practice, and the event was carried out in a certain manner because it had always been done that way. But in the late nineteenth-century, attempts were made to organise and structure the Common Riding. Printed timetables were introduced for the first time (although they not always adhered to); ‘song-books’ were produced, which included lists of previous principals; official guests and speakers were invited to attend; and tickets and printed programmes were issued for some events. In addition, formal organising committees were established to run the local riding, and ‘clubs’ and societies were formed for those who participated in the event.

An interesting example of the latter was the Hawick ‘Callants’ Club’, which was formed in December 1903 (‘callant’ referring to the young men of the town who captured the English banner in 1514). The Callants’ Club was established in reaction to the purchase by the War Office of land near Hawick for a training camp. The countryside around the town was thought to resemble the terrain

49. Details of the Hawick Callants’ Club are taken from W. Park, The First Fifty Years of the Hawick Callants’ Club. A Short History (Hawick, 1954).
encountered by the British Army during the Boer War. Locals feared that a large military presence would swamp the town and its native traditions. According to its constitution, the objectives of the Hawick Callants' Club included: 'the cultivation of local sentiment; the preservation of the ancient customs and institutions of Hawick; the fostering of local art and literature; the commemoration of important local incidents; and the perpetuation of the memories of local townsmen.'

However, although many locals undoubtedly supported these objectives, the Club had (and has) a restricted membership of only one hundred members, each of whom had to qualify through birth or residence in Hawick. Members were expected to be active supporters of the Common Riding, and had to pay an expensive annual subscription, which was obviously designed to exclude the less affluent. Women were not permitted to become members, and, remarkably, one of the original proposers of the club, Martin Dechan, was also excluded. Dechan had been Acting Father of Hawick in 1903, but, according to the official club history, he 'himself insisted that as a Roman Catholic and the son of an Irish father he was not the man to give the Club as good a start as some others'. These self-appointed guardians of Hawick conformed to a predictable type: local businessmen, church ministers, town councillors, and others with power and position in the local community. The Callants' Club held its first annual dinner on 19 February 1903. The toast list included the 'King and Queen', 'Prince and Princess of Wales', 'The Imperial Forces', 'Callants in Exile' and 'Local Sports and Pastimes'. The Callants' Club was active in promoting local pride and identity. Their activities included purchasing a chain of office for the Provost of the Burgh (who was usually one of their members), and building a memorial cairn on the old 'Ca Knowe' (or 'Call Knowe'), where the burgess role was read on the day of the Common Riding. Moreover, the Callants' Club actively encouraged young people to take pride in their town and community. The Club sponsored school competitions and offered books on local topics as prizes.

51. Ibid, p. 10.
In June 1909, school pupils were formally examined on the extent of their local knowledge. The Senior paper for pupils aged fifteen years and over included such questions as:

Describe in the form of a letter to a Colonial friend the various places of interest you would pass in walking from Hawick to Teviothead.52

Or alternatively,

Mention the names of four historic residences not more than six miles from Hawick, telling briefly what you know about the famous men or women connected with them.53

The popularity of the Common Riding amongst the prosperous middle class had other tangible results. It has been noted that a number of artworks were produced at this time which were inspired by Common Riding themes. The period also saw a increased interest and enthusiasm for 'local history', which resulted in the first historical studies of the Common Riding being undertaken. In 1898, Robert Craig and Adam Laing published The Hawick Tradition of 1514: The Town's Common, Flag and Seal, which, in the authors' words, set out to examine and verify 'the facts bearing on the time-hallowed tradition of 1514, and also on the possession of the Town's Common, and the ancient ceremony of the Riding of its Meiths and Marches'.54 The authors were archetypal middle-class Victorian gentlemen. Adam Laing was a solicitor and bank agent, who became Burgh Chamberlain in 1891 and Burgh Treasurer in 1907. He was also an agent for Liberal party candidates, an active cyclist, amateur archaeologist, bibliophile, poet, and 'fervent supporter' of the Common Riding. His partner, Matthew Robert Smith

52. Ibid, p. 29.
53. Ibid.
Craig, read Law at Edinburgh University and practised the legal profession in the Borders. Meanwhile, in Selkirk, Thomas Craig-Brown published his massive two-volume *History of Selkirkshire and Chronicles of Ettrick Forest* in 1886, which contained a great deal of material on Selkirk Common Riding. Like Craig and Laing, Thomas Craig-Brown epitomised Victorian respectability. He was the owner of a local spinning company, Provost of Selkirk on two separate occasions, a member of the school board, and an enthusiastic antiquarian. In a typical chivalric gesture, he financed a public library for the town (‘providing a means of self-education and rational recreation to his fellow townsmen.’)\(^5^5\) However, although these men were great supporters of the Common Riding, it would be wrong to think of them as apologists for tradition or slaves to local sentiment. Their books are intelligent, critical works which are still considered authoritative. Craig and Laing traced early facsimile copies of the Hawick Common Riding flag, and it was largely as a result of their research that in 1903 the design and shape of the flag was altered. Likewise, in his *History of Selkirkshire*, Thomas Craig-Brown expressed doubt about many aspects of the Flodden tradition of Selkirk.\(^5^6\)

Among his other talents, Robert Craig was also a prolific poet and a songwriter. Predictably, the majority of Craig’s work was based on local themes. His collection *In Borderland*, which was first published in 1898, contains poems on such familiar Border figures as Michael Scott the wizard, Thomas of Ercildoune, the Border Reivers, the Covenanters (from whom Craig proudly claimed descent), and

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\(^5^6\) ‘The apostolic injunction “neither to give heed to fables and endless genealogies” is advice that a county historian cannot be expected to observe: yet, when the alternative has presented itself, tradition has been religiously set aside in favour of the truth, however destructive.’ Craig-Brown, *History of Selkirkshire*, vol. i, preface.
also on Flodden and the Common Riding (including new words for the traditional Hawick tune, *Teribus*). Robert Craig’s work is typical of a large number of local collections which were produced in the later nineteenth-century, a further reflection of an intellectual and rational enthusiasm for local studies. The Common Riding was a popular theme with local writers, and some of the songs written around this time subsequently became part of the Common Riding itself. Indeed, it might be argued that the ‘Common Riding songs’ are the most enduring legacy of the Victorian and Edwardian period. Most of songs featured in the modern ridings date from this time, and their continuing importance to the festival cannot be overestimated. As we have seen, knowing the Common Riding songs signifies ‘belonging’ to the community. Like the traditional Border ballads, the songs are learned by word-of-mouth and locals say that they know them ‘by heart’.

The Common Riding songs were symptomatic of a wider growth in popular music in later nineteenth-century Britain. In his book *Popular Music in English Society*, Dave Russell observes that ‘Britain in the Victorian and Edwardian periods was an extraordinarily musical place’. Throughout the country people were coming together in unprecedented numbers to produce music. The growth of popular music was the result of key social and economic changes in British society. As we have seen, from the 1870s, the majority of working people had increased leisure time and more money to spend. Many turned to music for their relaxation, entertainment and enjoyment. Popular music also benefited positively from the prevailing atmosphere of Victorian Britain. As Dave Russell states: ‘Music, because of its association with religious ceremony and its supposed ability to civilise and humanise, was known to the Victorians as the “sacred art”’. The performance of music was encouraged because it was believed that music could

57. See pages 39-40.
elevate. Consequently, the later nineteenth-century saw the unmistakable rise of a music 'industry'. There was, for instance, an expansion of musical instrument manufacture. Hire purchase, increasingly common from the 1860s, coupled with a thriving second-hand trade, made the purchase of instruments a realistic possibility for all but the poorest members of society. Piano ownership gradually permeated down the social scale. In 1840, the piano was a luxury item, but by 1910, there was one piano for every ten to twenty of the population.60 The piano was the ultimate symbol of respectability in a working-class home, 'valued as an instrument but above all prized as the status symbol of the age'.61 By 1900, the musical service industry could supply all the prerequisites of popular music, everything from piano stools, manuscript paper, music stands and bandsmen's uniforms. Cheap music lessons also became widely available, both from full-time professional teachers and an army of part-timers.

Throughout Britain, people came together in an unprecedented numbers to make music. There was, for instance, a phenomenal expansion in the numbers of brass bands. Dave Russell states that in 1856 there were perhaps only half a dozen brass band contests in England, yet in 1896 there were over two hundred and forty.62 The brass band represents one of the most remarkable working-class cultural achievements in European history. In Hawick, the 'Saxhorn Band' was founded in 1855 by Samuel Stainton, a local stocking-maker, churchman and staunch Tory.63 Money was raised by public subscription, and Stainton received a salary of £5 as the first band-master. The Saxhorn Band certainly took itself very seriously. Forty

60. Ibid, p. 1.
63. The Saxhorn Band was named after a valve instrument of the bugle type devised by Adolphe Sax, a Paris-based instrument maker. For details of the Hawick Saxhorn Band, see O. Connelly, Seven Score Years. Hawick Saxhorn Band 1855-1995 (Hawick, 1995).
musicians received an initial audition, of which only fourteen were chosen. In the traditions of nineteenth-century brass bands, all of these players were male. For many years, the Band experienced a precarious financial state. In 1885, it was commented: 'band members have made repeated appeals to the public for support but have meet with scanty treatment, if not the cold shoulder.' Many of the Band members were unable to afford a uniform and had to make-do with their Sunday best. Inter-town contests took place between brass bands, and these were popular spectator events. In August 1892, three train loads of supporters travelled from Hawick to watch the Saxhorn Band take part in a contest at Galashiels. The event reflected the respectable working-class at play, and the new, increasingly peaceful, nature of local rivalries. However, matters could sometimes get out-of-hand. In May 1893, members of the Hawick Saxhorn Band were harassed and intimidated by other musicians whilst preparing to take part in an open contest at Linlithgow, possibly because the prize money on offer was £60. One report stated: 'This unseemly conduct culminated in a cowardly and unprovoked attack on the judge and Mr Atkinson, the respected conductor of the Hawick Saxhorn Band. Stones were thrown and the police had to intervene. Undaunted, the Hawick band will play at Silloth tomorrow.' Brass bands developed an important role in the Common Riding, and were utilised in the procession on Common Riding morning and at other events. However, their involvement sometimes created resentment on the part of individuals who traditionally provided music at the Common Riding, such as the fifers and drummers. When it was suggested that the Hawick Saxhorn Band might lead the Common Riding procession, the redoubtable Walter Ballantyne ('Wat the Drummer') proclaimed: 'a brass band tae play in front o' the Comet wad never dae: yon's nae music for horses!'  

64. Hawick Express, 21 March 1885, p. 2.  
65. Connelly, Seven Score Years, p. 7.  
The nineteenth-century also saw the emergence of the Scottish pipe band, which was a direct consequence of the adoption of the instrument by the military, when Highland regiments were raised after a period of proscription following the failure of the 1745 Jacobite Rising. Although primarily a Highland symbol, the popularity of the pipe band gradually spread to the Lowland burghs. In addition, there was also vast amount of informal music taking place at this time. Singing in the streets and at work was relatively common, and large gatherings of people were often illuminated with sing-songs.

In this intense musical atmosphere, it was inevitable that people should write songs for themselves and about the things they knew and loved. We must remember that until the advent of the cinema, radio and television, people had to rely on themselves to provide their own entertainments. Family or neighbourhood sing-songs with piano or fiddle accompaniment were a popular way of passing an evening. The demand for local songs was assisted by the rise of a music publishing industry and the cheap printing of musical scores. By the end of the nineteenth-century, most towns had at least one entrepreneur who was willing to publish locally produced material for a fee. The covers of these printed scores became art forms in themselves. A painting by Tom Scott was used by Adam Grant, a Hawick publisher, to illustrate the sheet music of the Common Riding song *Teribus: The Ballad of Hornshole and the Fight of 1514* ('Adapted to the Ancient Air').

One of the major themes of the Common Riding songs was a longing to return home, and one group of people who were particularly attached to the local songs were the 'exiles', those who left their native town to relocate in Britain or to emigrate abroad. It has often been said that Scotland's greatest export is her people. For centuries, Scots of all levels of society and all regions have gone all over the world seeking greater opportunities. This process was accelerated in the nineteenth century by a sharp increase in population and the pressures of industrial
change. Describing nineteenth-century Scotland, Sydney and Olive Checkland have written that, 'in spite of her industrial and trading achievements, Scotland could not hold her natural increase in population at its prevailing growth rate. The peak emigration decade of the century was the 80s, with Scotland losing 41 per cent of natural increase or 218,274 persons. In all between 1861 and 1901 just under half a million Scots went abroad (including to England).’

Emigrants had three main destinations overseas: the United States (after 1783), British North America (to become the dominion of Canada in 1867), and Australia. There was also a great deal of internal migration within Scotland at this time. The bulk of the population steadily concentrated itself in the central belt, especially in and around Glasgow.

Many of those caught-up in this torrent of social change experienced feelings of bewilderment and disorientation. Emigrants were thrust into strange, new worlds, often reluctantly and against their will, and had to cope with challenging and stressful environments. The majority, of course, were on a one-way ticket. Battling against homesickness and self-doubt, emigrants sought comfort in what was familiar to them, the old world in the new. In his biography of Robert Louis Stevenson, who was one of Scotland’s most famous emigrants, Ian Bell writes: ‘Exile

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68. S. and O. Checkland, Industry and Ethos. Scotland 1832-1914 (London, 1984), p. 184. In his book Hawick in Olden Times, James Turnbull gave a moving description of emigrants leaving the Borders in the later nineteenth century. ‘When the emigrants were going away it was a special day, as they all had friends who wished “to set them up the road a bit.” They all walked up the road “cracking” away to each other; sometimes it was almost a crowd that went along with those who were leaving. When Martin’s Bridge was reached the driver would stop the cart, and then the company lost grip of themselves, for they knew they had reached the parting of the ways. Too full for words, the emigrants would look up the river and all around them, and then shake hands with their friends. At this point I have known them try to sing “Auld Lang Syne,” but even that grand old anthem of human love and kindness, at such a time as this, was only a broken melody.’ J. Turnbull, Hawick in Olden Times (Hawick, 1927), p. 18.
is a state of mind, as much a condition of the heart as a physical event. The exile is reminded, more often than the rest of us, to question who he is and what he is."69

By exporting their ‘native’ culture, emigrants were able to provide themselves with a reassuring identity and a security blanket, which in turn created a powerful bond between fellow exiles. In countries across the world, exiles came together with a common feeling infused by nostalgia and idealisation of the homeland. Time and distance leant a sort of enchantment, a melancholy pleasure to the old country. In the late nineteenth-century, ‘Scotch Borderers Associations’ were formed in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and London, and also in several cities of the Empire and the United States. Members organised special dinners, excursions and other events, all with a Border theme. Recognising that emigration could go badly wrong, these organisations also had a charitable ethos. One of the aims of the London Scotch Borderers Association was to help, ‘young Scotch Borderers who came to London, and who perhaps got into straits’.70

The Common Riding was one of the strongest expressions of local identity for many Scottish emigrants. As the festival came around each year, emigrants were reminded of their native town and the people they had left behind. To console themselves and to remind themselves of who, in their own minds, they really were, emigrants organised mock Common Ridings to coincide with the ‘real’ event. One of the earliest of these occurred in 1854 when a ‘Hawick Common Riding’ was held in Melbourne, Australia, which included a ‘Cornet’ and a facsimile of the burgh flag.71 Similarly, from 1883, an annual ‘Hawick Common Riding’ took place in Canada. Participants elected their own Cornet, went on a sailing excursion, organised a sports tournament, and concluded with a celebratory dinner and a sing-song.72 In Boston USA, an annual ‘Hawick Common Riding’ was instituted in the

70. The Border Magazine, vol. iii, no. 29 (June 1898), p. 110.
71. Hawick Monthly Advertiser, 7 October 1854, p. 3.
72. Hawick Express, 5 July 1890, p. 4.
late nineteenth-century by John Scott ('Johnnie the Gover'), a wealthy tweed designer who had been Cornet in 1853 ('No Cornet ever carried out his duties with more fervour or enthusiasm'). On 11 June 1915, the Boston Common Riding included a grand dinner in honour of Hawick, the Borders and Scotland; plus a mock 'colour-bussing' and a concert of Common Riding and Scottish songs. There was not a dry-eye in the house. The following day, the company enjoyed a picnic, 'highland' dancing and sports events (which included a 'married women's race': first prize, a cut glass salad bowl). The next assemblage was scheduled to take place in September 1915 in honour of Sir Walter Scott. Whilst local affinities of this kind were dissipated with the second generation, exiles associations survived into the twentieth-century. In the 1950s, a 'Glasgow-Langholm Association' existed, which once had the honour of being addressed by the poet Hugh MacDiarmid.

Emigration and exile became one of the major themes of the twentieth-century ridings. It has been argued that emigration like warfare threatens the survival of the town, and that when exiles return for the riding they represent the victory of life over death. Exiles, as we have seen, have special status in the ridings. In Selkirk, there is a special 'Colonial Society', which was formed in Guelph, Ontario in 1910. Emigration was a painful process, not just for those who left the town, but also for those who stayed behind. Whilst some emigrants were probably never heard of again, there existed a strong desire on the part of exiles and 'stayers' to maintain links between the 'mother town' (a powerful image of the

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74. Hawick Express, 2 July 1915, p. 4.
75. In June 1994, the Hawick News reported that a Canadian 'Common Riding' had taken place in Thornhill, Ontario. The event was organised by local 'exiles' and included a replica flag, colour-bussing and a 'Cornet', complete with a top hat (and jeans). Hawick News, 10 June 1994, p. 9.
76. See pages 341-42.
ridings) and ‘her sons and daughters across the seas’. This led to the development of a kind of ‘international community’ of local people, where emigrants kept in close contact with each other and with the old town itself. Letters and parcels (and copies of the local newspaper) flowed back and forth across the oceans, keeping emigrants in touch with local news and gossip. Reporting the ‘Snuffin’ at Hawick Common Riding in 1881, the Border Advertiser noted that ‘some of the snuff out of the horn has already been sent off to America’.78 When locals travelled abroad, there were often remarkable coincidences. In 1914, the Reverend David Cathels of Hawick reported that whilst sailing on the Yangtse River in China he had met a man from Hawick, seemingly as if it were the most natural thing in the world.79 When emigrants returned to visit the town, they were feted and lionised. In 1914, a special ‘Exiles Homecoming’ was organised at Hawick to coincide with the four hundredth anniversary of the capture of the Burgh flag. The exiles were welcomed with a civic reception, where they were played into a packed town hall by the Common Riding band, preceded by two halberdiers. According to the official programme, around 160 people returned to Hawick for this special Common Riding, the majority from the United States and Canada.80

The close affinity which many emigrants retained for their home town produced a regular supply of material benefits for the local Common Riding. In Hawick, the Common Riding of 1854 became known as the ‘gold nugget year’, because Hawick emigrants in Melbourne sent home a gold nugget to be competed for at the Common Riding races.81 Similarly, in 1913, Peebles received a new ‘Beltane Bell’ to be competed for at the annual Beltane festival horse races. The bell was presented from Peebleans in the United States, and based on a design copied from the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, which in 1776 had proclaimed the independence

78. Border Advertiser, 15 June 1881, p. 3.
79. Hawick Quater Centenary Souvenir Programme (Hawick, 1914), p. 54.
of the United States. Peebles did rather well out of her exiles. In 1922, Peebleans in South Africa presented a ‘Coronation chair’, which was upholstered in leopard skin and carved by African craftsmen. In 1926, crowning robes for the Beltane Queen were sent from New Zealand, and in 1928, an Indian carpet for the crowning ceremony was presented by local exiles in Darjeeling.82

Increased colonial activity also brought benefits for the travelling funfair. Improved communications and transport between Britain and the Empire made it easier for entrepreneurs to bring potential attractions from abroad. A coloured person was considered a novelty at this time, and the display of indigenous people from the colonies was a popular feature of the fairground. Dressed in their ‘native’ costume and performing traditional skills (especially warlike), the likes of Zulu warriors and Red Indians had the ability to frighten, amuse and mystify. The colonies could also supply unusual and exotic creatures. Travelling ‘menageries’ and collections of animals were a regular feature at fairgrounds. In 1903, the fair at Hawick Common Riding featured displays of live crocodiles, much to the fascination and terror of locals.83 Less honest showmen sometimes produced ‘fake’ animals, such as horses disguised as unicorns, which they claimed were the only specimens in captivity. In 1901, the Hawick fairground featured a sheep with seven legs, ‘and other monstrosities’.84 Humans and animals sometimes performed together. In 1863, the Hawick Advertiser reported that at the Common Riding fair huge crowds were drawn by a showman who was on extremely familiar terms with a large serpent.85 In 1896, the Common Riding fair of Hawick and Selkirk featured the ‘Wild West Menagerie of Buffalo Bill’ (‘Illuminated by Electricity!’),

83. Hawick News, 12 June 1903, p. 3.
84. Ibid, 14 June 1901, p. 3.
85. Hawick Advertiser, 13 June 1863, p. 3.
which included bareback riders, cowboys and indians, and live rattlesnakes. Unusual animals could also provide good advertising for the fairground, and often the arrival of the fair or circus was heralded with a street parade, which featured elephants and caged lions and tigers. Crowds filled the streets to gawp and marvel, and one cannot over-estimate the sense of wonder they experienced on seeing these strange sights.

_The Invention of Tradition_

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have described the period between 1870 and 1914 as the age of ‘invented tradition’. Commonly across Europe, ‘traditions’ were created in response to the profound and rapid social transformations of the period. New social environments, especially the concentration of people in urban units, who worked in industry and who were remote from the old agrarian world, required new forms of organisation and social control. Broadly speaking, the invention of tradition fell into two categories. First, there was the invention of ‘political’ tradition, the deliberate creation by states or organised social or political movements in order to establish new bonds of loyalty and order. In Bismarckian Germany, the state tried to contain the dangers of industrialisation by reviving peasant culture in areas where industrial change was making the most impact. Second, there was a widespread invention of ‘social’ traditions, which had no conscious political ends. A good example here was the invention of sporting traditions, such as football’s ‘cup final day’ or regular ‘international’ fixtures (which in the twentieth-century were sometimes manipulated for political or nationalistic ends). The invention of tradition has important implications for the study of festival life because much of what now appears archaic is actually quite

86. Ibid, 5 June 1896, p. 5.
modern. For instance, 'Up Helly Aa' in Lerwick is presented as an 'ancient' Viking festival, when in fact it was instituted in 1884 to replace the much older tradition of 'tar-barrelling'. This had been prohibited in the 1870s because it was believed to threaten life and property.88 Likewise, nineteenth-century Scotland saw the widespread introduction of 'Highland Games', which, as Grant Jarvie has shown, were originally casual, spontaneous and loosely-organised affairs, but in the late nineteenth-century became increasingly codified and bureaucratic.89

Traditions apparently handed down from time immemorial can be shown to have been created for determinate reasons, by identifiable individuals, at a definite point in time. Take, for example, Peebles Beltane Festival and March Riding, which was instituted in 1897. The Beltane Festival was based on the old tradition of riding the marches, and was therefore both a revival and an invention. As we have seen, march ridings took place in Peebles until the late eighteenth-century. From its inception, the Beltane Festival had a strong patriotic theme, and sought to underpin loyalty to the British state. In 1897, a 'Citizen's Committee' moved to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria by staging a revival of the riding of the marches. Victoria had achieved almost universal popularity in Scotland by the occasion of her Jubilee. As David Cannadine has written:

'Victoria's longevity, probity, sense of duty and unrivalled position as matriarch of Europe and mother-figure of empire had come to outweigh, and then eclipse, the earlier hostile attitude towards her.'90 Victoria was venerated as a unifying symbol of permanence and national community, as the 'head of the nation' rather than head of society. Eric Hobsbawm has observed that Victoria's Golden Jubilee in

1887 and Diamond Jubilee ten years later 'were new insofar as [they were] directed at the public, unlike traditional royal ceremonials designed to symbolise the rulers' relation to the divinity and their position at the apex of the hierarchy of grandees.' The citizens across Britain and the Empire were encouraged to take part in the celebrations, so that they could unite and share in the greatness of the nation.

The revived Peebles riding was held on 22 June 1897. 'Never in its history has the ancient and Royal burgh been so gaily or profusely decorated,' said The Scotsman. The procession was headed by W. H. Williamson, the town treasurer, who acted as Cornet, 'but not for him a glorious dash around the burgh boundaries on mettlesome steed - he completed his tour seated in a brake'. The procession was designed to represent the 'organic' whole of the burgh, coming together as one to celebrate a single great event. It included brass bands, the burgh council and officials, the police force, the fire brigade and engine, between seventy and eighty horsemen and women, and members of the town’s clubs and societies. The event was so successful that it was decided to hold it annually, hence the invention of tradition.

In 1899, the riding was reconstituted as the 'Beltane Festival'. Historically, Beltane was associated with 1 or 3 May, an old Scottish 'quarter-day' which marked the entry of one of the four seasons or quarters of the year. A pagan fire festival is believed to have taken place on these days, which survived in some

92. The Scotsman, 23 June 1897, p. 11.
parts of Scotland, including the Borders, until the eighteenth-century.94 Whilst the superstitious aspect of Beltane waned or adopted a Christian theme, it remained a time of fairs, games and races. In the sixteenth-century, Peebles Beltane Fair was a popular social occasion, attracting the interests of royalty and visitors from across Scotland and possibly other countries. In 1899, it was decided to give a prominent role to children, especially to a young girl who was chosen as the 'Beltane Queen'. (See plate 22.) Although she did not ride the burgh marches, the Beltane Queen shared the leadership of the festival with the Peebles Comet. The first Beltane Queen was Margaret Muir, 'dux' girl of the 'English school'. In 1906, her successor, Nellie Louisa Dickman, was described as 'the cynosure of every eye .... elected to the proud position on account of her vivacity of spirit and intelligence of mind'.95 The Beltane Queen symbolised purity, gentility and innocence, and she was accompanied by her 'court' of local children in fancy dress, who represented a microcosm of history and society. As we might expect, chivalric themes were prominent. The Queen's court included lords and ladies in waiting, knights in armour, winsome maids, heralds, and, in an unconscious echo of earlier times, Robin Hood and Little John. Imperial imagery was also much in evidence: children were dressed-up to represent the different peoples of the Empire and of other lands. The Beltane Festival was almost certainly inspired by Lanark (26 miles from Peebles), where in 1893, a 'Lanimer Queen' had been appointed for the first time. In both towns, the 'tradition' was quickly established, and soon overshadowed the riding of the marches. The pre-Christian origins of the Beltane Festival were largely ignored, apart from a large bonfire on one of the hills surrounding Peebles. Instead, the Festival concentrated on its 'royal' principals, the colourful highlight being

the crowning of the Beltane Queen on the steps of the Old Parish Kirk. Like other events taking place throughout Britain at this time, the Beltane Festival had a strong patriotic theme. Whilst local allegiances were to the fore, the nation was never diminished or sidelined. A song written for the riding of 1897 concluded: ‘That the Peebles folk can do/Something worthy the occasion/And that we are patriots true.’\textsuperscript{96} In 1906, a detachment of the Scots Greys took part in the Beltane Festival procession and staged a mini-tattoo at the Festival sports. The following year, ‘a squad of lads’ from HMS Wellesley put on a gun display.\textsuperscript{97} On both occasions, the visitors were enthusiastically received, reflecting the patriotic adulation of the military. In 1911, the Beltane Festival was timed to coincide with the Coronation of King George V (22 June). In a typical paternal gesture, Provost J. P. Ballantyne and his wife presented school children with a commemorative box of sweets, thus impressing on them the special significance of the day.

Peebles was not the only town to invent traditions in this period. After a lapse of about 80 years, Lauder revived its Common Riding in 1911, also to commemorate the Coronation of George V. Towns which had no tradition of riding the marches trawled through their history to find the basis for a festival. Innerleithen combined several invented traditions to create an event of its own. The earliest of these was ‘Saint Ronan’s Border Games’, which had been instituted by, amongst others, Professor John Wilson and James Hogg in 1827. In 1901, the ‘Cleikum Ceremony’ was introduced ‘to familiarise the youth of the town with the legend of Saint Ronan’, a sixth-century saint who, according to local tradition, caught (or ‘cleeked’) the Devil with his crozier and immersed him into the local ‘Doo Well’, thus giving the water a distinctive, sulphurous flavour, much appreciated by later


\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Peebles March Riding}, p. 9.
travellers and health-seekers. In the modern ceremony, the Dux boy at Innerleithen primary school was selected to play Saint Ronan, and a kilted Standard Bearer was appointed to carry the town banner. There was also a torchlight procession of Freemasons, dressed in their full regalia. Other towns were more casual about the invention of tradition. Annan staged a riding of the marches only at irregular intervals. On 21 March 1871, a special riding was held to celebrate the marriage of the Marquis of Lorne and Princess Louise, both of whom had local associations. Twelve years later, on 20 September 1883, a riding was held to mark the completion of the paving of the Annan High Street. The next riding was not held for another thirty years (20 September 1913). It was described by The Border Magazine as ‘another instance of the revival of pageantry throughout the land’. Annan Common Riding did not become an annual event until 1947.

By 1914, an annual pattern of ridings had become firmly established. These events seemed traditional and timeless, even though some of them had only been recently established. The original Common Ridings had shed their poor image, and now attracted widespread support. They had become vehicles for promoting important social values and ideals. For contemporaries, the most significant of these was patriotism, the love of home and the willingness to defend it. The good patriot was always vigilant and ready. Britain, it was believed, was surrounded by enemies, all of whom were a potential source of mischief and none of whom could be trusted. At the Hawick Colour Bussing of June 1914, Lord Dalkeith, who was principal guest at the Common Riding, asked his audience:

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What did the [Hawick] flag stand for? Everything good in this country! Their flag was won by the sword, and sooner or later, it might have to be defended by the sword. He hoped that the Cornet would not be called upon to do anything of the sort, but if he were he had the faith that he would emulate the deeds of his forerunner 400 years ago.¹⁰⁰

Events would soon prove the prescience of these words.

The First World War

'There are stock images for every period,' writes Paul Addison.¹⁰¹ For August 1914, one thinks of cheering crowds greeting the outbreak of war with enthusiasm and patriotic fervour. But at the time, most people were probably apprehensive about the war and supported it out of a sense of duty and because they believed that their country was in danger. Despite early assurances that the war would be 'over by Christmas', it was soon realised that the war would require an enormous national effort and resources. In late August 1914, Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, appealed to civilians for the creation of a 'New Army' of 100,000 men. British regular regiments had long carried regional titles, but until 1914 prolonged overseas service made these connections tenuous. Kitchener's recruiting campaign emphasised locality and gave the army deep links with the local community for the first time. Young men joined-up for many different reasons: out of instinct, realism, peer pressure, concern for the homeland and fear of invasion, never out of stupidity. An important incentive was the promise that they would be able to serve alongside their friends, relatives, neighbours and workmates from the same town and district (a policy which would have disastrous consequences for some communities in Britain). Local loyalties were widely recognised as the building-blocks of effective national mobilisation.

¹⁰⁰. Hawick Express, 12 June 1914, p. 4.
It was inevitable that an institution like the Common Riding, which promoted local identity and pride, was manipulated for nationalistic ends. Common Riding tradition provided some excellent patriotic role models, and these were used throughout the war to motivate people behind the war effort, and in particular to inspire young men to do their duty and join-up. Common Riding flute and silver bands, which were normally reserved for the festival itself, were used to promote recruiting meetings. Speakers at these meetings, well-briefed about their audience, exploited the heroic past for the needful present. At a recruiting meeting held in Hawick public park in October 1915, several speakers from amongst a group of 'prominent Borderers' warned the youth of the town not to dishonour their illustrious predecessors:

They were all proud of the way the Hawick young men had fought after Flodden; they were all very fond of the Common Riding and of singing 'Hawick was ever Independent', but that song and those great traditions were won by brave men who did brave deeds - they were not won by the slack young man who went slouching down the street with the cigarette in his mouth to the picture palace. The Hawick motto then and now was 'Independence', and how did they win it? They did not win it by talking, they won it by fighting!102

Similarly, in the early years of the war, local newspapers and magazines made constant reference to the past and that it was the duty of contemporaries, especially young men, to honour and maintain tradition. The message was reinforced by patriotic verse, which flowered during the early stages of the war. Pringle Thorburn’s poem Up Borderers Up! appeared in several widely-read Border newspapers and magazines in 1916:

You boast of Flodden, and are proud
Of the blood that runs in you.
You think of home and loved ones,
Yet you must up and do.
For courage comes indigenous
In the hour of fiercest pain -
No coward blood flows thick and slow
Where runs the patriot vain.
You are needed, you are needed.
Up Borderers Up!!

As the war dragged on into 1915, the question arose as to whether the Common Riding should take place during a time of national emergency. The joyful pre-war celebrations were clearly inappropriate with the sombre, determined mood of the country. They were also impractical because a large number of young men (and horses) were away on military service. But what form, if any, should the war-time Common Riding take? The issue caused great controversy and genuine heart-searching. Local people had to consider an unprecedented break with the past, and the abandonment of their cherished local festival. For some, it must have seemed that the future of the Common Riding was at stake.

Two of the oldest Common Riding towns, Hawick and Selkirk, handled the crisis very differently. In March 1915, the *Hawick Express* surveyed a selection of worthy townsmen (no women) for their opinions on the form of that year’s Common Riding.104 Most of those questioned agreed that the Common Riding should take place, but on a much restricted scale. Some expressed doubt over the election of a young man as Cornet. It was argued that the town’s senior magistrate should carry the burgh flag on Common Riding day, symbolising that the youth of the town had sacrificed local position and honour in the sake of the national interest. The old

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104. *Hawick Express*, 15 March 1915, p. 3.
campaigner Adam Laing said that not to appoint a Cornet would be ‘an act of vandalism’, a view which was supported by fifteen ex-Cornets who sent a petition to the Hawick town council requesting them to elect a Cornet as normal. The petition made a strong patriotic case for the Common Riding, hinting that a traditional Cornet might act as an incentive to recruitment:

The annual flying of our flag by a selected youth is a commemoration of the patriotism of the past, and one of the strongest incentives to the patriotism of the present day and in the future. It appeals in a most picturesque way to all that is noblest and best in the spirit of our young manhood.105

It was suggested that the Cornet be selected from local men serving in the armed forces and that the whole event should take on a ‘military air’. Adam Laing proposed that during the riding ‘the old function of calling the Burgess role … might be imitated to the extent of calling the town’s Roll of Honour’, meaning the list of local men on active service or who had been killed in the war. Everyone agreed that the Common Riding races and games should be abandoned, and that the travelling fair should not take place. Several writers saw the war as an opportunity to settle old scores against the Common Riding. The Reverend David Cathels said that he favoured a war-time festival, but that it was right to suspend the horse racing ‘and all its swindling and sordid accompaniments’. Perhaps Reverend Cathels hoped that this might kill off the racing for good.

Ultimately, on 11 May 1915, Hawick town council voted not to elect a Cornet, and not to grant a licence for games or racing, which led to the complete abandonment of the 1915 celebrations. The war demanded sacrifice, and Hawick could not make a greater one than by cancelling its annual festival. The actual day of the riding (11 June) was still observed as a public holiday, although, without

the Common Riding, it must have been a strange occasion. Many locals chose to leave the town on special cheap-day excursions, although children were encouraged to take part in 'patriotic' sports held in the afternoon. In these circumstances, it seems rather strange that the fairground went on as normal. The proprietors tried their best to take people's minds off the war, but the fairground was patronised mainly by soldiers from the military camp near Hawick (who excelled on the shooting galleries) rather than locals.

Selkirk faced a similar dilemma over its Common Riding. The same arguments were gone over, but, unlike Hawick, it was decided that the Common Riding should continue, albeit on a restricted scale. This decision was not accepted by everyone: the Provost of Selkirk, Andrew L. Allan, resigned from the town council because of it. The argument in favour of the Common Riding was that it was about tradition, vigilance and liberty: the parallel was obvious. A military Standard Bearer was selected from Selkirk men serving in the armed forces, and on 25 June 1915, Selkirk Common Riding took place 'in a manner befitting the times'. Only 14 riders were involved in the 1915 riding as against 136 the previous year. There was no colour bussing, horse racing or guild involvement, but the casting of the colours took place in Selkirk town square as normal. For those present, it must have been a poignant and heart-rending scene. Thomas Craig-Brown encouraged locals to take pride in their sacrifice:

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106. Later in the month, Peebles chose a Beltane Queen and organised children's sports, but did not elect a Cornet or stage a riding. Kerr, Peebles Beltane Festival, pp. 17-19.
Children of the warrior race -
In race, valour still confiding,
While youth takes its honoured place,
Age will keep your ancient Riding,
Flodden and Flanders - hallowed pride -
In the Border heart abiding,
In days to come will, side by side,
Be cherished with each Common Riding.108

Later in the war, Selkirk Common Riding was even more restricted. In 1916, there were only six riders, and the town standard was carried and cast by the senior burgh officer. A wreath was laid at the Flodden memorial. It said: 'In memory of Selkirk's sons who have fallen in this war. Common Riding morning, 16 June 1916.'109

For those at the sharp end of the war, the Common Riding could act as a comfort and a spiritual bond, just as it had done for exiles. Although dedicated to their cause, the men of Kitchener's New Army were essentially civilians in uniform, and, unlike the regulars, often lacked a strong sense of identity with the regiment. Consequently, group solidarities were expressed differently from those of the professionals. Impromptu concerts of Common Riding songs took place between recruits on leave or resting behind the lines, and men from the same town were sometimes brought together because one overheard the other whistling or singing a Common Riding song. Likewise, mock Common Ridings were organised amongst groups of soldiers. The following is an extract from a letter of May 1918 written by a Hawick soldier, Corporal John Dodds, Royal Scots, who was interned in a prisoner of war camp in Holland. Dodds wrote that he and his three friends (all Hawick men):

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[We] have arranged a Common Riding, and though after choosing the Cornet and right and left hand men, we have only one supporter, we intend to issue complimentary tickets to natives of Gala and Selkirk [who were also in the camp]. We anticipate that it will be possible to provide donkeys for the occasion.\textsuperscript{110}

The terrible losses of the First World War had an enormous impact on communities all over Scotland. Common Riding tradition, which had been used to motivate people behind the war, was also used to express their sorrow and despair. In the Borders, a parallel was drawn between the local loss at Flodden and the carnage of the Great War. Poems such as Robert Craig's \textit{A Dream of Flodden}, which was written in the 1890s, acquired a whole new meaning after 1914:

They came from lonely moorlands and far sequestered towers,  
And every hill and valley yielded their its fairest flowers.  
From Liddel and Esk and Yarrow, from Teviot, Tweed and Jed,  
They were gallant hearts who followed, and a king himself who led,  
From Carter Fell and Cheviot to lone St Mary's Lake  
They failed not at the summons, who knew the black mistake.  
And they rode away to the eastward, and the land was still as night;  
And never a man that faltered, and never a thought of flight.\textsuperscript{111}

For the Borders, the blackest day of the First World War was 12 July 1915, when the territorial battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers (1/4 KOSB) was involved in heavy fighting at Gallipoli. The Battalion was ordered to charge the Turkish defences, but, as so often happened during the war, the attack ended in confusion and slaughter. Over 300 men were killed and over 200 were injured in a single action that wiped out over half the fighting strength of the Battalion. With good reason, 12 July 1915 became known in the Borders as a 'second Flodden'. John Buchan, a famous Borderer himself, wrote: "The losses ..... had been such that for

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid}, 10 May 1918, p. 3.  
\textsuperscript{111} R. S. Craig, \textit{In Borderland}, pp. 32-3.
the Scottish Lowlands it was a second Flodden. In large areas between the Tweed and the Forth scarcely a household but mourned a son. It was appropriate that the image and tradition of Flodden was used to commemorate the disaster of Gallipoli. Every year on the anniversary of the ‘charge’, a special service for Gallipoli veterans was held at the ‘1514 Memorial’ in Hawick. A large laurel wreath with arum lilies was placed on the monument. In 1916, the inscription on the wreath stated: ‘The ancient spirit of our fathers hath not gone.’

The end of the war brought about the resumption of the ridings. Although tempered by local loss, the sheer relief at the end of hostilities, and the reunion of so many friends and families, gave the ridings of 1919 a special poignancy, as they would also have in 1946. The ridings symbolised the victory of life over death. Having cancelled its riding of August 1914, Musselburgh organised a special ‘Peace Riding’ in 1919. The event was joyously celebrated, although Major Hope of Pinkie, who had been appointed Town Champion for 1914, was unable to take part because of his war injuries. No-one could forget the impact of the war, and it was inevitable that community festivals like the ridings were used to commemorate local loss and sacrifice. In Hawick, it was proposed that the dates ‘1914-1918’ be added to ‘1514’ on the Common Riding flag. It was also suggested that bronze plaques bearing

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113. For more details on Gallipoli, see G. Richardson, *For King and Country and Scottish Borders* (Galashiels, 1987). The commemorative service for 12 July 1915 became a significant annual event in the Borders. In the 1920s and 1930s, hundreds of First World War veterans attended the special service. The service still survives under the auspices of the Hawick Callants’ Club, who every year organise a wreath laying at the 1514 Memorial and also on the Hawick war memorial. In recent years, the service has turned into a more general commemoration of the First and Second World Wars. Inevitably, the number of veterans has steadily declined.

with the names of the fallen be added to the base of the 1514 Memorial. In the 1920s, a universal feature of the ridings was a visit the town war memorial, where the principal laid a wreath of remembrance on behalf of the local community.

New Festivals and the Second World War

The inter-war years saw the development of more festivals based on the original Common Ridings, proving that the invention of tradition is an ongoing process and not, as Hobsbawm and Ranger suggest, restricted to the period before the First World War. Indeed, the impact of the war led to the development of new festivals because it heightened the sense of community in towns and drew people together in a common purpose and struggle. The new ridings were a positive response to the horrors of the First World War, and reflected the desire to construct a brighter future. In the Borders, old rivalries were strong, and there may have been some envy of the traditional Common Ridings, which were an obvious focus of community and civic pride.

115. The suggestion that the 1514 Memorial should double as a local memorial to the Great War was not pursued, although one man was ultimately commemorated in this way. William F. Beattie, the original sculptor, was killed in action shortly before the end of the war. Beattie's father, who was also a sculptor, added the following inscription to the base of the monument:

'SCULPTOR WILLIAM F. BEATTIE M.C. R.F.A.
A NATIVE OF HAWICK
BORN 1886. KILLED IN FRANCE 1918.'

The local newspaper described William Beattie as 'a young man of great promise in his profession, most kindly and unassuming in manner.' Hawick and the Great War (Hawick, 1920), p. 200.
In 1930, Galashiels instituted the 'Braw Lads' Gathering', which was an immediate success and became an integral part of the annual Borders circuit. The original proposal was made by Provost J. C. Dalgleish, although the Gathering was only instituted after lengthy consideration by the community. Historically, Galashiels did not possess common land, so the Gathering was based on significant events in the town's history, notably the dispersal in 1337 of a band of English marauders at a spot known as 'the Englishmen's Syke'; the granting by James IV as a gift to his future bride of the lands of Ettrick forest; the granting of the charter as a Burgh of Barony to Galashiels by Sir James Pringle of Gala in 1599; and, perhaps most important of all, the remembrance of Galashiels men who had died in war. It was inevitable that the Gathering imitated features of other ridings. One of the most important of these was a civic reception for overseas visitors and returning 'exiles'. Indeed, it was the 'Galaleans' Society' of Lawrence, Massachusetts, who provided the sashes of office for the original principals of the Gathering, Braw Lad Henry Polson and Braw Lass Hazel Gardiner. (See plate 23.) In the spirit of the times and the recent enfranchisement of women, the Braw Lass was appointed in her own right and not as partner to the male principal. Neighbouring towns were keen to support the new festival. On 28 June 1930, the first Braw Lads' Gathering featured a mounted cavalcade of 269 riders, amongst whom were the Cornets of Hawick, Peebles, Langholm and Lauder, plus the Standard Bearers of Selkirk and Innerleithen. The procession also included about 50 women riders. Ceremonies were held at the 'Raid Stane' and the mercat cross; riders visited Abbotsford, the home of Sir Walter Scott, and Gala House, home of the laird of Gala; and there were also children's sports, singing and dancing.116 The first Gathering was described as 'a day of crowded joys', although the memory of the Great War also cast a shadow over proceedings. The climax of the day's events was an 'act of homage' at the Galashiels war memorial. The Scotsman reported: 'As the strains of the Flowers of

the Forest broke on the air, the Burgh Standard was slowly lowered, heads remained uncovered and a silence reigned'.\(^{117}\) For those present, it was a poignant moment, a reminder of what they had lived through and the sacrifice they had made. The Galashiels war memorial was an outstanding piece of work by the sculptor Thomas Clapperton. It showed a sixteenth-century Border Reiver on horseback and was said to have captured 'the spirit of the Border'. One travel writer in the 1920s described it as 'the most perfect town memorial in the British Isles'.\(^{118}\) (See Plate 24.)

Throughout the 1930s, other towns followed the example of Galashiels and instituted their own horse-based festivals. In 1932, Dumfries revived the old tradition of riding the marches, which had taken place in the town until the nineteenth-century, and established an annual event called 'Guid Nychburris Day' (the name being adopted from sixteenth-century records which exhorted burgesses to be 'guid nychburris' or good neighbours). The new event featured the familiar figures of Cornet and Cornet's Lass, but there was also a 'Pursuivant', who symbolised royal authority, and the 'Queen of the South', another variation on the theme of a summer queen. In August 1935, Musselburgh staged a riding of the marches (the first since 1919), which was so successful and well-supported that it was decided to organise an annual event in an attempt to maintain the spirit of community and civic pride. Thus, in July 1936, Musselburgh instituted the 'Honest Toun' Festival, which was loosely based on the traditional ridings. The 'Honest Lad' and his entourage became regular visitors to the Border ridings. Likewise, in 1937, Kelso instituted an annual summer festival which featured the 'Kelso Laddie' as principal and ride-outs to neighbouring villages and to Floors castle, home of the Duke of Roxburghe. In 1938, Melrose instituted the 'Summer Festival', which, as noted in chapter one, incorporated a vast array of historical associations.

The Second World War created new challenges for the ridings. The response to the war was similar to that which occurred twenty five years earlier, although now there was an obvious precedent to follow and controversy was largely avoided. As in 1915, most towns suspended their riding for the duration of the war, although with greater confidence that the riding would resume once the war was over. In some cases, towns maintained a degree of continuity with the past by appointing an individual, usually an ex-principal, to ride the marches alone. Selkirk continued to hold a Common Riding, although on a restricted scale. In 1946, it was written that ‘the flags had been carried in procession at the Common Riding in defiance of Hunnish Nazism’. However, the Selkirk flags were not ‘bussed’ during the war.

The Second World War also produced a remarkable testament to the strength of local attachment and pride in the Common Riding. In 1945, women workers at the Pringle knitwear factory in Hawick made a replica of the ‘Banner Blue’ (the Hawick Common Riding flag) and sent it to local men serving in Germany with B Company, 4th Battalion of the King’s Own Scottish Borderers. The battle honours of the Company were embroidered on the flag, which became known as the ‘Letzlingen flag’ after the town where the Company were stationed. As the date of the Common Riding approached, ‘principals’ were appointed from the Company, including a Cornet, Right and Left-hand Men, Acting Father and acting Provost. On 8 June 1945, the day of the Common Riding, the flag was carried in procession through the streets of Letzlingen and dipped in the River Elbe. (See plate 25.)

The ridings of 1946 were particularly memorable, just as they had been in 1919. Everywhere, there was sheer relief at the end of hostilities and thankfulness at the gradual return to familiar patterns of life. In 1946, all of the pre-war ridings were revived, and people made great efforts to be at home for these special

119. Southern Reporter, 20 June 1946, p. 3.
occasions. In June 1946, the Hawick Express reported that locals were ‘exceptionally enthusiastic’ about that year’s Common Riding, ‘feeling the need to revive old memories after the lapse of celebrations during six years at war’. The same newspaper stated that the Common Riding of 1946 had been ‘the most jubilant Common Riding of the century and perhaps the best supported Common Riding of all time’. Unsurprisingly, the standard bearers of 1946 were ex-servicemen who had ‘done their bit’ for the war effort. In Selkirk, the Royal Burgh Standard Bearer was Andrew (‘Danny’) Hislop, who had served in the Royal Air Force during the war. He was described by the Southern Reporter as ‘a manly young Souter’. The Melrosian of 1946 was Arthur Brown, who ‘on the rugby fields and on the stern fields of war has proved his manhood. In him will be symbolised the Melrosians who shed their blood and all who served their country in the struggle for liberty.’ The restrictions and shortages of wartime produced difficulties for the organisers of the ridings, and in many respects the post-war ridings were ‘make-do’ events. In Peebles, there were problems in obtaining material for the children’s costumes, and the community had to make strenuous efforts to procure outfits. As with the previous generation, Common Riding traditions acquired new meanings and symbolism for those who had lived through the war. Reporting Selkirk Common Riding of 1946, the Southern Reporter stated: ‘The old songs of Selkirk had a new significance when sung at the victory Common Riding. They were triumphant songs, declaring that the name and fame of the Royal Burgh had been upheld in the latest holocaust of war.’ Inevitably, the emotional significance of the ridings was heightened as people drew parallels between their own experience and local tradition. In 1946, the ‘casting of the colours’ at Selkirk Common Riding was described as:

120. Hawick Express, 5 June 1946, p. 5.
121. Ibid, 12 June 1946, p. 5.
122. Southern Reporter, 16 May 1946, p. 4.
123. Ibid, 20 June 1946, p. 3.
A memorial to brave men who had fallen and to women who have sorrowed. The Burgh Standard Bearer made the Flag to tell with an eloquence and revenue more powerful than words the tragic and triumphant story of Flodden and of other fields right up to yesterday. As the flag of the Empire was dipped, the silence fell. The assembly remembered heroes of the past and more especially their own kith and kin who had not returned.124

The invention of tradition continued in the immediate post-war era when other towns developed ridings modelled on the traditional Common Ridings. Like the Edinburgh International Festival, which was established in 1947, these ridings were a positive response to the universal degradation of the Second World War, and a desire to maintain the strong feelings of community which the war had entailed. Jedburgh ‘Callant’s Festival’ was instituted in 1947, which included ride-outs to places of historic interest in the neighbourhood. The first ‘Jethart Callant’ was Charles McDonald, an ex-serviceman, who, in the words of the Southern Reporter, carried the burgh flag as ‘the emblem of our past glories, and the symbol of our hope for future achievements’.125 In 1949, Duns instituted the ‘Reiver’s Week’, which followed the basic model of the new festivals. Likewise, in 1952, Coldstream Civic Week was instituted, which included a ride-out to the Flodden battlefield. By the mid-1950s, the annual cycle of Borders festivals had become firmly established.

‘Hugh MacDiarmid’ and Langholm Common Riding

Christopher Murray Grieve, who became internationally famous as the pseudonymous writer and poet ‘Hugh MacDiarmid’, was one of the intellectual and artistic giants of twentieth century Scotland. MacDiarmid was born in Langholm on 11 August 1892, the son of the local postman, and lived in the town until he was

124. Ibid.
125. Ibid, 17 July 1947, p. 3.

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sixteen-years-old. Growing up in Langholm left an indelible mark on MacDiarmid. His prose and poetry are rich in topographical references to Langholm and he constantly drew inspiration from his early life in the 'Muckle Toon'. On his 79th birthday, Valda Trevlyn, MacDiarmid's second wife, wrote in tribute:

Over the years you've dreamed your dreams
And as always
You go back to your past
In Langholm - your tap-root.126

The traditional pivot of local life in Langholm was (and is) the Common Riding. Like other locals, MacDiarmid grew-up with the festival, and was infused with a love and respect for it from an early age. Although a solitary boy who, in his own words, 'preferred bein' alane - wi' his ain thochtys', MacDiarmid loved the noise and bustle of the Common Riding, and thrilled each year as the population of Langholm turned out for festival. (See plate 26.) MacDiarmid never lost his admiration for Langholm Common Riding, and knew that it was a significant part of his identity. Later in life, MacDiarmid made every effort to return to Langholm for the Common Riding. When he returned, he played the role of an 'exile', not a famous literary figure.

The language and imagery of Langholm Common Riding is a recurring theme in MacDiarmid's prose and poetry. On 12 March 1927, MacDiarmid's short story The Common Riding was published in the Glasgow Herald.127 MacDiarmid's story is based in Langholm and tells of a Common Riding obsessive called 'Yiddy Bally' (Bally for Ballantyne), who may have been based on a real person (or people).

According to the story, Bally was ‘Common-Riding daft’, and MacDiarmid probably knew some individuals in Langholm who fitted the description:

He seemed to leeve for naething else. This year’s was nae sunder owre than he begood talkin’ aboot next year’s. He was like that memory man in the papers - only the Common Riding was Yiddy’s a’ subject ..... He’d the names o’ a’ the Cornets aff by hert frae A to Z, and no’ only the Cornets, but the dogs that wun the hound trail; the horses that wun the races; the men that wun the wrestlin’ and wha’ cairried the Croon o’ Roses and the Thistle and the Bannock and the Saut Herrin’ ..... He was a fair miracle.128

MacDiarmid’s enthusiasm for the Common Riding is apparent throughout the story, but there are also some sly criticisms of the event, and also of Langholm. There is the shrewd observation that the Common Riding is controlled by an exclusive ‘clique’ or select group: ‘Ye ken what a Committee is in a place like this. It’s aye in the haunds o’ a certain few, and if ye dinna belong to their cleek ye’ve nae mair chance o’ gettin’ on to’ than a rich man has o’ gaen’ through the e’e o’ a needle.’129 MacDiarmid observed the exclusive nature of the Cornetship and that only wealthy individuals are likely to be eligible:

Yiddy was young eneech and licht eneech in a’ conscience to be Cornet, but he’ nane o’ the ither qualifications. Apart frae the fact that he didna’ ken a’ end o’ a pownie frae the ither, the Cornets are aye drawn frae the sprigs o’ the gentry or young bluids o’ farmers - no’ factory haun’s. It tak’s a bonny penny to be a Cornet.130

In the conclusion of the story, Yiddy, like a true native of Langholm, gives his life to uphold the dignity of the Common Riding.

129. Ibid, p. 347.
Hugh MacDiarmid’s undisputed masterpiece was his epic poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, which was first published in 1926. The poem has been described as, ‘not only the most revolutionary work in Scots literature, but also one of the most powerfully imaginative achievements in twentieth-century poetry.’

It has also been noted that *A Drunk Man* ‘is informed at a deeper level than is sometimes realised by memories of Langholm and in particular of its summer festival’. The most obvious image is that of the thistle itself. A thistle is one of the ‘four emblems’ carried in procession on Langholm Common Riding morning. It is no ordinary thistle but a monster specimen eight foot in height and specially grown for the festival. This powerful image was familiar to MacDiarmid and was almost certainly in his mind when writing *A Drunk Man*. (The thistle also has an important role in his short story *The Common Riding* where the hero Yiddy Bally has the honour of carrying it.) In the poem, the thistle becomes all things, including bagpipe music, a pair of bellows, a skeleton, parts of the human anatomy, and a flash of lighting. One critic summarises the importance of the image of the thistle: ‘Although the drunk man’s struggle to perceive the nature of the thistle is seen as a facet of his dichotomous attitude towards Scotland, MacDiarmid uses that as a starting point to investigate the divided nature of mankind.’

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132. R. McQuillon, ‘A Look at the Langholm Thistle’, *Calgacus*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Spring 1976), pp. 14-15. In his autobiography, MacDiarmid wrote: ‘Another thing about Langholm. There is an annual Common-riding, and amongst the emblems that are carried in procession through the streets in the blue twilight of so long ago - in addition to the Crown of Roses - an eight-foot thistle and a barley bannock with a salt herring nailed to it, with a twelvepenny nail, and all the children carry heather besoms. In the same way I was always determined that in whatever work I might do, the emblems of my nationality would figure second to none.’ *Lucky Poet* (London, 1943), p. 222.
contains reference to Langholm Common Riding and MacDiarmid expresses his memories of the festival:

Drums in the Walligate, pipes in the air,  
Come and hear the cryin’ o’ the Fair.

A’ as it used to be, when I was a loon  
On Common-Ridin’ Day in the Muckle Toon.

The bearer twirls the Bannock-and-Saut-Herrin’,  
The Croon o’ Roses through the lift is farin’,

The aught-fit thistle wallops on hie;  
In the heather besoms a’ the hills gang by.134

‘The Bannock-and-Saut-Herrin’ refers to one of the four emblems carried in the Common Riding procession. A barley-bannock and salted herring are fastened to a wooden dish by a large nail, and signify the Duke of Buccleuch’s rights in local mills and fisheries. ‘The Croon o’ Roses’ refers to a floral crown, probably a symbol of royalty although the rose was also a symbol of the Virgin Mary in medieval iconography. The fourth emblem is a spade, used for cutting the sod at different points of the Common.

The Ridings in the Late Twentieth-Century

There is no doubt that MacDiarmid, like other natives of small burghs, was rather suspicious of city life. In an address to the Glasgow-Langholm Association in April 1946, MacDiarmid stated that cities were anonymous, alien environments:

In the small town we all know each other .... these human ties which stretch back over generations are infinitely more preferable to the anonymity of the great cities, where you live for years and not know your neighbours on the same stairs. That is not human life.135

Through his experiences as a native of Langholm, MacDiarmid believed that the Common Riding was a reaffirmation of common humanity and universal dignity. In his 1967 poem The Borders, MacDiarmid wrote:

O dinna fear the auld spirit's deid,
Gang to Selkirk or Hawick or Langholm yet
At Common-Riding time - like a tidal wave
It boils up again, and carries a' afore it.136

Thirty years later, is Hugh MacDiarmid's optimism still justified? What is the state of the Scottish Common Riding as we near the end of the twentieth-century? Unlike MacDiarmid, it would be tempting to take a pessimistic view. Forces undoubtedly exist in the modern world which have the potential to undermine local identity and indigenous culture, and to destroy much of what make the ridings unique. It is often said that the twentieth-century has seen the rise of a 'global' culture, that increasingly we live in a 'global village', where, as a result of improved production, transport and communications, everyone consumes the same goods, entertainments and experiences, irrespective of their religion, race or nationality. No-one can deny that global culture is immensely seductive, brilliantly packaged and instantly accessible, albeit only to those with the resources to purchase it. In addition, global culture is glamorous, and, to the neutral observer at least, it can make local events seem amateurish and insignificant. But it would be easy to take the global culture argument too far. People are not puppets

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who can be manipulated at the whim of the international market. In towns which stage ridings, locals are as modern as anyone else, but their culture is pluralist, meaning that aspects of an older local culture co-exists and intermingles with modern influences. Observe any Common Riding gathering and the process is clear. In the Borders, young people buy heavily-marketed football strips to wear as fashion items, but they also wear the shirt of their local rugby team in the same way. Young girls take pride in having the latest clothes, but decorate them with Common Riding ribbons and rosettes. An impromptu Common Riding ‘sing-song’ is likely to be a mixture of local songs and well-known popular tunes (from any time in the last hundred years). The Common Riding Ball mixes traditional dancing with popular modern trends. Even alcoholic drinks are adapted locally. At Hawick, rum and milk are mixed to produce the traditional festival drink.

There is, however, a danger that tradition might turn stale. To take one example, many Common Riding songs were written before the First World War, and, whilst there is no doubting their continuing popularity, they may in future become anachronistic and, to some people, an obsolete embarrassment, as happened recently to the Church of Scotland hymn book. Likewise, one wonders if the travelling fairground will survive long into the twenty-first century. The ridings are also beset by ongoing economic problems. These events are expensive to maintain, even though much of the organisation and administration is carried out by amateur enthusiasts. Arguably, the solution lie in ‘sponsorship’, and some events have already received financial backing from outside agencies. In the early 1990s, the Colour Bussing at Hawick received financial assistance from a national bank, whilst the Common Riding games were sponsored by a local knitwear company. But sponsorship of this kind can be double-edged. Locals must be wary that they do not surrender too much control of their riding, and repeat the mistakes made by certain sports bodies where sponsors are now dictating the rules and style of the game. Certainly, there is a fear that ‘big business’ is taking over and exercising an
unwarranted control over people’s lives. When a new ‘supermarket’ was opened in Hawick in 1993 (ironically, the opening ceremony was performed by that year’s Cornet), concern was expressed that it would further erode local identity and individuality, not least because several local traders were forced out of business. A song was written about the arrival of the new store, which, although partly humorous, also expressed the feeling of powerlessness in the face of commercial pressures:

Last night, I had a dream,  
And wi’ this I end my ditty.  
It was twenty year frae now  
Hawick had been renamed Safeway City.  
And such was the extent  
They ‘d ta’en owre the town we bide in,  
They’d even come to run the Common-Riding.  
There were nae horses at the Chase,  
Safeway trolleys hed ta’en their place,  
And on the Cornet’s flag quite clear,  
This altered slogan did appear,  
Without a doobt, it said  
Safe Oot, Safe In and Safeway.137

Perhaps the biggest threat to local identity and to the ridings is the increasing mobility of the population and the steady arrival of ‘incomers’ into the towns. In recent years, the Borders has been recognised as a highly desirable place to live, especially for people who are raising a family or who are living in retirement. This has attracted many incomers into the area, who have unwittingly undermined the basic homogeneity of local communities. Gwen Kennedy Neville quotes one Selkirk man whose family had run a business on the High Street for several generations. Recalling his boyhood before the Second World War, he stated: ‘Back in those days ..... everyone knew everyone else. 80 per cent of the town

137. I. W. Landles, Safeway (Hawick, 1993).
was Selkirk [born on burgh soil]. Now only about 20 per cent is Selkirk.\(^{138}\) Incomers have an ambiguous status in the community. They are always made welcome, but they are also seen as a potential threat to a distinctive way of life. Of course, locals would find it difficult to define their difference from other people, and to say what makes their way of life special (when asked, they might say 'the Common Riding and that'). However, there are no restrictions on incomers taking part in the ridings, although they are unlikely to become principals. Conversely, the presence of non-native incomers can in some ways benefit the ridings. Incomers are usually anxious to shed the label of being an 'outsider', and as a result they often become staunch supporters of the local riding.

Coupled with the presence of incomers, the ridings are also threatened by the steady drain of young people away from towns. This problem has been exacerbated in recent years because of increased educational opportunities, especially for the young, and also from the need for employment flexibility and mobility. One consequence for the ridings has been that there are not so many young people available to become festival principals. Indeed, whilst there is intense competition in the older Common Ridings, some towns have had very real difficulties in finding young people, especially young men, to come forward and fill the roles. Galashiels, for instance, often struggles to find a candidate to become Braw Lad. Similarly, in 1996, the festival committee at Duns could not find a local man to take on the mantle of Duns 'Reiver' and lead the celebrations. In this case, the problem was solved in a novel way by creating the new post of 'Reiver-Lass', nineteen-years-old Vicki Rybowska, who carried the burgh standard on the day of the riding. (See plate 27.) In future, female standard bearers may become increasingly common.

\(^{138}\) Neville, *Mother Town*, p. 37.
So it is clear that the ridings cannot afford to become complacent. As in the past, innovation and imagination will be necessary for the ridings to survive. And yet there is much to be confident about. The threats to local identity have, paradoxically, encouraged an increasing awareness of individuality and the need to protect local institutions. Indeed, it might be argued that in the late twentieth-century the ridings are more popular than ever before. There are such large numbers of riders taking part in some events that local landowners and farmers have expressed disquiet at the damage they are causing. There are many other factors working in favour of the ridings. Rising standards of living mean that more people are now able to own or hire a horse. Since the 1960s, horses have been largely associated with leisure rather than work, and for many they have come to symbolise a lost Arcadian past. In addition, as a result of improved transport, it is much easier for ‘exiles’ and others living away from the town to return for the riding. And, perhaps most importantly, the ridings are now an integral part of the local economy, plus an eagerly anticipated annual holiday.

The ridings have also started to attract increasing national interest. In part, this is a reaction to the blandness and materialism of modern culture, and the desire to recapture an innocent, more simple time. Beginning in the 1950s, national newspapers such as The Scotsman and The Glasgow Herald, and some London-based titles, occasionally featured photographs and articles about the ridings. In 1991 and 1992, colour photographs of Hawick Common Riding were given pride of place on the front cover of The Scotsman. The ridings have also been featured on television and radio, usually on local channels but sometimes on national programmes. In 1991, Selkirk Common Riding was broadcast ‘live’ across the United Kingdom on breakfast-time television. Unfortunately, the presenter committed a serious faux-pas in local eyes by referring to Selkirk as ‘the village’.139 Locals are generally flattered by the media attention, although they do not actively court it.

Here, the ridings are unlike events devised specifically for tourists. There is no real need to promote the ridings, because local people, who are the intended audience, know all about them anyway. There is no doubt that tourist industry chiefs find the ridings awkward and occasionally infuriating. The ridings are a unique local asset, and in theory could be used to attract visitors into the area. But locals are generally reluctant to package and sell their event. In 1996, a representative of the Scottish Borders Tourist Board commented: ‘So much more could be done to promote the Common Ridings. It is an opportunity missed as far as tourism is concerned. Borderers are extremely proud of their heritage, but are not willing to get involved in the promotion of it.’ With the growing importance of tourism and the ‘heritage industry’ in the local economy, this attitude may have to change in future, and the ridings may become more ‘tourist-friendly’. At the moment, strangers are welcome to attend, although it is felt that they do not know the ‘true’ meaning of the event. Their growing presence, and even participation, may intensify communal identity and attach locals even closer to their riding.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to trace the history of the riding of the marches in Scotland from the early sixteenth century to the present. Covering a period of almost five hundred years, the focus has been on general trends and developments in the history of the ridings.

There is no doubt that the ridings are remarkable historical survivals. As this thesis has shown, the key to the survival of the ridings has been the ability to adapt to different social environments. Consequently, whilst the original purpose of the event has become outmoded, the ridings have generally avoided becoming anachronistic or obsolete. People have used the ridings to express their own values and ideals, although inevitably these have ebbed and flowed over time. In the sixteenth century, the ridings were used to express ideas of social harmony and order, and whilst these have remained important, other notions have also been expressed through the event.1 In the late eighteenth century, the ridings seem to have flirted with political radicalism, but in the late nineteenth century, they were highly conservative and deferential, especially towards the monarchy and the British state.2 The modern ridings flourish because they are festivals of community and 'belonging', and provide local people with a unique symbol of their identity. This thesis has shown that the ridings have been flexible and adaptable, and that they have survived because they have meant different things to different people at different times. Of course, the evolutionary process has not always been smooth or easy. As we have seen, the ridings faced a major challenge in the nineteenth century when new standards of personal and social behaviour became increasingly influential.3 Likewise, in the late twentieth century, the changing

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1. See pages 98-100.
2. See pages 200-1 and 295-8.
3. See chapter five, passim.

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role of women in society and ability of the ridings to adapt to these changes has produced deep antagonisms and controversy.\textsuperscript{4}

The modern ridings are a complex historical mix. As we have seen, the ‘genuine’ Common Ridings such as Hawick and Selkirk have gone through several stages of development and the influence of these can be discerned in the modern event. First, there is the ‘original’ or sixteenth century riding, which we examined in chapter two. The riding originated when commony was granted to the burgh by the crown or local baron, and the inhabitants of the burgh had to make regular inspections of the common to check encroachment upon it by neighbouring landowners. This ancient riding survives today through the act of the town ‘riding out’, although this now takes place only in a symbolic manner. The ancient riding can also be discerned through the importance of burgh flags (possibly derived from religious banners), youth groups, craft and trade guilds, corporate feasting and drinking, and other ‘carnival’ elements. In addition, Hawick and Selkirk have local traditions about the battle of Flodden. It was shown in chapter three that these traditions may be contemporary with the battle, although since the early nineteenth century they have developed more general meanings about death and loss.

The next phase of Common Riding history begins in the eighteenth century. Chapter four showed that many ridings were discontinued at this time as a result of social and economic changes, in particular agricultural improvement and urban expansion.\textsuperscript{5} The ridings which survived acquired new meanings as the original purpose of the event declined and it was less important to inspect the boundaries of the common. In the late eighteenth century, the ridings began to reflect powerful national trends and, in some respects, they were politicised. There was, for

\textsuperscript{4} See pages 59-66.
\textsuperscript{5} See pages 218-25.
instance, a steady growth in national patriotic sentiment, beginning from the accession of George III in 1760 and reaching its zenith in the late Victorian period.\(^6\)

Whilst the ridings remained intensely local, the reaffirmation of national loyalties became a feature of ridings, and it survives today in various guises, such as making toasts to the Queen at official receptions or displaying the Union flag from public buildings. Likewise, the major social changes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries deeply affected the ridings and the influence of these events is still apparent in the modern ridings. For instance, large-scale emigration was an important feature of nineteenth century Scotland.\(^7\) By its nature, emigration threatened to undermine local communities by draining people away from the towns. The ridings allowed communities to reaffirm family and social ties, and thus overcome their own social death. It was shown in chapter one that ‘exiles’ make a special effort to return home each year for the ridings, where they are warmly welcomed and given special status for the duration of the event.\(^8\) One of Gwen Kennedy Neville’s deepest insights about the Common Riding is that it provides a temporary resolution, through ritual, of the dilemma which many local people face: namely, the need to leave home to seek one’s individual fortune, thus becoming dead to one’s family and town; or to stay at home to gain a position in the community at the expense of individual advancement in the outside world. In the Common Riding, ‘stayers’ are eligible for the position of standard bearer and other posts, whilst ‘leavers’ acquire the status of returning exiles.\(^9\)

Chapter five demonstrated that the mid-nineteenth century was an important turning-point in the history of the ridings. National changes in taste and behaviour led to new standards of control and organisation in the ridings. Events became more orderly and formalised, which in turn encouraged greater

\(^6\) See pages 196-200 and 295-8.

\(^7\) See pages 312-17.

\(^8\) See pages 37-8.

\(^9\) Neville, *Mother Town*, p. 115.
participation in the event. One of the most important legacies from this period is a strong local song culture. These songs were concerned with local themes, but many of them also stressed national and patriotic values. During the First World War, the ridings acquired a further layer of symbolism and meaning. The ridings were a powerful expression of communal solidarity in the face of sacrifice and loss, whilst local traditions about Flodden developed deeper poignancy and relevance. Chapter six showed that from the 1890s new festivals and revivals became increasingly popular as towns which did not have a riding of the marches invented their own festival traditions. Galashiels and Musselburgh, for example, instituted new festivals partly as a response to the local sacrifice in the First World War. By the early 1950s, the modern circuit of ridings had become firmly established.

The final phase in the history of the ridings is, of course, the modern riding itself, which completes the development of the ridings from the sixteenth century to the present. Like Christmas and Easter, the riding is a convenient reference point in the annual social cycle of the town. The riding fits into busy schedules and modern patterns of living, where mental horizons are less restricted than at any time in the past and many local people travel outside of the town for work, shopping and leisure. It is fair to say that most locals are only vaguely aware of the original purpose of the riding and of the complex historical development of the event. Nevertheless, they eagerly anticipate the riding each year and partake in it with relish and great enthusiasm.

Whilst the ridings have gone through several distinct phases in their history, they have also retained some consistent features and themes. The most

10. See pages 308-12.
11. See pages 324-32.
12. See pages 318-23.
obvious of these is that the ridings are a celebration of the ancient relationship between man and the horse.\textsuperscript{13} In the late twentieth century, it would be easy to forget the crucial role which horses have played in the development of human society and culture. As we have seen, horses have been used in work, leisure and on the battlefield. Certain human activities have been made possible by horses, such as travelling around the boundary of the burgh common in a single day. Moreover, horses have always been a symbol of power and they have been used in the ridings to enhance burgh authority. The display of burgh authority is also a consistent theme in the history of the ridings.\textsuperscript{14} Processions have always been stage-managed to represent the social hierarchy of the burgh, with prominence being given to the burgh authorities, guild members, the rich and powerful. Other people, such as women and children, have been excluded, thus being reminded of their lowly status. In the modern ridings, a certain degree of social exclusivity continues to operate, even if it is now largely pomp without political power. Most towns have a Common Riding clique, which controls events and has special privileges.

The history of the ridings indicates that the festive or ‘carnival’ aspects of the event have always been important. Whilst the ridings had the serious purpose of defining the boundaries of the common, they were also occasions of enjoyment and fun.\textsuperscript{15} As we have seen, riders were fortified with food and drinks, whilst the riding usually concluded with an official dinner and dancing. The enjoyment also extended to non-riders, who could visit the horse-races, fairground or hold small celebrations of their own. Another long-term theme of the ridings emerges here: the reinforcement of social harmony. Whilst the ridings were in some respects divisive, they were primarily communal events which drew people together in a common

\textsuperscript{13} See page 14.

\textsuperscript{14} See pages 98-100, 189-92 and 284-7.

\textsuperscript{15} See pages 51, 111-12 and 203-7.
purpose. The riding of the marches has always been strong social cement, designed
to promote social harmony. As we have seen, one of the most important functions of
the ridings was that they involved young people and adolescents in communal
activity and harnessed their energies for the good of the community.

The riding of the marches encouraged communal identity because it created
external boundaries. As Gwen Kennedy Neville points out: 'we find in the town
ceremony a strong distinction between inside and outside, home and away,
belonging to the town and being an incomer.' By their nature, boundaries imply
the existence of an external threat, whether real or imagined. A group of people
who perceive themselves to be threatened by external forces will be drawn closer
together in mutual support and encouragement, as generally happens to a nation in
wartime. The presence of an external threat is one of the constant features in the
history of the ridings and is an important factor in the survival of the event.
Sometimes, there has been an obvious target against which communities have
focused their anger or defiance. The greatest threat to the common land came from
neighbouring landowners and the local aristocracy, whose power and influence has
always had the potential (sometimes realised) to encroach upon the common and
remove parts of it from burgh control. At other times, communities have been
threatened by more subtle and complex forces. Local people may not have
understood the dynamics behind these forces, but they have fully appreciated
the consequences and effects on their lives and community. As we have seen, Selkirk
and Hawick were transformed in the nineteenth century by rapid industrial and
social change. One local historian has noted of Selkirk that: 'in the 40 years from
1841 until 1881 the population increased from 1675 to 5977. Incomers to the town
made up the bulk of the increase, drawn by the mills and prosperity of the textile
trade'. Whilst the effects of these changes were not entirely negative for locals,
there were widespread feelings of disorientation and uncertainty, not least because the presence of so many incomers threatened to swamp the community and its traditions. The ridings presented the ideal opportunity to reinforce local identity and to incorporate incomers as part of the community. Likewise, in the twentieth century, communities have been twice seriously threatened by warfare, which has taken the brightest and best away from the town, often never to return. The ridings have provided comfort and reassurance in times of change and uncertainty. By undertaking the ritual each year, locals have created a sense of renewal and confidence in themselves and their community. In this respect, it is unsurprising that towns which did not have a riding have been anxious to invent traditions of their own.

The presence of an external threat can also be seen in the recent dispute over women’s involvement in Hawick Common Riding. Since the mid-1970s, the knitwear industry in Hawick, the town’s major employer, has experienced severe economic depression, which has created social decline and feelings of bewilderment and concern, even amongst those in secure employment (who tend to be amongst the Common Riding’s staunchest supporters). Throughout these difficult years, the Common Riding has been a steady and reliable fixture: a comforting beacon in the economic gloom. In their attempt to take part in the Common Riding, women have not only questioned its accustomed hierarchy, but they have also threatened to change its nature, thus creating uncertainty and doubt over the future of the event. After all, no-one really knows what the Common Riding would be like if women were allowed to take part. Traditionalists have argued that the town faces enough problems without meddling in the Common Riding, which is one of the few aspects of life over which local people have complete control. Of course, some traditionalists probably feel threatened by the profound social changes of recent years which have created much greater equality between the sexes and challenged many of the traditional roles of men and women. They might argue that these
changes have gone 'far enough' and some things should be left as they are.

Although this thesis has been a general history of the ridings in Scotland, much attention has been given to Hawick Common Riding. In this sense, the present work forms a useful complement to that of Gwen Kennedy Neville, who of course concentrates on Selkirk Common Riding. Like all the ridings, there is much in the Hawick event which is unique and special: for instance, the green-coated Cornet and the Acting Father; the tradition of Flodden and the callants who captured the English banner; the series of local ride-outs; the snuffing ceremony and the dancing on the Moat hill. At the same time, Hawick Common Riding contains much which is found in other ridings, although locals would probably deny this and claim that their riding was more 'genuine' than those of other towns. The conclusion to be drawn here is that each burgh has developed the riding of the marches in their own way. Individual ridings have special features and idiosyncrasies, which makes them different from each other. Locals take great pride in stressing the individuality of their event, although as chapter one demonstrated, the basic pattern of the ridings is similar.

This historical development of Hawick Common Riding repeats this pattern. Since it was first recorded in 1640, the event has developed in its own unique and special way. At the same time however, the history of Hawick Common Riding conforms to the broader picture of popular festivals and folk customs in the British Isles. For instance, Hawick Common Riding became a subject of great controversy in the mid-nineteenth century, when new forms of behaviour challenged traditional festival life. Whilst these events are well-documented in Hawick, they also took place in other ridings and festivals in Britain. Similarly, in the late nineteenth century, the Common Riding was utilised by the local business classes as a means of promoting themselves and their achievements in the community. As we have seen,
many traditional festivals in Britain were appropriated in a similar way.18

A remarkable feature of all of the ridings, even in the late twentieth century, is that knowledge of them is generally limited to the towns where they are staged. This thesis has shown that the ridings are intensely local and private. They are a culture which is only accessible to members of a particular community, rather like adherence to a religion or a sports team. The ridings have their own songs, music, language, stage-props and modes of behaviour, and knowledge of these is gained by living in the town and being involved in the event. Likewise, the experience of taking part in the ridings, whether on horseback or as an inhabitant of the town, differentiates local people from others. In her book on Selkirk, Neville is correct in comparing the performance of one Common Riding in one town to an opera that is performed in a particular opera house on one day each year.19 As Neville suggests, the opera (and the riding) has significance as an economic and a social event. But in addition, the opera has deeper levels of cultural importance and creativity, which can only be viewed and understood by the music critic and the educated literary public. Similarly, each riding is a complex cultural event, which can only be properly read and appreciated by the people who take part in it each year.

As a result of their 'private' nature, the ridings can be described as low-key and undemonstrative. Local people occasionally visit other ridings, but in general they are only vaguely aware of neighbouring events. In part, this reflects the widespread belief that the local riding is the only one which matters and that the others are less important or impressive. However, there is also sensitivity about the ridings, and a realisation that a town's riding is its own affair and not the concern of people from elsewhere. Regarding the women's issue in Hawick Common Riding, both traditionalists and reformers have disliked having the event exposed

19. Neville, Mother Town, p. 5.
to public attention and ridicule, especially when the outside world is normally apathetic about the event. Both sides in the women’s dispute agree that the problem is one for local people to resolve, and there has been resentment at outside media intrusion.\textsuperscript{20} It was suggested in chapter six that with the growing importance of tourism in the regional economy, the ridings may have to lose some of their traditional insularity in future.\textsuperscript{21}

Whilst the culture of the ridings is localised, it provides an alternative to the ‘tartanism’ which characterises the modern Scottish identity (although, inevitably, pipe bands, kilts and other highland symbols do feature in some of the ridings). This thesis has shown that an independent lowland culture has survived and continues to flourish, despite the existence of powerful national trends. Similarly, the popularity of the modern ridings demonstrates that local culture can co-exist with global commercial interests. It was suggested in chapter six that there is an increasing desire to find alternatives to the blandness and uniformity of modern culture. For many people, events like the ridings seem to represent an older, more ‘genuine’ way of life, and not one which is based on commercial exploitation and marketing. Local people create the ridings for themselves and their community, and everyone can take at least some part in the ridings, regardless of their social background.

As stated, this thesis has attempted to trace the history of the ridings from the sixteenth century to the present. The study has been wide-ranging and comprehensive, but the subject is by no means exhausted. Valuable historical studies could be made of individual ridings, such as Selkirk Common Riding, Lanark Lanimer Day and Linlithgow Marches. Likewise, a fascinating study could be made of the new or revived festivals, showing how the original riding of the

\textsuperscript{20} See page 66.
\textsuperscript{21} See page 347.
marches has developed new meanings and functions. It is also hoped that all of the ridings will be properly recorded and logged. However, students should remember that the ridings remain the property of those who create them.
Appendix
Musselburgh Riding of the Marches
17 October 1732

The following report is taken from the Caledonian Mercury of 18 October 1732:

Musselburgh Oct 17. This day, according to the old Custom of this ancient Burgh, the Honourable Magistrates and Town Council, attended by their Vassals and the Burgesses, in Number above 700, rode the Marches of the Burgh. The Trumpets and Hautboys marched in Front; then the Magistrates and Town-council, followed by the Gentlemen vassals, with the Town Standard; after them, the several Incorporations, distinguish’d by their respective shining new Standards, and headed by the Masters of the Crafts. In this good Order they march’d out to the Links (all on Horseback) making a gay Appearance.

But, alas! while they were marshalling, an unlucky Difference arose ’twixt the Weavers and the Taylors, (that had well nigh marr’d the Pomp of the Cavalcade) which should have the Pas or Precedency; so that, in order to prevent the Effusion of the Blood of his Majesty’s good Subjects, they agreed to submit the Merits of the Cause to the Magistrates.

The Taylors argued, That as the Precedency had previous fain to them by lot, no Opposition could now be offered in that respect. ’Twas alledged on the other hand, That they - the Weavers - were Men and as such, preferable at in all Events to Taylors. This signal Affront could not possibly be digested. Accordingly to Work they went, without waiting the Deacon of Authority, and while the Weaver Squadron were filing off to take the Post of Honour, with Capt. scot at their Head, Adjutant Fairly, (who acted in that Capacity on the Taylor Squadron), directed a blow at our Captains Snout, which brought him to the Ground. Thus were the two
Corps fiercely engaged; and nought was to be seen but heavy Blows, hats off, broken Heads, bloody Noses and empty Saddles; till at last the Plea of Manhood seemed to go in favour of the Needleman, who took Scot, Hero of the Weavers, Prisoner, disarmed him, and beat them quite out of the Field, tho’ far more numerous; so that it was with the utmost Difficulty the Weavers got their Standard carried off, which they lodged in their Captain’s Quarters, under the charge of 3 Huzza’s; ’tis true indeed, the conquering Taylors were then march’d off the Field, and at a Mile’s Distance. The Weavers alledge in excuse of their Retreat, That the Butcher Squadron had been ordered to assist the Taylors, and that they did not incline to embark with these Men of Blood. However, ’tis lucky the Fray was got so soon quell’d; for already an intolerable Stench had almost suffocated the Bystanders.

P.S. To-morrow the riotous weavers are to be conven’d before the Magistrates; who, as they always generously apply the Fines to publick Uses, will convert this Frolick into a publick Benefit.¹

¹. Caledonian Mercury, 18 October 1732, pp. 9938-9.
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