

REMEMBERING THE BATTLE OF FLODDEN FIELD 1513



The memorial at the battle site.

THE BATTLE OF FLODDEN FIELD 1513

Next year we will be remembering the centenary of the start of the Great War and the men who set out from Sutton to fight for their Country. However, this year it is five hundred years since men from the village set forth and fought in a very different war, one which culminated in the last great Medieval battle on English soil.

In 1513 Henry VIII was on the throne and had embarked upon a war against the French. He had gathered his army mainly from southern England and the Midlands and had departed for France in June that year. He was, however, aware that the Scottish king had recently renewed a treaty with France, in which each would support the other if invaded. Therefore, before he departed, he made his Queen, Catherine, Regent and left instructions for her to watch over his northern borders.



Skipton Castle, where Henry Lord Clifford mustered the men of Craven in 1513.

James IV of Scotland wasted no time in complying with his commitments to the French and in July 1513, in accordance with Medieval chivalry, sent a letter to Henry declaring his intention to invade, and then marched into Northumberland. Thomas Howard, the Earl of Surrey, had already been appointed Lieutenant-General and immediately sent out notice to the lords in the North, instructing them to raise men to form an army. One such notice was received by Henry, Baron Clifford, Lord of Skipton, instructing him to muster the men of Craven at Skipton Castle.

Over three hundred men from Craven gathered under Clifford's banner, three of whom came from Sutton, John Blakey, Robert Harper and John Parkinson. The document that records their names was subsequently kept at Bolton Priory and is generally known as the Craven Muster Roll, it is the first record that we have of the names of individuals who left the village to go off to war. John Blakey is listed as having *a bow and able horse*, the other two men needed providing with war bows or other weapons. Henry VIII had reinforced the archery laws in 1511/12 and they required every boy over the age of seven and man up to the age of sixty to practice at the butts. The butts in Sutton were on land to the rear of the Black Bull Inn and extended from Bow Hill across what is now Ash Grove and over towards Elm House in Elm Road, the former field was known as Hemp Butts.

Our three villagers joined Clifford's force at Skipton Castle, where it was soon attired, according to the Ballad of Flodden Field (first printed 1564), in ... *curious coats, most cunning wrought, with dreadful dragons .. bedecked ...* .



Two wyverns flanking Henry Clifford's coat of arms in the courtyard at Skipton Castle.

The coats may well have been no more than a simple tabard, emblazoned with the Clifford's heraldic emblem, the red wyvern, a two legged, winged dragon. Clifford was no stranger to warfare and had mustered men from Craven in 1487, 1489 and again in 1497, when they had also fought the Scots. Turning out his men dressed in

his own livery would have been very prestigious for Clifford and also, more importantly, it would have enabled his soldiers to recognise one another in the heat of battle. Weapons would also have been issued out of the castle armoury and those men who were not archers were armed with a variety of bills, the standard weapon of the day for a common soldier.



Members of the York Guard dressed in replica Tudor attire, but carrying original 16th century Italian bills, on loan from the York Castle Museum.

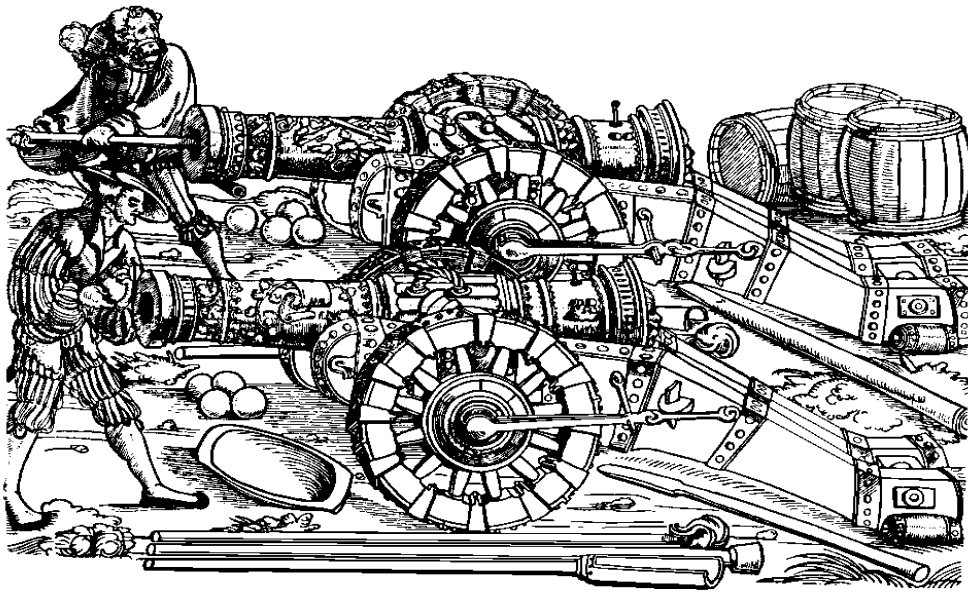
The English bill and the Italian bill were common weapons used by English and European soldiers throughout the 16th century. Both consisted of an ash pole about 6 feet long, surmounted by a chopping blade from which spikes and a hook projected. The bill was a lethal weapon in battle and could be used for stabbing, chopping and dragging knights from horseback with the hook. Common soldiers also carried their own personal weapon, a long, pointed, dagger known as a bodkin, which was used when the fighting got close up and personal. Some lucky men may have had a helmet, but most would have relied on leather caps. Thick, quilted, jacks (jackets) were commonly worn for body protection and some soldiers may have had splints, strips of metal sewn onto leather and worn to protect the arms.



Pontefract Castle where the Earl of Surrey raised his army before setting out to Flodden.

Having gathered his men Lord Henry Clifford unfurled his standard, also emblazoned with the red wyvern, and marched to Pontefract Castle, where the Earl of Surrey had set up his headquarters in early August 1513. From Pontefract the army marched to Newcastle via Durham, where Surrey collected the great war standard of St Cuthbert, a symbol of the North, which had been present at many victories over the Scots. From Newcastle they went to Alnwick Castle, where they arrived on 3rd September. Here they joined forces with Surrey's eldest son, Thomas Howard, the Lord Admiral, who brought a further 1,000 men. The army now numbered some 26,000 fighting men, but they only had light artillery and their cavalry were no more than a few hundred mounted men under the command of Lord Dacre.

By comparison the Scots had over 30,000 men. Their foot soldiers had been recently been equipped and trained in the use of the Swiss pike, which was a spear about 16 feet long and had been used successfully in European warfare, particularly against cavalry. The Scots were also well equipped with heavy artillery, which included James IV's prized Seven Sisters, heavy culverins cast in brass. It is said that it required 400 oxen to pull his guns to the battle field.



A German woodcut of 16th century culverins similar to James IV's Seven Sisters.

The English army now marched north to Wooler, from where Surrey issued a challenge to James IV to do battle on 9th September on Milfield Plain. However, the Scots were strongly encamped on Flodden Hill, some miles to the north and declined to accept the challenge. On 8th September the Earl made his move towards Flodden and camped that night near Barmoor Castle. The next day the army left its baggage behind and marched north, circling around the Scots to cut off their retreat. Our three Sutton men and the Craven company, with Lord Clifford, were in the vanguard and commanded by the Lord Admiral. They formed the the main body of the army, totalling some 14,000 men and 22 cannons and arrived to the south west of Branxton Village, opposite the Scots, who by now had changed position to Branxton Hill, near Flodden. Surrey quickly followed with a further 12,000 men.

By mid afternoon Surrey had deployed his forces in two main groups, known as battles, each with a supporting wing. On the right wing was Edmund Howard, Surrey's younger son; next to him, in the first battle, was Thomas Howard, the Lord Admiral; Sir Marmaduke Constable, with his East Riding forces, made up the second battle and to his left was Surrey himself. Lord Dacre and his Border cavalry were to the rear of Surrey and still to come to the field of battle was Sir Edward Stanley who with his force was marching with all haste towards the Scots right flank.

The two armies now faced one another across a shallow valley and as it approached late afternoon the cannons opened fire and the English archers sent clouds of arrows into the sky. Devastated by the English fire and eager for battle, James IV dismounted and lead his men in a charge against the English line. The weather had been foul and rain had made the ground wet and slippery, not only that, but the valley bottom was a bog. The Scottish charge lost momentum and the Swiss pikes were unwieldy at close quarters and the English billmen simply cut them into pieces. As the Scottish army struggled against the English, Stanley arrived and attacked the Scottish right flank. The English now surged forward and King James of Scotland was cut down, along with the cream of Scottish nobility. As for the men of Craven they charged forward and captured three of the Seven Sister guns for Lord Clifford.

When the fighting was over the English soldiers lost all semblance of order and turned to looting the dead and dying. Most bodies were stripped of all valuables and clothing. King James's body was eventually found stripped naked. It was removed from the battle field, taken to London and buried in an unmarked grave.

The Battle of Flodden Field was fought on 9th September 1513 and was the last battle in England in which knights fought in full armour and where bows and arrows, swords and bills played a decisive roll in the outcome of an engagement.

As for the three Sutton men, it seems that they returned triumphant, as their names appear in later documents. No doubt they returned laden with the spoils of war, as did Henry, Lord Clifford - the three captured culverins were brought back to Skipton and put on display at the Castle.

Sources:- Craven Muster Roll; Ballad of Flodden Field; Battle of Flodden Field by Jane Lyell; The Shepherd Lord of Skipton Castle by Richard T. Spence; Use of Arms and Armour by Stone; and various online sources.

Compiled and researched by Robin Longbottom, 2013