A HISTORY OF KIRKBY FLEETHAM – NORTHALLERTON
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NORTHALLERTON

Northallerton has occupied its position in the northern part of the fertile Vale of Mowbray for nearly 2,000 years when there was almost certainly a Roman signal station on Castle Hills just to its west.

The Allerton part of the town's name could be derived from the Old English Aelfereton – the farm of a Saxon called Aelfere but can also mean the farm near the alder trees. The name gradually changed to Alverton and then Allerton. The North was added to differentiate it from the other Allertons that existed.

Northallerton was one of the early centres of Christianity, with the missionary Paulinus, acting on behalf of the Roman Church, instigating the building in the 7th century of a wooden church where today's magnificent parish church, All Saints, stands at the North End of the High Street. That wooden building was replaced by a more substantial stone one in 855 and some Saxon stones survive from that time. Although the Normans were not at all popular when they were camped at Northallerton in 1069, when William the Conqueror brought an army north to avenge the earlier killing of many of his soldiers by the Saxons at Durham, they would later play a major role in creating All Saints church.

Dominated by an imposing square tower, the present church dates from before 1150 and is mainly medieval work but with a chancel created by the architect Charles Hodgson Fowler in 1885. From 1687, All Saints had four bells in its belfry, a fifth being added in 1764. A note of 1791 records that '*there were five bells and a good clock'.* In 1802, a sixth bell joined the rest, followed in 1871 by two more to provide the ringers with a full octave but the bells were out of tune with one another, some having to be recast and others retuned in 1898. When the church was being refurbished in the 1950s, it was decided that the bells should be restored too. Consequently, in 1961, they were removed and sent to Taylor's bell foundry, in Loughborough, where ther were recast and, on their return to Northallerton, were rehung in a steel frame. In 1991, two more bells were added.

Northallerton was not a particularly peaceful place to live during the Middle Ages as it was frequently involved – but never through choice – in 300 years of the Scottish Wars, when the monarchs of England and Scotland argued almost continuously about where the border between the two countries should be.

A stone memorial obelisk about three miles north of Northallerton on the Darlington road commemorates a battle fought in 1138 between the English and the Scots. This ferocious medieval conflict lasted only two hours but, although today considered almost insignificant in the great scheme of things, had its outcome been different, English history might well have been radically rewritten. Scotland would undoubtedly have gained an early ascendancy.

The Battle of the Standard, as it is known, would never have needed to have been fought had the English King Henry I, cemented his succession more clearly before his death in 1135. Henry was probably the first Norman king to speak English fluently. He was known as Beauclerc, meaning the scholar, and as William the Conqueror's youngest son, his future was almost certainly intended to have been in the Church, but he did not opt for that vocation. While his older brother, Robert, was overseas fighting in the Crusades, his eldest brother, William Rufus, was killed by the arrow of an unknown archer. At the same time, Henry was hunting in the same area, and the belief grew that he was somehow implicated in his brother's death. With Robert, the natural heir, out of the country, Henry seized his chance and the English throne to become king in 1100.

The problem of finding his successor was that although he had 27 children, most of them illegitimate, few, whether born in England or France, could ever have succeeded him as ruler of England. His legitimate male heir, William, had drowned in November 1120 when the White Ship sank in the English Channel. Next in line was his daughter Matilda, who he named as his heiress. Although his barons swore an oath of loyalty to her, when he died there was another who had the English throne in his sights.

Both Matilda and Stephen were grandchildren of William the Conqueror and from the age of six, Stephen was raised by Henry I, who was his uncle. Following Henry's death, however, although Matilda had the greater claim to the realm, Stephon, by then the richest man in England, was quicker off the mark and had himself crowned king three days before Christmas 1135. Much of the support he received from his fellow barons was because they opposed the notion of a woman ruling the country but Matilda had her allies too. As a result, the two camps and their followers frequently clashed, so Stephen was occupied keeping Matilda at bay.

One of her most fervent supporters was her uncle, King David I of Scotland who was also Prince of Cumbria and Earl of Huntingdon, titles and land granted to him by Henry I. David had actually lived for many years at the English court before returning to Scotland in 1124 to rule the whole country, which he had inherited.

In the years so soon after William I's conquest of Britain, the border, such as it was, between England and Scotland existed in an almost constant state of flux. On the death of Henry I, David of Scotland tried to claim still more of England as his own. Having assembled a large army, he marched south and between 1135 and 1137 devastated most of Northumberland with the exception of Bamburgh, Newcastle and Hexham Abbey. He was prevented from moving any further south by King Stephen's army which twice marched north to repel the Scots who retreated without a fight.

In 1138, David and his Scots chanced their arm again, this time expecting no resistance. They knew that Stephen was too busy fighting Matilda's supporters in the South and West of England to concern himself with his neighbours in the far North. The Scottish raiders, '*an army more barbarous than any race of pagans',* caused grief and misery to all those it encountered on its way south through Durham. Many who were not killed outright were sold, like cattle, into slavery in Scotland.

By the middle of August, the intruders approached Yorkshire and the inhabitants of York began to panic. The Scots were too close for comfort and the people appealed to King Stephen for help. Unable to leave his problems in the South, he sent help in the form of a group of Norman knights under the command of Bernard Balliol. They seemed to be the catalysts that spurred the Archbishop of York, Thurstan, into action. The Archbishop urged the formation of a local army and with the help of noblemen, militiamen from York, Ripon and Beverley, and the king's knights, a force was assembled.

Although too old and infirm to travel with his army, Thurstan had a mobile rallying point prepared to accompany it. Called a standard, it was a cart to which was fixed a 12 metre high wooden mast. At its top was a cross. Below that was a box, referred to in Richard of Hexham's contemporary account as a '*pix'*, which held communion bread to ensure divine support. Attached to the mast were the banners of St Peter the Apostle, St John of Beverley and St Wilfrid of Ripon.

The English army marched to Thirsk where it stopped while messengers were sent to King David to offer him the Earldom of Northumbria if he would withdraw his forces. He refused and he and his army crossed the Tees into Yorkshire. On 22 August 1138, the two armies came within sight of each other on Cowton Moor, about two miles north of Northallerton. The English gathered around a small rise in the land to the south while the Scots formed up to the north. The Scots army was the bigger, while the strength of the English lay in their greater number of knights. The English standard was positioned on the site of today's Standard Hill Farm. David was not happy that his country's tradition dictated that he must allow 6,000 Picts from Galloway to lead his attack but, at daybreak, he did so and it cost him dear.

As they rushed forward, many were cut down by the English archers. A rumour ran through the Scottish ranks that David had been killed. Although untrue, many of the Scots believed it and even after a Scottish cavalry charge broke through the English lines David's forces had lost heart. When he failed to rally them, the Scots gave up the fight and fled the field. David escaped to Carlisle as did 19 of his knights but an estimated 10,000 of his men died in battle of while they were being pursued afterwards. Many were reportedly never buried but some were probably interred in Scots Pit Lane to the south of the memorial.

The results of the Battle of the Standard were that, even though he was not present on the day, Stephen's tenure of the English throne was confirmed by the victory while Matilda's cause was severely damaged. King David lost any claim he believed he had to Northumberland, but a year later, in a conciliatory gesture, Stephen made David's son Prince Henry, Earl of Northumberland so that, paradoxically, in 1139 King David of Scotland controlled the entire north of England.

In a way, even Matilda did not lose everything. As Marriott Edgar concludes:

> *'She didn't do badly at finish.*
> *When everything's weighed up and reckoned.*
> *For when Stephen was gone the next heir to the throne*
> *Were Matilda's son, Henry the Second.'*

The memorial beside the A167 was the idea of local bank manager, WS Charlton. It was funded by local people, erected in 1913 on the western side of the battlefield and was recently restored.

When English armies marched north to Scotland, notably forces led by the first three kings called Edward, they often made Northallerton one of their stopping points. In 1318, a Scottish army attacked the town and burned down its church.

In 1745, the Duke of Cumberland rested his army at Northallerton on his way north to defeat the Jacobite forces of Bonnie Prince Charlie at the Battle of Culloden.

The bishops of Durham had a castle at Northallerton and the town was granted a royal charter by King John in 1200, giving the royal assent to the Wednesday markets, which had been held there since soon after the Norman Conquest. The town was permitted to hold two annual fairs, one in February, at Candlemas, the other at the Feast of St Bartholomew in September.

In 1555, Queen Mary also gave royal consent for the Wednesday market and for a St George's Fair each May while in 1610 King James I allowed an October fair on St Mathew's Day. It was not until 17192, during the reign of George III, that the Wednesday market was permitted to be held every week of the year. In 1858, it was remarked that the St George's and Candlemas Fairs were renowned across the whole of the North for the trading of horses and cattle. For centuries, Scottish and Northumbrian drovers herded their cattle and sheep to market in the town. The original cattle market was near the church, while sheep were sold in the High Street until the early years of the 20th century.

In the 1820's a chronicler wrote of Northallerton: '*This is a brisk market town, pleasantly situated on the side of a rising ground, gently sloping towards the east. Market, Wednesdays. Fairs, February 14 for horses and horned cattle and a week preceding for horses only; May 5 and 6 for horses, horned cattle, sheep, leather and woollen cloth; September 5 and 6 for horned cattle, sheep and leather; October 3 and 4 for horned cattle and sheep; second Wednesday in October for cheeses'.*

The High Street has been a busy highway for centuries, part of one of the principal routes between London and Edinburgh. Many of the street's hostelries were coaching inns during the 18th and 19th centuries and in 1820 the King's Head and the Golden Lion were regarded as the best of these.

The railway, which came to Northallerton in 1841, was the principal reason for the demise of coaching. The Golden Lion was immortalised in a 1945 film that most critics rate as one of the finest war films ever made; the story of *The Way to the Stars* written by Terence Rattigan, concerns the life on a British airfield and in a nearby typical English market town from the opening days of the Battle of Britain. The stars of the film included Michael Redgrave, John Mills, Stanley Holloway, Trevor Howard and Bonar Colleano. In a brief scene, some RAF officers drive up to the pillared entrance of the Golden Lion and go inside. The hotel is then supposedly the small hotel whose interior is the backdrop for much of the story.

Northallerton today is as busy as ever, with at least two of its stores having been in business for more than a century. The Barkers have farmed in the area since the mid 17th century but in 1882 William Barker broke the mould when he became an apprentice at local drapers Oxendales. After a time, the shop became Oxendale and Barker's, and then Barkers, selling fabrics and millinery. Another well-known emporium is Lewis and Cooper's, opened by Mr Lewis and Mr Cooper in 1899.

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