

Clan Prints in the Sands

Turnbull Clan Association Publications

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Hello Everyone,

Hopefully our new venture will become a classic Turnbull paper. You are invited to send in stories, pictures and histories. The follow article was sent in by Bob Turnbull, Bomaderry, Australia, who proudly sent a picture of his Dad visiting at Fatslip Castle. In the lower right hand corner standing in the doorway is Robert James Turnbull.

FATLIPS CASTLE, ROXBURGHSHIRE, SCOTLAND



Castle with a name you'll never forget

From the Evening News May 13 1978 by Liz Taylor

Visitors to the Borders who ask the name of a lonely castle perched high on a rocky crag near the small town of Denholm often think they are having their legs pulled when they hear the reply. Because the castle's name is FATLIPS.

Fatlips castle, which looks like a Scottish version of one of the castles on the Rhine, is a place of mystery. No one knows how it received its strange name. No one knows much about its history, who built it, when or even why.

But it stands on the top of its almost inaccessible rock, one of the best preserved of the Border keeps. The keen tourist who has enough energy to scale its hill finds that the view from the top is literally breathtaking.

Lookout

There is no road to Fatlips castle. A rutted track of the road between Ancrum and Denholm peters out as though it had run out of breath halfway up the rock. On the other side approaching Fatlips from Minto, access is through the private lands of Lord Minto, a two mile walk over fields and woods for which permission must be asked.

Who built Fatlips in this impregnable position? It is thought that the castle was a lookout tower for old Barnhills castle which stands at the foot of the Minto Crag and which was at one time the stronghold of an unruly Border family, the Turnbells.

They were a continual scourge to the Kings of Scotland from the 14th to the 17th century and when they were not killing Englishmen they were killing other borderers. Their bloodthirsty history is summed up with the nickname of one of them, John "Out with the sword" Turnbull.

Today Barnhills is only a heap of stones but in the heyday of the Turnbells it was strongly defended, and in order to keep it secure they built their lookout tower on the top of the hill behind them. From there, from Fatlips, they could spy out the approach of unwelcomed visitors and from their history it would seem that almost all visitors would have been unwelcomed.

Below the lookout tower there is a stone ledge in the rock which is known as the Barnhill's bed because it too was used as a lookout place for a round-the-clock sentry. There is also an old legend that an underground passage runs from Fatlips to Barnhills but it has never been found and if it ever did exist, the man who made it through that solid rock must have been an engineer of incredible ingenuity.

In the days of the Turnbells Fatlips, appears in the records under name of Minto Tower. It is referred to as this when note is made of it being burned down by the Earl of Hertford, who ravaged the Borders in 1545 on the orders of King Henry VIII.

In spite of Hertford, Fatlips survived and in the 1700's it passed from possession of the Turnbells to the rising family of Eliots, who still own it. The present member of the family, Lord Minto has an 18th century print showing Fatlips when first in possession of his family. "It looked like a dilapidated Smailholm Tower only not as grand," he said. It stayed dilapidated till the end of the 19th century when another Eliot decided to renovate it and use it as a shooting box.

The construction of the shooting box turned Fatlips into what we see today. Only the ground floor of the original peel tower was retained and another four floors were built upon it, with a fine parapeted walk on the fourth storey. Inside were large vaulted rooms which were used to store arms and armour belonging to the Eliot family. This collection was so vast that it soon became a private museum and contained many treasures brought back from the East by distinguished Eliots.

Perhaps the pride of the collection was a fine cannon with an 8ft long barrel which had been captured from a French squadron off the Isle of Man by Admiral Eliot in 1760. This magnificent cannon had inscribed on its breach the legend that it was made in Amsterdam in 1637 by Ahaseurus Koster.

Why did they give it such a strange name? There are various theories – one local historian thinks it has some connection with a carving of a Negro head on the roof of one of the castle rooms.

But Lord Minto dismisses this theory. "Fatlips was called Fatlips long before that Negro head was carved there" he said. "The head is part of our family crest which was adopted because one of the family members was created Governor General of Corsica and the Negro head is meant to be the head of a Moor. The Moors held Corsica in those days"

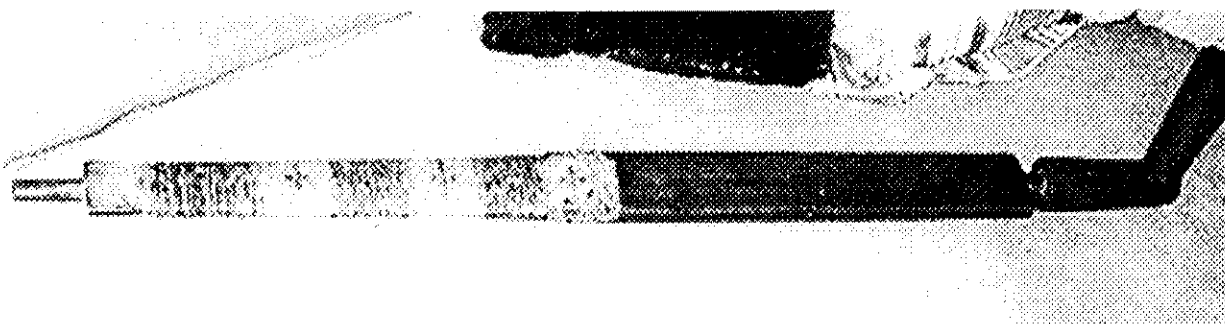
His theory about the origin of the name is even stranger- Fatlips he said was a goat kept by the Turnbells which was allowed to roam over the Cheviots at will and when it came across a band of Englishmen it would take to its heels and make for home. Whenever Fatlips appeared, the Turnbells knew that the English would not be far behind. They called their lookout tower after the goat as a joke.

Calumet or Peace Pipe, possibly as old as the United States (214 Years) was given to John Turnbull the Scottish Trader by a Native American Tribe in the Louisiana area, which could have been either Choctaw, Chickasaw, or Creek. A very distinctive design of three red crosses is worked into the design on the main part of the pipe close to the mouthpiece.



The colors have remained very vivid. In the most familiar picture of the great Choctaw Medal Chief Mushulatubbe, he is holding one very similar to this. This pipe is presently in a collection at the beautiful Catalpa Plantation in St. Francisville, LA, known in earlier times as West Florida. It is being held in this picture taken August 1999 by Frankie James, 4th great-granddaughter of John. It was a pipe similar to this that signified the great Mingo and was subsequently lost.

It seemed it is wrapped with very fine leather-perhaps deerskin rolled in a thin cord then wrapped thus. The paint or dye and decoration must have been then applied. The first thing that occurs to me is the crosses symbolize the 3 great medal chiefs of the Choctaw, but it could be Chickasaw too. The stock is a lighter (more yellowish-about the color of maple) than this appears. Although it appeared to be wood, I have been told the was a pipestone that was used most of the time. I have seen some similar at Gilcrease Museum here in Tulsa, but not actually talked to the curator about it.



CRUMBLING

Author and Historian, Nigel Tranter, who has made a special study of Scottish Castles also believes the goat theory. He said that "Fatlips" was a name given to a certain kind of goat and he thinks the tower was called after it because it stood in a place where only a goat could reach.

But, the odd thing is that there's another Fatlips Castle. Today its only a 6ft long strip of crumbling stone wall hidden away of the south east slope of Tinto Hill near Symington in Lanarkshire. No-one knows how it was named either, but it does not occupy the same precipitous position that the Denholm Fatlips does. And it is unlikely that the Turnbells' goat managed to roam as far as Symington.

Perhaps there is another reason for these strange names which no-one so far has thought about. Any suggestions?

My thoughts:

The Eliots family would naturally have much information on this building, it is strange that I had a friend called Dudley Eliot who asked me why I had called a farm I had purchased by the name of "Minto Park" and I told him that it was in memory of the Turnbells' family location at Fatlips castle in Scotland, to which he replied, in words to the effect that it was his forebears who had purchased it from the Turnbells. Up to that time I was not aware of the Eliots involvement in the building.

The tunnel theory seems plausible and it would be easier to locate such a passage with modern electronic equipment.

I believe Fatlips was a type of goat and may have contributed to its name.

It is interesting that several family emails have indicated that it is a "Crumbling ruin" which does not describe the Denholm Fatlips but does describe the Symington Fatlips.

My Father and Mother visited the building and indicated its imposing position and size. It was locked up when they visited it so they took outdoor photos of it and the magnificent views from its location.

I have enclosed a scan of a photograph they took of it. It appears to be about 15 meters in height considering the height of my father standing at the ground floor entrance and the compression of perspective with the increasing height of the building.

Perhaps Turnbull family members could find out more, particularly anyone who live in that area of Scotland or may be visiting it in the near future. I did get as close as Jedburgh in 1995 whilst on a Coach tour but did not have the time or means to get to Fatlips Castle.

I made a few enquiries in Edinburgh but was unable to find out who was responsible for its upkeep etc. Since then I've searched on the net but nothing much comes up.

Yours Aye

Bob Turnbull, Bomaderry Australia

*Turnbull Clan Association
Thanks Bob for his contribution*

John Turnbull Indian Trader; part 2

Legends

In Scotland during 1700-1750, the country was going through some hard times. William III (William of Orange) died in 1702 and the reign of George I began. In 1707 the unification of Scotland and England became reality, and Mary Queen of Scots was executed in 1714. A cause was taken up in 1688 by the Jacobite, and in 1708 "The old Pretender" James Francis Edward Stuart, son of James VII & II, led 3 unsuccessful Jacobite rebellions. These rebellions continued off and on until 1745-6, when Bonnie Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the "Young Pretender" was defeated, he fled for France, and what was left of the rag tag bands of Scots are butchered in the battlefields of Culloden by the British army.

In between these wars Commander-in-chief Wade goes to Scotland and major road construction was started in the Highland, a sure sign to the Highland Scots that the British have no intentions of letting them live their own way of life. 1727 King George I is dead, George II is on the throne. By 1739 the Black Watch has been raised to keep the Scots in line. The first half of the century shows the Scots that the way of life is changing and difficult time still lies ahead. (Little did they realize that the quietly started Clearance in the Highlands would tear families apart and leave the Highlands barren of most humans.)

It is into this era that John Turnbull was born. Mr. Anders author of the books, believes that John was born around 1736, his brother Walter around 1733, and possibly a brother William born in 1738-40. The parents are unknown but thought to be Walter and Isobel Turnbull of Dumfries-shire. In what time frame this family came to America is questionable. Mr. Anders believes it was around 1741, that the family went into the area of Georgia where James Oglethorpe took his Scots. There is no evidence to support this idea, but it is fact that several person with whom John and Walter will do business with over the years, were in the Georgia area during the 1740-1760 time period. If it is fact, it would mean that the family was here for almost 20 years before the evidence shows John and Walter as present in the area of Mobile, Alabama in 1761/3. There are several factors that come into play here, as whether they are fact or fable. One legend has the parents and a sister possibly Sarah as having died 1 year after reaching Alabama, from the fever. It is true that the location of Mobile at that time, was swampy, and infested with mosquitoes. There is evidence of a house in Mobile owned by John and /or his family in the same time period, and also there is a place called Nanna Hubba Bluff, where they are thought to have built a residence, which was called "LaNaniaba". There is another legend associated with the mother of John still being alive in 1835 and remembered by a child. Here the legend is most assuredly false as that would have made her well over 100 years of age. Another legend is that John had a part Choctaw daughter named Winifred, (Wenefred) supposedly 11 years of age (born 1752). It is thought by several of the researchers that Winifred was not his daughter but was indeed his Choctaw wife. She will have a daughter Susannah (will we follow her later). It was said that John bought a mule and packing gear and went off into the woods and the Indian Nations to become a trader. This is very believable and having Indian wives also believable, as what better way to make friends with the Indians but to marry into the (clan) tribe. It is also known fact that many of the traders had a winter wife in one tribe and a summer wife in another tribe. Which brings us to John's wife in the Chickasaw nation who will give him at least 2 sons, George and William. John claims these two sons in his will in 1799, along with a daughter Sylvia (Sylvestra) by one of his later Chickasaw wives, Isabella Perry. There is also a legend of a daughter Mary or Sophia, depending on who's history you read, that lived in New Orleans, or Mobile. Now John was suppose to have visited this girl and was injured in a carriage accident, which will ultimately cause his death in 1799. As far as I can find, there was no child, but there was his arch enemies sister Sophia McGillivray Durrant. She is in the business of slaves and cattle at the time and her home is in Mobile, and John is definitely in the slave trading business. So this legend can be explained. The death of John is document by a letter in the Turnbull-Bowman collection: "John is gravely ill, of the epidemic", it will be the ultimate cause of his death, not an accident.

The legend of a younger brother William, which says he was sent with a British Merchant, and the largest part of the personal belonging, to British Virgin Islands in 1754. There is evidence that a William lived in Tortola, married Anne and had 2 small children, and he died in 1766. There is no proof that this William was any relation

to John and Walter Turnbull, a point that is speculative to say the least, but it does pretty much fit the time frame. The Islands were used in slave trading, and William could have been one of those slavers, but there is no known evidence.

Our last bit of legend deals with John's brother Walter. In the papers passed on to family members from Marielle Engels and Emily Turnbull, there is an interesting pedigree, hand drawn, and it goes as follows. "Walter and wife left London for Virginia in 1763. Walters wife and daughter died in route to Mobile., he is heartbroken." This can be assumed a good reason why Walter would not marry until he is living in the Bahamas 1780-1795. Fact, who really knows, it does possibly change other of the legends, it is reasonable to believe that if Walter did not come until 1763, then maybe they all came at this time frame. We do know for sure, documented, that in 1763 John and Walter are in the Mobile area.

John has family; Wenefred, a full blooded Choctaw wife?, with whom he has daughter Susannah,(c.1766), a Chickasaw wife with whom he will have George c.1763 and William c.1768, a later wife Isabella Perry by whom he has daughter Sylvia c.1783, and finally a Catholic marriage (1784) in the white mans world, to Catherine Ruckers (age 16) of Virginia by whom he will have 9 children. With Catherine his empire in Louisiana becomes reality and his social status and power are evident. Johns Last will and testament is some 400 pages long and it took 4 years before it was settled... Two of the biggest questions in regards to the will; if Susannah was his daughter, why was she not mentioned in the will and Johns ambiguous statement in regards to his children by Catherine. " I give and bequeath unto my lawful and dearly beloved wife Catherine Rucker with whatever children may be at my decease, to be equally divided among them, share and share alike".

Next time we will take a closer look at John's children, who they marry, where they go with their lives, and what legacy will children of these children leave in the future... Judge, outlaws, major players in Indian treaties, walk the Trail of Tears, writers, and others.

I want to thank Harely Anders for the use of his books, Frankie James and Jimmie Jean Bowman for the always helpful hands full of information.

NOTES.

If for some reason you have not received a membership card, please let me know..