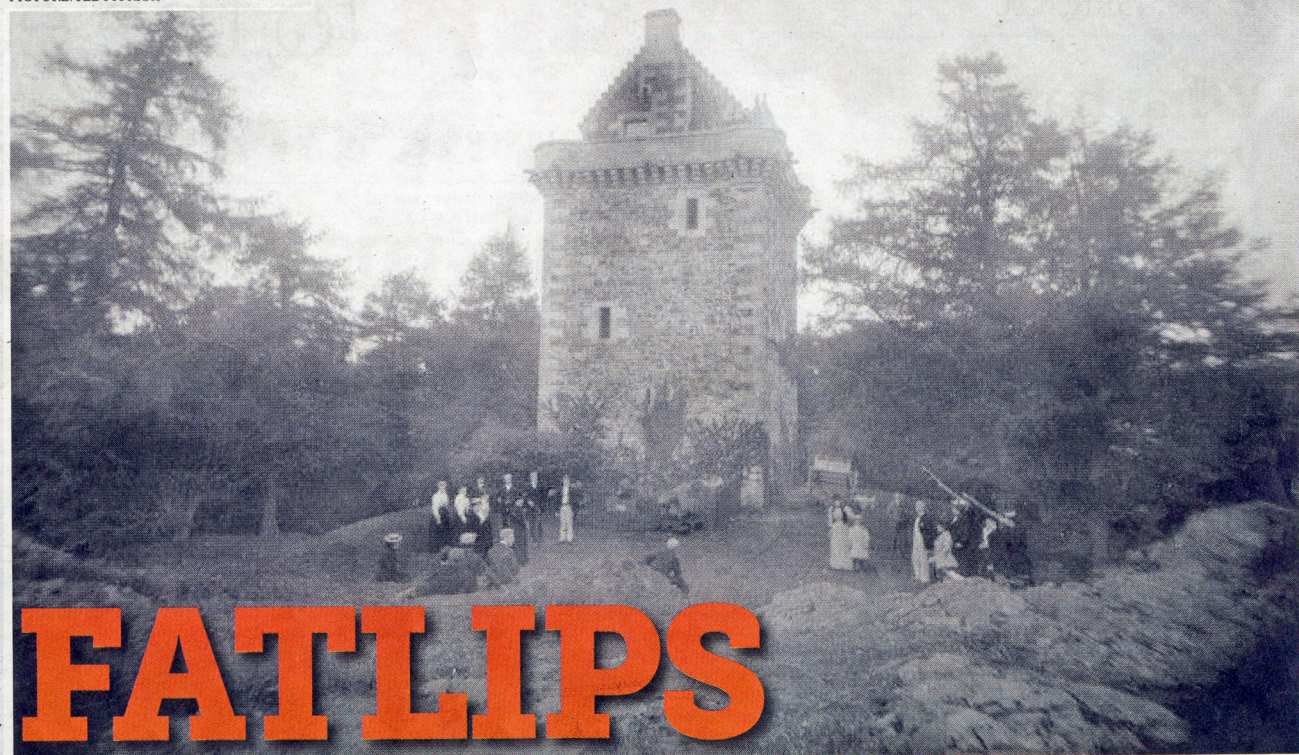


By Alastair Redpath

A shooting party at Fatlips in 1898

PICTURE: JED MURRAY



FATLIPS

and the Turnbells of Barnhills

If Carlsberg did peel towers... so the advert might go. Fatlips Castle is a local treasure.

Situated in a prominent position atop the formidable Minto Crags - the remnants of an ancient volcano last active when the Borders region of Scotland was south of the equator - it oversees the lands of its original masters, the notorious Turnbells of Barnhills.

Before we delve into the history, let's tackle the unusual name. It remains something of a mystery, with several interesting (if fanciful) theories. Take your pick from the following:

* There was once a goat nicknamed 'Fatlips' on the Dunion which warned of an approaching English force by bleating loudly.

* In the early 18th century the Elliot family had a child with Down's Syndrome who lived out of sight in the tower. The servants who cared for the child cruelly named his home 'Fatlips'.

* A name given to a spirit dwelling in Dryburgh Abbey, by a hermit woman who took up residence in the ruins. She claimed 'Fatlips' stamped the moisture away with his heavy iron boots from the ground where she slept. (The Borders Magazine of October 1927 contains a more detailed account of this version).

* A supernatural being, named so by a disturbed woman who lived in the castle's shadows during the day and wandered about it at night. When asked how she survived and found food, she said that the spirit 'Fatlips' provided.

* Male members of the Turnbull household were apparently very forward and kissed women upon entering the castle - "...every gentleman, by indefeasible privilege, kisses one of the ladies on entering the ruin", notes Robert Chambers in 1828.

* The distinctive look of Turnbull of Barnhills!

Whatever the origin of the name, being unusual, it adds an aura of mystery and importance to it. There is another Fatlips Castle near Symington in South Lanarkshire, and a couple of others elsewhere, marked on old maps.

The occupation of Minto Crags predates the construction of Fatlips.

Although evidence has been obscured by later quarrying activity, an older fort exists to the north, likely dating to the Bronze Age. A large undated ditch also lies beneath the Crags at Craigend Bank. One line of thought is that these were put to use during the subsequent Roman occupation of the area.

A legendary account of the Turnbull name is given by Hector Boece in his *Historia Gentis Scotorum* (History of the Scottish People). Boece tells that during the Wars of Scottish Independence, William de Rule saved King Robert I by wrestling a bull to the ground that'd charged at him. For this feat, the king rewarded William with the lands of Philiphaugh and dubbed him Rule "Turnebull" (the 'e' was later dropped from the name).

A wonderful sculpture depicting this event, by the multi-talented Angela Hunter, sits outside the Heritage Hub, and is a point of pilgrimage for Turnbells the world over.

Another theory is that the Turnbull name derives from the Old English 'Trumbald', meaning 'strong and bold'; Robertus de Turnbulyes, who swore fealty to Edward I of England in 1296, could well be one of the first ancestors of that line.

In 1375 Walter Turnbull received a charter for the barony of "Mintow" from David II, son of Robert the Bruce. Later that century,

Walter's son John built the first tower on Minto Crags. It was surrounded by a barmkin - an enclosure into which cattle could be driven. The occupants used bonfires to signal nearby Bedrule Castle, across the Teviot to the south, of impending danger (it too was owned by the family).

John granted his lands to Sir William Stewart in 1390 and is said to have travelled to France to fight the English. His successor disputed the validity of the transfer on the ground of John being a leper. An inquisition was held at Rulemouth in 1458 and the lands of Minto were divided, the Turnbells getting two-thirds and the Stewarts one-third.

The Turnbells also held land in the Ettrick valley and by the 15th century

controlled much of the Rule valley and the Borthwick valley. Closest to Hawick, there were Turnbull lairds at Whitchope, Hornshole, Penchrise, Harden and Hassendeanbank.

There is a natural platform on the steep face of Minto Crags called "Barnhill's Bed", reputed to have been the refuge of a notorious Turnbull outlaw during the time of the reivers. The Turnbells also had a farm in the vicinity of the Crags at Barnhills. This was razed to the ground in 1500 by Peter Turnbull and others.

In 1513, following the Battle of Flodden, Lord Dacre led an English army through the Rule valley for further assaults on the Borders. George Turnbull quickly rallied a defensive

force of 700 Turnbells, Kerrs, Douglasses and Scotts, and defeated the invaders at the Battle of Sclaterford. The only historical record is a (one-sided) letter from Lord Dacre, penned in November 1513: "...so to the Sclater Ford on the water of Bowset; was pursued by the Scots, assisted by 'Dand' Kerr of Fernehirst, the Laird of Bondgedworth, and the sheriff of Teviotdale; the Laird of Walchope and Mark Trumbill [Turnbull] are hurt".

The site of the battle was a ford over the "water of Bowset" which is likely the Fodderlee Burn in Abbotrule. A large cairn marked the spot until the early 1800s; in 1903 a memorial plaque was erected by Hawick Archaeological Society on the bridge over the burn.

Deep in the woods beneath the Crags lies the remains of Barnhills Castle, another important defensive stronghold of the Turnbells, built sometime during the 16th century. The "Barne Helles" was burnt by the Earl of Hertford, Edward Seymour's men in 1545 during the height of the Rough Wooing, but the damage cannot have been extensive as "Barnehyll" was one of the houses appointed to watch the fords of Tweed in 1548-49.

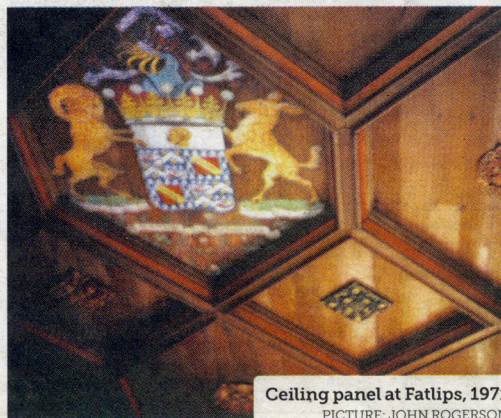
Fatlips Castle was completely destroyed and very little remained. Among the other places to be

burned were 'Mantoncrake' (i.e. Minto Crags) and 'East Barnehill' and 'Weast Barnehill'.

The turning point for the Turnbells came in 1510 when James IV, despairing of the lawlessness of his Border subjects, held a mass hanging at the 'Deed Haugh' near Rulemouth, two miles from Denholm. The principal Turnbells made their submission to the king, coming before him in linen sheets with withies about their necks, and "put themselves in the king's will". The family largely scattered thereafter, many of them choosing to emigrate overseas to the New World.

The lands of Minto (with its separate portions) remained in the Turnbull family until John Turnbull, the last laird, parted with them in 1673. During the thirty years that elapsed between the sale of Minto and its purchase by Sir Gilbert Elliot, there were no less than five intermediate proprietors: Walter Scott of Harwood, Walter Riddell, Thomas Rutherford, the Earl of Tarras - Walter Scott of Highchester, and Gideon Scott of Highchester.

Gideon, the eldest son of Lord Tarras, obtained a charter in February 1695 to create the barony of Minto, Craigend and Deanfoot. By a later charter in favour of Sir Gilbert and his son (dated April 30, 1706, and ratified in parliament one year later), Headshaw, Langhope, Minto



Ceiling panel at Fatlips, 1971

PICTURE: JOHN ROGERSON