Category Archives: John Hunter (D.1685)

The Escape From The Devil’s Beef Tub
Above the Strait Step © Chris Heaton and licensed for reuse.

According to traditions recorded in the nineteenth century, after John Hunter was killed above the Devil's Beef Tub in 1685, his companion, ‘——-’ Welsh, the ‘Babe of Tweedhopefoot’, escaped from Colonel James Douglas’s men.

Tweedhopefoot lies in Tweedsmuir parish to the north of the Devil's Beef Tub.

Map of Tweedhopefoot  Street View of Tweedhopefoot

Fingland © frank smith and licensed for reuse.

There were two individuals named Welsh who lived in Tweedsmuir parish appear on the published Fugitive Roll of May, 1684.

A John Welsh ‘in Fingland’ lived a short distance down the River Tweed from Tweedhopefoot.

Map of Fingland  Aerial View of Fingland
Menzion © David Medcalf and licensed for reuse.

A second fugitive, ‘John Welsh in Munion’ i.e., Menzion, was also listed on the roll. (Jardine, ‘United Societies’, II, 223.)

Map of Menzion       Street View of Menzion

Menzion lies down the Fruid Water from Carterhope, a key location in the traditions of his escape.

It is possible that Welsh was one of the John Welshes on the Fugitive Roll, however, the stories of him belong to the realm of tradition, rather than that of history. Even Simpson, who first recorded the tradition, conceded that Welsh was a legendary figure: ‘How he acquired this soubriquet it is not easy to say, but he was a man of very great bodily strength; and stories are told of his wonderful feats, that seem to partake more of legend than of sober truth. He was, however, identified with the Covenanter. His house was a home to the ministers, and he had suffered many privations on account of the sympathy which he showed them.’ (Simpson, Traditions, 113.)

According Simpson, ‘[...] After the death of his companion [at the hands of Colonel Douglas’s men], Welsh continued his flight across the wilderness, intending, if possible, to reach a place called Carterhope.’ (Simpson, Traditions, 114.)

In 1892, a letter was sent to the author of Martyrs Graves from the minister of Tweedsmuir parish. It related a little more about what allegedly happened after Hunter was shot. The information it contained
had come from a descendant of Welsh who had emigrated to and died in Australia.

‘Welsh got out through the Skail Step, otherwise named Coolin Pass, and on to the moor above, where for a time he was master of the situation, for the ground being rough with moss and hay, a hardy peasant could easily outstrip the best mounted trooper. On he flew past Earlshaugh, making for his aunt’s home at Carterhope, which he at length reached in safety.’ (Thomson, *Martyr Graves*, 448-9.)

The Strait Step lies directly above the traditional spot for Hunter’s death.

**Map of Strait Step**

Earlshaugh © Iain Russell and licensed for reuse.

**Earlshaugh** lies across the moor to the north of the Strait Step.

**Map of Earlshaugh**       **Aerial View of Earlshaugh**

The Fugitive Roll of 1684 listed a ‘William Porteous in Earl’s-haugh’. He may have been banished to Barbados in either 1685, or 1687. (Jardine, ‘United Societies’, II, 223.)

Passing by Earlshaugh, Welsh fled on to Carterhope, which lies across the moor to the north-east.
Carterhope Burn © Richard Webb and licensed for reuse.

The Ruins of Carterhope now lie just below the waterline of the Fruid Reservoir.

Map of former site of Carterhope

The ruins of it are just visible below the water.

Aerial View of Carterhope

According to Simpson, at Carterhope, Welsh made one of those cunning escapes which are found in many later traditions about the Covenanters:

‘He arrived at the house without having been seen by the troopers, and placed himself by the fire, to wait the result. The soldiers, though they did not see him enter, had nevertheless followed in the track in which he had fled, and at length came to the place. They entered in their usual uproarious manner, while Welsh was sitting apparently unconcerned before the fire. The soldiers not expecting, perhaps, to find the object of their pursuit in the hut, and having no personal knowledge of him, did not seem to notice him. The mistress of the house, however, fearing lest a discovery should by some means be made, resorted to a kind of stratagem to prevent suspicion. She approached Welsh, who appeared to be carelessly dozing over the fire, and giving him a heavy slap between the shoulders, commanded him to rise and to proceed to his work, chiding him for his slothfulness in sitting all day cowering by the hearth, while his proper business was neglected. He took the hint, and withdrew from the apartment.
The soldiers naturally conceived that he was a person belonging to the house, and consequently made no inquiries. He often remarked, that the kindest cuff he ever received was from the gudewife of Carterhope, whose presence of mind, at that critical moment, was in all likelihood the means of saving his life.‘ (Simpson, Traditions, 114.)

According to the 1892 letter’s version of his escape:

‘Here his aunt made him strip and put on old working clothes, and then said, Sit ye doun by the fire. By and bye the soldiers came to the door and demanded the fugitive. She told them to search the house, and at the same time called out to Welsh, Get up and hau the sodgers horses. He did as he was bid. They searched the house in vain, then came out, mounted, and rode off, leaving Welsh exactly as they found him.’ (Thomson, Martyr Graves, 449.)

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Filed under: ‘------' Welsh (Tweedhopefoot), 1685, Borders, Carterhope, Colonel James Douglas, Earlschaugh, Fingland (Tweedsmuir), John Hunter (d.1685), Menzion, Peeblesshire, Tweedsmuir parish, William Porteous (Earlschaugh) Tagged: Annandale Way, Borders, Devil's Beef Tub, Hillwalking, History,

Making History: The Mystery Of The Moving Martyr’s Stone
Can you resolve the mystery of the Martyr’s Stone of John Hunter? Can you find it? Can it be photographed?

The Martyr’s Stone marked the traditional location of the shooting of John Hunter by Colonel James Douglas in 1685. He is buried in Tweedsmuir churchyard. You can read Hunter’s story in full, here.

The place where Hunter was shot may still be marked by the Martyr’s Stone.

When it was first recorded on the Six Inch OS map, which was surveyed in 1857, the stone lay on the west side of the path below the Strait Step and above the Devil’s Beef Tub. (Dumfriesshire, Sheet IX)

The stone is simply described on the map as ‘Martyr’s Stone John Hunter shot here 1685’ and is marked by a rectangle at the bottom left of the ‘M’ in Martyr’s Stone and above the ‘hn’ of John.

It appears in the same location on the second edition of the Six Inch map which was revised in 1898. (Dumfriesshire Sheet IX.NW)

However, on the modern OS map it is marked at a short distance off to the east of what appears to be the same path. That location appears to accord with the circle and dot after ‘Stone’ on the original map.

Map of the Martyr’s Stone

Aerial View of Area of the Martyr’s Stone

It is clear from the original map that the circle and dot are common contour spot-height markers, rather than the Martyr’s Stone.

The Martyr’s Stone, or stones, was described in 1892 by a minister who had visited it:
‘The spot where Hunter was killed is marked by large blocks of undressed stone piled one upon another and grey with moss and lichen, and the surrounding scenery being stern and wild, is a most fit theatre for such a tragedy.’

Is it still there? Any information or photographs that would help to resolve this mystery would be appreciated. Any contribution will be acknowledged.

My contact email can be found here.

**Access to the Martyr’s Stone**
The easiest point of access for any search for the Martyrs Stone is from the Annandale Way, a new walking route which runs around the top of the Devil’s Beef Tub and meets the path down to the Martyr’s Stone above the Strait Step.

**Map of the Annandale Way and the Martyr’s Stone**

The Annandale Way can easily be joined at from the A701 above the Devil’s Beef Tub. There is plenty more to see on the route. See the official website [here](#).

**Street View of Access to Annandale Way from A701**

Good Luck.

**UPDATE**
Ronald Turnbull has visited the site and kindly sent me the following report of it.

‘I [have] pinned down the OS location of the ‘Martyr’s Stone’ as marked on the current Explorer map at NT 06681 12972. This is 10m above (east of) the current signposted path leading from Corehead to the Strait Step. There is an old and tumbledown cairn on one of the many hillside stones herabouts, alongside a small peaty spring. The accuracy of the gps should make the cairn within 10m at most of the dot marked on the OS map. ...It’s an excellent short stroll to the stone from A701 via Annanhead Hill and the Strait Step, but it’s more easily accessed from Annandale on the signposted path via Corehead.’

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Filed under: Annandale, Covenanter Sites, Dumfriesshire, John Hunter (d.1685), Martyr’s Stone (Devil’s Beef Tub), Moffat parish Tagged: Annandale Way, Days Out, Devil's Beef Tub, Dumfries and Galloway, geocaching, Hillwalking, History, Moffat Hills, Scotland, Scottish History

Posted in Annandale, Annandale Way, Covenanter Sites, Days Out, Devil's Beef Tub, Dumfries and Galloway, Dumfriesshire, geocaching, Hillwalking, History, John Hunter (d.1685), Martyr's Stone (Devil's Beef Tub), Moffat Hills, Moffat parish, Scotland, Scottish History |
The Devil's Beef Tub © Sarah Charlesworth and licensed for reuse.

John Hunter was shot escaping from a house at Corehead in Annandale in 1685.
His death was first recorded by Alexander Shields in 1690: ‘Item, the said Col: James Douglas and his party, shot to Death John Hunter for no alleged Cause, but running out from the house at Corehead, the same year, 1685.’ (Shields, A Short Memorial, 35.)

The officer held responsible for Hunter’s death by the Society people was Colonel James Douglas, the commander of His Majesty’s Regiment of Foot Guards.

Colonel James Douglas

**When Was Hunter Shot?**
Shields only dated Hunter’s death to ‘1685’, which from other cases suggests that he was shot between January and July of that year. That time frame can be narrowed down when the movements of Colonel Douglas are taken into account.
At the beginning of the year, Douglas was in Galloway where he was involved in the shootings at Caldons and that of Adam MacQuhan. In March, he was allegedly involved in a raid in Ballantrae parish, which lies next to Galloway.

Where he went after Galloway is not clear. However, on 27 March, he was granted a wide-ranging commission to pursue fugitives and Society people in the Southern and Western shires which lasted until 20 April. (Wodrow, *History*, IV, 207n.)

During that commission, Douglas executed Thomas Richard at Cumnock in Ayrshire on 5 April. At the end of his commission, he briefly attended the privy council in Edinburgh on 21 April (*RPCS*, XI, 24.)

At some point, probably before his judicial commission expired and certainly before 5 May, he was in Dumfriesshire, as Douglas, Robert Grierson of Lag and John Graham of Claverhouse sat on an assize in Dumfries which questioned Euphrain Threpland, aka. Mistress Macbirnie, about assassinations. (Wodrow, *History*, IV, 327.)

On 28 April, he was also involved an intelligence-led raid which resulted in the shooting of five Society people at Lower Ingliston in Glencairn parish.

It is probable that Hunter’s death took place at around the time of the assize and the raid on Ingliston, as a few weeks later, on 23 May, Douglas was with the Scottish army when it was stationed about Ayr to oppose the Argyll Rising. A month later, on 24 June, he was once again in Edinburgh at the privy council. (*RPCS*, XI, 78.)

Hunter was probably shot between mid April and mid May, 1685.

Hunter’s death was not recorded by Wodrow.
The House at Corehead

Hunter was killed escaping from a house in Corehead, which lies by the Devil’s Beef Tub in Moffat parish, Annandale, Dumfriesshire.

Map of Corehead    Aerial View of Corehead

The estate was held by James Johnston of Corehead. In 1678, he was appointed a commissioner for raising the Cess Tax. In 1689, he was commissioned as a captain of the militia to defend the Revolution. (*RPS*, 1678/6/22; 1689/3/82.)

Corehead had a history of hiding fugitives. A ‘George Hunter, in Corehead’ was listed under Peeblesshire on the published Fugitive Roll of May 1684 for resetting fugitives. It is possible that John Hunter and George Hunter were kin. (Jardine, ‘United Societies’, II, 223.)

The meeting point of the boundaries of Dumfriesshire, Lanarkshire and Peeblesshire lies a little way to the north-west of Corehead.

Map of the meeting point of the three shires

The nodes where shire boundaries intersected were often used by the Society people as meeting points. Nearby sites associated with the Societies can be found at Talla Linn, which was used as a convention site, and Peden’s Pulpit in Gameshope.
John Hunter’s Grave © Walter Baxter and licensed for reuse.

**Hunter’s Grave in Tweedsmuir**

In 1726, a stone was erected on his grave in Tweedsmuir churchyard.

[Map of Tweedsmuir Churchyard](#)  [Aerial View of Tweedsmuir Churchyard](#)

The inscription on it is of a fairly standard form and adds no new information about his death. The opening lines of it are based on the text of Shields/Cloud:

‘Here Iyes John Hunter
Martyr who was cruelly
Murdered at Corehead
By Col James Douglas and
His party for his adherance
To the Word of God and
Scotland's covenanted
Work of Reformation
1685.
Erected in the year 1726.

[on reverse]

When Zions King was robbed
of his right
His witnesses in Scotland
put to flight
When popish prelats and
indulgence
Combin'd gainst Christ to
Ruin Presbytrie
All who would not with
their idols bow
They sought them out and
whom they found they slew
For owning of Christ's cause
I then did die
My blood for vengeance on
His en'mies did cry.' (Thomson, Martyr Graves, 474.)

The inscription on the reverse was first recorded in the third edition of Cloud of Witnesses in 1730.

The historical sources indicate that Hunter was shot by Colonel Douglas's troops when he attempted to escape from a house at Corehead in Dumfriesshire, probably between mid April to mid May, 1685.

His burial in Tweedsmuir parish kirkyard suggests that he was possibly connected to the parish.

In 1837 an obelisk dedicated to Hunter was erected in front of the the original parish church at Tweedsmuir. The original church, which was built in 1648, was replaced by the present building in 1874.

'In Memory of
John Hunter
Martyr
whose
Gravestone
is in
the lower part
of this
churchyard
1837.’ (Thomson, Martyr Graves, 446-7.)

Fingland © frank smi and licensed for reuse.

**Later Traditions.**
In the nineteenth century, local traditions were recorded by Simpson and Thomson which interwove Hunter’s story with that of a companion, ‘——’ Welsh, the ‘Babe of Tweedhopefoot’. The traditions were primarily about the story of Welsh, rather than that of Hunter. How reliable a guide they are to the history of John Hunter’s death is not known.

Simpson’s tradition claimed that Hunter was a ‘native of the same place’ as Welsh, i.e., that he was a resident of Tweedsmuir parish. An ‘Adam Hunter, in Fingland’, Tweedsmuir parish, was listed under Peeblesshire on the published Fugitive Roll of 1684. (Jardine, ‘United Societies’, II, 223; Simpson, Traditions, 113.)

Map of Fingland Aerial View of Fingland
Fingland lies just to the north of Tweedhopefoot, which also lies in Tweedsmuir parish.

Map of Tweedhopefoot Street View of Tweedhopefoot

There is a Tweedhope Burn beside Corehead, but the tradition refers to the location in Tweedsmuir parish.

Map of Tweedhope Burn

According to Simpson’s tradition, Hunter and Welsh fled to ‘the solitudes of Corehead, near the source of the Water of Annan’, in order to evade capture by Colonel James Douglas. The River Annan rises at Annanhead, above the Devil’s Beef Tub and beside the location where Hunter was allegedly shot. Their flight was betrayed:

‘[Colonel] Douglas, however, having got notice of their flight, pursued them with his troop, and soon gained ground on the fugitives. When they saw that there was a likelihood of their being overtaken, they directed their course to a place called the “Straught Steep,” which, being difficult of access to the dragoons, they expected would afford them a safe retreat.’ (Simpson, Traditions, 113.)

Above the Strait Step © Chris Heaton and licensed for reuse.

The Strait Step lies south of both Tweedhopefoot and Fingland, and just over the shire boundary in Dumfriesshire. It also lies directly on a path to the north-west of the house at Corehead.
Map of Strait Step

‘By this time the horsemen were very near, and began to fire upon them. Hunter, who it seems was fully within the reach of the shot, was struck by a ball which proved fatal. He fell among the stones over which he was scrambling, and his life’s blood oozed forth upon the rocks, where he expired. His body was removed, and interred in the churchyard of Tweedsmuir.’ (Simpson, *Traditions*, 113.)

A second version of the tradition recorded in a letter to Thomson of 1892 tells a slightly different version of events. According to the letter, ‘Hunter was visiting the Welshes at Corehead when it was reported that Colonel Douglas and his troops were coming up the glen.’

They then ‘fled on foot up the hill at the back of the house. When two-thirds of the way up Hunter was seized with a violent pain in his side, and could run no farther. So, telling Welsh to go on and save his own life, he waited there to meet his fate. Up came the dragoons and shot him down like a dog.’ (Thomson, *Martyr Graves*, 448.)

The place where Hunter was shot is, or was, marked by the Martyr’s Stone. The location was first recorded on the original Six Inch OS map in 1857. The modern OS map places the stone in a slightly different position.

Map of the Martyr’s Stone
John Hunter Covenanter Monument at the Devil’s Beef Tub © Walter Baxter and licensed for reuse.

**Another Monument**

In 1955, a further monument to Hunter was erected beside the A701 at the Devil’s Beef Tub. The view from it looks towards the area of the Martyr’s Stone mentioned above. The inscription on it is as follows:

‘On the hillside
opposite
JOHN
HUNTER
COVENANTER
was shot
by
Douglas’s Dragoons
in
1685
THE GRAVE IS IN
TWEEDSMUIR KIRKYARD
1955’

**Map of the 1955 Monument**

To help resolve a mystery concerning the site of Hunter’s death, see here.
For the escape of Welsh after Hunter's death, see here.

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Filed under: '-------' Welsh (Tweedhopefoot), 1685, Andrew Welsh (Tweedhopefoot), Annandale, Colonel James Douglas, Corehead, Covenanter Sites, Covenancers, Dumfriesshire, Euphrain Threpland (aka. Mistress Macbirnie), Fingland (Tweedsmuir), His Majesty's Regiment of Foot Guards, John Hunter (d.1685), Martyr's Stone (Devil's Beef Tub), Moffat parish, Peden's Pulpit (Gameshope), Peebleshire, Scotland, Scottish History, Tweedhopefoot, Tweedsmuir, Tweedsmuir parish Tagged: Annandale Way, Covenancers, Devil's Beef Tub, Hillwalking, History, Moffat, Scotland, Scottish History

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