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### Roxburgh castle and burgh – Roxburgh, Scottish Borders





## The burgh

*Across the river Tweed from Kelso, there is a grassy field used for point-to-point racing. At its west end where the rivers Tweed and Teviot narrow to an isthmus 150m wide, there is a 100 foot high mound grown with oak trees on which may be seen a few lengths of ruinous wall. This is the royal castle of Marchmont or Roxburgh which David of Huntingdon founded in the early 12th century as the seat of his principality of Cumbria, which his brother, King Alexander, devolved on him. Later he erected a new burgh of Roxburgh on the haugh land beyond, now used for horse racing. The town grew to be one of the four most important burghs in Scotland in the 13th and 14th centuries and held an annual fair of St James on 25th July.*

*The castle and burgh arose and fell in response to political requirements. Founded by David I, it was destroyed following the successful siege of 1460 by James II that ejected the English from southern Scotland, killing off both castle and town. The subsequent use of the castle site for a fort in 1547 by protector Somerset was a short-lived episode that came to nothing with the signing of peace in 1550 and the removal of the English garrisons. Subsequently the site has been variously parkland of Friars House belonging to the Earl of Roxburghe in the 17th century and farmland after the move to Floors castle in the 18th century. The last occasion on which the burgh site was ploughed, in the 2nd World War, produced large quantities of medieval pottery. Recent interest has been rekindled by a Time Team excavation in 2003.*

*The burgh plan has been retrieved from oblivion by a combination of documents, topographical analysis and serendipity. In the hot dry summers of 1984 and 2006 parch marks in the grass revealed the drainage ditches that lined the streets of the burgh, the outlines of buildings with stone footings that fronted on to them and the great ditches that delimited the burgh ramparts. Indeed the streets can in places be observed on the ground where the camber of the roads is still recognisable. This has all been made possible by a 3D survey using high resolution GPS during 2006-9 that covered every part of the burgh and the castle mound. The names of several streets are mentioned in property transactions called charters that survive in monastic records and royal charters. These include King Street, an east-west street, Market Street, a north-south street and Senegede Street. The main east-west street, probably King Street, ran along a natural terrace on the north of the castle mound, and made a junction with a north-south street just south of the Tweed near the east rampart, which may be Market Street. A raid by the earl of Dunbar in 1385 to avenge the killing of one of his men, laid waste the market which lay along it and may be located where the north-south street rides up over a higher terrace. Here in a space where another road meets the north-south street lines of square pits may be seen in the cropmarks which may be the cellars of, or for the rubbish of market booths.*





## The castle

*The castle already housed a strong tower in the reign of King David in which he imprisoned Malcolm, brother of the Mormaer of Moray in 1134 who was foolish enough to raise the standard of revolt against him. No definite trace of the tower now remains although a high point on the castle with a lump of masonry on its north side may be a relic of this strong point. It sits at the south-west corner of a central court of the castle that is shown on a plan of 1547 as 'The bell mowntte'. This occupies the north-west corner of the artillery fort that was built on the old castle mound during the war of the Rough Wooing to hold down southern Scotland. It was short lived but made a huge impact on the castle. Enough remains to determine that there was one long enclosure that narrows at its north-east end. There is an entrance at each end, ruins of which can still be seen. Of the two that at the south-west is a wide entrance defended by two towers and a yett, wear marks of which can be seen in the left hand tower as you enter. At the north end one side of a barbican with a doorstep still stands above a steep slope down to the great ditch than defends three sides of the castle, leaving the Teviotside open apart from a long wall of masonry at the top of the vertiginous slope of the mound. Two arched gaps in the wall mark the position of postern gates and there is a hole in the wall half way along in which there is a drain for the disposal of liquid rubbish or slops from the castle kitchens. Nearby to the south another gap gives way to a terrace that was once the location of the Captain's lodging shown on a plan in 1547, but may have been a rebuild of an earlier hall.*

### References:

*Martin, C. and Oram, 2007, R. Medieval Roxburgh: a preliminary assessment of the burgh and its locality. In Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 137 (2007), pp 357-404.*

*RCAHMS, (1956), The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. An inventory of the ancient and historical monuments of Roxburghshire: with the fourteenth report of the Commission, 2v. Edinburgh, pp 407-411*

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<https://canmore.org.uk/site/58412/roxburgh-castle>  
<https://canmore.org.uk/site/58422/roxburgh>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKBZ9F418Wk>



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