

## KINMONT WILLIE'S ESCAPE

The castle was kept in service as a base for keeping watch on the border lands and as a prison for cattle thieves. In 1596, **William Armstrong of Kinmont**, or 'Kinmont Willie', a famous **Border Reiver** who was being kept prisoner at the castle, was helped to escape by his fellow Reivers. The story of his escape is told in 'The Ballad of Kinmont Willie' but misses out the key facts that Kinmont Willie was not chained down in a dungeon but held in a room in the outer ward, and that he and his rescuers had help from inside the castle.



The notorious Border Reiver William 'Kinmont Willie' Armstrong was helped to escape from Carlisle Castle on 13 March 1596.  
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## 1600s: SIEGE OF STARVATION

In 1617, when King James I (r.1603–25) returned to England from Scotland, he stayed at Carlisle Castle. The castle had been neglected, but James did not repair it. When James had been crowned king of England and Scotland in 1603, the two countries were united as one kingdom so the castle was no longer needed to defend the border.

Things changed during the **English Civil War** when Charles I (r.1625–49) was king. The castle was prepared for attack from the **Parliamentarian** army with three **gun batteries** set up in the inner and outer **wards**.

In 1644, the Parliamentarian victory at the **Battle of Marston Moor** meant that most of northern England was controlled by Parliament and the Scots. Later that year, Carlisle came under siege by the Scots once again. The city was surrounded by cannons and earthworks. Rather than attack the city and castle directly, the Scots waited to starve the people out, not letting anyone in or out of the city gates. The people in the city became so hungry that they were forced to eat their horses, dogs and, later, even rats. Eventually, after eight months, the city surrendered.

When the **monarchy** was restored, Carlisle Castle once again belonged to the Crown. Very little money was spent on it and by the end of the 1600s the **garrison** had left.



In the 17th century, Charles I prepared the castle for attack from Parliamentarians by adding new gun batteries.

# SELF-LED ACTIVITY

## KINMONT WILLIE: A TRUE STORY?



KS2

KS3

### Recommended For

KS2 and KS3  
(History, English)

### Learning Objectives

- Understand how historians judge the reliability of sources based on their provenance
- Compare sources to assess their reliability
- Understand how language is used persuasively, i.e. imagery, sensory description, emotive words and evocative adjectives

### Time to complete

30 minutes



The notorious Border Reiver, William 'Kinmont Willie' Armstrong, was helped to escape from Carlisle Castle on 13th March, 1596.

### SUMMARY

Use the Historical Information in this kit to explain the story of Border Reiver William 'Kinmont Willie' Armstrong's escape from Carlisle Castle on 13 March 1596. Start the activity by explaining that the ballad form was originally stories passed down orally through generations. 'The Ballad of Kinmont Willie' was first recorded in 1802 in Walter Scott's 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border' but would have been told for generations before this.

People who sang the ballad probably supported the Border Reivers and would have wanted to portray Kinmont Willie and the Reivers as heroes. For example, the ballad uses lots of sensory description about sound to mock the ease with which the Reivers were able to break into the castle and leave without being caught.

Students can start by comparing the ballad (Source 3) with the evidence from the sources below. For example, the word 'stole' contrasts with the way the ballad describes the noise created by the Reivers' escape that failed to alert the guards, i.e. the 'clang' of Willie's chains.

After considering these sources, the students should look again at the ballad and highlight any language techniques that might show that the writer wanted to portray Kinmont Willie and the Border Reivers as the heroes of the story. Explain to students that the ballad was told as entertainment in an era before television and the internet. The tellers would have used specific techniques to keep people listening and make their stories memorable.

### MORE LEARNING IDEAS

In small groups, students can turn the ballad into a play. They should imagine that they are telling the story to others, so they should come up with actions and choose which dramatic moments in the ballad to act out. Key characters will be Kinmont Willie, Red Rowan, some other Reivers, Thomas Scrope and the other castle guards who don't notice Willie escaping. You could perform this at the castle and take photos.

We'd love to see your photos, so please tweet them to @EHEducation.

# KINMONT WILLIE: A TRUE STORY?

‘The watch, as yt shoulde seeme, by reason of the stormye night, were either on sleepe or gotten under some covert to defende themselves from the violence of the wether, by means whereof the Scottes atchieved their enterprise with less difficultie...’

“”

This source is Thomas Scrope's account of the escape of William 'Kinmont Willie' Armstrong. It was written on 13 April 1596. Thomas Scrope was Warden of the Western Marches and responsible to the English king for security of the area from 1593 to 1603.

‘... the repairing and amending of the postern gate which William of Kynmowth did break under when he stole away.’

“”

This source describes a payment made for repairs at the castle. It is taken from an exchequer record (a record of how money from public taxes is spent) from the late 16th century.

- 1 Can you find any words in the sources above that **challenge** the description of events in the ballad?
- 2 How **reliable** are these sources?
- 3 How does the writer use **language** to portray the Border Reivers as the heroes of the story? Think about:

- imagery
- emotive language
- sensory description
- interesting adjectives

Use quotations from the ballad or the sources to help explain your answer.

### SOURCE 3

And when we left the Staneshaw-bank,  
The wind began full loud to blaw;  
But 'twas wind and weet, and fire and sleet,  
When we came beneath the castel wa'.

We crept on knees and held our breath,  
Till we placed the ladders against the wa';  
And sae ready was Buccleuch himsell  
To mount the first, before us a'.

He has ta'en the watchman by the throat,  
He flung him down upon the lead  
"Had there not been peace between  
our lands,  
Upon the other side thou hadst gaed!"

"Now sound out, trumpets!" quo' Buccleuch;  
"Lets waken Lord Scroope, right merrilie!"  
Then loud the Warden's trumpets blew  
"O whae dare meddle wi' me?"

Then speedilie to work we gaed,  
And raised the slogan ane and a',  
And cut a hole thro' a sheet of lead,  
And so we wan to the castel ha'.

They thought King James and a' his men  
Had won the house wi' bow and speir;  
It was but twenty Scots and ten,  
That put a thousand in sic a stear!

Wi' coulters, and wi' foreharmers,  
We garr'd the bars bang merrily,  
Until we came to the inner prison,  
Where Willie o'Kinmont he did lie.

And when we came to the lower prison,  
Where Willie o'Kinmont he did lie –  
"O sleep ye, wake ye Kinmont Willie,  
Upon the morn that thou's to die?"

"O I sleep saft, and I wake aft;  
It's lang since sleeping was fley'd frae me!  
Gie my service back to my wife and bairns,  
And a'gude fellows that spier for me."

Then Red Rowan had heute him up.  
The starkest man in Teviotdale-  
"Abide, abide now, Red Rowan,  
Till of my lord Scrope I take farewell.

"Farewell, farewell, my gude lord Scrope!  
My gude lord Scrope, farewell" he cried-  
"I'll pay you for my lodging maill,  
When we first meet on the border side."

Then shoulder high, with shout and cry,  
We bore him down the ladder lang;  
At every stride Red Rowan made,  
I wot the Kinmont's airns okay'd clang!

This source is an extract from 'The Ballad of Kinmont Willie'. It was first recorded in 1802 in Walter Scott's 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border' but would have been told for generations before this.

