


The logo for Biggar Archaeology Group is a square with a white border and a dark brown background. It features a green brushstroke at the top. The text 'Biggar Archaeology group' is written in white, with 'Biggar' on the top line, 'Archaeology' in the middle, and 'group' at the bottom.

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Bringing the past to the present

A photograph of a large, ancient stone structure, the Clydesdale Bastle, built from stacked, irregular stones. The structure is set against a blue sky with white clouds. The foreground shows green grass and some rocks.

**Clydesdale Bastle Project**

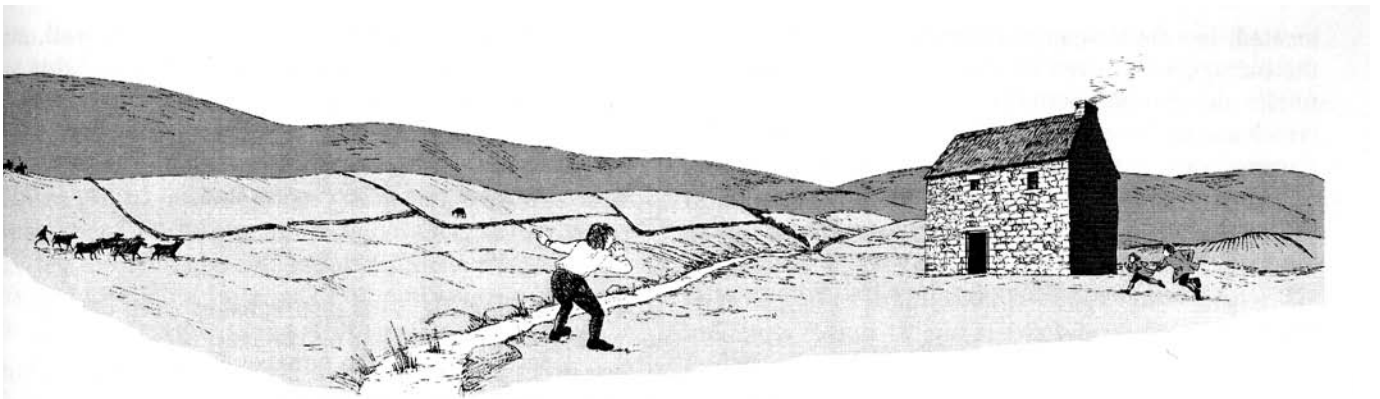
# **The Great Monition of Cursing by Gavin Dunbar, the Archbishop of Glasgow on the border reivers – 1525**

Occasional Paper No. 1

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## Introduction

Lawlessness had reached an unprecedented state on the Anglo Scottish Borders by the late 16th century, with the culprits paying equally scant attention to the remonstrations of either state or church. Although this state of affairs was prevalent for most of the history of the borders, more or less since Roman times, it would appear that following the reformation, the church grew less influential on the morals of the population there, and provided the condition of inter clan or kinship feud did not escalate too far from the borders region, the monarchs and rulers of both countries did little to resolve it. Often the men put in charge to solve the problem soon became a corrupt part of it.

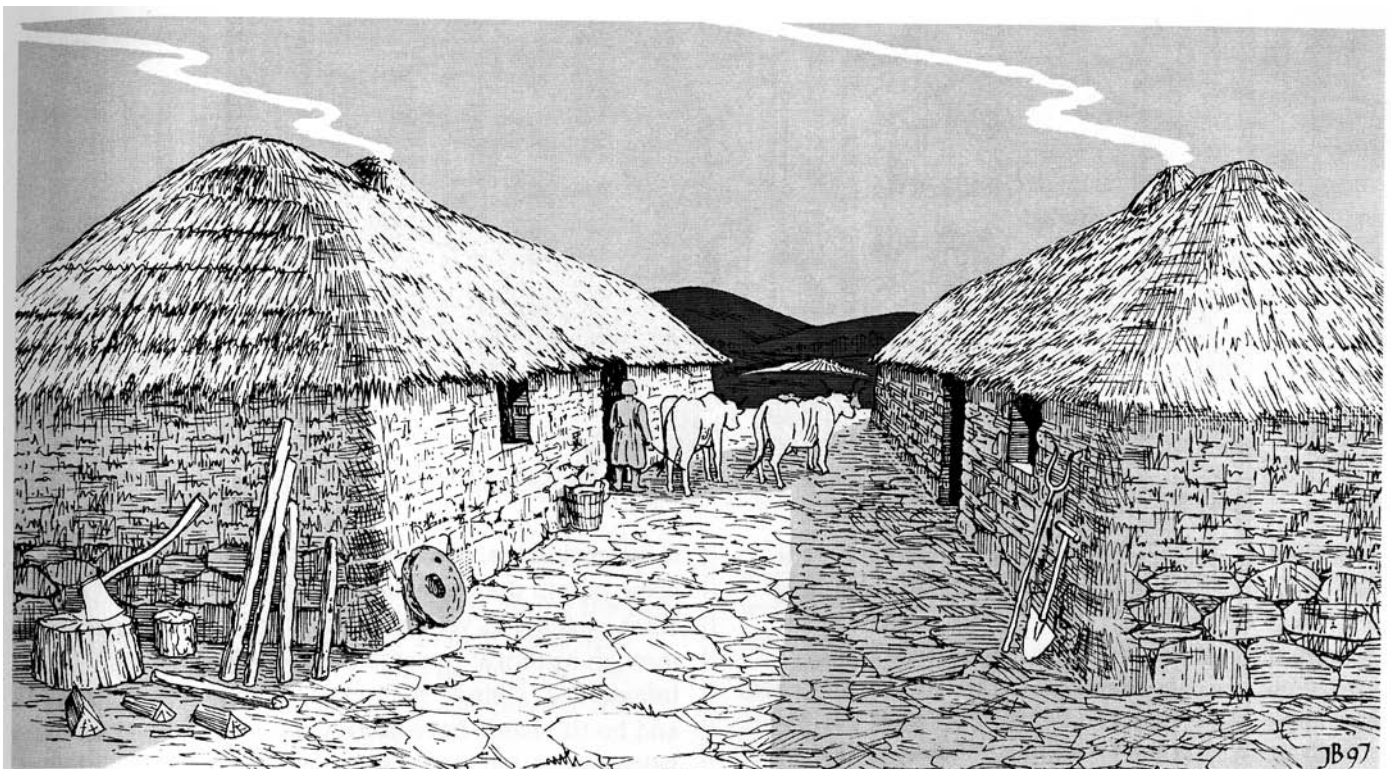


The following quote is taken from Borland (1898) who also gives the full curse and which is given below:

“It was during this period of weakness, almost of total moral collapse, that the Archbishop of Glasgow took it upon him to excommunicate the Border thieves. Had the same vigorous measure been adopted at an earlier period, the result might have been more favourable. As it was, the launching of this ecclesiastical thunderbolt really created more amusement than consternation. It was regarded simply as the growl of a toothless lion. In no circumstances were the Border reivers easily intimidated. Their calling had made them more or less indifferent to the claims of Church and State. They had never had much affection for the king, and they had, perhaps, still less for the priest. Having shaken themselves free, to a large extent at least, from the control of the State, they were not prepared to put their neck under the yoke of an ecclesiastical authority which even the best men of the age had ceased to venerate. But the Archbishop felt that he had a duty to discharge, and he applied himself to the task with commendable vigour.”

“The curse was ordered to be read from every pulpit in the diocese and be circulated throughout the length and breadth of the Borders.”

(Robert Borland, minister of Yarrow. *Border Raids and Reivers*. Dalbeattie: Thomas Fraser 1898)



# The Great Curse

Given here in the Scottish vernacular, see opposite for translation.

“Gude folks, heir at my Lord Archibishop of Glasgwis letters under his round sele, direct to me or any uther chapellane, makand mension, with greit regrait, how hevvy he beris the piteous, lamentabill, and dolorous complaint that pass our all realme and cummis to his eris, be oppin voce and fame, how our souverane lordis trew lieges, men, wiffis and barnys, bocht and redemit be the precious blude of our Salviour Jhesu Crist, and levand in his lawis, ar saikleslie part murdris, part slayne, brynt, heryit, spulzeit and reft, oppinly on day licht and under silens of the nicht, and thair takis and landis laid waist, and thair self banyst therfra, als wele kirklandis as utheris, be commoun tratouris, revaris, theiffis, duelland in the south part of this realme, sic as Tevidale, Esdale, Liddisdale, Ewisdale, Nedisdale, and Annandaill; quhilkis hes bene diverse ways persewit and punist be the temperale swerd and our Sovereane Lordis auctorite, and dredis nocht the samyn.

“And thairfoir my said Lord Archibishop of Glasgw hes thocht expedient to strike thaim with the terribill swerd of halykirk, quilk thai may nocht lang endur and resist; and hes chargeit me, or any uther chapellane, to denounce, declair and proclame thaim oppinly and generalie cursit, at this market croce, and all utheris public places.

“Heirfor throw the auctorite of Almighty God, the Fader of hevin, his Son, our Salviour, Jhesu Crist, and of the Halygaist; throw the auctorite of the Blissit Virgin Sanct Mary, Sanct Michael, Sanct Gabriell, and all his angellis; Sanct John the Baptist, and all the haly patriarkis and prophets; Sanct Peter, Sanct Paul, Sanct Andro, and all haly appostillis; Sanct Stephin, Sanct Laurence, and all haly mertheris; Sanct Gile, Sanct Martyn, and all haly confessoris; Sanct Anne, Sanct Katherin, and all haly virginis and matronis; and all the sanctis and haly company

Translation to (approximate) English

“Good folks, here at my Lord Archbishop of Glasgow’s letters under his round seal, direct to me or any other chaplain, making mention, with great regret, how heavy he bears the piteous, lamentable, and dolorous complaint that passes all of our realm and comes to his ears, by open voice and fame, how our sovereign lords true lieges, men, wives and children, both and redeemed by the precious blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and living in his laws, are innocently part murdered, part slain, burnt, harried, spoiled and robbed, openly on day light and under silence of the night, and their farms and lands laid waist, and they are self banish therefore, as well church lands as others, by common traitors, reivers, thief’s, dwelling in the south part of this realm, such as Teviotdale, Eskdale, Liddiesdale, Ewisdale, Nithsdale, and Annandale; which has been diverse ways pursued and punished by the temporal sword and our Sovereign Lords authority, and dreads not the same.

“And therefore my said Lord Archbishop of Glasgow has thought expedient to strike them with the terrible sword of holy church, which they may not long endure and resist; and has charged me, or any other chaplain, to denounce, declare and proclaim them openly and generally cursed, at this market cross, and all other public places.

“ Herefore through the authority of Almighty God, the Father of heaven, his Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy ghost; through the authority of the Blessed Virgin Saint Mary, Saint Michael, Saint Gabriel, and all his angels; Saint John the Baptist, and all the holy patriarchs and prophets; Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saint Andrew, and all holy apostles; Saint Stephen, Sanct Laurence, and all holy martyrs; Saint Gile, Saint Martin, and all holy confessors; Saint Anne, Saint Katherine, and all holy virgins and

of hevin; be the auctorite of our Haly Fader the Paip and his cardinalis, and of my said Lord Archbishop of Glasgw, be the advise and assistance of my lordis, archbishop, bischopis, abbotis, prioris, and utheris prelates and ministeris of halykirk.

I DENOUNCE, PROCLAIMIS, AND DECLARIS all and sindry the committaris of the said saikles murthris, slauchteris, brinyng, heirschippes, reiffis, thiftis, and spulezeis, oppinly apon day licht and under silence of nicht, alswele within temporale landis as kirklandis; together with thair part takaris, assistaris, supplearis, wittandlie and resattaris of thair personis, the gudes reft and stolen be thaim, art or part thereof, and their counsalouris and defendouris, of thair evil dedis generalie cursit, waryit, aggregeite, and reaggregeite, with the greit cursing.

“I CURSE thair heid and all the haris of thair heid; I CURSE thair face, thair ene, thair mouth, thair neise, thair tounge, thair teith, thair crag, thair schulderis, thair breast, thait hert, thair stomok, thair bak, thair wame, thair armes, thair leggis, thair handis, thair feit, and everilk part of thair body, frae the top of thair heid to the soill of thair feit, befoir and behind, within and without. I CURSE thaim gangand, and I CURSE thaim rydand; I CURSE thaim standand, and I CURSE thaim sittand; I CURSE thaim etand, I CURSE thaim drinkand; I CURSE thaim walkand, I CURSE thaim sleepand; I CURSE thaim rysand, I CURSE thaim lyand; I CURSE thaim at hame, I CURSE thaim fra hame; I CURSE thaim within the house, I CURSE thaim without the house; I CURSE thair wiffis, thair banris, and thair servandis participand with thaim in thair deides.

I WARY thair cornys, thair catales, thair woll, thair scheip, thair horse, thair swine, thair geise, thair hennys, and all thair quyk gude. I WARY thair hallis, thair chalmeris, thair kechingis, thair stabillis, thair barnys, thair biris, thair

matrons; and all the saints and holy company of heaven; by the authority of our Holy Father the Pope and his cardinals, and of my said Lord Archbishop of Glasgow, with the advice and assistance of my lords, archbishop, bishops, abbots, priors, and other prelates and ministers of the holy church,

I DENOUNCE, PROCLAIMS, AND DECLARES all and sundry the committers of the said of innocents murders, slaughters, burning, inheritances, robbery, thefts, and spoilings, openly upon day light and under silence of night, as well as within temporal lands as church lands; together with their part takers, assisters, suppliers, knowingly and of their persons, the goods snatched and stolen by them, art or part thereof, and their counsellors and defenders, of their evil deeds generally cursed, waking, aggravated, and re-aggravated, with the great cursing.

“I CURSE their head and all the hairs of their head; I CURSE their face, their eyes, their mouth, their nose, their tongue, their teeth, their skull, their shoulder’s, their breast, their heart, their stomach, their back, their womb, their arms, their legs, their hands, their feet, and every part of their body, from the top of their head to the sole of their feet, before and behind, within and without. I CURSE them going, and I CURSE them riding; I CURSE them standing, and I CURSE them sitting; I CURSE them eating, I CURSE them drinking; I CURSE them walking, I CURSE them sleeping; I CURSE them rising, I CURSE them lying; I CURSE them at home, I CURSE them from home; I CURSE them within the house, I CURSE them without the house; I CURSE their wives, their children and their servants (who) participate with them in their deeds.

I Worry their corn, their cattle, their wool, their sheep, their horse, their swine, their geese, their hens, and all their live goods (animals). I Worry their houses, their rooms, their kitchens, their stables, their barns, their byres,

bernyardis, thair cailyardis, thair plewis, thair harrowis, and the guidis and houses that is necessair for thair sustenatioun and weifair. All the malesouns and waresouns that ever gat wardlie creatur sen the begynnyng of the warlde to this hour mot licht apon thaim. The maledictioun of God, that lichtit apon Lucifer and all his fallowis, that strak thain frae the hie hevin to the deip hell, mot licht apon thaim. The fire and the swerd that stoppit Adam fra the yettis of Paradise. Mot stop thaim frae the gloir of Hevin, quill thai forbere and mak amendis. The malesoun that lichtit on cursit Cayein, quhen he slew his bruther just Abell saiklessly, mot licht on thaim for the saikles slauchter that thai commit dailie. The maledictioun that lichtit apon all the warlde, man and beist, and all that ever tuk life, quen all wes drownit be the flude of Noye, except Noye and his ark, mot licht apon thame and droune thame, man and beist, and mak this realm cummirles of thame for thair wicket synnys. The thunnour and fireflauchtis that set down as rane apon the cities of Zodoma and Gomora, with all the landis about, and brynt thame for thair vile synnys, mot rane apon thame, and birne thaim for oppin synnys. The malesoun and confusioun that lichtit on the Gigantis for thair oppressioun and pride, biggand the tour of Babiloun, mot confound thaim and all thair werkis, for thair oppin reiffs and oppressioun. All the plagis that fell apon Pharao and his pepill of Egipt, thair landis, corne and cattail, mot fall apon thaim, thair takkis, rowmys and stedingis, cornys and beistis. The watter of Tweid and utheris watteris quair thai ride mot droun thaim, as the Ried Sey drownit King Pharao and his pepil of Egipt, persewing Godis pepill of Israell. The erd mot oppin, riffe and cleiffe and swelly thaim quyk to hell, as it swellyit cursit Dathan and Abiron, that ganestude Moeses and command of God. The wyld fyre that byrnt Thore and his fallowis to the nowmer of twa hundredth and fifty, and utheris 14,000 and 700 at anys, usurpand aganis Moyses and Araon, servandis of God, mot suddanely birne and consume thaim dailie ganestandand and commandis of God and halykirk. The maledictioun that lichtit

their barnyards, their cabbage patches, their ploughs, their harrows, and the possessions and houses that are necessary for their sustentation and welfare. All the bad wishes and curses that ever got worldly creature since the beginning of the world to this hour might light upon them. The malediction of God, that lighted upon Lucifer and all his fellows, that struck them from the high heaven to the deep hell, might light upon them. The fire and the sword that stopped Adam from the gates of Paradise might stop them from the glory of Heaven, until they forbear and make amends. The bad wishes that lighted on cursed Cain, when he slew his brother just Abel guiltless, might light on them for the innocent slaughter that they commit daily. The malediction that lighted upon all the world, man and beast, and all that ever took life, when all were drowned by the flood of Noah, except Noah and his ark, might light upon them and drown them, man and beast, and make this realm free of them for their wicked sins. The thunder and lightning that set down as rain upon the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, with all the lands about, and burnt them for their vile sins, might rain upon them, and burn them for open sins. The bad wishes and confusion that lighted on the Gigantis for their oppression and pride, building the tour of Babylon, might confound them and all their works, for their open disregard and oppression. All the plagues that fell upon Pharaoh and his people of Egypt, their lands, corn and cattle, might fall upon them, their leases (of land), rooms and buildings, corn and animals. The river of Tweed and other rivers where they ride might drown them, as the Red Sea drowned King Pharaoh and his people of Egypt, pursuing Gods people of Israel. The earth might open, split and cleave and swallow them alive to hell, as it swallowed cursed Dathan and Abiron, that disobeyed Moses and command of God. The wild fire that burnt Thore and his fellows to the number of two hundredth and fifty, and others 14,000 and 700 at anys, usurping against Moses and Aaron, servants of God, might suddenly burn and consume them daily disobeyed and commands of God and holy church.

suddanely upon fair Absolon, rydand contrair his fader, King David, servand of God, throw the wod, quen the branchis of ane tre fred him of his horse and hangit him be the hair, mot licht apon thaim, rydand agane trewe Scottis men, and hang thaim siclike that all the warld may se.

The maledictioun that lichtit apon Olifenus, lieutenant to Nabogodonoser, makand wier and heirschippis apon trew cristin men; the maledictioun that lichtit apon Judas, Pylot, Herod and the Jowis that crucifyit Our Lord, and all the plagis and trublis that lichtit on the citte of Jerusalem thairfor, and upon Symon Magus for his symony, bludy Nero, cursit Ditius Makcensius, Olibruis, Julianus, Apostita and the laiff of the cruel tirroranis that slew and murthirit Cristis haly servandis, mot licht apon thame for thair cruell tyranny and murthirdome of cristin pepill. And all the vengeance that ever wes taken sen the warlde began for oppin synnys, and all the plagis and pestilence that ever fell on man or beist, mot fall on thaim for thair oppin reiff, saiklesse slauchter and schedding of innocent blude. I DISSEVER and PAIRTIS thaim fra the kirk of God, and deliveris thaim quyk to the devil of hell, as the Apostill Sanct Paull deliverit Corinthion. I INTERDITE the places thay cum in fra divine service, ministracioun of the sacramentis of halykirk, except the sacrament of baptising allanerllie; and forbiddis all kirkmen to schriffe or absolve thaim of thaire synnys, quill they be first absolyeit of this cursing.

I FORBID all cristin man or woman till have ony company with thaim, etand, drynkand, spekind, prayand, lyand, standand, or in any uther deid doand, under the paine of deadly syn.

I DISCHARGE all bandis, actis, contractis, athis and obligatiounis made to thaim be ony persounis, outhere of lawte, kyndenes or manrent, salang as thai susteine this cursing; sua that na man be bundin ti thaim, and that thai be bundin till all men. I TAK frae thame and cryis doune all the gude dedis that ever thai did

The malediction that lights suddenly upon fair Absolom, riding contrary to his father, King David, servant of God, through the wood, when the branches of a tree knocked him off his horse and hanged him by the hair, might light upon them, untruly Scots men, and hang them suchlike that all the world may see.

The malediction that lighted upon Olifernus, lieutenant to Nebuchadnezzar's, making war and hardships upon true Christian men; the malediction that lighted upon Judas, Pilot, Herod and the Jews that crucified Our Lord, and all the plagues and troubles that lighted on the city of Jerusalem therefore, and upon Simon Magus for his treachery, bloody Nero, cursed Ditius Magcensius, Olibrius, Julianus, Apostita and the rest of the cruel tyrants that slew and murdered Christ's holy servants, might light upon them for their cruel tyranny and martyrdom of Christian people. And all the vengeance that ever was taken since the world began for open sins, and all the plagues and pestilence that ever fell on man or beast, might fall on them for their open evil, slaughter of guiltless and shedding of innocent blood. I SEVER and PARTS them from the kirk of God, and deliver them alive to the devil of hell, as the Apostil Saint Paul delivered Corinth. I exclude the places they come in for divine service, ministration of the sacraments of holy church, except the sacrament of baptising only; and forbid all churchmen to take confession or absolve them of their sins, which they be first absolved of this cursing.

I FORBID all Christian man or woman to have any company with them, eating, drinking, speaking, praying, lying, standing, or in any other deed doing, under the pain of deadly sin.

I DISCHARGE all bonds, acts, contracts, oaths and obligations made to them by any persons, other of law, kindness or duty, so long as they sustain this cursing; so that no man be bound to them, and that they be bound to all men. I Take from them and cry down all the good deeds that

or sall do, quhill thai ryse frae this cursing. I DECLARE thaim partles of all matynys, messis, evansangis, dirigeis or utheris prayeris, on buke or beid; of all pilgrimages and almouse dedis done or to be done in halykirk or be cristin pepill, enduring this cursing.

“And, finally, I CONDEMN thaim perpetuale to the deip pit of hell, to remain with Lucifer and all his fallowis, and thair bodies to the gallows of the Burrow Mure, first to be hangit, syne revin and ruggit with doggis, swine, and utheris wyld beists, abhominable to all the warld. And thir candillis gangis frae your sicht, as mot thair saulis gang frae the visage of God, and thair gude fame fra the warld, quhill thai forbear thair oppin synnys foirsaidis and ryse frae this terribill cursing, and mak satisfaction and pennance”.

ever they did or shall do, which they rise from this cursing. I DECLARE them excluded of all matins, masses, evensongs, mourning or other prayers, on book or bead; of all pilgrimages and poorhouse deeds done or to be done in holy church or by Christian people, enduring this cursing.

“And, finally, I CONDEMN them perpetually to the deep pit of hell, to remain with Lucifer and all his fellows, and their bodies to the gallows of the Burrow Muir, first to be hanged, then torn apart with dogs, swine, and other wild beasts, abominable to all the world. And their life gone from your sight, as might their souls go from the sight of God, and their good fame from the world, which they forbear their open sins aforesaid and rise from this terrible cursing, and make satisfaction and penance”.

So it was that seldom was there such a more comprehensive excommunication of people from the grace of God. Evidently the Curse had little effect on the problem of border reiving and it was not until the unification of the Crowns of Scotland and England after the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, that the final solution was enacted. The new King of the unified country; James I of England and VI of Scotland, took up residence in London. He resolved to manage the country as one, and it was no longer acceptable to allow the reivers free reign of the borders with near impunity. The so called ‘pacification of the borders’ was simply resolved by the summary execution or deportation of the offenders en masse. By about 1610, the ‘broken men of the borders’ were finally broken themselves. Although occasional feuds and acts of criminality continued to occur, the business was less endemic and the law became more effective in dealing with perpetrators.

However, no one could be confident that this would become the case; and it would appear that the need for a defensive house was still required by some relatively wealthy people. These were tenant farmers who had managed to acquire wealth by rearing cattle and sheep in the uplands of southern Scotland, and also managed to survive the deprivations which existed a decade either side of 1600.



The defensive houses were of course the bastle houses which appear to be largely ignored by both historians and architectural writers.

Such houses in England continued to be used and indeed some are still occupied today, while many other examples are in a reasonable state of preservation. In Scotland the picture is less well understood and certainly poorly researched. In Clydesdale in particular, where a 'pocket' of bastle houses has been discovered and in some cases excavated (Ward, 1998), the evidence is clear for occupation beginning around 1600 and ending in the mid 18th century. It may well be that the occupiers of these bastle houses, which appear to have been built c 1600, were hedging their bets as to whether they would require the defensive capabilities of such strong houses. There was a major raid in 1600 in Clydesdale (Reg Privy Council Scot), where the bastle farm of Glenochar was relieved of some 200 cattle, it is possible that the bastle house there was not yet built, and this particular incident may have been the stimulus for building it and several other bastle houses in Clydesdale.

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