



I SAVED THE KING

THE STORY OF THE TURNBULLS

by R. E. Scott

I SAVED THE KING
THE STORY OF THE TURNBULLS

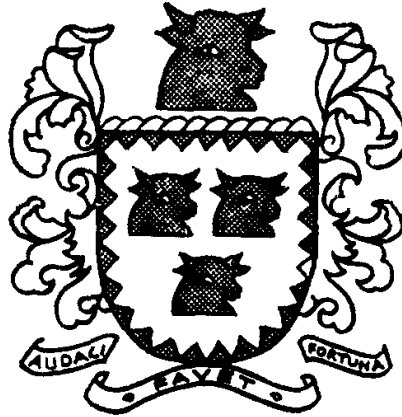
by

R. E. SCOTT



First Edition 1977
Second Edition 1979
Third Edition 1986

Printed and published by
"Hawick News," 24 High Street, Hawick, Roxburgshire, Scotland



DEDICATED TO ALL WHO BEAR THE NAME OF TURNBULL
THROUGHOUT THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING WORLD, AND TO THE
SPIRITS OF THEIR FOREFATHERS WHO LIE AT PEACE BY
THE BANKS OF THE RULE WATER.

Land of my sires! What mortal hand
Can e'er untie the filial band
That knits me to thy rugged strand.
Still, as I view each well-known scene,
Think what is now, and what hath been.

Sir Walter Scott.

I SAVED THE KING

(The Story of the Turnbills)

By R. E. SCOTT

“**A**T THE TOWN OF STIRLING began the great wood of Caledon where roamed a number of white bulls, with crisp and curly manes, like fierce lions . . . and more wild than any other beasts. As soon as any man appeared before them the bulls would rush forward without fear of hounds, sharp lances, or other weapons.

“It is said that King Robert Bruce went hunting in this wood and, having only a small party with him, narrowly escaped with his life. One of the bulls, after being sorely wounded by the hunters, rushed fiercely on the King who had then no weapon in his hand to defend himself from the impact.

“Then a man of great spirit, who was nearby, leapt before the King and, grappling with the bull, cast it to the earth with great force and held it there while the remaining hunters slew it with their weapons. The man who rescued the King was called thereafter **TURN-E-BULL** and awarded with rich lands by the King.”

The man of spirit was William of Rule whose athletic and sporting prowess was already known far beyond his native bounds in the Scottish Borders.

The fullest account of that forest chase was first written by Hector Boece, an early Scottish historian, in his “History of Scotland” published in Latin in Paris about 1526. His tale was based on a current tradition perpetuated by word of mouth and, no doubt, by the ballads of wandering minstrels. In 1530 the account was translated into the old Scots tongue by John Bellenden of which the above is a brief quotation in the more modern idiom.

Traditions are frequently coloured and enlivened in the retelling but even after allowances have been made the romantic origin of the name Turnbill is one of which any family can be justly proud.

In this case, however, truth is contained in the tradition, with its minor variations, since “the rich lands” mentioned were the

western parts of the estates of Philiphaugh, in Selkirkshire, and bestowed by King Robert to a William called Turnebull in 1315 for the payment of one broad arrow each Assumption Day of the Virgin (August 15). Interesting to note too that before this time the name of Turnbull had never appeared on record.

Such a romantic tale has been the subject of several ballads and none expresses the episode better than the Denholm-born John Leyden in his "Scenes of Infancy" wherein he describes the heroic deed:—

. . . Where Turnbolls once, a race no power could awe,
Lined the rough skirts of stormy Ruberslaw.
Bold was the chief from whom their line they drew,
Whose nervous arm the furious bison slew;
. . . On Scotia's lord he rushed with lightning speed,
Bent his strong neck to toss the startled steed;
His arm robust the hardy hunter flung
Around the bending horns, and upward wrung
With writhing force his neck retorted round
And rolled the panting monster on the ground,
Crushed with enormous strength his bony skull;
And courtiers hailed the man who turned the bull.

But who was this William of Rule? In the 13th century the designation appears several times on record. In 1296 a Thomas and Adam, both described as "of Rule," were among the many Scottish Border lairds who swore fidelity to Edward I, the English King, as a matter of expediency at a time when the throne of Scotland was vacant and national affairs were in a somewhat chaotic state. Again a William of Rule, probably the first of the Turnbull name, acted as a witness to a grant made to the monks of Kelso in 1300.

There is no doubt that the family adopted their designated surname from the Rule Water, a tributary of the River Teviot in Roxburghshire. It rises in the Southern Uplands and flows in a northerly direction for some nine miles, touching the parishes of Kirkton, Cavers and Bedrule, before falling into the Teviot about midway, between the towns of Hawick and Jedburgh.

Rule, as a place-name, is probably a relic of the ancient

Celtic tongue spoken by the earliest inhabitants and used to describe the rivulet as "roaring in haste" — aptly named.

The main township is generally believed to have been situated on the left bank of the river on the slopes of Ruberslaw, the 1392 feet craggy peak, that dominates the whole area.

Dark Ruberslaw, that lifts its head sublime.
Rugged and hoary with the wrecks of time. . .

Nothing now remains of the ancient habitation with only a farm-house, its outbuildings and a few workers' cottages, marking the site. But the farm place-name is truly significant — Town o' Rule.

After 1315 mention of Rules in the district became fewer as the new surname of Turnbull was substituted for the place-name and the older one died out completely.

Following the hunting incident William became something of a national hero and assumed a bull's head as his heraldic symbol with the motto, "I Saved the King." Modesty found no place among his martial and sporting qualities! Perhaps it was this lack of restraint, in his maturer years, that eventually led to his gruesome end at the Battle of Halidon Hill in 1333 when a Scottish force, in command of a Douglas, attempting to relieve the town of Berwick, was halted by an English army.

Chroniclers tell of how:— "A certain stout champion of great stature, who for a feat done by him was called Turnebull, advanced before the Scots army and a great mastiff dog with him, and challenged any of the English army to fight with him a combat. One, Sir Robert Benhale, a Norfolk knight, by the King of England's leave, took him up, fought and killed him, and his dog too."

Another historian adds more details by relating how the mastiff attacked first and was severed in two by a mighty swipe of the knight's sword! In the single combat that followed Turnbull lost an arm and then his head. Thereafter the Scots suffered a sore defeat and among the many killed was their leader Douglas.

The Rule Water territory of the Turnbells was by that time a baronial possession of the powerful house of Douglas and successive superiors were ever mindful of the fighting qualities of the Rules-cum-Turnbells who were given small lairdships in

exchange for military service in time of need — a mutual arrangement beneficial to both the baron and his tenants.

In the beginning of the 14th century, one of the most famous of the Douglasses was the Good Sir James, friend and close companion of Robert the Bruce, and it may well have been through his influence that William of Rule was included in the King's hunting party.

The oldest and largest stronghold in the Rule Valley was undoubtedly Bedrule Castle built in the 13th century by the Comyns, another influential family, who entertained Edward I there during his Scottish visit in 1298. On the death of the Red Comyn at the hands of Robert the Bruce in 1306, all the Comyn's lands were forfeited. Before 1320, the castle had been added to the Douglas possessions.

Sir James soon installed a Turnbull as its occupant and members of that branch of the family remained there for many generations. The power of the Douglasses eventually almost equalled that of royalty and, indeed, as one old historian remarked that "nae man was safe in the country, unless he was either a Douglas or a Douglas man." And, of course, the Turnbills proved themselves to be good and reliable Douglas men!

Although Bedrule Castle, among other Scottish Border strongholds, was destroyed by the English in 1545 during their devastating raid, the Turnbills continued in heritable possession until about the end of the 18th century.

The derivation of the place-name Bedrule, with its many variations in spelling, is a matter of choice from the "birch" trees by the River Rule, to the lands named after "Bethoc," supposedly the wife of Radulph, son of Dunegal, recorded about 1150 as the first-known lords of the manor.

The castle today consists of large grass-covered mounds and heaps of fallen rubble above the steep right bank of the Rule, a short distance from the church. A dry-stone dyke cuts across the site where part of the ground has been cleared to add to the arable land of the adjoining field.

From a survey made by the Royal Commission of Ancient Monuments, it was established that the castle had had an oval-shaped enclosure measuring some 66 yards by 43 yards with

signs of five circular towers, one of which formed the gateway approached by a track from the river to the west (near the former church manse). Although no datable relics are known to have been found among the ruins, the arrangement of the ancient buildings are suggested by the Commission to be similar to others of a 13th century date. A closer examination of the dividing dyke reveals many hewn stones obviously quarried from the convenient ruins.

PHILIPHAUGH

But what happened to the "rich lands" of Philiphaugh awarded to Turnbull the First in 1315? These lands in Ettrick Forest, with the Murrays as the immediate neighbours, remained in Turnbull hands, at least in part, for some 300 years.

During the early occupation a John Turnbull is mentioned in 1360 as Sheriff of Selkirkshire, and, four years later, another of the family name held the post of depute sheriff—the only occasions in which Turnbells are credited in connection with the administration of the law!

In 1461 the Murrays acquired part of the lands and the properties became further merged after the marriage of a Murray to a Turnbull daughter. After two of the Philiphaugh family were killed at Flodden, and another in Spain, the estate gradually dwindled. When the last of the name died there in 1572 what was left was divided up and eventually fell into Murray possession.

MINTO

The family name had also a long connection with Minto, a nearby estate on the opposite bank of the River Teviot to its junction with the Rule Water. A Walter, reputed to be a son of the original at Philiphaugh, was granted possession and had his titles to the Minto lands confirmed by David II before 1370.

Then one of the most famous, or infamous, of the Turnbull clan appears on the scene as lord of Minto. This was John, nicknamed "Out with the Sword" on account of his headstrong temperament and hasty actions! John had apparently married a Stewart of Jedworth and, in 1390, gave the lordship of Minto to

his nephew, Sir William Stewart, whose disposition matched that of his uncle. That unlikely pair had much in common and were often in the forefront of plundering raids into Northumberland.

In 1399, during one of these incursions, the Scots party were surrounded in Coquettale and taken prisoner. The Border chiefs, including "Out with the Sword" and Sir William Stewart, were committed to the Tower of London where they remained until 1413. Six years later the doughty pair were listed among the leaders of a Scottish force supporting the French army against the English, being overseas for many years until "Out with the Sword" Turnbull was killed at the Battle of Cravant in France in 1424.

Several of the clan gained French honours for their gallantry and services and settled in the provinces of Champagne and Normandy where the name of Turnbull is recorded with their coat-of-arms of three bulls' heads!

After "Out with the Sword's" death, his son, Walter, made a claim through the courts that at the time his father gave away the estate of Minto he had already been declared a leper and was therefore debarred by law from taking part in any contracts! A 19-strong jury, including several of the family name, met at the Leper Hospital at Rulemouth (now Spittal-on-Rule) and found in Walter's favour. Naturally the Stewarts appealed and the case hung fire until 1438 when King James II appointed Douglas of Cavers, the Sheriff of Teviotdale, to perambulate the Minto bounds and make a decision.

The result was a compromise with Stewart receiving one third of the lands, including the baron's superiority, while the remaining two thirds reverted back to the Turnbells. And so for several more generations the Minto lands were held by two lairds, before passing through various owners until the Elliots bought the estates in the late 17th century.

BORDER BATTLES

The story of the Turnbells is a long and complicated one. More appears to be known of their misdeeds than their good ones judging from the many mentions in Pitcairn's Criminal Trials recorded from court proceedings (1488-1624) at Jedburgh and elsewhere. Other sources testify all too clearly that the clan was



Bedrule Church, and its surrounding burial ground, seen from the path leading from the former manse. The site of Bedrule Castle lies about 200 yards to the left of the drawing on the same level.



The ivy-covered ruins of Barnhills Castle, built in the 16th century on the north side of the River Teviot, near the base of the Minto Crag.

somewhat unruly, but what Border family could possibly claim to leading an angelic life in these unsettled and unscrupulous days?

Few Border battles have been recorded without one or other of the Turnbells being implicated and, indeed, when the occasion arose, the whole of the clan rallied to the Douglasses, and their neighbours, in defending their country and their homeland, besides relishing any opportunity in battling with the "auld enemy" over the Border.

Although no specific mention is made of the Turnbells at the Battle of Otterburn in 1388, it is very unlikely that they missed the engagement since the Scots army of some 30,000 men, in the invasion of Northumberland, was led by James, Earl of Douglas, accompanied by his son, Archibald, founder of the Cavers branch of the family.

By 1510 the Rulewater clan had become so audacious and scornful of authority that even King James IV sensed the danger of allowing the Turnbells to exert all the power they could muster. Determined to make an example of them, and as a deterrent to others, James, with a suitably large and impressive force, set out from Edinburgh for Spittal-on-Rule. From there an order was broadcast for all able-bodied Turnbells to submit themselves before their sovereign. Two hundred members of the family complied and appeared before the King wearing linen sheets, holding naked swords in their hands, and with halters round their necks.

Accounts vary of what happened next. Some reckon every tenth man was hanged, and that the place where the penalty was carried out is still pointed out as Deadman's Haugh! Others say that only a few suffered the capital punishment, several imprisoned as hostages, and the majority bound over on promise of their good behaviour. The effect of the rough justice produced a quietude in the district for a few years — but not for long!

The affair at the Sclaterford in the Rule valley in 1513 may not be regarded as a major Border battle yet it illustrates how the Turnbells could rally to a cause, forget their parochial differences, petty family feuds, and be ready to assist in the repelling of marauding bands.

Following their success at the Battle of Flodden, the English army retired south to treat their wounds and regroup in readiness

for further onslaughts on a stricken nation. But firstly the southerners had to cross the Cheviot Hills and pass through the territory of desperate men before penetrating into the heart of Scotland.

Towards November of that fateful year, Lord Dacre with a thousand horsemen came over the hills. Warning beacons were soon alight and word spread rapidly for all armed men to rendezvous in the upper Rule valley where they concealed themselves in the deep cleuchs of the Bowset Burn in the path of the oncoming enemy. The English party, encumbered with cattle and sheep looted en route, rode into the ambush and, as Dacre later recounted, "the Scots bickered us right sore, and gave us hand strokes." Booty was abandoned as the marauders fled for the safety of their own country and, despite the arrival of reinforcements to a total of 4000 horse and 400 bowmen, continued their retreat harried all the way by the pursuing Borderers.

The Scottish force of some 700 consisted of Kerrs and Douglasses from Jedburgh, the Scotts from Hawick, and, of course, the Turnbulls clan to a man defending their own territory with George Turnbull of Bedrule as their leader.

Taking advantage in 1514, of the lack of the united leadership, and the weakness of Regent Arran, in Scotland, an English army again crossed the Border, plundering and ravaging the least defensive areas, forcing several local chiefs to pay for protection, and into entering the service of their ranks. The following year yet another force of over 5000 foreign mercenaries and northern English, including about 700 "broken" Scots (Turnbulls among them), invaded the Borders once more.

The previous subduing of the Border clans had left the district practically defenceless, the valley of Rule, with its many towers, devastated, all homes destroyed, and cattle and household goods carried off. What the feelings of the Turnbulls in the invading force were can be guessed at. Helpless to interfere, or even intercede for their own, they could only bide their time.

But a Scottish force had hurriedly been assembled under Archibald Douglas, 6th Earl of Angus, soon joined by the Scotts of Buccleuch and their retainers. The English leaders, confident in their superior numbers, met the defenders on Ancrum Moor. What they could not foresee was that the coerced Scottish Borderers in

their own forces would cast off the Crosses of St George supplied to them and turn their swords against the hereditary foe! The tide of battle suddenly changed. English ranks were broken and routed till "the Scots following . . . there was no longer a battle but a slaughter!"

The last of the Border frays took place on June 7, 1575, at Reidswire on the bleak moorland of the Carter Bar where Scotland and England meet. It was the day when the Wardens of the respective Marches met to settle disputes, redress wrongs, and arrange compensation for proven thefts from either side. Allegations of unfair treatment caused some resentment. Then the men from Redesdale and Tynedale on the English side of the Border Line discharged a hail of arrows among the Scots bystanders! Just then a body of Jedburgh citizens arrived as pent up emotions were released into a gory conflict:—

. . . The Sheriff brought the Douglas down,
Baith Rule Water and Hawick town,
Wi' a' the Trumbills, strong and stout . . .

At first the fight appeared, to favour the English but the skirmish ended in a complete victory for the Scots:—

. . . Little harness had we there;
But auld Badrule had on a jack,
And did right weel, I you declare,
Wi' a' his Trumbills at his back . . .

PACIFICATION

For 300 years inhabitants of the Scottish Borders lived in a territory dividing two nations at war. Periods of peace were so few and so short that the natives subsisted in an atmosphere of almost constant conflict. Even in a so-called peace, the people were still exposed to freebooting raids from southern neighbours, yet none looked to a Scots King, or his Government, for protection, compensation, or revenge. The Border clans learned the hard way. They had to depend on their own strong arm for protection, and replace their stolen goods and livestock at the expense of some unwary, or weaker, neighbour preferably from south of the Border. Life was free, dangerous and adventurous; there was no choice.

The unsettled state of the Borders, and the lawlessness of the clans, did not help towards establishing a permanent peace between the nations despite many attempts by both the Scottish and English authorities. A complete reformation in the whole social structure of the Border area took some time even after the Union of the Crowns in 1603 when James VI became James I of Great Britain, France and Ireland.

King James knew it would be no easy task to convert the turbulent clans into law-abiding citizens so vigorous and ruthless methods were adopted. Wardens of the Marches on both sides of of the Border Line were ordered "to use hostile feud in hostile manner against the malefactors," to punish by death, or banish, all who would not conform.

The most influential men in the area had to sign an undertaking to assist the King's officers; and among them were the Turnbolls of Bedrule, Minto and Wauchope. The natives had never experienced such a strict control. Many were outlawed and either fled the district or joined mercenary bands on the Continent, like the 200 legionnaires who enlisted under Scott of Buccleuch to assist the Netherlands in their war with Spain. Among the declared fugitives, whose whereabouts were henceforth unknown, were George Turnbull, son of James of Westlees, and Gavin, son of the laird of Bedrule.

Petty crime was continued by a few of the outlawed men but organised raids and disorders were easily suppressed. By 1612 the pacification of the Borders was almost complete, the clan system broken, and Government authority established.

How did the Turnbolls adjust to the new life under peaceful conditions? Not very well, it appears. Those declared rebels forfeited what holdings they had in the valley, while others, including the chief branches of Bedrule and Minto, fell into financial difficulties and had to sell their properties to pay their debts.

In the valuation roll of 1643 some 26 Turnbolls were assessed for land in the parishes of Abbotrule, Bedrule, Cavers, Hobkirk and Kirkton, lying on or near the Rule Water. By 1811 the numbers had dwindled to two, one in Hobkirk Parish and the other in Kirkton, while in Bedrule, after 500 years, not one of the family name is recorded!

There is no doubt that many families left their old homeland to carve out new careers overseas, and in the more populous areas like Glasgow and Edinburgh where the surname is still popular. Border towns absorbed their share; in Hawick, today, the name of Turnbull is second only to that of Scott as the most predominant.

Local pronunciation has produced a number of varieties in spelling—Trumell, Trummel, etc. Those recorded since the Turn-e-bull of 1315 include:— Trumble, Tornbule, Tournebull, Trubul, Trimbill, Trimble, Trombel, Trumbul, and the French Tournebu or Tourneboeuf, and others.

BISHOP WILLIAM TURNBULL

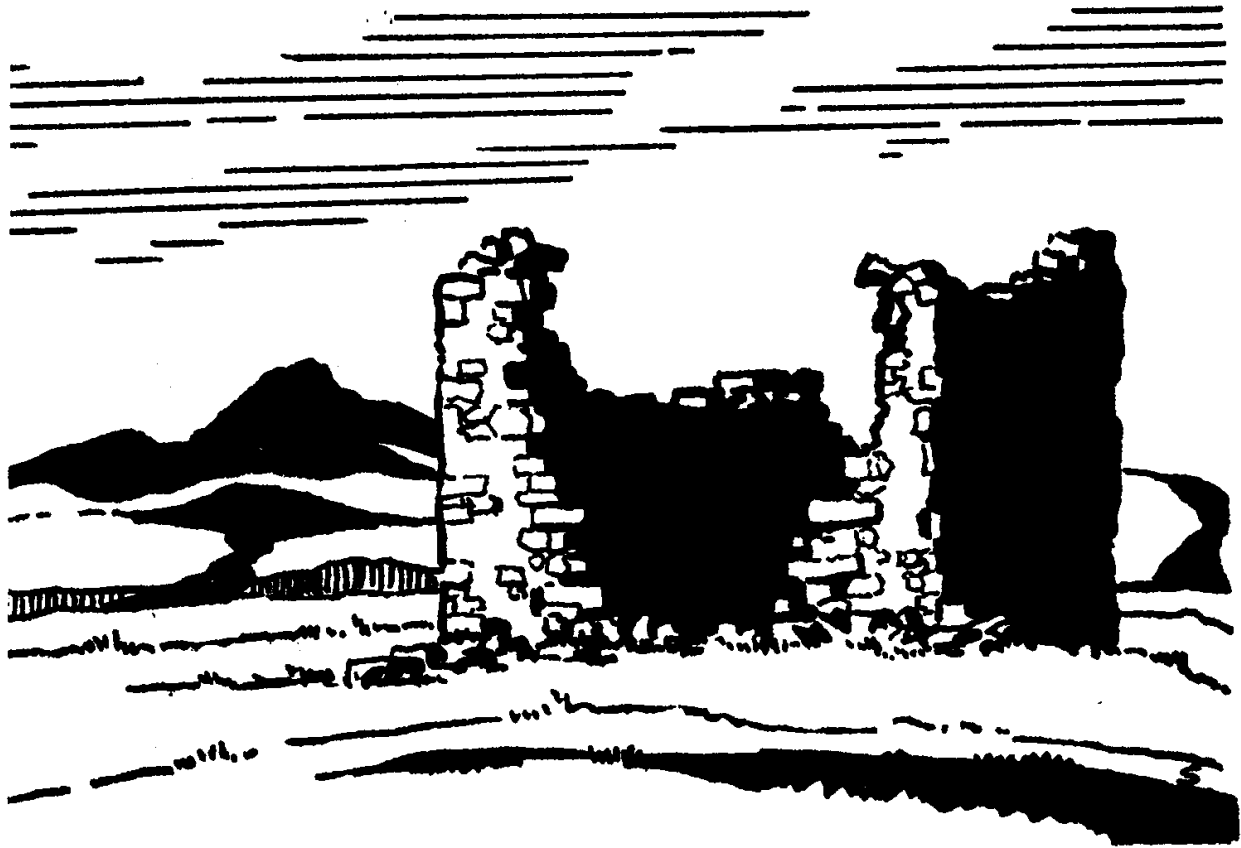
In startling contrast to the general nature of the clan, one appears who achieved everlasting fame for his career in the Church and in Scottish educational circles as the founder of the University of Glasgow!

This was William Turnbull born about 1400, reputed to be a younger son of the Laird of Bedrule Castle. By the age of 20 he received a licentiate from St Andrews University and thereafter gained degrees as Master of Arts and a Bachelorship in Canon Law. In 1431 Turnbull was appointed Rector of Hawick, and Canon of Glasgow and Aberdeen at the same time.

An outstanding scholar, further ecclesiastical honours were preferred upon him — Dean of Faculty, Bishop of Dunkeld, Privy Councillor, Keeper of the Privy Seal, and, in 1447, the Bishopric of Glasgow. From Pope Nicholas V, Bishop Turnbull secured an edict allowing him to establish a college in Glasgow. When the building was completed (in 1451) he was elected its first Chancellor. He is believed to have died while on a pilgrimage to Rome on September 3, 1454.

HERALDIC ARMS

Family names frequently suggest the symbols to be used in a coat-of-arms, such as the “strong arm” of the Armstrongs, or other distinguishing emblems associated with an individual or clan. The armorial bearing chosen by the original Turnbull was ready made and, surely, could have been none other than a bull’s head, qualified by the reminder “I Saved the King.”



**The remains of Fulton Tower on a bare hillside on the right bank of the Rule Water.
On the skyline rises the rugged outline of Ruberslaw.**

The Turnbells of Philiphaugh, Bedrule and Minto appear to have used the same arms of one bull's head as did Bishop Turnbull on his episcopal seal and on carved stones in Jedburgh Abbey and Glasgow Cathedral.

For some unknown reason the Turnbells of Minto changed to three bulls' heads in the 18th century and carried the slogan "Courage." In 1759 a branch of the Bedrule family also adopted the three heads above the motto "Audaci Favel Fortuna" (Fortune Favours the Brave), while the French Tourneboeufs and Tournebulles proudly proclaimed their Scottish origin by displaying 'trois tetes de buffle!'"

In Bedrule Churchyard are a considerable number of tombstones bearing the Turnbull crest with the bull's head. But who would expect to find the three heads elaborately carved on a stone in an overgrown burial ground on the island of Tortola in the Virgin Islands, West Indies? The memorial is for a William Turnbull, probably a planter, who died there in 1766 and his wife Anna, deceased 1771. And, incidentally, a number of dark-skinned natives there bear the name of the one-time slave-master!

TURN-E-BULL'S BONES

An excellent story concerning the Turnbells is told by James Robson in his "Churches and Churchyards of Teviotdale" (1893):—

In digging graves here (Bedrule) within recent years large numbers of bones have been, from time to time, unearthed. These in some cases have been found to be exceptionally large. This has led to the assumption that possibly they were the remains of some of the chiefs of the Turnbells clan who were known to be men of large and powerful build. A story is told concerning the discovery of human bones in this churchyard . . . over a dozen years ago. It has the advantage of being true, as the writer can vouch for its accuracy. Two young worthies from the neighbouring village of Denholm appeared at the church one Sabbath morning. It so happened there was an interment that day, and in digging the grave the sexton had come upon two very large thigh bones . . . the two worthies had no difficulty in identifying the osseous relics as being those of the veritable and original Turnbull, the hero who saved the life of King Robert the Bruce.

It was a Sunday; nevertheless they appropriated the prize, and, to avoid suspicion and prevent exposure, they each stored one of the huge bones down his trouser leg, and with perfect composure and serenity marched home in company with their unsuspecting fellow churchgoers. It need hardly be added that the uncouth relics were refused house-room, and had to submit to an unceremonious burial, one in a "yaird" on the east, and the other on the west side of the village, where they still remain . . . so Denholm, unawares, may thus hold the remains of a great Scottish hero!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Rulewater and Its People—Tancred.
History and Antiquities of Roxburghshire—Jeffrey.
Surnames of Scotland—Black.
Place-names of Scotland—Johnstone.
Scots Heraldry—Johnston.
Criminal Trials—Pitcairn.
Inventory of Roxburghshire—Royal Commission Ancient Monuments.
Selkirkshire—Craig-Brown.
Gazeteer of Scotland—Groome.
Tales of the Border—Wilson (Barnhill, the Freebooter, and John Turnbull).
Border Battles and Battlefields—Robson.
Churches and Churchyards of Teviotdale—Robson.
Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border—Sir Walter Scott.
Steel Bonnets—Fraser.
Transactions of the Hawick Archaeological Society:—
 Lower Rulewater and Its Associations—1882.
 Bishop Turnbull—1928.
 Incident in Jedburgh, 1571-1903.
 Pacification of the Borders—1903.
 Skirmish at Sclaterford, 1513-1903.
 Turnbells of Rulewater—1903.
 Hospital at Rulemouth—1903.
 Minto and Roundabout—1930.
 Turnbells of Bedrule—1955.
 Black Turnbells of the West Indies—1964.