

# The Clan Armstrong Ancestral Home

## Have You Heard?

About the Anglo-Scottish Border

Issue Sixty-Eight

July 2018

Greetings once again to the Armstrong Family through our Have You Heard (HYH) email newsletter. Issue 68 should have been sent out a number of months ago but...

To our worldwide kin folks, our apologies, the building has caused us some considerable concern during the repair works, but as we now write up our notes, we believe we have at last gained control of the building.

My my up until April 2018 Gilnockie Tower was subjected to cold, wet, snowy, frosty, miserable Anglo-Scottish Border weather. We were forced to close for a number of days during the visit of the 'Beast from the East' due to more than adverse weather conditions. Even the local farmers had a tough time ensuring that the stock they have, mainly sheep, were safe and fed.

Despite that bad weather, many of our artisans were on site, all be it restricted hours, working to get the Clan Armstrong ancestral home into order for our new season visitors.

The list of news items has been building up and these will be fed through to you over the next few months. We believe that we now should really start the story of Gilnockie Tower repairs from around January 2016 working our way through 'the bad, the good and dear dear me the ugly' right up to date with some very interesting photos that will surly save us a hundred thousand words.

Our part in this story is minor compared to the outstanding and particularly high-quality workmanship carried out by our team of local craftsmen, all working together as a very close knit team, all with the same goal in mind, to ensure that the repair to the Clan Armstrong ancestral family home was carried out to the very highest standards.

We are very proud of this team, and we salute them all; we hope that you will have the same sentiments when you visit us, the inside structure of the building takes your breath away, really really takes your breath away...

**Gilnockie Tower:** The team repairing the tower have always said that they would do their best to keep the tower open to visitors during the essential repair process and over the winter season. Many Armstrongs travelled thousands of miles to meet us, so we felt we had to do our best for them!

That said we have on occasions, due to specific Health and Safety guidelines had to close off the building for short periods of time, and if you were one of the visitors who we had to decline entry, we apologise profusely, your safety was of overriding concern to us.

If you know of any kin folks coming too, or even already in the United Kingdom please tell them Gilnockie Tower is patiently waiting to shake the hand of the Armstrong family members. Yesterday, the work was continuing, with the ground floor cafe and shop development coming to a close, celebrating the opening of our new and innovative product range, the majority of the produce locally sourced.

Now then folks, lets break you into this repair job gently, aye very gently, the last thing that we want to do is have an Armstrong family member sitting on the edge of their chair wondering what is coming next! Well, 'oo hev tae tell ee' we 'dinna care', we are going to tell the story as it was, the Good, the Bad, and the downright Ugly and not necessarily in that order.

Our expectations while writing this text is that we could explain what was going on inside that building, and how it has over this last two and a half years moved from the twenty



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first century, back in time to circa the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, well... as near as research allows us to say, and yes you do not need to clean your glasses, back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

While our initial vision of this ‘Auld Rubble Build in the Esk Valley’ has been of immense interest to us as 16<sup>th</sup> century historians, a hefty element of this last 28 odd months is now entrenched into the future wellbeing of this ‘cantankerous auld fossil’ affectionately known as the CAF. This is mainly down to the numerous and well hidden ‘surprises’ that the team have discovered as the repair work continued throughout 2016/17 heading rapidly into 2018.



Much of this work will be explained on the accompanying photographs, and you will see clearly the ‘surprises’ that unfolded on more occasions than

## **Damaged stone work in the third floor.**

wrestling one difficult predicament after another.

One of the major problems we were handling throughout the building was the ingress of water, from various areas around the structure. We were experiencing water leaking in through the upper walkway, dampness leaching through the walls on all five levels, and the lack of proper heating and ventilation.



What did we do? Following a long and in-depth examination of our charge, we made a cup of strong tea and sat down with our team of thinkers. This strategy very quickly cleared the way for a strict, disciplined, but positive plan going forward.

As we sit and write this chapter middle of July 2018 the various trades who have been working on this project are now dropping off the radar, and the tower is currently fully open for business, other than a few ‘twiddly’ bits.



## **Water damaged timber found in the third floor.**

The photos above were taken when the repair work was just getting underway, but we promise that more will follow as this ongoing drama develops, letting you, the reader follow Gilnockie Tower as it re-awakens from a recent reverse in its fortunes.



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Our restricted opening date was 8<sup>th</sup> September 2017 up until 31<sup>st</sup> March, and we were very surprised by the number of overseas visitors passing through Gilnockie Tower front door. Even more, the effect our new Clan Armstrong Centre Brown Signs sited on the A7 Edinburgh to Carlisle tourist route, near to Canonbie, and it attracted many many other Border families, other than only Armstrongs!

Be back with you very soon, take care and gang warily! We have lots more to talk to you about regarding the family home, but there is so much in this HYH we are going to move onto other news.

**The Reiver Trail:** This is a work in progress. Later this year we hope to present you with an idea that will revive the Armstrong fortunes in the Esk and Liddesdale Valley.

**A Grave Situation:** The story about the Johnnie Armstrong Grave at Caerlanrig continues. The comments that will be sent to you in the next HYH will outline where we are and hopefully help will be at hand to recover this historical landmark back into Armstrong hands.

## Owt Else?!

We apologies for the delay getting the HYH updates out to you, time seems to be a constant enemy and while not intentionally holding back on the news, we are now going to see if we can get a HYH out every 4/6 weeks.

Please please please remember if you or a friend are interested in our monthly newsletter update, then send an email to us at [gilnockietower@gmail.com](mailto:gilnockietower@gmail.com) or Facebook, check us out at 'Gilnockie Tower Reiver Centre'.

The website is being worked on, and the tower opening-times are correct as of approximately 'eight minutes ago'. Our new contact email address, landline phone, and mobile number are now available as advertised below.

For updates regarding the 'ongannings' in the Esk Valley, see [www.gilnockietower.com](http://www.gilnockietower.com) and **Gilnockie Tower Visitor Centre** on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

We have welcomed a number of tour organisations through the door at Gilnockie Tower and we have found that the visitors they transported have enjoyed a very high quality experience with the respective tour company. The organisations are SOLWAY TOURS, NORTHERN BORDERLANDS HERITAGE TOURS and SCOTTISH CLANS and CASTLES LTD. Should these organisations fit into your itinerary then please contact them direct. Gilnockie Tower does not have any connection with these Tour Company's.



SOLWAY TOURS are a five star, historic, award winning tour company based in Dumfries in the heart of the South of Scotland. The company are run by academic historians who specialise in ancestral tours and are passionate about Dumfries and Galloway. The company use a 7 seater car and their minibus to create personalised tours which highlight, the history, culture and scenery of the local area and across Scotland. We will help you to walk in the footsteps of your ancestors.



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Contact us on [beinspired@solwaytours.co.uk](mailto:beinspired@solwaytours.co.uk) or phone 01387 449104

## NORTHERN BORDERLANDS HERITAGE TOURS



Northern Borderlands Heritage Tours explore the wild and rugged landscape of the Border country.

It is a tour that takes you into the heartlands of the Borderlands when reiving and raiding was

Common place amongst feuding families of the Border country.

Linking up along these rural routes are visits to many places of historical interest which include; Abbotsford, ancestral home of Sir Walter Scott; Hermitage Castle, famously associated with Mary, Queen of Scots; and Gilnockie Tower set in the heart of the Debateable Lands and the stronghold of the infamous Border Reiver, Johnny Armstrong.

A 'potted history' of the life and times of these feudal times is given by the tour guide who has local knowledge of this area steeped in history

An exclusive circular tour has been mapped out for those wishing to explore the bleak and beautiful Borderlands.

Also, tailored tours to suite one's needs can be arranged.

### ENQUIRIES

E-mail: [hazelrose@northernborderlandsheritagetours.co.uk](mailto:hazelrose@northernborderlandsheritagetours.co.uk)

Mobile: 07850 093 733

[www.northernborderlandsheritagetours.co.uk](http://www.northernborderlandsheritagetours.co.uk)

Alastair Cunningham  
Scottish Clans and Castles Ltd  
Coille House  
Appletreehall  
Hawick TD9 8RS  
Scottish Borders  
Tel. 44 1450 371719  
[www.clansandcastles.com](http://www.clansandcastles.com)

### Johnnie Armstrong

What was in Johnnie Armstrong's mind when he rode out from Gilnockie with 50 men that fateful day in 1530? It was natural, was it not, that the 17 year old king would want to shake hands with the great Johnnie Armstrong?

Johnnie's elder brother, 'Sim the Laird', had been negotiating terms with the Earl of Northumberland and Johnnie perhaps rode with a similarly rewarding chat in mind.

But James saw Johnnie as a flamboyant gangster, one with ideas above his station. There was no trial but Johnnie and his men were all hanged at Caerlenrig.

*John murdered was at Carlinrig,  
And all his gallant company;  
But Scotland's heart was so sorrowful,  
To see so many brave men die.*



For a guided tour of Armstrong castles and monuments: [www.clansandcastles.com](http://www.clansandcastles.com)

## Troubled Times in the Esk Valley.



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**Now then,** we have a problem and before we sign this month we have a tantalising yet delicate wee problem, and it is vitally important to us that we need expand on and share the content of the last (November 2017) part of the HYH Mail Box story?

As reported in our last HYH we have recently installed a new post-box at the tower so that the UK Royal Mail delivery team could efficiently deliver our important Armstrong letters, along with other interesting correspondence. It was early after that installation that we discovered that we had a ‘broken hearted and very lonely’ post box, simply because it does not receive any personal mail. We also have a heart broken Royal Mail delivery van. Recently speaking to the Royal Mail delivery operative, he has informed us that the Royal Mail engineering think that the van he drives, has come out in sympathy with the post box.

The only place on his entire daily journey in the Canonbie rural community that he cannot use the headlights on the van is coming down the track towards Gilnockie Tower. The van is driven all over the Parish of Canonbie with no ill effects or problems. Tested in the Royal Mail garage to see if there is an electrical fault, nothing could be found.

As a result, the only theory we can come up with, and the motor engineer investigating the problem backs this up, is the post box, and the van are in collusion, yes a conspiracy. We are also convinced that Gilnockie Towers resident ‘yin leggit’ ghost and his ‘Twa Dugs’ might also have an input with what is going on. The ‘yin leggit’ ghost’ story is for the next HYH, and it’s turning into an enormous narrative, with ‘ghost hunters’ visiting us on a regular basis confirming we have two ghosts in the tower, not the one that we thought, but more next time!



That said, we send a sincere and grateful thanks to those of you who have sent us postcards from all over the globe, this initiative partially helped smooth the situation, but, we have taken the predicament very seriously and analysed the cards being delivered, and a very very bizarre outcome has emerged.

The painstaking research program undertaken by four of our local academics, produced a League Table of the type of post card, where they came from, and the family name responsible for the despatch to Gilnockie Tower. The stunning result of this work is listed below.

Routledges,	45 cards received,
Laidlaws,	41 cards received,
Robsons,	40 cards received,
Kerrs,	35 cards received,
Crosers,	32 cards received,
Scotts, aye Scotts,	29 cards received,
Eliots,	28 cards received,
Armstrongs,	23 cards received,



Aye as you can see from the above results, the Armstrong Family are eighth in the league table, yes eighth, so we really really still need help, please.



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Our challenge today is that any ARMSTRONGS who have asked us to send this newsletter, please take a few moments to send the post box another card, yes a snail mail stamp job, and when you are in contact with family or friends, say a target of ten (10), make them aware of this heart-rending story. Ask them if they could please send the Mail Box at Gilnockie Tower a post card, a really brightly coloured and decorated one so that the post-box knows it is loved worldwide?

We pass by these two heartbroken individuals every day of the week at the 'Ancestral Home of the Armstrongs in the beautiful Esk Valley', and we well know that we are in desperate need of your help, especially when the Scott family, aye even the Eliot family are higher up the league table, and in Armstrong Land!

Please permit the Gilnockie Tower Post Box and the Royal Mail van to have a great day, by posting your cards to:-

**The Post Box, Gilnockie Tower, Hollows, Canonbie, DG14 0XD, Dumfriesshire, Scotland.**

## Gilnockie Tower, the Esk Valley Clan Armstrong Reiver Centre.

### The Clan Armstrong Ancestral Home

**History, Mystery and Discovery while exploring the far-reaching lands of the Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers, join us for an enthralling 500 years of Clan Armstrong History at Gilnockie Tower.**

**Yes Gilnockie Tower is 500 years old next year, watch out for further news, that said if of any interest please email on [gilnockietower@gmail.com](mailto:gilnockietower@gmail.com).**

Gilnockie Tower is a stunning example of a Scottish Pele tower. Built some 500 years ago, it was home to Johnnie Armstrong, a notorious border reiver. In 1530 this powerful chieftain was hanged by a Scottish king, his story romanticised by Walter Scott.

Gilnockie Tower has five floors, including vaulted chamber, banqueting hall and spiral staircase. The entrance stone is thought to be two thousand years old. Once a roofless ruin, the place has been completely repaired and is open as a clan and visitor attraction. The Clan Armstrong Centre houses reiving artefacts and the world's largest collection of Armstrong archives.

Getting married, Christening, a Wake, Business Meetings, Training Days, keep an eye on our website, exciting days ahead.

Many times recognised by historians, students and visitors alike as: the **Gilnockie Tower; Armstrong's Tower; Hollows Tower; or Holehouse Tower** and believed to be **from the period circa 1490-1520 as a rubble built, carved stone, Medieval Period Scots Tower House.**

### How do you get to the Clan Armstrong Centre?

**By Road:** Join the A7 Carlisle to Edinburgh Tourist Route and that road takes you through some of the darkest history relating to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Scottish historical development. 12 miles north of Carlisle, or 4 miles south of Langholm, look for the brown information signs, Clan Armstrong Centre, on the Canonbie by-pass. Follow these signs, and they will direct you to the Gilnockie Tower, a bleak Scots Tower House in the Esk Valley.

**Via the X95 Bus:** There is an hourly bus service from both Carlisle and Edinburgh that passes the Clan Armstrong Centre, Gilnockie Tower road end. The Carlisle bus departs from



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outside of the Carlisle Rail Station, and the Edinburgh bus leaves the City Centre Bus Station, near to Waverley Railway Station.

Just let the bus driver know you want off at the Clan Armstrong Centre, Hollows, near to Canonbie and the driver will do everything to help you. You pick up your return journey at the same stance. Hold your hand out when the bus is in sight, and the driver will stop for you. The X95 team are excellent and very caring for the customers they have.

Price; Adults £6.00, Children 5/16 £3.00, Concessions £5.00, and an additional £4.00 per person for personalised tours.

Personalised guided tours of the tower are now available at 12.15 pm, 13.15 pm, and 14.15 pm by booking through our phone numbers 013873 71373 and 07733 065587.

Google Map for **Gilnockie Tower:**

Classification, Rubble Built, Carved Stone, Medieval Scottish Tower House. Period, circa 1490-1520.

Alternative Name(s) Hollows Tower; Holehouse Tower; Armstrong's Tower; Gillknocky Tower; Gilnocky Tower

Canmore Link to Gilnockie Tower: <http://canmore.org.uk/site/67509>

**Site Number:** [NY37NE 3](#)

**Scran ID for Gilnockie Tower:** [https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/results.php?QUICKSEARCH=1&search\\_term=gilnockie+tower](https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/results.php?QUICKSEARCH=1&search_term=gilnockie+tower)

**Map Ref for Gilnockie Tower Ordinance Survey 6" Map NGR:** NY 38231 78559

## Gilnockie Tower Contact Details.

Clan Armstrong Centre  
Hollows  
Canonbie  
Dumfriesshire  
Scotland  
DG14 0XD

**Ancestral Home of the Clan Armstrong**

**Phone: 013873 71373**

**Mobile: 07733 065587**

**Phone Intl: +44 13873 71373**

**Mobile Intl: +44 7733 065587**

**Website: [www.gilnockietower.com](http://www.gilnockietower.com)**

**Email: [gt@gilnockietower.com](mailto:gt@gilnockietower.com)**

**Newsletter Email: [gilnockietower@gmail.com](mailto:gilnockietower@gmail.com)**

**Instagram: [gilnockietowerreivercentre](#)**

**Gilnockie Tower is open all year round. 10.00 am until 4.00 pm, 7 days, Easter to end October 2018.**

**Last tour 30 minutes before advertised closing time.**

**Customised guided tours of the tower are now available at 12.15 pm, 13.15 pm, and 14.15 pm by booking through our phone numbers 013873 71373 and 07733 065587.**

**Price; Adults £6.00, Children 5/16 £3.00, Concessions £5.00, and an additional £4.00 per person for customised tours.**

**Holders of current YOUNG SCOT CARDS £1.00.**

**Special prices for tour parties of over 8 persons.**

**Cafe and shop now open in the tower's ground floor.**

**All Major Debit and Credit cards accepted,**

**Gilnockie Tower on the Anglo-Scottish Border.**

**[gilnockietower@gmail.com](mailto:gilnockietower@gmail.com)**



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Aye tae ee a'. See you in HYH 69, early autumn 2018, or at the front door o' the 'Toor'.



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