

THE ANGLO-SCOTTISH BORDER:
GROWTH AND STRUCTURE IN THE MIDDLE AGES*

The border dividing England from Scotland runs on a roughly south west - north east alignment for approximately 110 miles (176 km), from the head of the Solway Firth - an arm of the Irish Sea - on the west to a point 3 1/2 miles north of the mouth of the River Tweed on the east. In the medieval period the border line followed the midstream line of the River Esk as it flows into the Solway Firth, and the midstream line of the River Tweed as it flows into the sea at Berwick [see Figure 1], for until 1482 the burgh and castle of Berwick upon Tweed lay in Scotland, not England, and that fact explains why 'Berwickshire' is a Scottish, not an English, county¹. Even although Berwick was occupied and elaborately fortified by the English in the generations following 1482, it was not formally annexed to England before the second half of the nineteenth century². It has always been a point of pride among its inhabitants - 'Berwickers' - that they are still in a state of war with Tsarist Russia, for although Queen Victoria's government declared war upon Russia in 1854 in the name of England, Scotland, Ireland etc. and Berwick upon Tweed, they forgot to specify Berwick when making peace by means of the Treaty of Paris in 1856.

Looked at historically, the Anglo-Scottish border could be seen as an artificial creation, the product of a series of compromises between northern rulers, who failed to extend their power as far south as they would have wished, and southern rulers who despite their greater wealth and potentially bigger armies lacked the resources to subjugate and permanently occupy the northern part of the island of Britain. But the Border is not wholly artificial if by that we mean that it has no basis in the hard facts of geography and geology. Between Solway and Tyne the British island narrows to about 70 miles (112 km), a fact of which the Roman army engineers took advantage when they built first of all the Stanegate, a military way, and then in Emperor Hadrian's reign a wall, mainly of stone but partly of turf, from Wallsend on Tyne to Bowness on Solway³. That natural 'Waistline' produces

* All works cited are published in London unless otherwise stated.

¹ Nicholson, R., *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1974), 507; Macdougall, N., *James III* (Edinburgh, 1982), 154-5, 169.

² Scott, J., *Berwick upon Tweed* (1888), 478. By the Reform Act of 1884, Berwick ceased to be a parliamentary burgh and became part of the Berwick upon Tweed division of the County of Northumberland. Previously the 'Liberties of Berwick', as the small district immediately around Berwick upon Tweed was known, lay in a species of limbo or no-man's land, although clearly subject to English rule. The Local Government reforms of 1974 (20 and 21 Eliz. II, c.10, schedule 1) have confirmed Berwick's status as an English borough.

³ Breeze, D.J. and Dobson, B., *Hadrian's Wall* (3rd edn. 1987).