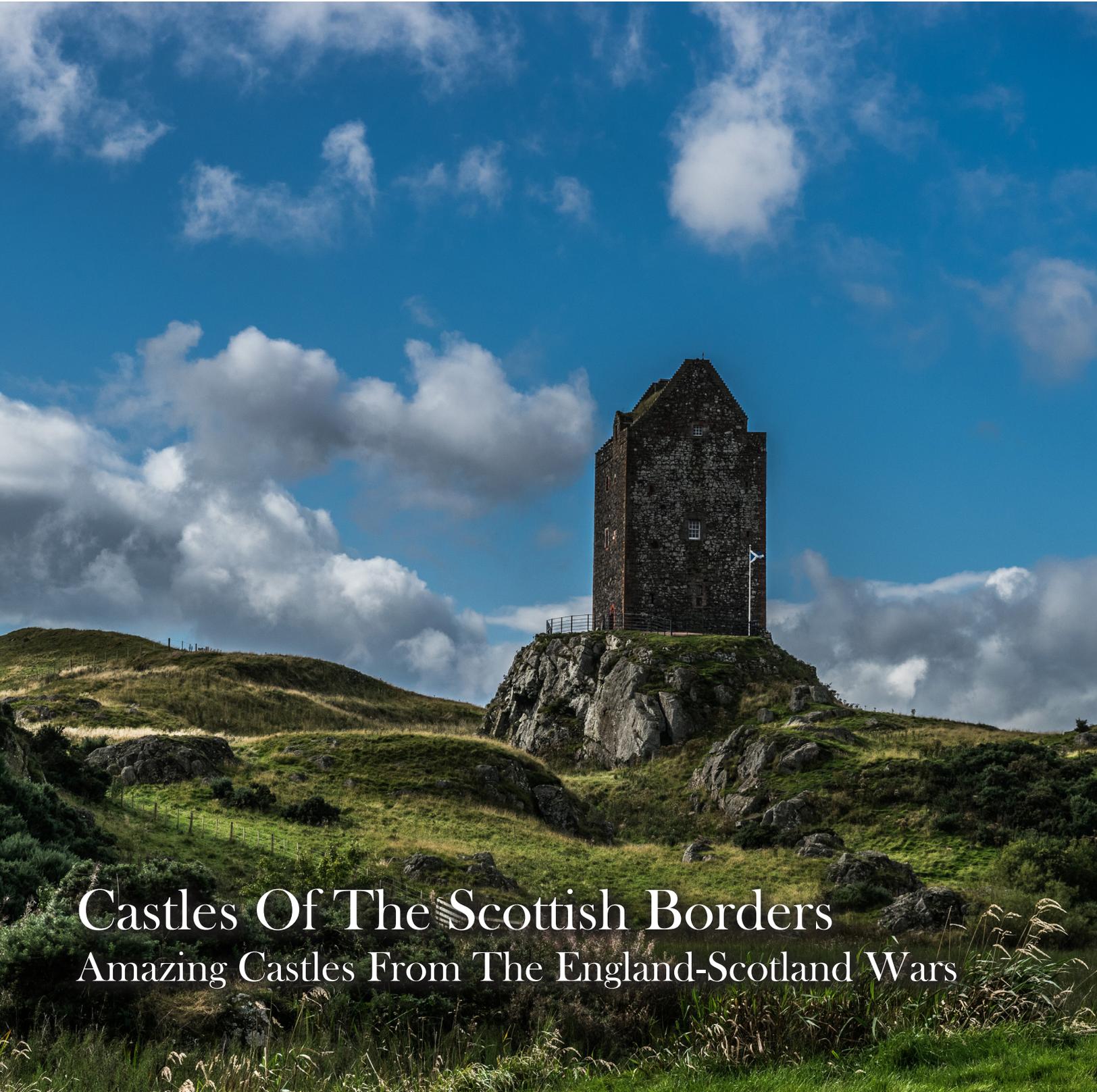


British Castles

August 2025



Castles Of The Scottish Borders
Amazing Castles From The England-Scotland Wars



EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear all,

Welcome to the August 2025 issue of the British Castles magazine which has a 'Castles of the Scottish Borders' theme.

The Borders is the term for the southern Scottish border with England, the scene of the bloody violence of the England-Scotland wars.

Our first feature this month showcases five castles either resulting from this period, or a result of the conflict's end a couple of centuries ago producing restorations of old castle ruins, or brand new castles often built by local clan chiefs.

Our gallery is, as you'd expect, of some of these castles. Our photo quiz tests your knowledge (and how well you've been paying attention!) of Border castles.

Our second feature looks at what else there is to offer in a region often overlooked for the more spectacular Highlands or Western Isles.

Our 'Lesser Known Castle' this month is also the one with the best name: Fatlips Castle near the Borders town of Denholm.

I hope you enjoy the issue

Chris



CASTLES OF THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

The Borders are a gently version of Scotland than the more rugged and spectacular Highlands or Western Isles, comprising rolling hills and pretty market towns.

However they were also the scene of some of the worst violence of the long running England-Scotland wars, spawning several castles built by the Scots against English invasion.

In later years, as this conflict reduced, many of these castles became ruins. However, many were restored and often turned into fine country homes – sometimes by local clan chiefs – or even copied by wealthy landowners as they built their own residences.

What's left then is a brace of fine castles existing now as either as atmospheric ruins or as fine rural residences. The following list contains examples of each.



FLOORS CASTLE

Floors Castle is the largest inhabited castle in Scotland and the seat of the Duke of Roxburghe.

It was built by the first Duke over 300 years ago as a home and hence, unlike many castles, has never had a military purpose. It has great views over the River Tweed and the Cheviot Hills.

The Roxburghe Estate just outside Kelso is home to the castle and extensive gardens and grounds, all open to visitors.

WEDDERBURN CASTLE

Wedderburn Castle is an 18th-century country house located near Duns.

Designed by architects Robert and James Adam, the castle was completed in 1775 for the Home family and features a symmetrical Georgian design, with castellated towers and ashlar stonework. It is surrounded by gorgeous landscaped grounds,

It's been fully retored and is now a venue for private events, including weddings and corporate gatherings. The interior retains period features

HERMITAGE CASTLE

Hermitage Castle is different to our first two picks. Rather than a welcoming family home Hermitage Castle is a wild place with a bloody past.

The 'Strength of Liddesdale' was key to defending the Scottish Middle March - fought over constantly by the English and Scots - from its construction in the Middle Ages. Indeed it was described by one writer as the "guardhouse of the bloodiest valley in Britain".

Its wild setting in Liddesdale perfectly captures the wild and warlike atmosphere of the Borders with its brooding medieval ruin, thick stone walls, and storied history.

It also has a connection to that most tragic of historical figures, Mary Queen of Scots. In 1566 she rode to rescue one of her nobles injured by cattle thieves in the area.

The long journey from Jedburgh, a fall from a horse, and a fever caught on the way nearly killed her.

The castle is a wonderful spot then for history buffs, though it's less suited to those seeking gardens or plush interiors.



Hermitage Castle

SMAILHOLM TOWER

Smailholm Tower is a rectangular, four-storey 15th-century tower house located in the Scottish Borders near Kelso.

Built for the Pringle family, the tower stands on a rocky outcrop and features thick stone walls, vaulted chambers, and defensive battlements.

It was purchased by the Scott family in the 16th century and inspired one of their ancestors, the romantic writer Sir Walter Scott, when he lived there during his childhood.



Smailholm Tower



Hume Castle

HUME CASTLE

Hume Castle is located near the Scottish Borders village of Hume, between the towns of Greenlaw and Kelso, is another product of the fierce and long running Anglo-Scottish wars.

Originally built in the late 12th or early 13th century by the Home family, the castle served as a significant defensive stronghold and was besieged several times, most notably in the 16th century. Commanding fine views over the neighbouring countryside and England-Scotland border it was also used as a beacon to warn the Scots of impending invasion.

The original fortress was largely destroyed in 1651 by Oliver Cromwell's forces during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. In the late 18th century, the ruins were partially reconstructed as a folly.

Today, Hume Castle is run by the Clan Home Association and is open to visitors.

QUIZ: SCOTTISH BORDER CASTLES

See if you can match the Scottish Borders castle with its photo. Answers on page 24.

Newark Castle

Ayton Castle

Smailholm Castle

Ferniehirst Castle

Neidpath Castle

Floors Castle

Roxburgh Castle

Smailholm Castle

Hermitage Castle

Duns Castle

Nisbet House

Greenknowe Castle

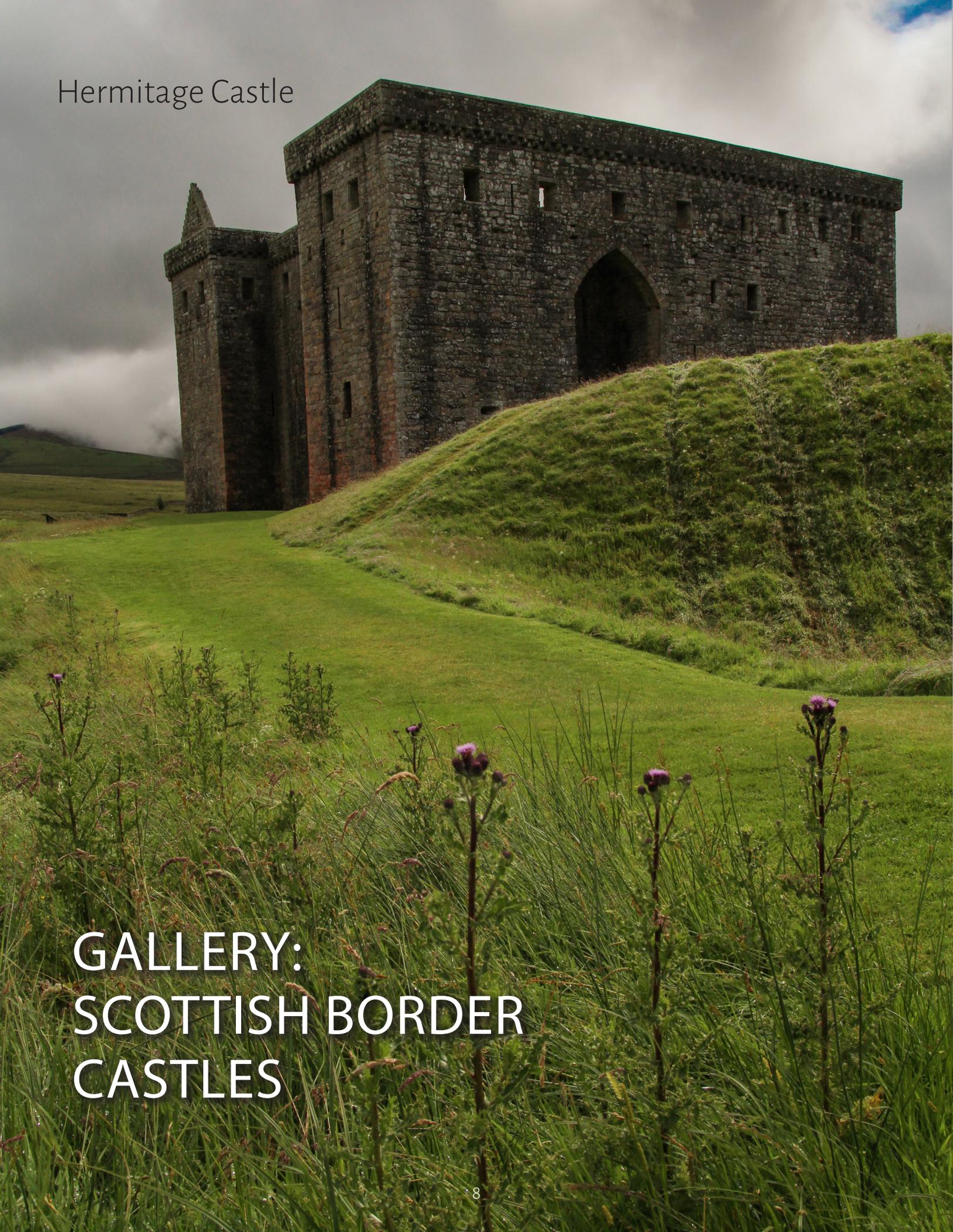
Hume Castle

Thirlestane Castle





Hermitage Castle



GALLERY:
SCOTTISH BORDER
CASTLES



Neidpath Castle

Wedderburn Castle Interior





Thirlestane Castle



Greenknowe Castle



Floors Castle Terrace Garden



Smailholm Tower



THE SCOTTISH BORDERS

WHAT TO SEE & DO

The Scottish Borders is an area of rolling hills, valleys, and the River Tweed, located along Scotland's southern boundary. It's a much gentler version of Scotland than the more rugged Highlands or Western Isles.

It's history isn't gentle, however. For centuries the Borders were the front line to near constant English-Scottish conflict - resulting in many of the castles featured elsewhere in this issue.

But castles are only one fantastic feature of this area - here's our guide to what to see and do if you're ever in the area.



Jedburgh Abbey



Melrose Abbey

EXPLORE HISTORIC ABBEYS

MELROSE ABBEY

A well-known Borders abbey founded in 1136, Melrose Abbey is noted for its architecture and connection to Robert the Bruce. Visitors can walk among its ruins and view stonework from the medieval period.

JEDBURGH ABBEY:

Dating to 1138, Jedburgh Abbey displays Romanesque and early Gothic styles. Set above the River Jed, it gives insight into monastic life in the Middle Ages and the region's turbulent history.

DRYBURGH ABBEY

Located by the River Tweed, Dryburgh Abbey is a quieter site, also known as the burial place of Sir Walter Scott. Its setting makes it a suitable place for a reflective visit.

KELSO ABBEY

Once a large and significant abbey, the ruins of Kelso Abbey remain in the centre of Kelso, suggesting the scale and importance the site once had.



VISIT TOWNS AND VILLAGES

PEEBLES

Peebles has a central street with independent shops and walks along the river. The town is home to artists and hosts a number of cultural events.

MELROSE

In addition to the abbey, Melrose features gardens, shops, and access to the Eildon Hills for walking and views.

KELSO

Kelso is known for its large market square and is the location of Floors Castle. The riverside is popular for walking and picnics.

SELKIRK

This town is associated with William Wallace and the Selkirk Common Riding. Its bakeries are noted for producing Selkirk Bannock, a local bread.

ST BOSWELLS

St Boswells is a riverside village with walking routes and a well-known independent bookshop, the Mainstreet Trading Company.

OUTDOOR WALKS AND ACTIVITIES

ST CUTHBERT'S WAY

A long-distance walking route of nearly 100 km from Melrose to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, passing through countryside and historic areas.

SOUTHERN UPLAND WAY

This route crosses southern Scotland and goes through part of the Borders, offering varied scenery and opportunities to spot wildlife.

TWEED VALLEY FOREST PARK

Known for mountain biking and hiking, the park has multiple trails through woodland areas.

RIVER TWEED FISHING

The River Tweed is internationally recognised for salmon fishing, with options for anglers of all abilities.

ST ABBS

A small fishing village known for its cliffs, clear waters, and the St Abbs Head National Nature Reserve, with opportunities for birdwatching

EILDON HILLS

These hills near Melrose provide accessible walks with views over the region.



St Abbs

OTHER NOTABLE SITES

SCOTT'S VIEW

A viewpoint overlooking the Tweed Valley and Eildon Hills, known as a favourite of Sir Walter Scott.

OLD MELROSE MONASTIC SITE

A lesser-visited site on the River Tweed with early Christian history.

TRIMONTIUM MUSEUM

This museum in Melrose focuses on the region's Roman heritage, especially the Trimontium fort.

VISITING ADVICE

A couple of tips if you do get to visit:

- It's probably much easier to visit the area by car than public transport. A car allows for easier access to rural areas, although buses connect main towns. The Borders can be reached from anywhere in northern England or southern Scotland
- Spring and summer are best for outdoor activities; autumn brings colourful foliage. Many attractions have reduced hours in winter, so it's wise to check ahead.
- Prepare for unpredictable weather by packing waterproof clothing and sturdy shoes





LESSER KNOWN BRITISH CASTLES

FATLIPS CASTLE

OK, we admit it. We chose this Scottish Borders castle as our lesser known British Castle mainly due to its wonderful name. However it is a fascinating place, even with the name - here's more...

The castle stands on the crest of Minto Crags, overlooking the Teviot Valley in the Scottish Borders. Though modest compared to Scotland's larger castles, Fatlips Castle is known for its historical significance and distinctive appearance. Its location, above the hills of Roxburghshire, has made it a recognisable feature of the local landscape.

WHY 'FATLIPS'?

Fatlips Castle is near the village of Minto, approximately six miles northeast of Hawick, in the historical county of Roxburghshire. The castle dates to the early 16th century, though the area itself has a longer history of settlement and activity.

The origin of the name "Fatlips" is unclear. One suggestion is that visitors to the castle once had the custom of kissing the ladies of the house upon their arrival.

Another theory links the name to a member of the Turnbull family who was said to have a pronounced lower lip. The actual origin is not confirmed, but the unusual name has remained associated with the site.

THE TURNBULL FAMILY AND THE BORDERS

The castle is most closely associated with the Turnbull family, who were a notable clan in the region.

The land around Fatlips Castle, historically known as the Minto Estate, was granted to the Turnbells by the Douglas family.

The Turnbells built Fatlips as a fortified residence, both for status and as a response to the instability of the Borders during this period.





STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Fatlips Castle and similar towers were built in response to the lawlessness that characterized the Borders during the time of the Border Reivers—families who engaged in feuds and raids.

The castle's position allowed for communication and provided some security during times of conflict, although there is little evidence of Fatlips being involved in major military engagements.

The Union of the Crowns in 1603 led to a gradual reduction of violence in the region, and many defensive towers were abandoned or fell into disrepair. Fatlips Castle also experienced periods of neglect.

RESTORATION AND RECENT HISTORY

By the 19th century, Fatlips Castle was in ruin. Its roof was missing and the stonework was deteriorating. The Minto estate, then owned by the Elliott family, initiated restoration efforts.

Sir Robert Lorimer's late-19th-century work included the addition of a parapet walk, improvements to the stairs, and a new entrance door. The castle became a local point of interest, visited by residents and travelers.

In the 20th century, Fatlips Castle continued to be a destination despite periods of vandalism. Restoration work led by the local community and supported by Historic Scotland and the Minto family was carried out in 2012, repairing the roof and stonework.

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

Fatlips Castle is an example of a Scottish pele tower—a small, fortified keep common in the Borders from the 14th to 17th centuries. Its features include thick stone walls, narrow slit windows, and battlements. The castle is rectangular, with four storeys, and is integrated into the rocky crag on which it stands.

The main entrance, originally reached by a removable wooden stair, leads to a vaulted basement. Above, a spiral staircase provides access to living quarters and a Great Hall. At the top, a parapet walk offers views over the valley.

The castle underwent restoration in the 19th century, directed by the architect Sir Robert Lorimer. This restoration added some new features while retaining the building's medieval character. Today, the castle's corbelled battlements and crow-stepped gables are prominent architectural elements.



LEGENDS AND LOCAL STORIES

Several stories and legends are associated with Fatlips Castle. It is said by some that the ghost of a Turnbull laird haunts the upper rooms. Another tale involves hidden treasure beneath the castle, guarded by a spectral dog. There is no strong evidence for these stories, but they are part of local tradition.

VISITING FATLIPS CASTLE

Fatlips Castle is currently managed by the Minto estate and local community members. While the inside of the castle is not always open to the public, the paths and surrounding area are accessible. The site is visited by walkers, those interested in local history, and photographers. The surrounding hills provide views of the Borders countryside.

Quiz Answers: 1. Ayton Castle; 2. Duns Castle; 3. Floors Castle; 4. Hermitage Castle; 5. Hume Castle; 6. Thirlestane Castle; 7. Newark Castle; 8. Greenknowe Castle; 9. Smailholm Castle; 10. Fatlips Castle; 11. Ferniehirst Castle; 12. Neidpath Castle; 13. Nisbet House; 14. Roxburgh Castle



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