

## **HERITAGE HUB SOURCE LIST**

### **FAMILY NAME: TURNBULL**

#### **Origin of the Name**

The Turnbull family is one of the largest in the Scottish Borders. It is an especially common name in the vicinity of Hawick and Jedburgh. The motto of the family on their crest is 'I Saved the King', a reference to the legendary origins of the name which suggest that William de Rule, while accompanying Robert de Bruce and Sir John Douglas on an hunting trip near Callander in 1315, saved the king from a charging wild bull by seizing the beast by the horns and twisting it around and thereby breaking its neck. In honour of this extraordinary feat of strength and courage, Robert de Bruce granted lands to Sir James Douglas and conferred upon him the name 'Turnbull' (*turn ye bull*). This tale is related in Hector Boece's '*Historie Gentis Scotorum*' (1527).

Most of the literature pertaining to the Turnbull family has concerned the more extraordinary and noteworthy events and personages, showing a particular interest in the Border Reivers and the involvement of some of the family luminaries in the political intrigues of the Middle Ages and the Anglo-Scottish borderlands. This is naturally of great interest and significance to histories, but it provides a very biased view of the past if studied in isolation. Most of those bearing the name Turnbull were not bandits and warlords—they were ordinary folk that sought to make their lives and those of their family better and to live a peaceful and prosperous life in the region. Although this information sheet summarises the traditions and regarding the origins of the family and some of its remarkable members, it is primarily concerns with the evidence at the Heritage Hub in Hawick that relate to the lives of the those bearing the surname Turnbull. Much of this evidence describes land purchases, leases, legal disputes and entries regarding military service and commercial undertakings. It is through this material that flesh is placed on the bare bones of history and we see the story of individual families emerge. We encourage you to pursue the history of *your* family through these records, to investigate the history and the stories of those that built the Scottish Borders as we know them through the rich and diverse records that we have available.

#### **Mythical Origins**

The origins of the family are lost to history and all that remains for scholars are the myths and legends reprised in song and ballad, some of which were transcribed and embellished by the minstrels of the Scottish Borders. It has been suggested that the family might have derived from Scandinavian settlers in the region because of the reputed size and the common occurrence of blonde and red hair amongst them. This can only be speculation, but it is worth noting that there is a curious concentration of Scandinavian place-names in the stretch of the Scottish Borders from Liddesdale to Coldstream—the villages of Langholm, Denholm, Yetholm, Smailholm and Leitholm all imply significant Scandinavian settlement. It has also been suggested, though, that the name derives from the Old English *Trumbald* or the French *Tumbald* (meaning 'strong and bold'), perhaps implying an Anglo-Norman origin of the family. An early cognate form of the name occurs with Robertus de Turnbulyes in 1296, entered in a document in which fealty was sworn to Edward I. Some regard this man as the principal ancestor whence the family is derived. All this must, however, remain speculation until further evidence is acquired.

## Early History

A recurrent theme, however, is that the family originally bore the name of Rule and was associated with the Rule Valley between Hawick and Jedburgh. The aforementioned William de Rule appears to have been a witness to a grant of land to the monks at Kelso in 1300, thus confirming the association of this family with this region of the Scottish Borders. This name begins to fade into obscurity in the fourteenth century, replaced by Turnbull. Hereafter the name flourishes throughout the region and their remains a strong connexion with Bedrule and Fatlips Castle. A particularly noteworthy forebear that was born in Bedrule is William Turnbull, who was the Bishop of Glasgow between 1448 and 1451 and founded the University of Glasgow in 1451.

## Examples from the Hub Archive Collection

SC/B/5	Case of debt, Richard Turnbull & Robert Learmont	1791-1793
SBA/456	Instrument of Sasine in favour of Robert Turnbull	1748
SBA/457	Disposition—Adam Rewcastle, Hawick to James Turnbull (colour copy in folder)	1690
D/48/48/27	List of Feu duties in the Burgh of Selkirk belonging to family of Mr. Turnbull of Know	1790
D/47/53/7	Libel J. Turnbull against Lang	24 May, 1711
D/47/80/14	Letter from Betty Turnbull, Tinnis to Mr. Paterson	24 March, 1810
D/47/82/23	Letter from Betty Turnbull to Mr. Paterson	21 June, 1815
D.47/83/21	Stamp Admission of John Turnbull, Selkirk	12 September, 1816
SC/S/48/4	Burgess Admission of John Turnbull, Selkirk	11 September, 1820
SC/S/81/7/46	Instrument of Sasine in favour of High Dobson and Adam Turnbull	1834



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