

The Drysdales of Dollar - 1503

After yet another round of investigation into the Douglas/Drysdale/1503 story, I can now draw some possible conclusions from the evidence that I and others before me have found to date. In my view these conclusions are reasonable based upon what is currently known (pending the appearance of further, as yet undiscovered, evidence!)

Conclusions

The 1503 story may be based upon real events but in the absence of any supporting historical evidence it is most likely that the 'story' itself is a fabrication. The principal problem with the 1503 story is that it narrates a tale whereby a property dispute in Dryfesdale, Dumfriesshire leads to a skirmish in which **fifteen members of the Johnston Clan are slain*** by three Douglas brothers (plus five of their supporters). This would have caused an outcry in those times and official records of such an event, had it occurred, would undoubtedly have been made (see **note** below).

The other 'facts' in the 1503 story can be just about accommodated:

- There were Douglases and Johnstones in that area (Dryfesdale) at that time, who were hostile to one another.
- Land disputes were common at that time and Douglas land was being taken over by other local families.
- There were water Mills in the area and on the river Dryfe.
- Some of the place names in the story do not exist, but there are place names there today which are similar.
- The King's 'friendship' with the Johnston Clan was a variable at that time - end of 1400s early 1500s.
- A 'great reward' was offered for the capture/killing of the Douglas outlaws - but no details were provided.
- The place name 'Hallidays Green' did not exist in 1503, it was named as such 100 years later.
- There were no known Drysdale families in Dollar before 1500 although land was purchased there in the early 1500s by someone called Drysdale.
- There are no known records existing for any of the people named in the 1503 document (Johnston or Douglas) apart from one 'Symon Drysdale of the Haugh of Dollar'.
- There is no original handwritten document, only typeset copies in Queens English.

Note In 1593 for example, the skirmish at Biddes-burn, leading to the Battle of Dryfe Sands was very well documented:

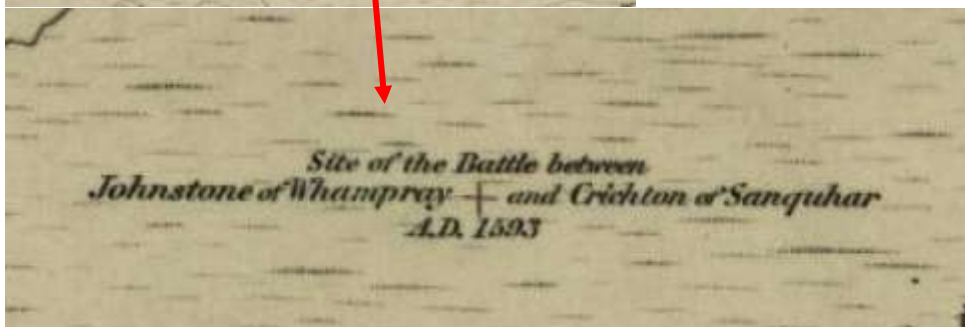
Ref: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Dryfe_Sands

*"...Crichton of Sanquhar and Douglas of Drumlanrig raising what forces they could muster attacked the Johnstones at a place called Biddes-burn, but were completely defeated and the Johnstones carried off the spoil. In this encounter **several Johnstones and fifteen Crichtons* were killed**... Johnstone was subsequently informed that Crichton, Douglas, etc. put themselves under the protection of Maxwell and warfare between the rival clans was instantly renewed."*

* The numbers slain and the names of those involved in the Biddes-Burn skirmish are very similar to those in the 1503 story but with their roles reversed!



Ordnance Survey Map



Some background info.

In the mid to late 1400s the powerful Douglas clan had most of their lands confiscated by the Crown.

In Annandale, the sources that are listed below and on the following page reveal:

1.the Laird of Johnstoun had taken forcible possession of certain of the forfeited lands of the Douglas in Annandale.....
2. John Johnstone of Johnstone was engaged in a law-suit about the lands of Upper Dryfe - Lord Carlyle claimed 12 merks yearly for nine years, during which period he alleged the chief had wrongfully occupied the lands.
3. In 1498 the remnants of the Annandale Douglasses obtained the protection of the Lords of Council for themselves and their tenants against hostile acts, noting that the local Dumfries Sheriff was also considered to be hostile.
4. There is a record of one George Douglas using the name Dryfe in 1528.
5. Members of the Crichton & Dryff families were responsible for slaying a James Douglas in Edinburgh in 1515.

Hypothetical scenario

In 1503, the Johnstones decide to dig a water channel across nearby Douglas land to get a water source for their new Watermill on the Dryfe. The Douglas brothers object, react violently and some of the Johnstones are seriously injured in a skirmish. The Douglas brothers, fearing official and local retribution flee the area.

The Johnstones, knowing that they were initially in the wrong and also that the Douglas chief had an exemption from the local sheriffs' jurisdiction (for disputes of that nature) and that they had actually gained the disputed land, decided to let things lie and took no official action. Thus, no words of the 1503 skirmish entered into official records.

Drysdale in Dollar The 1503 story is recited, exaggerated and handed down over time within the Drysdale family while being mixed/embellished/confused with the Biddes-Burn story and the slaying of 15 combatants.

References

1. Ref: Clan Dinwiddie - Family of Dinwoodie or Dinwoodie

<https://electricscotland.com/webclans/dtog/dinwiddie4.html>

Circa 1500 - Although the king had his "Seneschal of Annandale" still, there was no real single authority there to overawe the wild and turbulent Lairds and Chiefs, who grasped at whatever they could seize and held it by their strong hands despite royal parchments and in defiance of kingly seneschals and ineffectual threats of outlawry. **So it was, that the Laird of Johnstoun had taken forcible possession of certain of the forfeited lands of the Douglas in Annandale to which the Carlyle chieftain made claim as given him by charter from King James.**

2. Ref: The Annandale family book of the Johnstones - Earls and Marquises of Annandale - Sir William Fraser vol 1 1894

<https://digital.nls.uk/histories-of-scottish-families/archive/97147347>

1475-1503 - John Johnstone of Johnstone, 1454-1493..... He was engaged in 1475 in a law-suit..... **about the lands of Upper Dryfe.** Lord Carlyle claimed 12 merks yearly for nine years, during which period he alleged the chief **had wrongfully occupied the lands.** The court ordered Johnstone to remove from the lands and to pay Lord Carlyle for his wrongful occupation and for damages, 40 merks. Power was given to distrain the goods of Johnstone for the amount, but it was still unpaid in 1503.

3. Ref: Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum The Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland vol 1 1488-1529.

<https://archive.org/details/registrumsecret00scotgoog/page/n8/mode/2up>

29-6-1497 - In a decision of the lords of the council, William Douglas of Drumlanrig received an exemption from the Sheriff of Dumfries' Jurisdiction [Robert Crichton].

97. Apud . . . , 29 Jun.
A Letter of Exemptioun to WILZAM OF DOUGLAS of Drumlanrig, for himself, his men of houshold, and tennandis duelland on his proper landis, fra the jurisdiction of the schiref of Drumfres, becaus it is understandin be the lordis of consale that ther is dedly ennemyte betuix thaim, etc. Ex deliberatione dominorum concilii.
J. Butlar. xs. i. 22.

4. From the same source we can see that on 28th February 1528 in Edinburgh there was a George Douglas who was calling himself Dryfe.

5. Again from the same source it seems that on 15th October 1515, a number of Crichtons & Dryffs were responsible for the slaying of one James Douglas in Edinburgh.

4091. At Edinburgh, 28 Feb.
Ane Respet to ALEXANDER LUM-
LIE, for art, part, etc., gevin to James
Lumlie his broder and George Douglas
callit Dryfe, etc. : For xix zeris. Per
Signaturam manibus Regis et thesaurarii.
xs. viii. 22.

2644. At Edinburgh, 15 Oct.
A Respit maid with avise [etc.] to JOHNE
CREICHTOUN, Patrik Creichtoun,
Robert Creichtoun, Johne M^cKilvane,
Alexander Clerk, Johne Kyle, Johne
Dryff, Gregory Dryff and William Dryff,
for the slauchter of James Dowglas com-
mittit apoun forthocht felony in Edin-
burgh, and for al crime that may be imput
to thaim or ony of thaim thairthrow
alaneilie, during the space of a zere
next tocum efter the day of the dait
hereof and forther during the said
governouris will, and aye and quhill he
discharge the samyn be his express
writing, etc. Per Signaturam [etc., ut
supra]. Gratis. v. 20.

Concluding Remark

It is not unreasonable to presume that the Drysdales of Dollar were originally Douglasses.