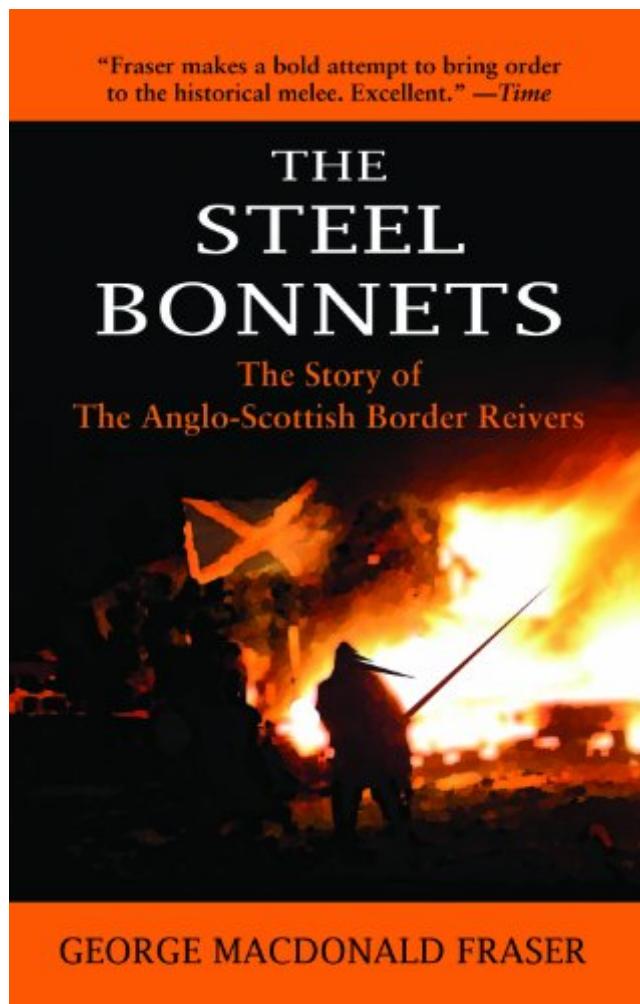


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# The Steel Bonnets: The Story Of The Anglo-Scottish Border Reivers



## Synopsis

From the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, outlaws reigned supreme on the contentious frontier between England and Scotland. Feud and terror, raid and reprisal, were the ordinary stuff of lifeâ "and a way of survival. Power was held by the notorious border reivers (the "steel bonnets," named for their flashy helmets), who robbed and murdered in the name of family: the famous clans (or "grains")â "like Elliot, Armstrong, Charlton, and Robsonâ "romanticized by Sir Walter Scott. In The Steel Bonnets, George MacDonald Fraser, author of the bestselling Flashman novels, and himself a borderer, tells the fascinating and bloody story of the reivers, their rise to power as ferocious soldiers of horse, and their surprisingly sudden fall from grace.

## Book Information

File Size: 1608 KB

Print Length: 436 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 160239265X

Publisher: Skyhorse Publishing (July 17, 2008)

Publication Date: July 17, 2008

Language: English

ASIN: B004UMRYAS

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #347,266 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #206  
inÂ Books > History > Europe > Great Britain > Scotland #981 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Europe > England #990 inÂ Books > History > Europe > Great Britain > England

## Customer Reviews

Until England and Scotland were united under a single king in March 1603, the border between them was, unsurprisingly, a natural place for strife and disorder. The two countries had been at war intermittently for centuries, and many armies had passed back and forth across the border counties. Fraser's history covers the last hundred years of the border, from 1503 to 1603, a period during which the decayed (and astonishingly corrupt) administration could never cope with the local gangs -- known as "reivers" -- who terrorized the district with cattle theft, murder, and arson. The book is

very well-organized. Fraser starts with a few pages on the long historical background, then takes about half the book to cover the reivers by topic: chapters on arms and armour; on reiving technique; on the key families and their alliances; on cross-border relations; on the administrative structure. Fraser gives a lot of details, and plenty of quotes from the original sources (with the original spellings!). This painstaking coverage sets up the second half of the book perfectly: one hundred and forty pages that cover the history of the border chronologically through the sixteenth century. With the details in hand, the second half is easy to follow and put in context; the writing is also clear and entertaining. The last section of the book details the uncompromising way in which King James I destroyed the reivers in a few short years after 1603. It is a startlingly bloodthirsty story: Fraser includes quotes from blanket pardons that King James issued to some of his enforcers, which essentially say "whatever murders you did, I'm sure it was in a good cause, and you're absolved".

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