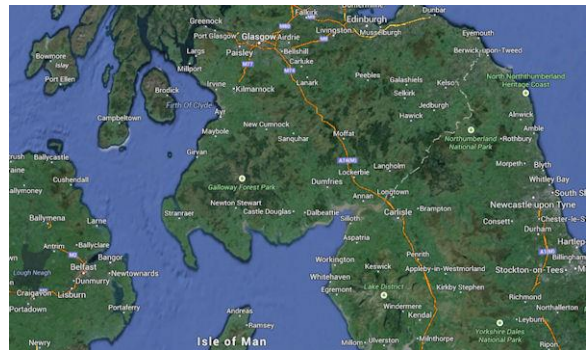


# BORDER RECORDS – LYTIL

[Author unknown but most likely Family Researchers, Ltd.]<sup>1</sup>

The surname Little is of very old standing in Dumfrieshire, its earliest written records dating back to the thirteenth century. It is doubtless much older, but of that we have only circumstantial evidence. The name was originally spelled LYTIL, is so pronounced to this day by old fashioned people on the border. Spelling in the Middle Ages was not an exact science, and Armstrong in his book on the Debatable Land gives seventeen

different spellings of the surname, Lytil being the oldest and most commonly used. The change to modern spelling, which led to modern pronunciation, began in the seventeenth century after the union of the Crowns, and was accentuated by the unsuccessful rebellions of 1715 and 1745, when it became still more fashionable to Anglicise things Scottish.



The Border between England and Scotland

The physique and temperament of the Border Littles clearly indicates a Scandinavian origin although in individuals signs are not wanting of the Celtic and Southern strains common to the blended blood of the inhabitants of this part of Britain. Their name is a patronymic of the same class as Kettle (Ketil), Baldry (Balder), Swain (Sweinn), Seward (Sigurd) &c., and it probably came in with the Anglian invasion of Scotland in the seventh century by Oswald, King of Northumbria, who marched northwards through what is now Berwickshire, and south along the dales of the Tweed and the Yarrow where "Yarrow Stone" is said to mark the site of one of his battles. The Celtic, of Romano-British population, appear to have been driven by their Anglian invaders into the mountainous country west of the river Nith, at which line, to judge by the place-names in Nithsdale, the pursuit seems to have stopped.



The original Lytil apparently found, or was allotted his share of the conquered territory in that part of the border afterwards known as the Debatable Land, part of the Western March between Scotland and England. Here his descendants increased and multiplied into a numerous sept. Their name appears in the early rolls of Holywood Abbey, near Dumfries, founded in 1269. John Lytil was one of these dignitaries



of that Abbey who assisted the Archbishop of Canterbury to serve Pope Binface's Bull<sup>2</sup> upon King Edward I. The Pope demanded the immediate cessation of the campaign

<sup>1</sup> Pictures and footnotes added by Fred Crane, February 2014.

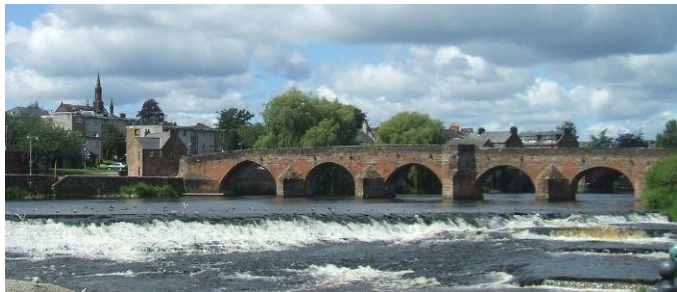
<sup>2</sup> Papal Bull: a letter or announcement from the Pope to the Catholic world

against the Scots, and ordered the Archbishop to serve his Bull personally upon the King. Edward knew what was coming and evaded the Archbishop for some time, but was at last brought to book by the ecclesiastics at Caerlaverock on 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1300.

The stronghold of the Lytils was a hill near Canonbielea, and in 1426 they had become powerful enough to assist the Regent of Scotland in putting down a rebellion among the other borderers. For this Service their chief Simon Lytil, who had raised and commanded his clan, was rewarded with a grant of land in Ewesdale which remained in possession of his descendants down to the nineteenth century. The Deed of Grant dated 30 April 1426 (James I of Scotland) “dilecto et fidell nostro Simoni Lytil” (to our trusty and well-beloved Simon Lytil) is still extant.

In 1460 certain Lytils took a contract to carry munitions to the siege of Roxburgh, perhaps for Mons Meg when she bursted there. But like other Borderers, the Lytils were not always found on the side of law and order, and there are numerous records of their activity in the reiving<sup>3</sup> times. In 1479 Jeffrs Lytil and William Lytil were summoned for taking away eighteen score of sheep from a place called Halkschawis.

They did not respond to the summons and their lands and goods were ordered to be “distrenged” a thing easier said than done in those days. When James IV visited Dumfries in August 1504 he held a Court of the 13<sup>th</sup> of that month for the trial of Borderers. Among other culprits were John and Alan Lytil. John was convicted of reiving sheep and of assisting the rebels of Eskdale, and was hanged, but Alan appears to have got off. Later in the sixteenth century another Lytil was tried at Dumfries for “harrying<sup>4</sup> hirsels”. He was condemned to death, but as “stouthreif” seems to have been regarded more as an act of war than an ordinary crime, he was allowed to choose the manner of his death. He elected to be drowned, a form of capital punishment sometimes practiced in those days, and he was pitched into the Nith from the parapet of Devorgillas old bridge that stands there to this day.



The penalty for “harrying of hirsels” remained a hanging matter for many years afterwards and as recently as 1835 one of the Border Lytils was tried and condemned at Carlisle. On the morning of the execution he declined spiritual consolation and walked to his doom singing. According to Keary’s “Vikings in Western Christendom” (V.1.145.146) their predilection for nick-names and practical jokes, and their contempt for death is evidence of the large proportion of Scandinavian blood in the veins of the Scottish Borderers.

The men of the Western March, fortunately for themselves, were not present at the fatal battle of Flodden in 1513, their suzerain Lord Maxwell, being at the time out of favour at the Court of James IV. Bu.t in the muster- roll of clansmen who followed the Warden of the West March to the siege of Stirling in the time of Queen Mary, the surname Lytil frequently occurs. It

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<sup>3</sup> reive: verb – to rob; plunder

<sup>4</sup> harry: verb – make war, lay waste, ravage, plunder

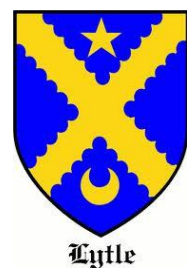
is recorded that early one morning after the fighting was over, the Commander was roused with the information that the Borderers had disappeared during the night. He ordered that they should be pursued, but that was found impracticable because every horse in the camp worth taking had also disappeared. How it ended History saith not, but both before and after that time it was sometimes found to be the wisest course to turn a blind eye to the Border, and to put up with the pranks of its unruly denizens.

A section of the clan seems to have settled and prospered in the Scottish Capital. Among the wills of burgesses of Edinburgh entered in the register of the See of St. Andrews, we find in 1540 that of John Lytill whose estate works out at about £480 at to-days value of money. In 1542 Alexander Lytill figures for about £330 and Katherine Lytill for £750. In 1544 William Lytill, a burgess of Edinburgh was paid £20 Scots, about £400 at present value, by order of Cardinal Beaton being payment of a loan he had made to the Cardinals sister. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1562, Isabel Lytil was betrothed to Alexander Napier of Merchiston, and in later times one of the Edinburgh Lytils founded the University Library<sup>5</sup>.

Before the Crowns of England and Scotland were united in 1603, there had been trouble for centuries on the Border line of the two countries. It was therefore divided into three sections called the East, Middle and West Marches, and for each March an English and a Scottish Warden was appointed, each Warden being responsible for maintenance of order on his own side of the line. The most turbulent of these sections was the West March which included the Debatable Land, a strip of territory about eight miles long and four broad lying along the north bank of the Esk, and so named because it came sometimes under Scottish and sometimes under English domination according to who had the upper hand at the time.

The most troublesome period seems to have been the first half of the sixteenth century when stringent measures had to be adopted to control raiding, especially from the Scottish side of the Border. One of these measures was an order of the Scottish Parliament dated the 12th October 1523 by which the borderers were charged to wear the cognizance of their clan in time of War with England. This was because some of them were suspected of siding with the enemy and of accepting pay for doing so. The cognizance of the Lytils was a St. Andrews Cross, white upon a black ground. It was not heraldic but merely a badge.

Later on it seems to have followed the fashion and developed into heraldry for we find it inscribed in the Lyon Office at Edinburgh as “sable, saltire argent”. This is the proper heraldic bearing of Little Meikledale in Ewesdale, the head of the clan, who bore his saltire plain prior to 1672. But we find it in the tombstone of Thomas Little, son of the Laird of Meikledale, in Ewes churchyard, dated 1675, the addition of a crescent and star very rudely sculptured, which addition of a crescent and star, ought only to be borne as a difference by a junior branch of that ilk. A further difference is the saltire engrailed (saw edged) and



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<sup>5</sup> *Edinburgh University Library pre-dates the university by three years. Founded in 1580 through the donation of a large collection by Clement Littill, its collection has grown to become the largest university library in Scotland with over 2 million periodicals, manuscripts, theses, microforms and printed works. These are housed in the main University Library building in George Square – one of the largest academic library buildings in Europe, designed by Basil Spence – and an extensive series of Faculty and Departmental Libraries.*



further record of a crest occurs in 1814 when Archibald little, a native of Langholm, who had made his fortune as a merchant in London, applied for a grant of arms and was allotted the saltire engrailed, with crest, a tiger's head "affronte". Another crest is a leopard's head "regardant" with motto "Magnum in Parvo"—probably early Victorian when there was a craze for heraldry, and all sorts of people sported armorial bearings until the Government put a tax on them.

Further steps were taken by Douglas, Earl of Angus, Chancellor of Scotland, during the minority of James V. He conducted no fewer than six expeditions to the Border between the years 1525 and 1528 without much success. More stringent measures were necessary and were afterwards taken with fire and sword. Many of the most unruly, chiefly Armstrongs, Crosiers and Lytils were banished to the north of Ireland where they settled down and became peaceful and prosperous citizens. The Glendinnings (Glendowyn) were banished to Galloway, and one of



them was the Provost of Kirkcudbright in 1642. My maternal grandfather was Robert Glendinning of Parton Galloway.<sup>1</sup> By a treaty of peace between England, Scotland and France signed in 1551, the Debatable Land was divided, the Northern portion being assigned to the parish of Kirkandrews in England. The boundary as finally settled is the Esk and the Sark, part of it being a line drawn between these two rivers. This line is known as the Scots Dyke and is still visible.

The West March, however, was not yet reduced to order and some of the Border Lairds continued to be held responsible for the good behavior of their tenants. In 1569 Sir Walter Scott of Howpaslay had to give surety of 200 marks each for certain of his tenants, among them was Wat Litill. But the more prominent of the raiders were sent away from the Border, some of them as far as Perthshire, to the custody of "nobill men, barons and having gude houses, seeing the King's Majesty's own house (H.M. Prisons) are not able to detain them". The allowance for their maintenance was thirteen shillings and four pence per week, and their position seems to have been somewhere between a paying guest and a prisoner on parole. Litill of Kessoch was placed under the guardianship of Stirling of Keir who allowed him to escape and Stirling thereby incurred a penalty of two thousand pounds Scots, but whether the fine was paid or not does not appear.

By a bond dated Lockerby 8<sup>th</sup> February 1580 one Christy Armstrong of Barngleish undertakes to Sir James Johnstone of that ilk, the Scottish Warden, that certain persons of the name of Litill should be forthcoming when required to answer complaints against them on both sides of the border. In this connection a document dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1585 signed and sealed at Dumfries "assuris" certain Borderers captured and confined in the "Castell of Lochmabane" amongst them John Litill, that misadventures committed "in time bypast" will be overlooked and they will be let out on good behavior.



Lochmaban Castle Ruins

Notwithstanding this proffered clemency seven Lytils were “put to the horn”<sup>6</sup> in June 1610 for refusing to pay church dues, and in 1624 a commission (warrant) dated August 30 was issued to the Sheriff of Dumfries to present John Littill, “maister of the Household to the Erle of Nithisdail and George Warrock issher to the Countess” to answer a complaint against them being “personnis suspect of Papistrie, recusants, and disobedient to the Ordour and discipline of the Kirk, and excommunicated therefor. The year 1628 seems to have been eventful for the Lytils. On February 28 Edward Littill “bailie of the Queensferrie compeers” in support of a petition for the application of certain moneys raised for the ransom of at Sales. Ordered that 400 marks be paid for the liberation of two Leith sailors, receipt to be given by Andrew Mitchell, skipper of the Leith ship to which they belonged. At this period the rovers of Sale had become so bold as to capture English ships off the Scilly Isles witness Robinson Crusoe. On August 1 of the same year a complaint was laid before the Privy Council at Holyrood against the same Edward Littill and another bailie of Queensferry for heading a mob of townsmen who “harled” the Carrick Pursuivant and prevented him from making proclamation at Market Cross concerning dues. The “bailies” counter-charged that these officials unlawfully tried to levy dues at the annual fair, and on being desired to restore the same “not onlye contentuouslie disobeyed but drewe ane lang dirks” and pursued the bailies, whereupon they were stayed by the townsmen. Sentence was given against the bailies and they were committed to Edinburgh tolbooth for a few days.



“Commission” dated 4th December 1627 was issued by the Privy Council of Scotland to certain bailies and elders to try Bessie Littill and Margaret Baine “indwellers in Lanhniddrie” who had long been suspected of witchcraft. On December 9th James Johnstone of that ilk, as cautioner in 500 marks for the appearance of a number of Borderers before the next Justice Ayre (circuit Court) held at Dumfries, petitions for exemption “because neither the petitioner nor his friends durst resort thither for fear of their lives in respect of the great troubles and feude quilk formerlie stood betwix supplicant, his predessours and the slaughters and bliudsheds quhilk fell out in these trouble”. These troubles originated in 1580 as recorded above.

A final effort to control the Borderers was made in the time of Cromwell. Scotland was included in the Commonwealth in 1651, and an act was passed by the Commonwealth Parliament” for the better suppressing of Theft upon the Borders of England and Scotland and for the Discovery of Highwaymen and Felons”. It came into force on the 24th day of July, 1657 and recites that the inhabitants on both sides of the Border “having been long accustomed to Idleness and Theft whilst the two nations were under several Governments, and cannot be brought off from their old evil and accustomed manner of Living reason of the situation of their Habitations” among bogs and mountains. It therefore enacts that the Magistrates of the Border counties shall hold a special session once a year at which constables and churchwardens are to present “a perfect List of all such Persons in their Parishes as live idly and can give no good account how they maintain themselves, or that are of bad fame, and not having any visible Estate real or personal to the value of One Hundred Pounds Sterling Money which may render him or them responsible. These loose characters were to be summered by warrant before the Justices and every such borderer was to bring with him “two sufficient Securities each to be bound to His

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<sup>6</sup> *Put to the horn: (obs. Scots law) to outlaw by three blasts of the horn at the Cross of Edinburgh*

Highness the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland in sums from ten to fifty pounds for his good behaviour. If the Borderer could not find anybody to go bail for him he was to be committed to prison until the next Quarter Sessions, when if he was still without friends, the Justices might transport him to some of the Plantations in America belonging to this Commonwealth.” The act concluded with the offer of an “encouragement” of ten pounds to any person who shall “discover any Felon or Felons (commonly called or known by the names of Mess-Troopers residing upon the borders of England and Scotland or any Tories in Ireland, who upon such discovery shall be apprehended.”

What the Tories in Ireland had to do with this business is not clear, but the allusion shows how opprobrious was the meaning originally attached to the word, and the animus of Cromwell and Parliament against their political opponents. The effect of the Act was a marked reduction of lawlessness on the Border, and from that time to this the acts of peace have gradually superseded the study of war until no more orderly and progressive region than the Debatable Land can be found in the King’s Dominions.

From the foregoing it would appear that the Lytils are a migratory and adventurous race. Members of them must have gone to America in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century before their surname became Anglicised, or from Ireland where it still remains Lytle. No fewer than five towns in the United States are named after them – named by the first settler after himself, as was and is the custom in new countries and the surname in both its ancient and modern form is common in the States and Canada. They are typical middle-class people, with an element of caution in their temperament which keeps them from extremes. *In meduas res tutissimus ibis* might be their family maxim. None of them have achieved high distinction in public life, none of them have amassed great wealth, nor do we find any of them in extreme poverty. It has been remarked that the Lytils are a marrying sort, but they do not marry for money nor for land and they do not marry a second time. They may be likened to an eddy in the human tide that began to flow in remote ages from the table-lands of Central Asia over Northern Europe, then drifted across the North Sea to the British Isles, where in the course of centuries it increased and multiplied and prepared for further movement, westward ever, to the forests and prairies of the New World.

**Towns in the United States named after Lytils:-**

LYTLE	Montgomery County	Ohio
LYTLE	El Paso County	Colorado
LYTLES	La Crosse County	Wisconsin
LYTLE	Walker County	Georgia
LYTLE	Bexar County	Texas

*Keith Johnstone, Royal Atlas of Modern Geography*

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<sup>i</sup> This sentence probably relates to the author/researcher from Family Researchers, Ltd.