

**The Border Reivers**  
Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 279 (1995)  
Text by Keith Durham ; illustrated by Angus McBride

Review by Rob Morgan

Few of the Osprey titles succeed in the depth and manner of this one. It contains enough material to prepare a wargamer for a new, relatively small scale, and interesting campaign. One which will last for two, perhaps three hundred years! A splendid book indeed, it provides a brief background to what must be one of medieval and renaissance Europe's most fought over, and generally troublesome borders, between Scotland and England. Great battles were fought here, Flodden and Solway Moss, and thousands of small brutal encounters between families and clans on either side, almost nightly!

Having set the scene, the volume goes on to consider the warlike array of these hard men, and I particularly like the description of a single night's raiding in the Middle March, on August 23, 1587, raids carried out by relatively small forces, usually mounted, with an element of foot soldiers in company, and between 4 and 400 well-harnessed men.

Although an unruly bunch, the borderers, Scot and Englishman, were eagerly sought out by their kings for the wars. Henry VIII regularly employed them in France. The author gives a splendid account of the borderers at both Flodden Field and Solway Moss, and of their frequent wars in Ireland.

There's information on the unique fortifications of the borders too, the towers and bastell houses, which were often the focus of attack or short sieges.

The raids, and the general disturbances, which were blood feuds and strife writ large, very large indeed, could not endure forever. By the end of 'Gloriana's' reign in 1603, a huge 'spasm of violence' as the book terms it, broke out, and with the ascent of James I & VI to the united ( huh!) throne of Britain, there was to be an end to it all. So a third force entered the field, King James's army and justice, though of course it could not be totally effective in the border environment.

By the 1640s with the kingdoms embroiled in a much greater war, the last few hard-core, 'moss-troopers,' who were outlaws in every respect, operating as brigands in small bands, living by attacking farms and robbing the highways, were falling apart. Though in 1648, we are told, a last group of these men scaled the walls of Carlisle, broke into the prison and released the prisoners and went back safe to Scotland!

Angus McBride's colour plates are exceptionally fine, and the array of weapons and gear of these lads well drawn and ample as a resource for the wargamer seeking to make a raiding group of Scots foot and horse, or even a small band of moss-trooper outlaws to face some ECW units in a short campaign.

This is an excellent introduction to Border warfare, and is all the better for being read in company with 'The Steel Bonnets,' a thorough volume of 400 pages, by George Macdonald Fraser, a valuable book which has scores of small and larger wargames scenarios in its pages. Published by Harper Collins 1971, still in print.

Now where table-top figures are concerned, then it's 15mm without a doubt. In the excellent East Riding Miniatures list by Tony Barr ...

[www.eastridingminiatures.co.uk](http://www.eastridingminiatures.co.uk)

if you will find his 16<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe range. There are a dozen packs of superbly moulded figures, LS31 is dogs and handlers, for example (an essential for a good raid!); while LS34 and 35 are border lancers, with bonnets or helmets, and LS36 some very good mounted pistoliers. While LS32 is an English command group of a March warden and escort, LS33 is the Scots equivalent. These small wars were also fought on foot, and most raids were of mixed groups of men, so plenty of options in the same series. If you need a gun, and many of the better type of fortifications had them, then go to the Peter Pig range if

[www.peterpig.co.uk](http://www.peterpig.co.uk)

In the English Civil Wars range 20, then pack 43 is two very light guns, and pack 41 is six frame guns, rather attractive the latter, crews are there too, but for the earlier encounters, ERM's figures lend to easy conversion. In the Pig range, you'll also find packs 24 and 32 and 39 for mounted and foot late period moss-troopers. Any Royal troops hunting them will be found in this list too, of course.

Incidentally, one thing you will need is a supply of scale cattle and sheep, the frequent objects of these raids. Any lineside HO/OO model railway range will provide them in quantity.

Overall, an excellent title, one that's been around now for nearly 20 years, and still a neglected but interesting frontier to fight over, as it has been since Roman times.

10 out of 10.

