

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Darnick

Designation Record and Summary Report

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields is a list of nationally important battlefields in Scotland. A battlefield is of national importance if it makes a contribution to the understanding of the archaeology and history of the nation as a whole, or has the potential to do so, or holds a particularly significant place in the national consciousness. For a battlefield to be included in the Inventory, it must be considered to be of national importance either for its association with key historical events or figures; or for the physical remains and/or archaeological potential it contains; or for its landscape context. In addition, it must be possible to define the site on a modern map with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

The aim of the Inventory is to raise awareness of the significance of these nationally important battlefield sites and to assist in their protection and management for the future. Inventory battlefields are a material consideration in the planning process. The Inventory is also a major resource for enhancing the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of historic battlefields, for promoting education and stimulating further research, and for developing their potential as attractions for visitors.

Designation Record and Summary Report Contents

Name	Inventory Boundary
Alternative Name(s)	Historical Background to the Battle
Date of Battle	Events and Participants
Local Authority	Battlefield Landscape
NGR Centred	Archaeological and Physical
Date of Addition to Inventory	Remains and Potential
Date of Last Update	Cultural Association
Overview and Statement of Significance	Select Bibliography

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

DARNICK

Alternative Names: Melrose; Skirmish Hill; Skirmish Field

29 July 1526

Local Authority: Scottish Borders

NGR centred: NT 533 346

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 Dec 2012

Date of last update: N/A

Overview and Statement of Significance

The Battle of Melrose was fought between Archibald Douglas, 6th Earl of Angus, supported by the Kerrs and Maxwells, and Walter Scott of Buccleuch supported by the Elliots. The Earl of Angus had secured guardianship of the young King James V in what was supposed to be a three monthly arrangement where James would be cared for by each of the four members of the Council of Regency; however, having taken James into his care, Angus refused to hand him on to the Earl of Arran whose turn was next. After over a year with Angus and having grown weary of what amounted to his informal imprisonment, James sent a message to Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch, pleading for him to launch an attempt to secure his liberty. After a visit to Jedburgh to participate in a Justice ayre, the king had begun his journey towards Edinburgh, escorted by Angus and his men, when they were intercepted by a large body of reivers led by Scott of Buccleuch at Melrose. Angus' troop, predominantly Kerrs, stood its ground and was able to drive off its attackers, inflicting relatively heavy losses.

The Battle of Darnick is significant against the backdrop of political turmoil in Scotland following the death of James IV. It comes at the point where James V is attempting to free himself from the control of Angus by any means necessary, Darnick being the first of two battles fought in 1526 for this aim. The King himself likely witnessed the battle from nearby Darnick Tower. Although only a small battle in terms of combatant numbers, it also showed Angus that his enemies were growing, and that other members of the nobility were now an active threat to him. Finally, the battle is also significant as an example of border warfare and politics in the period. Both armies consisted mainly of border reivers and the conflict undoubtedly also had some basis in the complex system of feuds and alliances that characterised relationships between border families at this time. As such, Darnick presents an opportunity to uncover physical evidence of border warfare at the time and to place it in the wider context of 16th century warfare.

Inventory Boundary

The Inventory boundary defines the area in which the main events of the battle are considered to have taken place (landscape context) and where associated physical remains and archaeological evidence occur or may be expected (specific qualities). The landscape context is described under

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

battlefield landscape: it encompasses areas of fighting, key movements of troops across the landscape and other important locations, such as the positions of camps or vantage points. Although the landscape has changed since the time of the battle, key characteristics of the terrain at the time of the battle can normally still be identified, enabling events to be more fully understood and interpreted in their landscape context. Specific qualities are described under *physical remains and potential*: these include landscape features that played a significant role in the battle, other physical remains, such as enclosures or built structures, and areas of known or potential archaeological evidence.

The Inventory boundary for the Battle of Darnick is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- The field known as Skirmish Field that lies between the Tweed and Darnick Tower.
- Darnick Tower, where James V was positioned for safety, and from where he likely watched the battle.
- Skirmish Hill, where the Hydropathic Hotel was built and which is now the Waverley Castle Hotel.
- Land to the east of Darnick, through which Buccleuch's men advanced from the Eildon Hills to meet Angus.
- Land to the south-west of Darnick, the route which Buccleuch's men fled, pursued by Angus' forces.

Historical Background to the Battle

Scott of Buccleuch intercepted Angus and James V at Darnick, just west of Melrose, leading perhaps as many as 1000 men down from Hellidon Hill (now known as the Eildon Hills). Angus charged Buccleuch's men but they held their ground. The result seemed in doubt until Lord Hume arrived with 80 more Kerrs. The reinforcements swung the battle in Angus' favour and the Scotts and Elliots began to fall back and run. There was a brief pursuit, and in the course of this Andrew Kerr of Cessford was killed by one of the Elliots in Buccleuch's force.

Events & Participants

Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus, was one of the most powerful Scottish nobles of the sixteenth century. He first came to prominence on 6 August 1514 when he married Margaret, the Dowager Queen, widow of James IV, mother of James V and elder sister of Henry VIII of England. The marriage was instrumental in breaking the fragile peace in Scotland as Margaret's regency was to last until James V came of age or she re-married. She had been holding a delicate balance between the pro-French and pro-English factions at Court, but her marriage to Angus gave impetus to the pro-French group to push her out and install the Duke of Albany as regent. She eventually fled to England, leaving Angus in Scotland, where he promptly took a mistress and started spending Margaret's money. The ensuing enmity between the couple coloured Scottish politics for years to come. Angus was

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

charged with high treason by the Duke of Albany, and was sent as a prisoner to France in 1522. He escaped to London in 1524 and then returned to Scotland with the support of Henry VIII. In 1524, Margaret made an alliance with the Earl of Arran and Angus had to take refuge in his ancestral home of Tantallon Castle. However, with the influence of Henry VIII from south of the border, Angus was able to force his way back into power and was appointed to the Council of Regency, which looked after the King in rotation despite Margaret's declaration in 1524 of his majority. Angus was the first of the council to have physical custody of the King, but refused to hand him over at the end of his three month period. He imposed himself as the Chancellor of Scotland, filled all positions of authority with Douglas family members and supporters and kept the young King effectively a prisoner. The Battles of Darnick and Linlithgow Bridge were both attempts to wrest control of the King from Angus. Despite his victory in both battles, Angus would only retain his control for another two years. James V escaped his custody in 1528 and began to rule on his own account, with his first order of business the removal of Angus, who had retreated to Tantallon again. Despite considerable effort on the part of James, Angus held out until 1529 when he was able to escape to England under a treaty between James and Henry VIII. Angus remained in England until James' death in 1542, at which point he returned on a mission from Henry to arrange a marriage between the infant Mary Queen of Scots and the future Edward VI. However, in 1544 he was in open conflict with the Earl of Arran, son of his ally in 1526, and imprisoned briefly. The English Rough Wooing (1543-1550), which attempted to coerce the Scots into accepting the marriage between Mary and Edward, hit Douglas lands hard and caused Angus to settle with Arran and the two fought together at the Scottish victory of Ancrum Moor and the defeat at Pinkie in 1547. He eventually died in 1557.

Walter Scott, Lord of Buccleuch (also known as Wicked Wat) was from a powerful Border reiver family. Scott was knighted on the field of the Battle of Flodden by James V's father, James IV, on 9 September 1513 and appointed Baillie of the lands of Melrose Abbey in 1519, a position that became hereditary thereafter. In 1524, he was imprisoned by Margaret in a dispute over lands she held in Ettrick Forest. He escaped and joined the party of Angus and Lennox, who were allied against Margaret at this point. In May 1526, he was given a letter of pardon under the Privy Seal for an attempt to take Arran prisoner, which he was presumably doing on behalf of Angus and Lennox. He was then contacted by James, who asked him to bring an army to release him from Angus' control. It is not clear why James thought this was wise, but it may have been a suggestion from Lennox, to whom James was now connected by a secret pact. After Buccleuch's attempt to free James failed he was exiled under a penalty of £10,000 for his participation in the incident; however, he was formally pardoned in February 1528 under the Great Seal and then by an Act of Parliament in September of that year. Buccleuch led raids into England in subsequent years, and fought alongside Angus and Arran in the battles of Ancrum Moor and Pinkie during the Rough Wooing. However, he was eventually killed in the street in Edinburgh in 1552 by a group of Kerrs taking revenge for the death of Andrew Kerr of Cessford in the aftermath of Darnick.

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

Battlefield Landscape

A range of historical sources and place-name evidence allows the site of the battle to be confidently located in the vicinity of Darnick village, to the west of Melrose itself. This area mostly comprises relatively flat land on the south bank of the River Tweed. However, several sources mention Hellidon Hill or Halidenhill or Helydon Hill, a group of three hills nowadays known as the Eildon Hills, that lie to the south-east of Darnick and rise steeply above the Tweed Valley.

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

There is a reasonable prospect of archaeological remains surviving from the battle. The armour, clothing and weaponry would all result in the deposition of artefacts on the battlefield. As the action was primarily a cavalry battle, there would also have been a concentration of lost horseshoes across the areas of combat; there is also a reasonable likelihood of pieces of horse tack. However, much of this material will have been made of iron, and it is possible that soil conditions will not have been conducive to the survival of ferrous objects. There are currently no artefacts known from the area of the battlefield that might be associated with the fighting. There is no record of eighteenth or nineteenth century discoveries of bones or weapons in the area.

Cultural Association

Several places in the vicinity of the battle are thought to have been named after the engagement, including Skirmish Hill, Skirmish Field, Charge Law Plantation and Turn-again (Milne 1743; Name Book 1859), although only Skirmish Field and Charge Law Plantation have survived to modern maps. This battle is commemorated in the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map; however, does not appear in any of the later editions, including the current version.

Given its reiver participants, it is no surprise that the battle is commemorated in poems, songs and pieces of music. The killing of Cessford, which began the long running feud between the Scotts and Kerrs was commemorated in a poem written by Sir Walter Scott in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel: A Poem* (1807: 21).

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Inventory of Historic Battlefields

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The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Features

Darnick

29 July 1526

Local Authority: Scottish Borders

