

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Dunbar I

Designation Record

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.

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Alternative Name(s)	Date of Last Update
Date of Battle	Overview and Statement of
Local Authority	Significance
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DUNBAR I

Alternative Names: None

27 April 1296

Local Authority: East Lothian

NGR centred: NT 695 765

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 December 2012

Date of last update: N/A

Overview and Statement of Significance

The first Battle of Dunbar is significant as the first major battle of the First Scottish War of Independence. The decisive English victory effectively destroys any organised resistance within Scotland to Edward I, although the Scots would not remain peaceful for long, and gives him effective control of the country, albeit briefly. It is also the only major battle fought on behalf of John Balliol as King, prior to his capture and forced abdication by Edward, although his supporters continued the fight in his name for many years after this.

Dunbar I was the first battle of the First Scottish Wars of Independence, in which Scotland and England engaged in a frequently violent struggle for control of the country over a period of over 30 years. Hostilities commenced in March 1296 when Edward I captured the Scottish border town of Berwick and then commenced the siege of Dunbar Castle in order to expand his footprint further north. This English incursion was itself a response to an attack on Carlisle Castle by the Scots under John Comyn. The siege at Dunbar was over-seen by John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, who also took command on the field during the battle.

The battle took place several miles to the south west of the castle when a Scottish force, under Comyn, was intercepted by the English before they could intervene on the siege. The well-equipped English army secured a decisive victory over the Scots, the mounted knights in particular proving themselves to be more than a match to their Scottish counterparts. A large number of leading Scottish nobles were taken prisoner and their absence in coming encounters was to be keenly felt by the Scots.

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 *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

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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 Dunbar I is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- The area to the north of the Spott Burn, the Spott Burn to the south of Spott village and the defile through which it runs, where some of the fighting may have taken place .
- The area of flat ground to the south of the Spott Burn, a likely location for fighting.
- The summit of Brunt Hill where the Scots may have arrayed prior to their advance onto the low ground.
- The gentle slope of the addle to the west of Brunt Hill summit, the likely location of the Scots descent onto the low ground.
- The area around Highside Hill, through which the Scots army advanced into position on Brunt Hill.

