

# The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## The Battle of Dunkeld

### 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.

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# Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## DUNKELD

Alternative Names:

21 August 1689

Local Authority: Perth and Kinross

NGR centred: NO 003 426

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 December 2012

Date of last update: N/A

## Overview and Statement of Significance

The first Jacobite Rising occurred in 1689, in the wake of the ousting of the Stuart King, James VII and II and his replacement by William of Orange in the so-called Glorious Revolution. The Jacobites (from the Latin for James) were led by Viscount Dundee, John Graham of Claverhouse and won a decisive early victory at the Battle of Killiecrankie on 17 July 1689, although Dundee was killed in the battle. It was followed a month later by the Battle of Dunkeld, fought on 21 August 1689.

Dunkeld was an urban battle, with the town held by a garrison of Government troops from the Cameronian Regiment under Lieutenant-Colonel William Cleland's command. After a long and bitter struggle, which saw much of the town burned to the ground, the Jacobites withdrew, leaving the Government force the surprised victors.

Dunkeld is an incredibly significant battle in the history of 17<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, occurring at a time when King William was yet to wholly solidify his position on the throne and on the back of a significant Jacobite victory at Killiecrankie. Had the Jacobites won at Dunkeld, the path would have been open to them to advance on a weakly defended and strongly Jacobite Perth and subsequently continue to Stirling, a situation for which the Privy Council had already made preparations to flee should it occur and which would have been a great boost to the Jacobite cause. The Cameronian's unyielding defence of the town prevented the Jacobites advancing any further south and turned the tide of a Rising which had thus far gone badly for the Government into one of increasing difficulty for the Jacobites, whose numbers dwindle drastically after Dunkeld and who essentially cease to present the threat they had after Killiecrankie, confined to skirmishing and minor actions in the Highlands until finally being utterly dispersed at Cromdale in May 1690.

## 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

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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 Dunkeld is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- The north bank of the River Tay, stretching to the east and west of the town to accommodate the routes of the Jacobite advances to attack and the fighting which took place as they did.
- The level ground to the north of the Cathedral, much of which was occupied by Dunkeld House and elements of the town in 1689.
- The hills to the north of the town, including Gallow Hill which provided an important vantage point for the Jacobites and was the location of their cannon.
- Hills to the west of the town, which again provided important vantage points for the Jacobites as they advanced.
- Ground to the east and north-east including Shiochies Hill, the location of some of the early stages of the battle prior to the Cameronians withdrawal into the town.

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## Historical Background to the Battle

With their victory at the Battle of Killiecrankie on 27 July 1689 tempered by the loss of John Graham of Claverhouse, the newly appointed Jacobite commander, Alexander Cannon, led his army through Braemar, pursued by General Mackay and a mounted column of Government troops. The Jacobites finally evaded this pursuit when they doubled back into the hills at Kincardine o' Neil, where Mackay was unwilling to follow. The Jacobites then advanced south toward Dunkeld.

The town of Dunkeld was defended by the Cameronians, recently raised from the ranks of the Covenanters. As a regiment they had yet to be blooded and were commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel William Cleland, who had been involved in both the battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Bridge in 1679. Cannon ordered the Jacobite army into the assault on the town of Dunkeld on the morning of 21 August 1689.

The engagement, which was to involve brutal street and house to house fighting was to rage for several hours and saw the Cameronian defenders gradually pushed back toward the cathedral in the face of a Jacobite assault on all side. Cleland was killed early on in the battle, though it is said that he survived long enough to make sure that he did not expire within sight of his men. By the end of the battle most of the buildings in the town were on fire and both sides were running extremely low on ammunition. For reasons which remain obscure the still stronger Jacobites eventually withdrew from the action, leaving the all but beaten Government troops victorious.

## Events & Participants

Fighting under the command of Lt. Col. William Cleland, a veteran of Drumclog and Bothwell Brig, a garrison of ex-Covenanters defended Dunkeld (derived from the Gaelic *Dun Chailleainn*, Fort of the Caledonians), 15 miles to the north of Perth, on behalf of the Government against a group of Jacobites led by Colonel Alexander Cannon, testifying to a decisive shift in the Scottish political climate after the Glorious Revolution, or the Revolution of 1688. This was a defining period in Scottish history as a group of English parliamentarians from the Whig party of opposition, unwilling to accept James VII's newborn Roman Catholic son, James, as heir to the English throne, invited William of Orange to take the throne in his stead, thereby terminating the Stuart dynasty. Determined to return James VII and his later House of Stuart descendents to the throne, John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, raised an army, the so-called Jacobites (after the Latin for James, *Jacobus*) and launched the first of a series of rebellions known as the Jacobite Risings.

Lt. Col. William Cleland was the commander of the Cameronian regiment deployed to Dunkeld in August 1689. By the time of Dunkeld he was an experienced combatant, although General Mackay considered Cleland to be:

“...a sensible, resolute man though not much of a souldier.”

He had been present at Drumclog in 1679, and indeed can claim much of the credit for the victory there. At one point during the battle Cleland had hold of

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John Graham of Claverhouse's own bridle, and Graham was lucky to avoid being killed when Cleland slipped, and this started a lasting animosity between them until their deaths in 1689. Cleland also served as a captain in the subsequent defeat at Bothwell Bridge, after which he was forced into exile on the continent. He served as a spy for both the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685 and the arrival of William in 1688. Outside of his military life, he studied both medicine and law during his exile in the Netherlands, with his legal thesis addressing legal abuses against the Covenanters published at Utrecht in 1684, and was also a poet, with a collection of his works published posthumously in 1697.

Major James Henderson was second in command of the Covenanter regiment at Dunkeld, and had more military experience than Cleland. He too had been present at Bothwell Bridge and spent time in exile after the battle, undertaking military service on the continent before serving as a major under Argyll in the Monmouth Rebellion of 1685.

Captain George Monroe was the commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Company of the Cameronians at Dunkeld, and following the loss of both Cleland and Henderson early in the battle he took overall command of the ultimately successful defence of the town.

Lord Cardross was another of the Covenanter commanders. He had previously been imprisoned for his beliefs, before he was banished to the Carolinas with Cleland's brother-in-law John Steel. He subsequently continued his exile in the Netherlands, from where he returned with William in 1688.

Colonel Alexander Cannon was the commander of the Jacobite army. He had assumed command following the death of John Graham of Claverhouse at the battle of Killiecrankie. However, he was far from Claverhouse's equal as a commander, with defeat at Dunkeld by the heavily outnumbered Cameronian's being probably the most prominent event of his tenure. Over the winter the numbers of his force dwindled and he was replaced as commander of the Jacobite army in April 1690 by Major-General Thomas Buchan.

## **Battlefield Landscape**

Dunkeld is a highly unusual Scottish battle because it took place in an urban environment, a form of combat which was generally avoided in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most of the town was burned to the ground during the battle, with only three houses reportedly left standing. When the town was rebuilt the area to the north of the cathedral, which had been occupied by Scots Row - a street which integrated Dunkeld House - was left open, so as to provide an open aspect between the house and the cathedral. Further buildings associated with the cathedral were found to the south, between the river and the cathedral itself, and this area also exists as open ground today.

### ***Location***

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Dunkeld sits on the northern bank of the River Tay, overlooked by a circle of hills to the north, including Gallows Hill, with lower hills, including Schiochies Hill, closer to the town. The town contained a main street running westward to the Cross and then skirting the southern side of the cathedral (Canon's Houses). Another street (Scots Raw) branched north-westward from the Cross, creating a 'Y' shaped street plan. This street integrated Dunkeld House, though this was a free standing structure. Built in 1679 for the Marquess of Atholl, Dunkeld House was an impressive mansion designed by the architect Sir William Bruce. Atholl had been buying up plots of land around this mansion for some years prior to the Battle of Dunkeld, including part of Scots Raw and another group of dwellings on the south-west boundary of the town (Hopkins 1986, 183). After the town was destroyed in the Battle of Dunkeld its location was altered, allowing the Marquess an uninterrupted view of the Cathedral.

### **Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential**

Given that the battle occurred in a built up area, and resulted in the destruction of buildings in an area which, in places at least, has not been redeveloped, it is probable that archaeological evidence remains. Indeed, impact scars from musket fire are visible on the eastern wall of the Cathedral.

According to Blackader's diary, when the Jacobite army fled the town of Dunkeld after their defeat at the hands of the Cameronians, they left "a number of their dead carcasses behind them" (Crichton 1824, 48), though it is likely these dead would have been buried thereafter. The town, which previously lay around the Cathedral, was almost completely destroyed in the battle and a new town was built to the east, a rather convenient location which gave the Duke of Atholl a clear line of sight to the Cathedral from his house. The Cathedral is now semi-ruined and many of the houses are owned by the National Trust for Scotland which rescued them from demolition in 1953 and has restored and preserved the centre of the town. The area occupied by the town at the time of the battle is now an open field and a recent geophysical survey by Glasgow University (Kellog and Jones 2003) revealed that despite intensive foundation robbing there do seem to be traces of the settlement surviving as archaeological features beneath the surface.

### **Cultural Association**

The preferred Jacobite tactic of firing one round then charging with swords was unsuccessful in the confined streets of Dunkeld town and the bodies of fallen men hindered the advance. The shock of this plus the requirement to take cover behind walls, a fighting style counter to the warrior virtues held dear by many Highlanders, prompted the Glencoe poet to lament:

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“They were not accustomed to stand against a wall for protection, as was done at Dunkeld. The stalwart young men fell..... felled by bullets from cowherds” (Maclean 1939, 316).

### Select Bibliography

Hopkins, P. 1986. *Glencoe and the End of the Highland War*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press

McLean, J. 1857. *Dunkeld: Its Straths and Glens*. Edinburgh: A. McLean & Son

*Stevenson, D. 1942. Alasdair MacColla and the Highland Problem in the Seventeenth Century. Edinburgh: Donald*

# The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Features

Dunkeld

21 August 1689

Local Authority: Perth and Kinross

301000

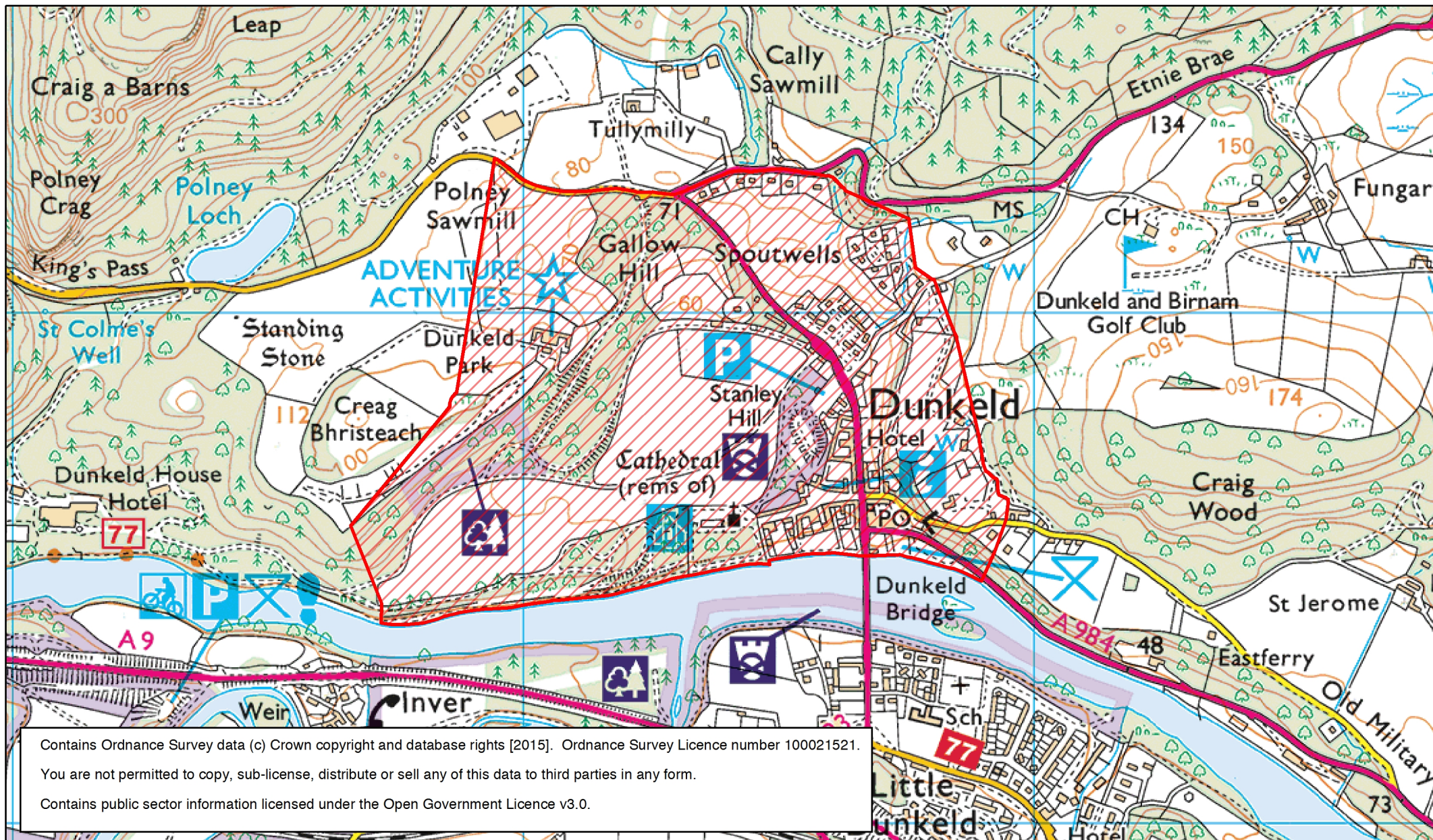
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