The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Inverkeithing

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

INVERKEITHING II

Alternative Names: None

20 July 1651

Local Authority: Fife

NGR centred: NT 125 819

Date of Addition to Inventory: 30 November 2011

Date of last update: 14 December 2012

Overview and Statement of Significance

The second battle of Inverkeithing is significant as the final battle within Scotland of the period of destructive conflict within the British Isles known as the Wars of the Three Kingdoms and brings Scotland within the complete control of the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell.

The proclamation of Charles II as the new king by the Scottish Parliament on 6 February 1649 set England and Scotland on a collision course. Cromwell invaded Scotland in July 1650; after a period of unproductive manoeuvring, Cromwell inflicted a heavy defeat on the Scottish army under David Leslie at Dunbar on 3 September 1650. However, Cromwell was still blocked by Leslie and unable to advance further into Scotland.

Cromwell realised that Fife was the key to outflanking Leslie, and prepared for a sea-borne assault on the Fife coast at North Queensferry. On the night of 16/17 July 1651, Colonel Overton led around 2,000 men to a landing on the north shore of the Forth, possibly at Inverkeithing Bay or Port Laing; by 20 July, the Parliamentarian force numbered around 4,500 men and was dug in on the Ferry Hills looking north towards roughly the same number of Scots at Castland Hill.

On hearing a report of Scottish reinforcements coming from Stirling, the Parliamentarians attacked. After a cavalry action that saw losses on both sides, the Scottish infantry retreated north towards Pitreavie Castle, with the fighting raging all the way there. At Pitreavie, the infantry made a final stand but were overwhelmed by the more experienced Parliamentarians who had the additional advantage of cavalry. The Scots took heavy losses, including many prisoners. This was the last major battle of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms in Scotland, and from 1652 Scotland was wholly under the control of the Protectorate.

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 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 Inverkeithing II is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- The possible landing points for the Parliamentarian beachhead in or near North Queensferry.
- The Ferry Hills where the Parliamentarian camp lay, together with field fortifications.
- Whinny Hill and Castland Hill where the initial Scottish deployment was made.
- The area north of Castland Hill where the fighting retreat took place.
- Pitreavie Castle where the Macleans made their last stand.
- The fields between the railway and the A823 where the last and bloodiest part of the battle took place.
- The land between the two areas has been specifically excluded, as very little action of the fighting retreat appears to have occurred within this area, becoming far more intense as the armies approached Pitreavie Castle to the north.

Historical Background to the Battle

Colonel Overton's force consisted of 1,600 foot plus four troops of cavalry. The landing took place on the peninsula at Queen's Ferry on the night of 16/17 July, with, according to Cromwell, the loss of only six men. The Scots had a garrison nearby at Burntisland and the alarm was quickly sent to Stirling; Sir John Browne and Major General James Holbourne were despatched with their brigades of Cavalry and infantry.

The two armies drew up facing each other, with the English dug in on the Ferry Hills and the Scots on the lower slopes of Castland Hill, with their right anchored on Whinney Hill and their left on the Hill of Selvege or Muckle Hill, a little to the south of Inverkeithing. Some of the Scots may have been dug in, as the English commander Lambert spoke afterwards of burying some of the Scots dead in their own trenches. Holbourne was reluctant to assault the English position with just one infantry brigade, and Lambert did not intend to move until all his troops had landed. When the cavalry joined Lambert, the outnumbered Holbourne decided to withdraw.

Lambert reported that Holbourne began to wheel as if to march away or take advantage of a steep mountain (Castland Hill). Lambert immediately sent the cavalry forward to engage the Scots rearguard, causing Holbourne to halt and draw up his troops in order of battle. In Lambert's account, the English probably outnumbered the Scots by at least five or six hundred but the Scots had the advantage of the ground, with the English horse on the left being on particularly bad ground, facing a pass lined by musketeers.

Once the deployments had been made, nothing happened for an hour and a half, with each side expecting to be attacked by the other. The trigger for action was a report from Cromwell that Scots reinforcements were marching from Stirling. As the English attacked, Browne on the Scots right led a cavalry charge using the slope and the Scots lancers broke the English cavalry opposite, who were probably inexperienced troopers. However, the English counter-attacked, routing the Scottish cavalry and capturing Browne himself. On the left, the moss troopers were initially successful, but lack of discipline began to tell and they, in turn, were routed.

With the rout of the Scots cavalry the battle was effectively over, with relatively little serious fighting at the initial battle lines. It seems the Scots cavalry either covered the retreat of the infantry, or that Holbourne withdrew the infantry leaving the cavalry to fight on alone. The pursuit of the defeated was protracted and bloody. Holbourne's experienced troops and Gray's regiment both seem to have escaped intact, although it is said that the Pinkerton Burn ran red with blood for three days, but the Highlanders were almost wiped out after a four hour running battle culminating in a stand on the slopes around Pitreavie Castle. Duart and his men turned to fight, the English accounts said that all but thirty-five out of 800 Highlanders were killed, though Balfour records that the Scots lost 800 in total of whom 100 were Duart's men.

Events & Participants

The Parliamentarian army was commanded by Major-General John Lambert. Lambert had fought for Parliament throughout the First English Civil War. He was at Marston Moor and later at Preston as Cromwell's second-in-command. In 1651, after Inverkeithing, he was with Cromwell at Worcester, the battle that ended Scotland's role in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. He was a commissioner for Scotland's affairs and appointed briefly as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; he took a role of leading military interests in the Protectorate, and led an army to meet Monck after Richard Cromwell's resignation; Monck brought about the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, and Lambert ended his days in prison as a traitor to the Crown.

The Scots infantry was commanded by Major General James Holbourne and the Scots cavalry by Sir John Browne. Holbourne fought against the Crown throughout the First English Civil War as an infantry commander. In 1645, he was offered a commission in the New Model Army but declined. He was one of the three man deputation from the Committee of Estates who opened unsuccessful negotiations with Cromwell in 1648 about the fate of the king and the future relationship between the two parliaments. In 1650, he was the commander of the escort that took the captive Marquis of Montrose from Ardvreck Castle to Edinburgh, where Montrose was executed. Holbourne was also part of Leslie's army at Dunbar later that year, and like him was able to escape to Stirling. From here, he was sent to engage the English landing at Inverkeithing Bay, commanding the cavalry on this occasion, and Holbourne once again was able to escape the battlefield.

Sir John Brown of Fordell was an experienced cavalry commander, who had driven a Royalist army under Lord Digby and Sir Marmaduke Langdale back into England in a small engagement known as the Battle of Annan Moor in late October 1645. They had been trying to force a passage north to link up with Montrose, although by that stage he had already been forced to flee after his defeat at Philiphaugh.

Sir Hector Maclean of Duart, the eighteenth clan chief of Clan Maclean and second Baronet of Morvern, was in command of the Highland soldiers during the battle. He and his father had fought for Montrose in 1645, and Maclean now found himself allied with his former enemies against Cromwell. He was killed in the battle, and one of the two slogans (war cries) of the Macleans dates from the battle: *Fear eile airson Eachuinn!*. This is a reference to seven brothers who are supposed to have shouted this, which translates as "Another for Hector", as each in turn stepped forward to protect their clan chief. All seven of the brothers were killed, and Hector died with them near Pitreavie Castle.

Battlefield Landscape

The landscape around Inverkeithing and Rosyth has been heavily developed since 1651, with quarrying, land reclamation, linear transport and communication routes, urban expansion and enterprise development all impacting on the landscape. Despite this, large areas of the battlefield survive. The best preserved area is the location of the Parliamentarian camp

in the Ferry Hills, where the only development has been related to radio masts. The defences for the position may well survive as buried features on and around the top of the hill. The location of the Scottish position opposite the Parliamentarian camp on the slope of Whinny Hill below Castland Hill is now arable land with woodland on the upper slope. It has been partially destroyed by the A90 and the B980, but the location of the initial fighting seems to be largely intact.

The bulk of the fighting retreat to Pitreavie Castle now lies under the town of Rosyth, while the location of the last stand of the Macleans has been partially swallowed in the development of the Carnegie Campus and enterprise development around Pitreavie Castle. However, much of the development around the castle has been relatively low density, and areas survive that appear to be relatively undisturbed. There is an area of arable lying between the railway line and the A823 around 300m south of Pitreavie Castle that is relatively undisturbed and which is likely to have been the scene of considerable fighting in the later stages of the battle; it is also likely to be where the majority of the killing took place.

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

Inverkeithing has a high potential for archaeological remains, including evidence of the entrenchments created by the English Parliamentarians as they established their beachhead on the peninsula. It is likely that there will be evidence of the camp within the area of undeveloped hillside on the Ferry Hills. There is also a high possibility of archaeological remains deposited by the camp itself within the entrenchments. It is also possible that there are Scottish entrenchments on the slopes opposite, although no surface indication of such trenches has been recorded. Lambert's account states that some of the Scottish dead were buried in their trenches, although conceivable this might refer to cultivation trenches that can be seen elsewhere in the vicinity. In addition, Cromwell's letter to Speaker Lenthall on 21 July 1651 reported that he considered the Scottish 'fortification' was too much for Overton's initial landing force to assault and that reinforcements would be required. A reasonable interpretation of this is that the Scots were entrenched on Whinney Hill. However, no surface indication of such trenches has been recorded.

Pitreavie Castle stands on the north side of Rosyth, and is now in the middle of an area of considerable development. In 1851, several skeletons were found with a leather bag containing coins of Charles I close to the castle (NS18SW 15; NS 1165 8481); these are presumed to have been victims of the battle. There is also a substantial Second World War military landscape around the castle.

The battle involved musketry, cavalry, pikes, swords and even archery on the Scottish side, with considerable hand to hand fighting; this is particularly true of the area around Pitreavie Castle where most of the Scots casualties would have been inflicted. This means that there is a reasonable probability of recovering artefacts from the battle and being able to determine some of the

choreography of the fighting. There will have been musket balls, some arrows and the hand to hand fighting will have caused personal items such as buckles, buttons etc to have been lost. There is a mention in the account of the Macleans of artillery fire from the summit of Ferry Hill into the Scottish lines, which would mean that shot and shrapnel may be present, but the same account appears not to know about the retreat on Pitreavie Castle and so should be treated with care (Maclean 1899: 180).

There is a chance of encountering human remains, particularly if the English version of the casualty figures is accepted. However, many of the Scottish infantry were local levies from Inverkeithing and Dunfermline, and it is reasonably likely that they will have been recovered by their families or at the very least given proper burial. The Maclean dead, however, are more likely to have been buried in a mass grave.

Cultural Association

The Battle of Inverkeithing, despite its great historical significance, has left very little trace in popular culture. There appear to be no songs or pipe tunes about the battle, and the only real trace is the birth of the Maclean slogan '*Fear eile airson Eachuinn!*', relating to the slaughter of Macleans around Pitreavie Castle.

There is a small cairn with a plaque to the Macleans in both English and Gaelic, which stands a little to the east of the castle at NS 1184 8489. There is also an interpretation board with an account of the battle at this cairn. This is the only commemoration and interpretation of the battlefield, which is surprisingly little known considering the importance of the battle in the last stages of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

Select Bibliography

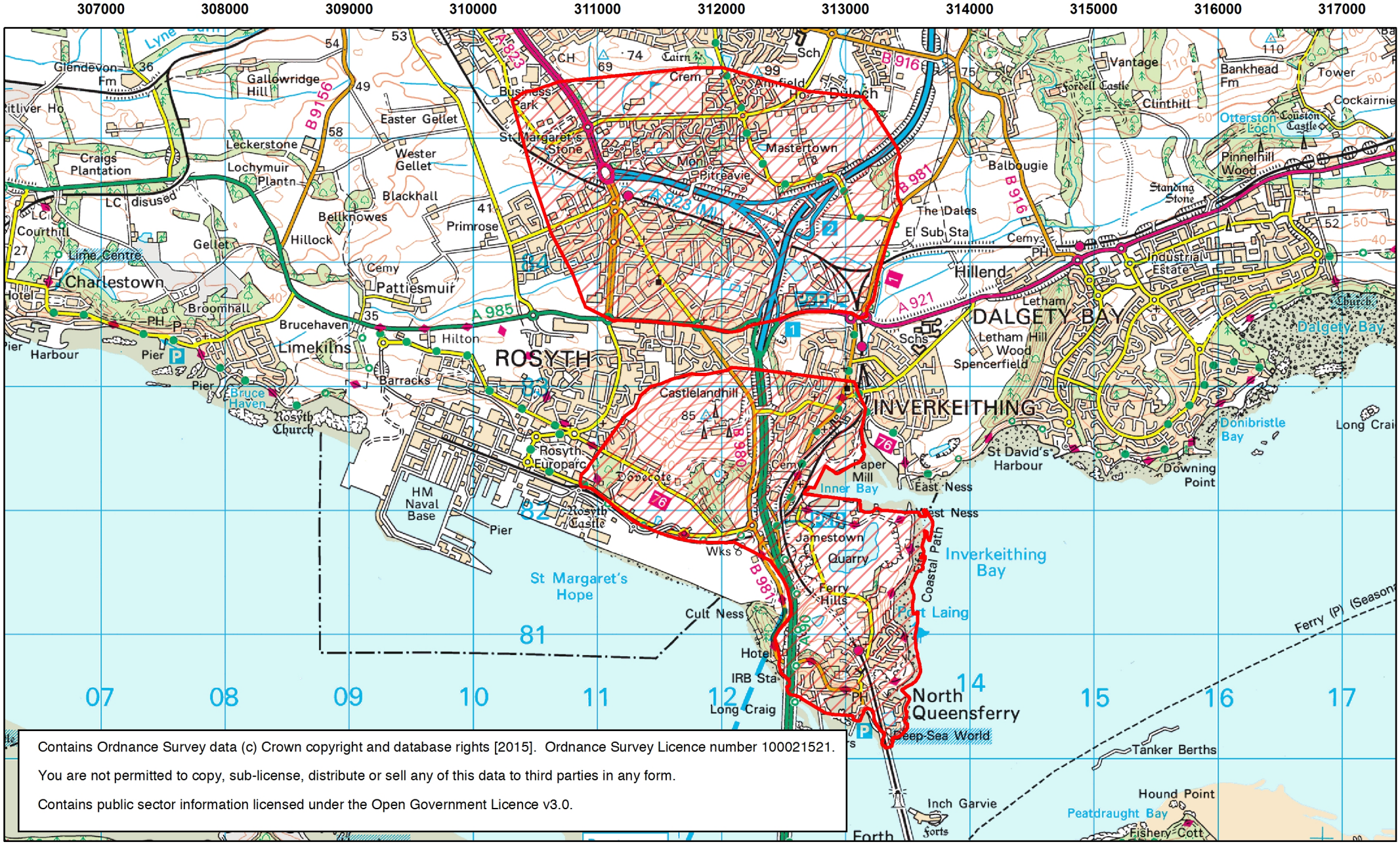
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The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary

Inverkeithing II 20 July 1651 Local Authority: Fife



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