The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Sauchieburn

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

SAUCHIEBURN

Alternative Names: Sauchie

11 June 1488

Local Authority: Stirling

NGR centred: NS 803 896

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 December 2012

Date of last update: N/A

Overview and Statement of Significance

In 1488 a number of disaffected Scottish nobles rose against James III, with his son, James, Duke of Rothesay, who was only 15, as their nominal leader. The two sides met in battle just south of Stirling and the rebels prevailed. James III fled, and tradition has it that he was murdered by a priest as he lay injured in a mill after a fall from his horse. Neither the location nor the precise circumstances of James III death are clear, however with his death his son became James IV of Scotland.

The battle is significant as a new King comes to the throne of Scotland as a direct result of the conflict. It also one of the few battles where a reigning King of Scotland is killed as a result of the battle, although James III does not appear to have died in the battle itself but in his attempt to escape.

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

- Patches of surviving woodland, including Bar Wood, Auchenbowie Wood, Pleanbank Wood, and the surrounding areas, that may indicate the original extent of the Torwood.
- The Bannock Burn, including the ford at which James III is traditionally said to have been murdered.

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- The area of Bannockburn, Muiraleside, Pirnhall and Croftside, where much of the fighting may have occurred.
- The line of the Roman Road, along with the current A872 and M9, as the likeliest approach routes of the rebel lord's army.
- The area high ground around Coal Wynd, to the south of the Bannock Burn, where James III's army may have initially deployed.

Historical Background to the Battle

James III is said to have had up to 30,000 men, including Highland archers, with a mixture of infantry and cavalry; this seems an unusually high number for the period and there is only one source that gives any numbers. Opposing him was a rebel army of up to 18,000 men (again with the caveat that the numbers are probably subsantially overstated) under Angus, Hepburn and Hume (known as the Lords), including a large contingent from Dumfries & Galloway. The accounts suggest that the main part of the rebel army was mounted. It was nominally led by James' son, the future James IV.

The two armies met at a point two miles from Stirling and a mile from Bannockburn, north of Torwood. The precise location is unknown but the general location is relatively clear. The fighting seems to have started with a charge by the Lords' army that was driven back by archery, but a second assault by the Annandale men caused James III to flee the battlefield as it seemed as though they would break through. Despite his departure, the fighting continued for some time, although there seem to have been few casualties on either side. Eventually the Royalist army withdrew, possibly due to the rumour of James III's death spreading among the army, and the Lords were left as the victors. The circumstances of James' death are unclear, and it took some time to establish with certainty that the king had been killed. As a result of his guilt over the death of his father, James IV allegedly wore a heavy chain around his waist as penance for the rest of his life.

Events & Participants

James III was an unpopular king for most of his reign, which lasted from 1460 to 1488. Amongst other things, his preference for his own favourites, many of them commoners, alienated many of the nobility and members of his own family. His early desire for an alliance with England also contributed to this unpopularity; despite the fact that his nobles were extremely reluctant and the English were suspicious of his motives, James insisted on trying to get an alliance. In 1482, he lost Berwick to the invading English, with whom his brother Alexander had allied himself; when he raised an army, again promoting his favourites, many of the nobility turned against him in open rebellion. James's favourites were murdered and he was imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. Even after this he continued to seek an alliance with England, continued to promote his favourites and became estranged from his wife and eldest son, James. The fact that James IV allegedly mistook Captain Wood for his father after the battle indicates the lack of relationship between the two James. It is not clear to what extent the young James, later James IV,

was an active participant against his father or simply a pawn used by the rebel nobles to legitimise their rebellion.

James IV would become known as a 'Renaissance King', patronising the arts and sciences, although his guilt and grief at his father's death was so great that he wore an iron belt of penitence around his waist for the rest of his life. He signed a peace treaty with Henry VII of England in 1502, and married his daughter Margaret in 1503. However, bound by the Auld Alliance treaty of 1295, he sided with France in its war with England and led his army south in the summer of 1513. The Scots were routed at Flodden Field on 9 September 1513, where James was killed, along with many of the Scottish nobility and thousands of his countrymen**.**

Archibald Douglas, 5th Earl of Angus, was one of the leaders of the rebellion against James III. Known as 'Bell-the-Cat' for having taken the risk of attacking James' favourites and executing them (the name is derived from one of Aesop's fables, *The Mice in Council*), Angus was one of the Scottish nobles who supported the English invasion of 1482-3 when Edward IV of England seized Berwick. Initially, Angus was one of James IV's guardians but his relations with the young king quickly became as troubled as they had been with James III, and Angus was on several occasions allied with England against the Scottish Crown. He was absent from the army at Flodden in 1513, but lost two sons in the battle.

Colin Campbell, 1st Earl of Argyll, was a strong supporter of James II against the Black Douglases and was created an earl by James III. He was Lord Chancellor under James III but turned against him because of his promotion of commoners to positions of power.

Alexander Home, 1st Lord Home, is said to have been one of the rebel lords at the battle. However, at the time of the battle, Home would have been 85 years old. His successor as Lord Home was his grandson, also Alexander, so it is possible that the chroniclers have confused the two Alexanders.

Battlefield Landscape

The landscape of the battlefield is not clearly understood. James III and his army had advanced south to Stirling and spent the night in the town. They moved further south the following day towards Torwood. The Lords had been south of the Carron, but spent the night immediately before the battle camped on either side of it. The two sides met at a point which the various sources place two miles from Stirling and a mile from the field of Bannockburn. Assuming that the Battle of Bannockburn was on or around the Carse, these two distances intersect around the southern edge of Bannockburn village. There is a lot of open ground here, including a hill which is a possible location for James III's men to have mustered before the battle began. The fighting may have taken place up on the high ground close to Bannockburn, or it may have spilled down onto the plain below. The area is now cut by the M80, M9 and the A9.

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

There are no physical remains currently known from the battlefield. However, the fighting will have generated a reasonable amount of material, as there was significant use of archery by James III's Highland troops, along with hand to hand fighting as the armies came together. The area most likely to have been the scene of the fighting is relatively undeveloped so there is a reasonable expectation that there will be artefactual material remaining from the battle.

The only human remains known from the battle are those of James III himself, which were buried at Cambuskenneth Abbey. It is unclear from the primary sources what the death toll was in the battle, but it seems to have been quite low. Accordingly, there is a relatively low potential of human remains from the battle.

The mill where James III is supposed to have been murdered no longer stands, and was apparently replaced with a farm house. A metal detector survey at Milne Park Road, Bannockburn, Stirling, was carried out for Bett Homes in April 2011 as the site was considered to be potentially part of the Bannockburn battlefield and perhaps of the Sauchieburn battlefield. While no material relating to the Battle of Bannockburn was found, two unidentified heavily worn coins, which may be late medieval, could possibly be contemporary with the Battle of Sauchieburn in 1488, though there were no other artefacts of this date. A metal detector survey and historic building recording undertaken in 2002 on the mill to the west of the site did not produce anything of note.

Cultural Association

The traditional location of the death of James III is at Milton Mill on the Bannock Burn. There is a plaque commemorating the event, but the stories surrounding his death are all later and of dubious authenticity. There are no ballads or poems about the battle, although there is a suggestion that Robert Henrysoun's poem *The Taill of Schir Chanticleir and the Foxe* contains a verse referring to James IV and the death of his father. However, the dating of the poem is uncertain and it may not refer to these events at all.

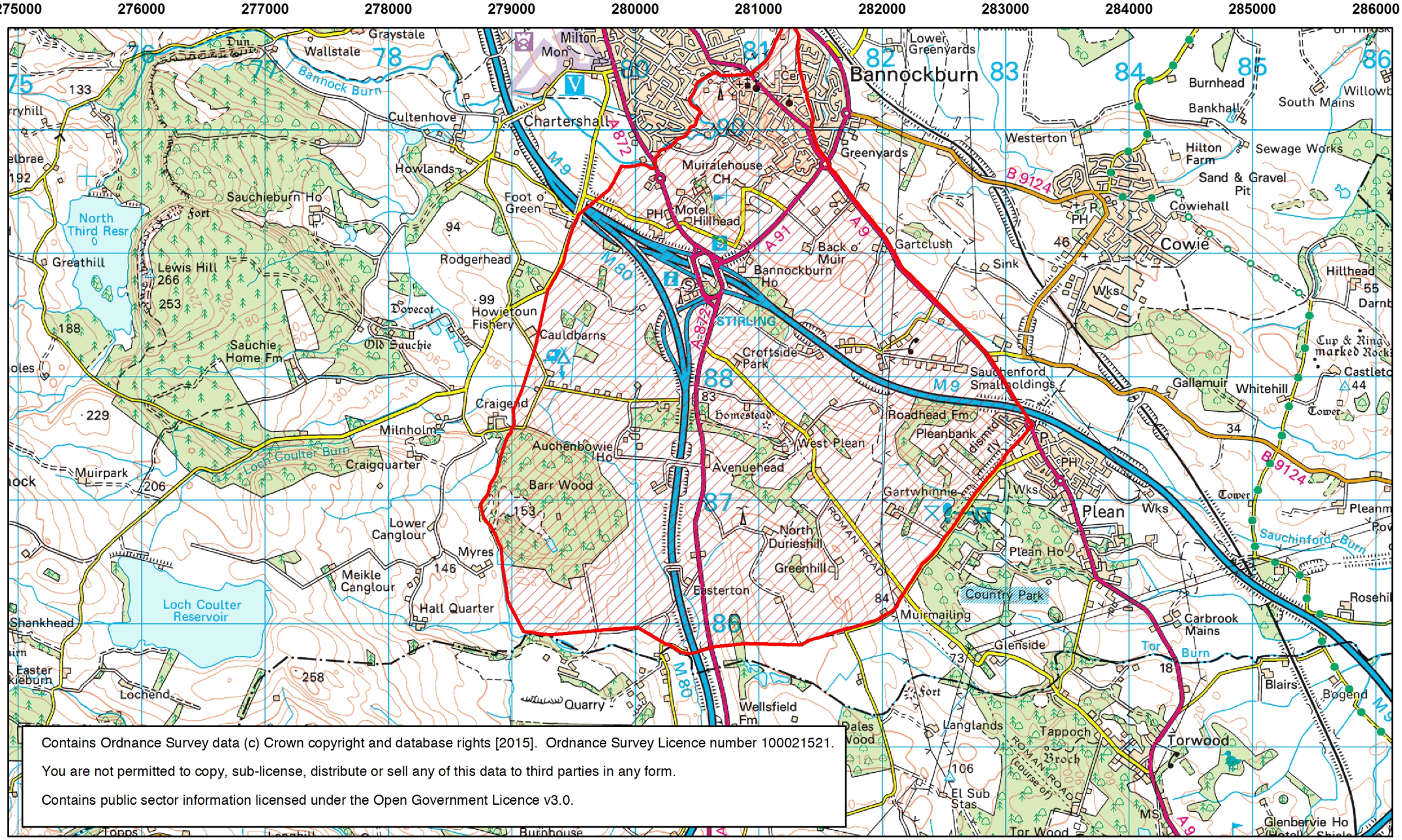
Select Bibliography

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The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary

Sauchieburn 11 June 1488 Local Authority: Stirling



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