

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The Battle of Roslin

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

ROSLIN

Alternative Names: None

24 February 1303

Local Authority: Midlothian

NGR centred: NT 275 641

Date of Addition to Inventory: 14 December 2012

Date of last update: None

Overview and Statement of Significance

The Battle of Roslin is significant as seemingly one of the largest battles within Scotland during the First Scottish War of Independence. The Scottish victory boosted morale for their cause, but in England the defeat enraged Edward I who personally led another campaign into Scotland the following year.

Following the Battle of Dunbar I in 1296, Scotland was in a prolonged period a state of political and economic instability. Contemporary English writers make scant mention of the numerous hostilities during this period, in which the Scots inflicted defeats upon Edward I's forces. Only two battles in this period of the war are relatively well recorded, the Battle of Stirling Bridge, where half of the English army under the command of Hugh Cressingham was slaughtered and the Battle of Roslin, where a Scottish army consisting of around 8,000 men routed a large mounted English army of up to 30,000.

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

- The southern boundary runs to the south of the animal research station at Mountmarle, a site with a possible place name association to the battle.

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

- The western boundary crosses the Kill Burn and takes in the Shinbane fields.
- The northern boundary takes in the fields to the east of Shinbane and carries across to the eastern boundary to accommodate the undulating ground which bounds the Hewan Bog.
- The eastern boundary takes in the area known as the Hewan Bog, which again is traditionally associated with the battle.

Historical Background to the Battle

As the English army advanced through Scotland in another retaliatory campaign for the Guardians earlier expulsion of Edward I's sheriffs and bailiffs, they initially met little opposition. The accounts talk of the army being divided up into three divisions, which entered Roslin in either February or March of 1303. The divisions were commanded by Sir John Segrave (or John de Segrave), Ralph Manton and Sir Robert Neville.

It was while in their respective camps that the English divisions were surprised by an attack led by mounted Scottish knights, led John Comyn and Simon Fraser. The Scots had ridden overnight from Biggar and attacked the occupants of the first camp, the survivors of this assault then warning the occupants of the second camp. The men in the second camp collected their arms and defended themselves against the Scots who had moved on from their first target. There was vicious hand to hand combat, in which the English almost succeeded in gaining the upper hand. However, rallied by their leaders the Scots renewed their assault and took the camp. No sooner had this combat ended than the third English division appeared, presumably better prepared for action than either of the first two. Again with the encouragement of their leaders the Scots re-entered the fray and to the astonishment of all won their third victory, though not before putting the survivors of the first two battles to the sword and taking their horses.

Events & Participants

Following Scottish defeat at the Battle of Falkirk on 22 July 1298 much of Scotland surrendered to Edward I, though some strongholds such as Urquhart Castle held out against him. With what appeared to be a general capitulation Edward established magistrates and governors across Scotland, his aim being to crush any sense of nationhood. To do this he repealed many ancient laws and seized the Stone of Destiny, along with other symbolic items from Scotland. It was within this context that resistance, in the absence of Balliol, continued. Key here was the campaign to expel the new establishment, in the form of governors, justices and sheriffs and it was this which prompted the punitive campaign of 1303, which climaxed with Scottish victory at Roslin. John Comyn played a key role in the battle, along with Simon Fraser being a commander of the Scottish host. It is possible however that there has been an attempt to reduce his achievements during this period by later chroniclers who were eager to please the Bruce faction.

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

Edward's response to the failure of the 1303 expedition was to once again take personal command a move which once again brought striking results, not least of these being the capture of that still potent symbol of the Scottish struggle for Independence, William Wallace, in 1305. At this point Edward's control of Scotland once again seemed assured, but then, in 1306, Robert the Bruce, grandson of the Competitor and previously a supporter of Edward against the Balliol loyalists, came out in open rebellion and after taking part in the murder of John Comyn had himself inaugurated King of Scots at Scone in March 1306.

John Comyn, was the nephew of John de Balliol, the rightful king of Scotland (the agreed outcome of the Great Cause), and one of the Guardians of Scotland (1296-1306). Comyn support for Balliol's claim to the Scottish crown set the family against the Bruces, who lost out in the competition due to Comyn being a generation closer to David I, albeit being further removed than Robert the Bruce in blood. John Comyn was heavily involved in the first Scottish War of Independence and, along with his father and cousin, took part in an attack on Carlisle in 1296, which at the time was being defended for Edward I by Robert Bruce (father of Robert the Bruce), an action which provided an early cause of animosity between the two families. He was captured by the English following the Battle of Dunbar in 1296 and spent several months in the Tower of London, being released only after agreeing to fight for Edward in Flanders. In March 1298 he deserted Edward's service while on the continent and on his return became a confederate of William Wallace, again taking up the sword against the English. It is uncertain as to whether he fought at the Battle of Falkirk but when Wallace's fortunes declined following his defeat in the battle, Comyn, as Guardian, became a dominant force in Scotland and a leading contender to the throne; Balliol was still in exile following the defeat at Dunbar and his submission to Edward. Comyn's main rival for the throne was of course Robert the Bruce, who settled the issue by killing Comyn in Greyfriar's Kirk in Dumfries in 1306 before being crowned King of Scots at Scone later that year.

Simon Fraser was the last in the male line of the Frasers of Tweeddale, the proprietors of Oliver Castle and sheriffs of Peebles, from which the families of Lovat and Saltoun had branched off. He fought alongside Andrew Moray and William Wallace and refused to submit to Edward when others, such as Comyn, did so. He went on to fight for Robert the Bruce and escaped from the debacle of the Battle of Methven in 1306, but was captured later that year and in September was hanged, drawn and quartered in London.

Some sources suggest William Wallace was also present at Roslin, although the truth of this is unclear as he appears to have resigned his role as Guardian following the defeat at Falkirk and allegedly refused command of the army at Roslin as a result.

Sir John Segrave was Edward I's First Lieutenant of Scotland. He commanded one of the English divisions at Roslin and was later involved in the execution of William Wallace (and was given the task of carrying his disembodied limbs back to Scotland for public display).

Ralph Manton was Cofferer, or Treasurer, to Edward I. Several sources place him in overall command of the army which invaded Scotland in 1303 instead

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

of Segrave, and although this is uncertain he was to be one of the most high-profile casualties at Roslin.

Little is known about Sir Robert Neville, as he is rarely mentioned in the historical sources, although he is said to have been killed during the second stage of the battle.

Battlefield Landscape

Much of the area is occupied by farmland, the majority of fields being given over to grazing. Agricultural activity also extends to a research facility, which represents the most extensive incursion into the battlefield area visible today. The area contains expanses of relatively level open ground to the south and east, though toward the north-eastern part of the Inventory area there are a series of deep defiles which serve to break up the landscape. The Kill Burn, which owes its name to the battle, runs across the site from south-west to north-east and the ground to the northwest of this line slopes up to form a ridge line. There are pockets of forestry but the over-riding impression is of a tapestry of grazed fields.

The English forces were encamped in three divisions prior to the battle, and although the precise position of each camp is unclear, the descriptions of the fighting suggest they were spread across the area. The Scots forces approached from the south-west for a surprise attack against the first English camp, seemingly unaware of the presence of further forces beyond. Given the nature of the battle it is likely that the combat ranged across a large part of the landscape, and this is supported by place-names associated with the battle which are found across the area.

Several of the place names in the area seem connected to the battle, although it is important to note these names are much later assignments. Finds of human bones in Shinbanes Fields (NT 270 641), in the south-western quarter of the site obviously suggest an association with the battle. Fighting is also associated with the Hewan Bog, a defile and area of boggy ground over to the eastern part of the area. The Kill Burn (NT 273 640), is said to have run red with blood for three days following the battle. Tradition has it that Mound Marl (or Mount Marl, or Mountmarle NT 279 639), today the site of the animal research centre, also has a strong association with the conflict. This is said to have acquired its name late in the battle, as the English forces began to waver. At this point, one of the English leaders, Marl, was advised by a retainer to flee, crying "Mount Marl, and ride!"

Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

There are reports of human bones being turned up in Shinbanes Field and it is possible that human remains and other artefacts associated with the battle are contained within the brook at Kill Burn, where the waters are recorded as having run red with blood for three days following the battle. Because of the large numbers involved and the large scale of the engagement, it is probable that further archaeological evidence remains on the battlefield.

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

The New Statistical Account of Scotland records:

“The Stinking Rig’, where multitudes of the slain were buried, and, not being sufficiently covered, emitted an intolerable stench.”

Because of the potentially large scale of the engagement, it is probable that more archaeological evidence remains on the battlefield. Indeed, even the ballad of the Battle of Roslin testifies that that area known as the Hewan is potentially rich in archaeological remains of the battle:

“An farmers tae this very day,
When they’re at the ploo-in,
Still find shinbanes in the clay,
At the place they call ‘The Hewin”

Cultural Association

Several place-names in the vicinity of Roslin commemorate the Battle of Roslin, including Shinbanes Field which contained many bones, Hewan Bog and Hewan Bank, where much of the more fierce fighting occurred, and Stinking Rig where bodies resulting from the battle were buried so poorly that they emitted a rancid smell as they decomposed.

In recent years, a cairn commemorating the battle has been erected on the site of the battle some way along the footpath from the end of Manse Road.

Select Bibliography

Sadler, J. 2004. *Border Fury: England and Scotland at War, 1296 - 1568*. Harlow: Longman/Pearson

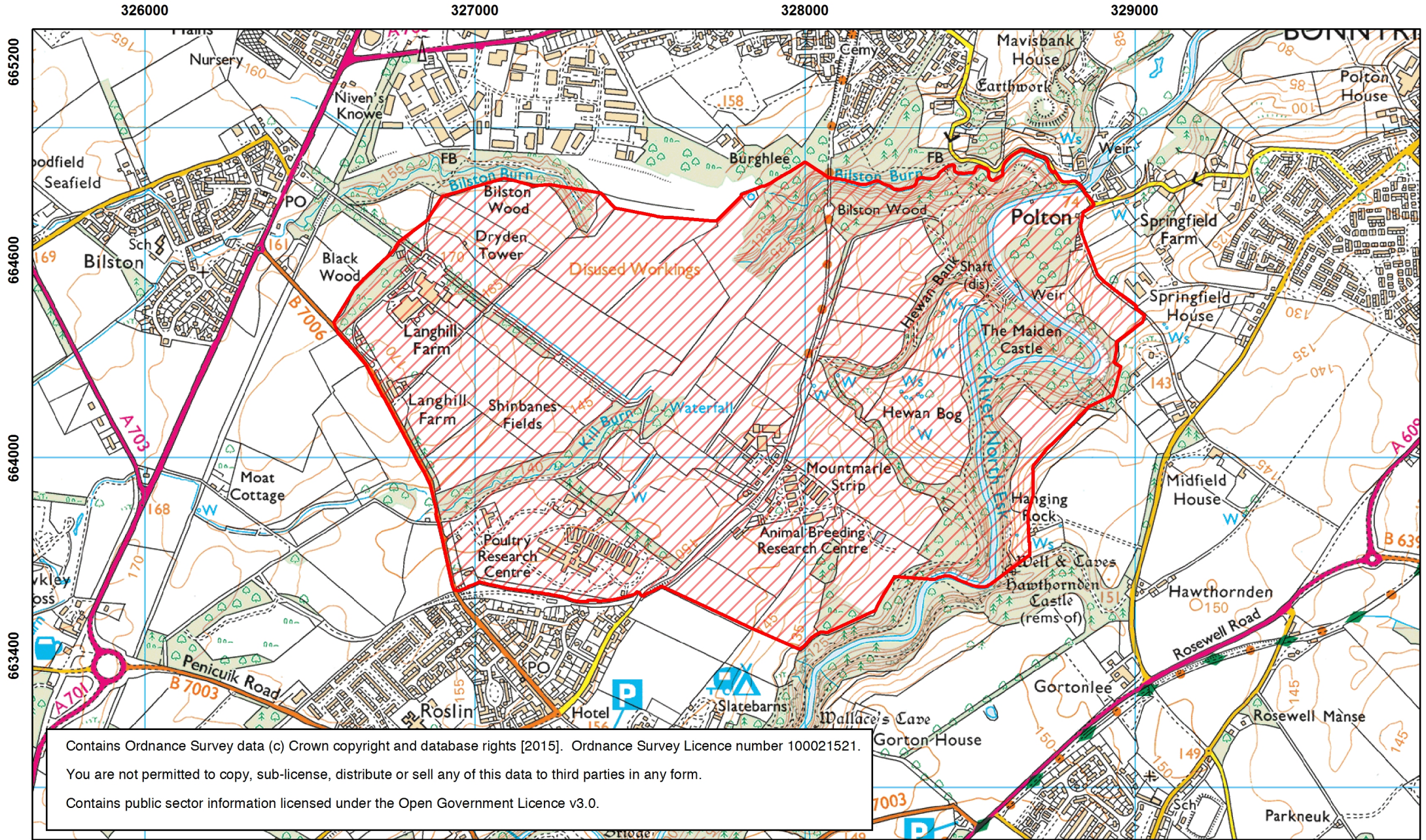
Stones, E. L.G. 1970. *Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174–1328*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary

Roslin

24 February 1303

Local Authority: Midlothian



Contains Ordnance Survey data (c) Crown copyright and database rights [2015]. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100021521.

You are not permitted to copy, sub-license, distribute or sell any of this data to third parties in any form.

Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

 Inventory of Historic Battlefields boundary

0 500 1,000
Meters