

# Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## DUNBAR II

3 September 1650

Local Authority: East Lothian

NGR centred: NT 690 767

### Overview

The battle of Dunbar was the most influential battle fought in Scotland during the Civil Wars. It one of the largest and bloodiest battles in Scottish history and had substantial military and political consequences. The English Parliamentary army (supporters of the Commonwealth of England) under the command of Oliver Cromwell succeeded in defeating the larger Scottish Royalist army. A large number of Scots were killed during the battle and over half the army was captured and marched to England to be imprisoned at Durham Cathedral.

Victory for the English Parliamentarians at Dunbar left southern Scotland open to Cromwell. He marched unopposed to Edinburgh and captured the city by December 1650. Dunbar was one of Cromwell's greatest military successes and played a key role in completing his rise to political power. The following two Scottish defeats at Inverkeithing (July 1651) and Worcester (September 1651) destroyed any serious Scottish bid for the restoration of Charles II and signalled the end of Scotland's role in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms.

### The Battle

Since entering Scotland in July 1650 Cromwell had played a cat and mouse game with the Scottish army (under the command of General David Leslie). By August the campaign was taking its toll on the English army and they moved south down the east coast towards Berwick. Leslie intercepted them at Dunbar and took up position on high ground to the south of the town on the slopes and summit of Doon Hill. This effectively blocked off the path of the English army's retreat to England, leaving Cromwell with limited choices. He could attempt withdrawal by sea, but there was little prospect of relief by forces from Berwick because of the deployment of Scottish troops at Cockburnspath. Instead, Cromwell decided to fight. There was a fatal weakness in the Scottish deployment: the right flank had come down to the lower slopes of Doon Hill and was within reach of the English if they could cross the Brox Burn. A concentrated attack on the right flank would be largely unhindered by Leslie's left flank because the defensive strength of their position restricted their ability to manoeuvre. Breaking the right flank would leave the centre and left exposed. At the same time, Leslie had left gaps in his deployment that meant a strike could get in amongst his lines and make it relatively easy to break through.

In the afternoon before the battle, Cromwell sent a small detachment across the burn where they briefly occupied a 'poor house' before being driven off by a Scottish unit. Just before dawn, the English crossed the burn and defeated a largely unprepared Scottish detachment that had been sent forward, possibly to attack Broxmouth House, the location of the English camp. Having crossed the burn, Cromwell marshalled his forces and attacked the Scottish right wing with John Lambert's cavalry; he threw assaults against the rest of the Scottish line but these were not intended to break through. Cromwell concentrated his main assault on the Scottish right, bringing in supporting troops under George Monck as well. This tactic enabled

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Cromwell to break through the Scottish battalions, and divisions of Lambert's cavalry reached the top of the lower slopes of Doon Hill; here they were able to stop the Scottish forces reforming. Many of the defeated troops surrendered, while others fled in all directions with the English cavalry in pursuit. After the battle the Scottish camp at Doon Hill was plundered and most of the dead were stripped and serviceable weapons recovered.

The numbers involved are open to question. There is general agreement amongst the secondary sources that the English army numbered between 11,000 and 12,000 and that they took very light casualties (c300 killed). In contrast, there is less agreement about Scottish numbers. The standing army was around 5,500 men, but the prospect of war had led to a muster for a new army. The requirement on the different districts should have produced an army of well over 20,000 and, as Cromwell recorded that Leslie's army was around 22,000, this has been the generally accepted figure. However, more recently questions have been raised about the response to the muster, leading to a revised proposal of 15,000 troops. This seems more likely in the context of raising a new army in a period of constant warfare and the decimation of Scottish armies in the Montrose campaign, but this does not mean that it is right and the higher figure could in fact be correct. Scottish casualties are similarly unclear. Cromwell recorded that 3,000 Scots were killed in the battle and 10,000 taken prisoners; of these, roughly half were released and the rest marched to Durham. In contrast, contemporary Scottish accounts talk of 800 dead; this may reflect the number killed on the battlefield, while Cromwell's figure includes those killed in the rout.

### Events & Participants

After Montrose's final defeat at the Battle of Carbisdale on 27 April and his execution on 21 May 1650, Scotland might have been able to settle into some form of peace after twelve years of conflict. However, the Scottish Parliament had been generally unhappy about the execution of Charles I in 1649 and, despite their opposition to Charles II's champion Montrose, had opened negotiations with Charles; they also suspected strongly that the English Parliamentarians would try to annex Scotland. The combination of anger over the execution and fear over the English Parliament's intentions culminated in the Treaty of Breda (Signed on May 1 1650 between Charles II and the Scottish Covenanters to establish Presbyterianism as the national religion and recognize the authority of the Kirk's General Assembly in civil law in England) on 1 May 1650, where Charles II guaranteed to establish Presbyterianism as the state religion and to recognise the authority of the Kirk in civil law across Britain.

The English Parliamentarians were already mobilising to deal with the threat from Scotland, and Cromwell was marching north with an army within five days of Charles signing the Covenant. The English army, which initially numbered around 16,000, had some successes in taking Scottish strongholds, but had to rely on supply from the sea as the Scots used a scorched earth tactic against them (destroying all food sources which the English could have used). Disease also began to affect the army and by August, Cromwell's army of around 12,000 men was quite dispirited. Edinburgh was held against them, and Leslie was countering any manoeuvres they tried. Cromwell withdrew to his supply base at Dunbar, but Leslie arrived first and took up position along Doon Hill. Cromwell had little choice but to fight, as his route back to England was now cut; his only alternative would be a difficult evacuation by sea. However, the initiative swung to Cromwell as the Scottish army came down from the heights onto lower ground, making an assault against them feasible.

The historically significant figures at Dunbar are a roll call of the English Civil War. Oliver Cromwell commanded the English army, and the battle is one frequently cited

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by later authors to illustrate his tactical brilliance. He was accompanied by other leading figures of the New Model Army and subsequent political developments in the Protectorate and Restoration. His son-in-law Charles Fleetwood was his Lieutenant-General; Fleetwood later served as Commander-in-Chief in Ireland, where he was known as particularly repressive.

The English cavalry was commanded by Major-General John Lambert, who had fought for Parliament throughout the First English Civil War. The English infantry were led by Major-General George Monck, who fought for Charles I in the First English Civil War and only joined the Parliamentarians in 1646.

David Leslie led the Scottish army. He was a very capable and experienced commander who had frustrated Cromwell's invasion throughout the summer. He inflicted the decisive defeat on Montrose at Philiphaugh that brought the latter's campaign to an end, and took Charles I's surrender at Newark in 1649.

### Physical Remains & Potential

No artefacts or archaeological features associated with the battle are known to have been recovered. However, given the nature of the weapons of the period and the character of the action and the intact nature of a high percentage of the battlefield, it is likely that considerable quantities of lead bullets could survive within the defined battlefield area. The use of artillery by both armies, including smaller field pieces deployed with the regiments, means that in addition to round shot (a spherical solid projectile fired from cannons), a distinctive distribution of case shot (a thin metal case containing a large number of bullets or small projectiles used in close range warfare) could survive.

The 'poor house' outpost occupied by a small detachment of the English soldiers and attacked by the Scots on the afternoon before the battle may be identifiable archaeologically and/or from documentary sources.

The location of the plundered Scottish camp, on the slopes and summit of Doon Hill, may well be recognisable archaeologically as a concentrated artefact scatter. As the English camp at Broxmouth House was not affected by the action it may have left little archaeological trace.

Individual burials and mass graves may well be located on the battlefield. In the absence of reports of any past discoveries these may remain largely undisturbed. The only burial known to relate to the battle is the grave of Sir William Douglas, who fought in the Scottish army, which is located within the grounds of Broxmouth House.

### Cultural Association

The Battle of Dunbar has very few Scottish cultural associations and has left little impact. It is mentioned in the ballad *The Battle of Philiphaugh* and in *The Song of the Bass Rock* and is named within poems written in honour of Cromwell in England, such as a 1652 poem by John Milton entitled *To Cromwell; Jockie's Lamentation* and the triumphal *Our Glory Roll*.

The battle is remembered by the community of Dunbar with an annual wreath laying ceremony at the modern commemorative monument located beside the former main road to England. Within the grounds of Broxmouth House is the grave of Sir William Douglas and an earthwork mound called 'Cromwell's Mount', though its association with the battle is presently unproven.

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## Battlefield Landscape

The general location of the battlefield is well established by a series of primary sources, including eyewitness accounts and a contemporary map drawn by Fitz-Payne Fisher. However, the exact location of the main deployment across the Brox Burn and the lower slopes of the Doon Hill will only be resolved through archaeological fieldwork.

On the night of 1 September the English camped in the fields to the south of Dunbar, with the baggage train and artillery located in a churchyard south of the town. The site of the English camp may have been lost under the southern expansion of Dunbar but the churchyard is likely to be the burial ground of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Town Kirk, now subsumed within grounds of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Queen's Road Parish Church.

Broxmouth House, where Cromwell was moved to on the 2 September, has been redeveloped but the grounds are largely intact. The point where the English crossed the burn and prepared to assault the Scottish right flank lies out-with the grounds of Broxmouth House but has remained relatively unchanged, while Doon Hill, where the Scots camped and initially deployed, survives as open farmland.

The battle was fought on open land on the outskirts of Dunbar. The main action took place on the lower slopes of Doon Hill and beside the narrow steep gorge created by the Brox Burn. This landscape has been significantly altered since the time of the battle through the enclosure of the land. Extensive mineral extraction and the construction of major transport links within the battlefield have divided the area into separate zones, making it difficult to read the land as a single entity. However, significant landscape features identified on Fisher's map including the Brox Burn, Doon Hill and the grounds of Broxmouth House survive intact and are well preserved.

The spatial and topographic relationships between these features played key roles in the battle and their preservation allows the landscape of the battlefield to continue to be read and understood. Important views such as those looking from the summit of Doon Hill towards Broxmouth House and Dunbar in the north are intact and provide the same outlook as it would have done in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The southern half of the defined area is mainly farmland with Broxmouth Park Garden and designed landscape, Dunbar Cement Works and part of Dunbar town located in the north. The mainline railway and A1 road running east-west through the site and the former limestone quarry located on the east side of the defined area may have impacted on surviving battlefield evidence.

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

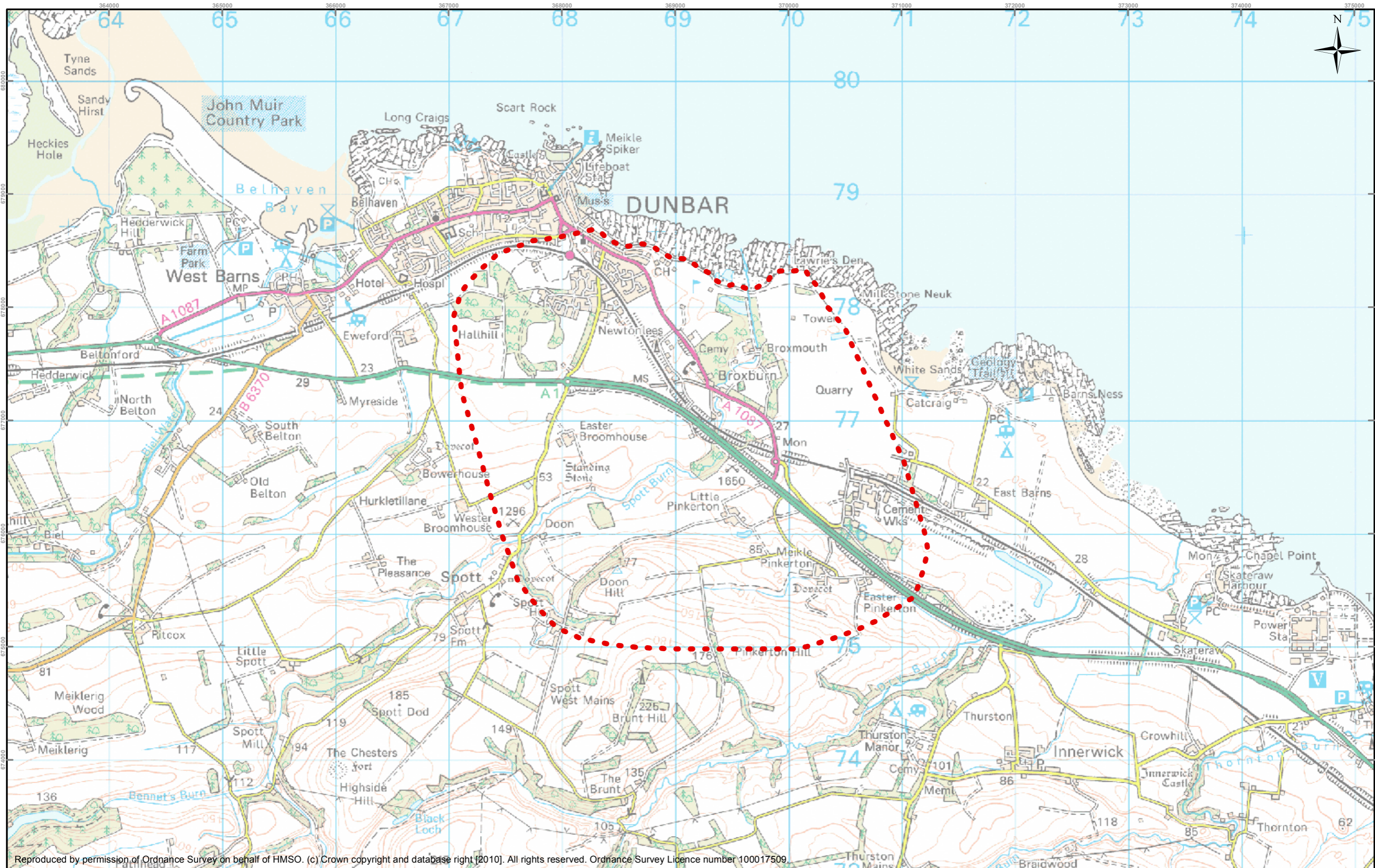
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- The slopes and summit of Doon Hill where the Scots camped and initially deployed.
- Broxmouth House and designed landscape and the southern part of Dunbar. The locations of the English camps including the graveyard of Queen's Road Parish Church in Dunbar where the baggage train and artillery were located.
- The Brox/Spott Burn and lands adjacent to the north, south and east. The general location of the main battle and the crossing point of the English army.
- Meikle Pinkerton Farm and lands to the north and south. The location of the Scottish right flank as shown on Fisher's contemporary map.
- The well preserved landscape characteristics of the battlefield including the views out and relationship between the summit and lower slopes Doon Hill, the Brox Burn and Broxmouth House and grounds.

### Relevant Publications

Firth, C. H. 1900 'The Battle of Dunbar', *Trans Roy Hist Soc* 14, 19-52.

Reid, S. & Turner, C. 2004 *Dunbar 1650, Cromwell's Most Famous Victory*. Osprey Publishing, Oxford.



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●●●● Inventory Boundary

0 250 500 Metres

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3rd September 1650

East Lothian  
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