

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

BOTHWELL BRIDGE

22 June 1679

Local Authority: South Lanarkshire

NGR centred: NS 709 575

Overview

The battle of Bothwell Bridge was a major defeat for the Covenanter army (Scottish Presbyterians opposed to interference by the Stuart Kings in the affairs of the Church of Scotland) against the Government troops led by the Duke of Monmouth. The catalyst for the Covenanter uprising was the hard-line repression of their open air meetings (known as conventicles) by Government forces. An attempt by Government dragoons to break up a conventicle at Drumclog in Lanarkshire on 1 June 1679 had resulted in a battle victory for the Covenanters.

Following this triumph a confident Covenanter army marched on Glasgow but failed to take the city. A Government army under the Duke of Monmouth hurried north to meet the Covenanters positioned to the south of Hamilton. The overwhelming Government victory at Bothwell Bridge effectively signalled the end of the Covenanters' military activities.

The Battle

On the morning of the battle, a Covenanter army of about 4,000, led by Sir Robert Hamilton, gathered on the south bank of the River Clyde. The Duke of Monmouth had left Edinburgh four days before at the head of 5,000 Government troops. As they reached the river, they realised that the bridge at Bothwell was held against them by the Covenanters, who were drawn up on the higher ground to the south of the river. Monmouth seems not to have wanted a bloodbath and initially tried to negotiate the surrender of the Covenanter army, but they refused the terms offered. With a fight now inevitable, the Government troops had the prospect of having to take the bridge and establish a bridgehead on the other bank. A small detachment of 300 Covenanters with a single cannon held the bridge against them. The main bulk of the Covenanter army was deployed on the slopes above the bridge to the south, posing a major threat to any crossing.

The Covenanter defenders put up a tremendous fight. Their musketry kept the Government dragoons from taking the bridge, while their single cannon was so effective that it caused the Government gunners to abandon their guns temporarily. However, the defenders received no assistance from the main army: as they began to run low on ball and powder, they asked for supplies but were refused as none could be spared. After holding the bridge for a period of between one and three hours, the remaining defenders retreated in the face of a dragoon charge (mounted infantry), and the bridge was taken by the Government.

Having forced the bridge, the Government army crossed the river unmolested and was able to form up without an attempted counter-attack by the Covenanters. In failing to commit his main force at this juncture, Hamilton allowed the enemy to redeploy on the south bank of the river. Hamilton's reasons for inaction have never been clear; it may have been incompetence, or it may have been because the Covenanter army was riven with factionalism and virtually impossible to control. The

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

effect of this inaction negated all of the tactical advantages that the Covenanters had, letting the Government army get into a position where the outcome was inevitable.

The Covenanter cavalry tried to break the Government line, but were forced back repeatedly until they ran into their own infantry, causing them to break and run. As the lines broke up, a rout began; the Covenanter sources suggest that the officers were the first to abandon the field, leaving their men to their fate. Monmouth gave orders for quarter for the Covenanters, but Claverhouse seems to have taken revenge for his defeat at Drumclog and 400 men were killed in the rout. Roughly 1,200 were taken prisoner and marched to Edinburgh, where they were held prisoner at Greyfriars Kirk.

Events & Participants

The battle was the culmination of a prolonged period of Covenanter conflict in Scotland, brought about when the restored monarchy of Charles II attempted to roll back the control of Scotland by Presbyterianism, which included attempts to impose episcopacy (the governing of the Church by a hierarchy of bishops) on the nation. The origins of this conflict went back to the signing of the National Covenant in 1638 in response to attempts by Charles I to impose his will on the Scottish church through, among other things, episcopacy and the enforced introduction of the Book of Common Prayer. Charles II's attempts to impose an episcopal structure on the church caused many Presbyterians to return to opposing royal government, with both moderates and radicals united in opposition. One manifestation of this was the holding of conventicles (a mixture of a religious meeting and a political rally, held in the open air) that appeared to be revolutionary in character. Despite an initial low level response to these by the Crown, in the 1670s there was a campaign to end conventicles and force Presbyterians to attend Episcopal services. This policy was implemented by military commanders such as James Graham of Claverhouse, who earned the epithet of Bloody Clavers.

The suppression of the conventicles increased the tensions in Lowland Scotland, with matters coming to crisis point in 1679. On 1 June 1679, an attempt by Claverhouse to suppress a conventicle resulted in the Battle of Drumclog, where the dragoons were routed by a large body of Covenanters. This success was taken as a sign of divine favour and within days, the Covenanters had an army of 7,000 near Hamilton having already conducted an assault on Glasgow. In response, the Duke of Monmouth marched from Edinburgh on 18 June with 5,000 men to confront them.

The most famous participants were on the Government side. The commander of the Government army was the Duke of Monmouth, the eldest of Charles II's illegitimate sons. He had become the senior officer in the British army on the death of George Monck in 1670, and had commanded troops in the Third Anglo-Dutch war against the Dutch, and in the Franco-Dutch War against the French on the side of the Dutch. He was given the task of putting down the Covenanter rising on his return to Britain, and with his success far outshone his uncle James, who was to become James VII & II. This was particularly because he was Protestant, unlike his uncle, and this same factor may explain his apparent lenient attitude towards the Covenanters that led him to attempt to negotiate their surrender and issue orders to give them quarter. He went on to oppose his uncle in 1685, when he raised an army in rebellion on his own account. However, he was no more successful than the Covenanters and, after his defeat at Sedgemoor, was beheaded on 15 July 1685.

John Graham of Claverhouse fought alongside Monmouth in Europe and had the distinction of saving the life of William of Orange (later William III) at the Battle of Seneffe in 1674. On his return to Britain, he was appointed to suppress the

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

Covenanters' conventicles and also plotted action against the government. His enthusiastic prosecution of his commission caused him to be named Bluidy Clavers, and he was personally responsible for the summary execution of Covenanters such as John Brown who refused to swear the Oath of Abjuration. His actions led to the rising that culminated in Bothwell Bridge, while his defeat at Drumclog at the start of June gave it greater momentum. In later years, he transferred his allegiance from Charles II to his successor James VII & II, to the point that he refused to accept the Glorious Revolution and raised the Jacobite standard against William and Mary, becoming known as Bonnie Dundee. However, his campaign came to an abrupt end at the Battle of Killiecrankie in 1689, when he was killed during the Jacobite victory; his death was a significant factor in the collapse of that rising.

Physical Remains & Potential

An archaeological evaluation and metal detecting survey was undertaken in 2006 in advance of a proposed housing scheme within a field 50 m from the north end of Bothwell Bridge known as the Covenanter's Field. A number of musket balls were recovered which may represent bullets fired at the Government army as they took up position on the high ground against the Covenanters stationed on the bridge. However, the evaluation was limited in scope and there may be further munitions and other artefacts relating to the battle within this field.

The present Bothwell Bridge is 19th century in date and is likely to be located on the footprint of the 17th century bridge. Illustrations of the bridge from the time of the battle depict it as having a gateway on it and a pronounced humped back.

Extensive ground on both the north and south side of the river has been lost to development, but there are still areas that are relatively open and could preserve physical traces of the battle. The primary sources suggest that the loss of life on the battlefield was relatively small, with most of the fatalities occurring during the rout. This reduces the likelihood of human remains in the near vicinity of the bridge, but suggests that there may be burials further to the south on the line of the rout.

Cultural Association

An obelisk monument dedicated to the Covenanter role in the battle was erected close to the south end of the bridge in 1903. A number of ballads were written about the battle shortly after it took place and Sir Walter Scott included the battle and the events leading up to it in his novel *Old Mortality*.

The site of the battle was used as a place of commemorative worship and social gathering well into the 20th century, and a photograph taken in 1946 shows a large crowd of people, many of them young army cadets, gathered together in the field to the north of the bridge. The period of Covenanter conflict is still lodged firmly lodged in the public consciousness and the battle remains a significant historical event in Scotland.

Battlefield Landscape

The general location of the battlefield is well understood through eyewitness and secondary accounts especially from Covenanter sources. These do not however give detailed information on the historic terrain and its character.

Prior to the battle, the Covenanter army is reported to have assembled on Hamilton Muir, while the government army camped on Bothwell Muir on the north side of the river.

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

Much of the main action is securely located as the initial phase centred on the bridge itself, while the final action took place immediately to the south of the bridge on the slope which rises up from the river bank. Roy's map of the 1750s shows the ground on both sides of the river close to the bridge as unenclosed ploughed fields. The north side of the bridge was fed by two roads, one to the left and north-west and the other to the right and north-east. The ground was generally open, with little settlement beyond the village of Bothwell. From the south, the bridge was approached by two roads: the Hamilton road running due north; a second road ran in from the west, joining the former close to the end of the bridge. On the south side of the Clyde the land was again generally open fields but with some enclosure. Roy's map gives little suggestion of the moorland noted on both sides of the river in the primary sources.

On the north side of the river, the Government army may have initially deployed on a spur of high land overlooking the bridge. Similar high ground on the south side appears to have been the location of the Covenanter troops.

Both the Covenanters and the Government army, once it had crossed bridge, would have been restricted by the Whistleberry burn, which debouches into the river to west of the bridge on the south bank. Several accounts mention a 'hollow ground' as the position of the Atholl Highlanders and the dragoons on the Government right. These troops may well have been located in the steep ravine of the burn.

The battle was fought on the banks of the River Clyde. The sloping ground of the river valley rises up from the water on both the north and south sides to higher, more level ground. The topography of the river valley and its hinterland played a key role in the manoeuvres of the armies and, although there has been considerable development across these areas with the residential suburbs of Bothwell now extending almost to the river bank to the north of the bridge, the overall character of the battlefield has survived well. Important landscape features including the steeply sloping banks to the north and south of the bridge have remained essentially unchanged. The spatial relationship between surviving elements of the battlefield landscape such as the river crossing and the positions of the Covenanters on the high ground to the south and the Government troops to the north overlooking the bridge survive well and their movements can still be easily read and understood.

The north side of the defined area has seen extensive development with the spread of Bothwell. However pockets of undeveloped land, including the Covenanter's Field, survive and have high potential for in-situ remains associated with the battle. The south side of the river is less developed, with areas of woodland and open ground surviving within an industrial landscape. It is possible that the river may have changed course a little, as General Roy's map shows the bend to the east of the bridge being sharper than it is today, but this could simply be a reflection of the limitations of 18th century mapping.

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*

Inventory of Historic Battlefields

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.

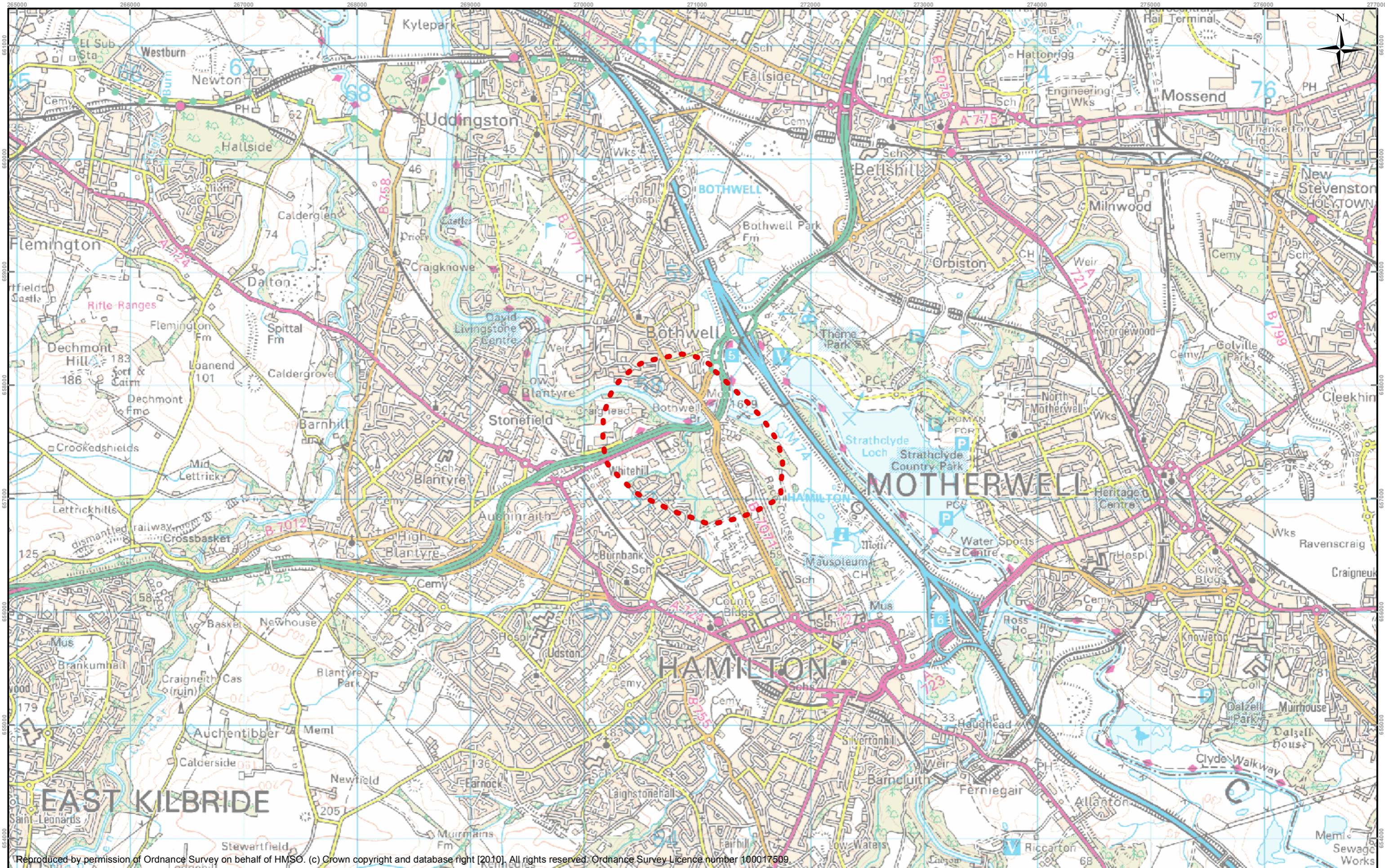
The Inventory boundary for the Battle of Bothwell Bridge is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- Land to the north of Bothwell Bridge. The direction of the advance of the Government troops and their initial deployment to cross the bridge.
- The south bank of the river at the bridge. The position of the Covenanter troops defending the bridge and the advancing Government army.
- The high ground on the south and south-east of the bridge. The position of the remaining Covenanter army and the probable route of the Covenanter's rout.
- The terrain of the river crossing and the views out from the higher ground on the north and south of the river. The views out from the initial Government position and the Covenanters stronghold to the river are key to understanding the manoeuvres of both armies and the outcome of the battle.

Relevant Publications

Brownlee, T & Brownlee, W C 1822 *Narrative of the battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Bridge: the former fought on the 1st and the latter on the 22nd of June, 1679 between the King's troops and the Covenanters*. Andrew Young, Glasgow.

Brownlee, W C & Duncan, W 1823 *A Narrative of the Battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Bridge : fought between the armies of King Charles the Second and the Covenanters, the one on the 1st, and the other on the 22nd of June, A.D. 1679*. William Duncan, Edinburgh.



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. (c) Crown copyright and database right [2010]. All rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number 100017509.

•••• Inventory Boundary

0 250 500 Metres

BATTLE OF BOTHWELL BRIDGE

22nd June 1679

South Lanarkshire
NGR: NS709575