

# Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## BANNOCKBURN

23/24 June 1314

Local Authority: Stirling

NGR centred: NS 808 913

### Overview

Bannockburn is one of the most iconic battles of Scottish history and was a key battle in the Scottish Wars of Independence. The battle was a continuation of Robert the Bruce's campaign to take control of the Kingdom of Scotland that he claimed in 1306. Fought over two days, the battle was a resounding victory for Bruce over a larger English army led by Edward II. A large number of English were killed during the battle and significant nobles taken prisoner. Edward was forced to flee Scotland by boat, leaving behind the valuable English baggage train.

The victory helped establish Bruce as *de facto* King of Scotland and essentially ended any realistic claims of the Plantagenets to the Scottish throne. Bannockburn helped define Scotland's identity in Europe and, although it would be another 14 years until the war ended, Edward II never fully recovered from the defeat which undermined his authority to rule Scotland. In the longer term the victory signalled a new era of confidence in the Scottish nation and in Bruce as its leader.

### The Battle

By 1314 Robert the Bruce was in control of large parts of Scotland. This position had been gained after a long struggle to take control of the Kingdom of Scotland, firstly against Edward I, and after the latter's death in 1307, against his Scottish enemies and the castles held by the English. Edinburgh Castle and Roxburgh had been taken from the English and Stirling Castle was under siege. A pact had been made that the castle would be surrendered to the Scots if the siege were not raised by midsummer 1314. Bruce gathered a large army to defend against any English relief force, and had time to drill the schiltrons to a high state of preparedness. Edward II raised a far larger army of the greatest of English chivalry, thousands of men-at-arms and archers. He marched on Stirling from Falkirk along the line of the Roman Road.

The events of the battle took place over two days. On the first day, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, the action took place around the New Park (a royal parkland) located to the south-west of St Ninians on the road from Falkirk to Stirling. The Scots were drawn up here in a naturally defended position that was improved by the digging of pits filled with sharpened stakes to defend against a frontal cavalry charge. The fighting was between the English vanguard of c. 4,000 men and Robert the Bruce's slightly larger army. According to John Barbour's later account (a 14<sup>th</sup> century Scottish poet who wrote *The Brus*, a long narrative poem celebrating the First War of Scottish Independence), as the English vanguard came in sight of the Scots Henry de Bohun (nephew of the Earl of Hereford, who was joint commander of the vanguard) saw Bruce isolated and forward of the Scottish lines and charged at him. Bruce avoided his charge and killed him as he passed with a blow of his axe that broke the haft (this is the incident commemorated on the old Clydesdale Bank £1 note). After this initial encounter, the English vanguard charged the Scottish lines, but could not break through and had to retreat; the lack of archers in the English vanguard undoubtedly

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contributed to the success of the Scottish schiltrons (a compact body of spearmen forming a battle array) in this engagement.

A small detachment of around 300 English under Sir Robert Clifford and Henry de Beaumont attempted to reach Stirling Castle by skirting the high ground to the east along the edge of the Carse, but they were intercepted by the Earl of Moray's schiltron and driven off with heavy losses. Repeated charges were unable to disrupt the schiltron; at this point, Sir James Douglas appeared with a second schiltron, while Moray started to advance his schiltron on the English. The English force broke, some heading for Stirling Castle and the remainder returning to the main army, which now moved down onto the Carse of Stirling (the marshland to the south-east of the castle) for the night.

On the second day, 24<sup>th</sup> June, the Scots advanced to meet the English, who had spent the night on the low ground and were not expecting a Scottish assault; rather, Edward II seems to have been convinced that the Scottish army would avoid battle, and many of his actions on the first day make most sense in terms of preparing to intercept Bruce when he tried to escape. Instead, Bruce marched out of the shelter of the woods (presumed to be Balquhiderock Wood) and began to march steadily forward in three battles.

The English cavalry responded with a charge led by the Earl of Gloucester. However, they seem to have mounted up with little formation, while the rest of the army according to Barbour, were ill prepared for the battle. These actions appear to reflect the strength of Edward II's belief that the Scots would not fight. The charge was unsuccessful, partly because of the lack of organisation of the cavalry and partly because part of Bruce's strategy appears to have been to reduce the amount of ground available to the cavalry and therefore the effectiveness of any charge.

There was also a great deal of tension in the English command. As the Scots began their advance, there was a bad-tempered exchange between Edward II and the Earl of Gloucester, partly over tactics and partly in recrimination of the English vanguard's failures on the previous day. The impression given by the primary sources is that Gloucester was angry with Edward II and acting rashly as he charged the Scottish line. Gloucester was amongst the English losses as the schiltrons held.

There seems to have been little contribution from the English archers, normally such an important part of English military tactics. The only source to talk about archery was Barbour, who referred to the English archers attempting to break up the Scottish ranks and beginning to have some success, before Bruce sent Sir William Keith at the head of the 500 strong Scottish cavalry to disperse them. If this happened, then it would be one of the few successes that Scottish cavalry ever recorded. However, there is no other record of this element of the fighting and it has been argued that at the time Barbour was writing, Keith's family were still important members of the Stewart court and therefore his participation in the battle was embellished to enhance his status. The archers would not have shot once the two armies had closed, which implies that the archers were never brought into action. If this argument is correct, then there was virtually no archery during the battle.

The Scottish schiltrons continued to advance and drove the English cavalry back, while the English men-at-arms were unable to come into the fighting because they were enclosed by the burns and bogs on both sides and the vanguard in front of them. As the vanguard was driven back, they collided with their own infantry, causing the English lines to collapse in confusion. At the same time, Bruce ordered in his reserve of Highland troops and the English broke. The tradition of the Sma' Folk relates to this, when the camp followers who were watching came running down the slopes to finish off the armoured soldiers who were struggling in the mud of the

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Carse; the English thought that they were fresh reserves, increasing the panic in their ranks.

Edward II's army collapsed and began fleeing in several directions. Edward went to Stirling Castle, but then turned aside and headed for Falkirk and Linlithgow, eventually reaching Dunbar, pursued all the way by a small force under Sir James Douglas; he was taken in a small open boat to Bamburgh and then to Berwick, from where he was able to get a ship that took him away to safety. Many of the English army fled towards Stirling Castle as well, but were denied access and taken prisoner. A group under the Earl of Hereford headed to Bothwell Castle near Hamilton, where they were taken prisoner and handed over. Others tried to reach the Forth, with some apparently drowning in the river. Many were caught in a great ditch and slaughtered; this ditch has caused a great deal of the controversy over the location of the battle as attempts have been made to identify it. Many writers have assumed that it is the gorge through which the Bannock Burn emerges onto the Carse, but it could instead be any part of the Pelstream Burn or the Bannock Burn as they cross the Carse towards the river. There is also a location known as Bloody Fould, which is traditionally in the vicinity of Bannockburn House and is the supposed location of a massacre of English fugitives. However, according to the English *Annals of Trokelowe* (written by John of Trokelowe, a 14<sup>th</sup> century monk whose annals include an account of the reign of Edward II), those who were taken prisoner were apparently well treated on Bruce's orders.

### Events & Participants

On the Scottish side, Robert the Bruce led the army of around 6,000 infantry armed with spears, with the assistance of Sir James Douglas (the Black Douglas), the Earl of Moray, Edward Bruce (Robert's brother) and Sir William Keith who commanded the 500 cavalry. Edward II's army consisted of around 3,000 heavy cavalry, 14-15,000 infantry and up to 2,000 archers. Apart from the Earl of Lancaster, the majority of the nobility of England were either present or had sent men to the army. These included the Earl of Pembroke, the Earl of Gloucester, the Earl of Hereford, Sir Robert Clifford and Henry de Beaumont. The latter two were highly experienced commanders that had fought the Scots throughout the campaigns of Edward I; de Beaumont survived the battle and gained revenge in 1332 by destroying a large Scottish army at Dupplin Moor. A number of significant English figures were killed in the battle including the Earl of Gloucester, Sir Robert Clifford and Giles d'Argentan, the Earl of Pembroke.

The battle was significant tactically by showing that not only could a disciplined infantry force use the schiltrons to withstand heavy cavalry, but that they could act as a mobile force rather than defending a position. The lessons that Henry de Beaumont learnt at Bannockburn were used to great effect against the Scots in the Second War of Independence and against the French in the Hundred Years War, where dismounted men-at-arms, supported by massed archery and using the terrain defensively, were able to destroy large armies of schiltrons and of French heavy cavalry.

The battle was a major victory in the first Scottish War of Independence and Robert the Bruce's campaign to take control of Scotland. It has great iconic and cultural significance for Scotland to this day.

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## Physical Remains & Potential

A single military artefact has been recovered from the defined area; a probable 14<sup>th</sup> century arrowhead found by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) in the vicinity of the visitor centre in 2004. Extensive programmes of metal detecting on potential locations of the fighting on the second day (the Carse, surrounding area and Dryfield) have recovered no artefacts which could be associated with the battle. Due to the nature of the fighting (with relatively little archery activity) and the early date of the battle, it is possible that the battleground has relatively low potential for the recovery of military artefacts.

There is potential for physical features relating to the battle to survive, such as the pits which were said to be dug by the Scots to break up English attacks. However, to date none of these has been found and excavations in 2002 of crop-mark pit features to the south of Bannockburn Wood revealed only activities relating to mining in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Wooden stakes recovered from Milton Bog in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, initially seen as the stakes from the Scottish pits, have been identified as Scots Pine roots dating to the Mesolithic period, and therefore with no connection to the battle.

No human remains or items of personal equipment have been recovered from the battlefield or the surrounding area. The potential for individual burials and mass graves to be located within the defined area, particularly from the areas of the Carse which have seen less construction, is high. The *Annales of Trokelowe* stated that the dead were buried on the battlefield, with the majority being buried in 'gret pyttis' [large pits].

## Cultural Association

There are a huge number of cultural associations to the battle, in keeping with its iconic status. The battle is mentioned in a wide range of poems, ballads and songs; *Scots Wha' Hae* and *Flower of Scotland* are the most famous examples. It has been depicted in film and television and has featured on Scottish currency, most notably with the old £1 notes that featured the incident where Bruce killed de Bohun, the £20 Clydesdale banknote showing Robert the Bruce and the Monymusk Reliquary (a sacred battle ensign of the Scottish army used in the blessing of the Scottish army before the fighting on the second day).

The battlefield has a visitor centre, run by the National Trust for Scotland and has been the site of several well attended re-enactments on the anniversary of the battle. The NTS land has a commemorative flag pole erected in 1870 and now enclosed within a concrete rotunda built in 1962. The rotunda contains a cairn which was made from fragments of the Bore stone, a boulder traditionally associated as a rally point for the Scots before battle. Close to the rotunda is a bronze statue of Bruce erected in 1964. The statute was the work of sculptor Charles d'Orville Pilkington Jackson who had produced a model of Bruce's face from his skull.

There is a plethora of place-names associated with the battle, from traditional field names, such as Bloody Fould, to modern street names, such as Targe Wynd.

## Battlefield Landscape

The general location of the battlefield is well established and the broad area of the first day of the conflict is defined. However, the exact location of the main deployments on the second day of the battle is a matter of considerable debate.

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It is widely acknowledged that the general area of the first day of fighting was around New Park, roughly in the area where the NTS visitor centre stands. This was an area of hunting reserve that was largely wooded and was, according to Barbour, the Scots camp and the location of the pits and traps dug to reduce the ability of cavalry to manoeuvre. As the English advanced along the Roman Road from Falkirk through Tor Wood, Clifford and Beaumont attempted to reach Stirling Castle by skirting the edge of the Carse towards St Ninians Church and were driven back by Moray's schiltrons.

Parts of the landscape of the first day of the battle have been covered with housing estates, and it is possible that the location of the fighting has been substantially redeveloped with the loss of any military artefacts or physical remains. Consequently, any remaining undeveloped open ground within this area has important potential for the survival of associated material of the first day of the battle. The location of the Roman Road is known from aerial photographs, and its route can be traced to the southern edge of Bannockburn where it is lost in urban development. Another key surviving landscape feature is the location of the main supply wagon for the Scots at Cambuskenneth Abbey. The abbey and grounds are undeveloped and the abbey is in the care of Scottish Ministers.

The topography of a substantial area of the first day of battle and the Scot's camp near the Whins of Milton survive as open land, now within the ownership of the NTS. This undulating landscape appears to have been key to Bruce's choice for a camp on the higher ground overlooking the castle to the north and the line of the Roman road to the west. The spatial relationships between these key landscape features can still be interpreted on the ground.

The English overnight camp is likely to have been somewhere on the Carse, located to prevent night attacks by the Scots. Barbour talks of the English army as being on the 'hard feld', which implies that they were not on a peat bog. However, the confined space they occupied, mentioned by sources from both sides, where they were crushed together because of the streams and pools of the Carse, fits the Pelstream/Bannock Burn location best. In the absence of physical evidence neither location can be ruled out.

There are currently eight alternative areas proposed for the location of the fighting on the second day, all originating from details given in the primary sources or secondary accounts of the battle. The two most viable locations appear to be the areas around the Dryfield and the Carse but no location has yet been supported by the recovery of artefactual evidence; it is likely that the exact area of fighting will remain unknown until detailed archaeological fieldwork is undertaken.

The Carse of Stirling is a low lying floodplain of the River Forth overlooked by a series of hill terraces to the north-east forming a ridge of higher ground running north-west/south-east. The Carse was marshland at the time of the battle, surrounded by small hamlets, farms and areas of woodland. It was historically an area of peat, pools and burns with several tributaries (including the Pelstream and the Bannockburn) running across it and emptying into the Forth. Accounts of Edward's army crossing the Carse claim that the men used walls and roofs taken from local houses to cross an area of deep peat; boggy, treacherous, and certainly not conducive to heavy cavalry or wagon trains. However, the level of peat cover is debatable, and it would be a mistake to consider the Carse as a uniform peat bog. While the underlying soils are all heavy clays, at the edges of the Carse there may have been areas of peat clearance or agriculture. The reference to the use of thatched roofs from houses as bridges may suggest that there was some level of settlement on this lower ground; it suggests an army using what was at hand to deal with localised problems.

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Much of the Carse, where the English camped and at least some of the action of the second day took place, remains open and undeveloped and important views out towards Stirling Castle and the location of the Scot's camp to the south-west are intact. There has been some building along the base of the scarp; it also features the rail line to Stirling and the A907. There is also the remains of a bing that has been largely removed.

The Dryfield refers to the area of drier land to the south-west of the Carse. As the chronicles largely talk of hard ground on which the fighting took place, the Dryfield, as its name suggests, fits that description. The Dryfield has seen a lot of development, and there is a considerable amount of housing in this area. It is now occupied mainly by the district of Broomridge, the more recent developments of the old village of Bannockburn and Bannockburn High School.

Open areas do survive within the Dryfield area which have very high potential to add further knowledge for the action of the second day of battle through further archaeological investigation. The relationship between the Carse and the Dryfield, both locations of action on the second day, can still be traced on the ground, while the current Balquhiddelock Wood may coincide, at least in part, with the area wooded at the time of the battle.

The accuracy of the legend of the Sma' folk running down a slope to the English on the Carse is uncertain. However, if the tradition is genuine a possible location of the camp followers is the high ground to the east of the proposed battleground, adjacent to the Scottish camp within the New Park. Coxet Hill is elevated ground to the north of the Scottish camp which overlooks both the Carse and the Dryfield. As it is a short distance from the proposed locations of the action of the second day it has high potential to be the position of the Sma' folk prior to their advance into the battleground.

The entire potential battleground landscape has been significantly altered through drainage and peat extraction on the Carse, the modern spread of Bannockburn and Stirling along the terraces and the disappearance of wooded areas, such as New Park, and extensive field enclosure. Overall, the defined area is a mix of housing and industrial estates, farmland and open countryside. Nevertheless, significant open areas remain, enabling the events of the battle to be understood despite the amount of development and offering the potential of archaeological deposits.

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

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- The former area of New Park hunting park incorporating the Whins of Milton, Borestone, Coxet Hill, St Ninian's and the line of the Roman road. The location of the Scottish camp and advance of the English army. The first day of the battle was fought within this area.
- The Carse of Stirling and the Dryfield incorporating the Pelstream and Bannock burns, Bannockburn Moor, Broomridge, Bannockburn village and Balquhiddelock Wood. The location of the English camp and the potential locations for the second day of fighting.
- Cambuskenneth Abbey and grounds. The location of the Scottish baggage train which was sacked by the Earl of Atholl in the aftermath of the battle.
- Bannockburn Wood. An area known as Bloody Fould which was possibly the location of a massacre of the English and has potential to contain human remains associated with the aftermath of the battle.
- The well preserved landscape characteristics of the battlefield including the surviving open ground of New Park, the views from and the spatial relationship between the Carse, Stirling Castle and the hill terraces to the south-west.

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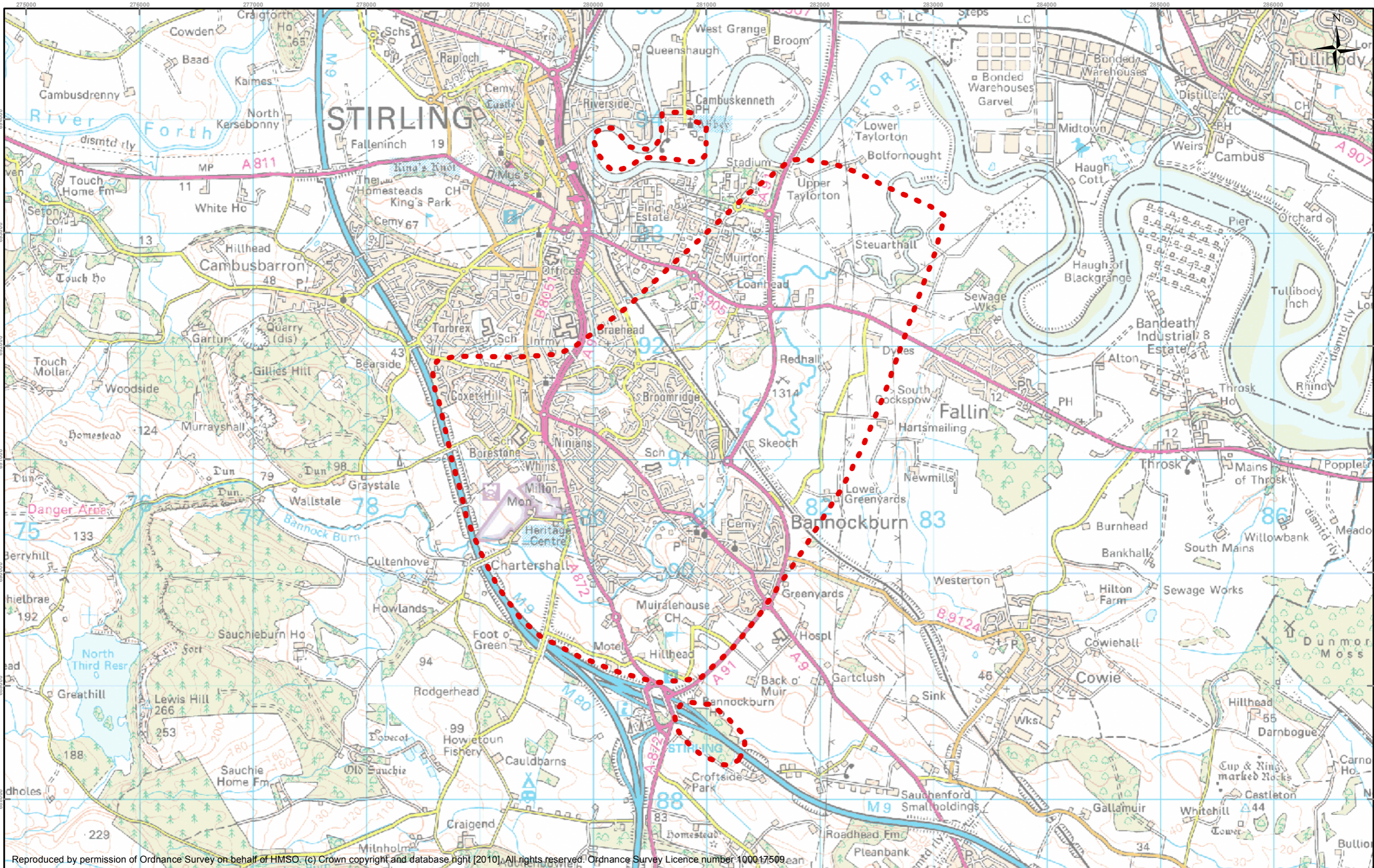
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●●●● Inventory Boundary

0 250 500 Metres

# BATTLE OF BANNOCKBURN

23 June 1314

Stirling

NGR: NS808913

HISTORIC SCOTLAND ALBA AOSMHOR

