

Battle Name:	Bothwell Bridge	Council area: S Lanarkshire
Date:	22nd June 1679	
UKFOC number:	275	

BOTHWELL BRIDGE

1 SUMMARY

1.1 CONTEXT

As his reign progressed Charles II imposed increasingly extreme controls on non-conformity throughout his kingdoms. In 1679 this led to open revolt by Covenanters in south west Scotland. Following the rebel success at Drumclog (see UKFOC 276), a government army of about 5000, comprising both regular and militia forces, was sent north under the command of the Duke of Monmouth to engage the rebels at Bothwell Bridge.(1)

1.2 ACTION

The rebels lacked an effective commander, were poorly equipped and lacked training or significant military expertise. On the morning of the 22nd June one of the few rebel leaders with any military experience, Hackston, took the handful of experienced troops and briefly held the bridge across the river Clyde. But their ammunition soon ran out and they were forced to retreat, allowing Monmouths' royal forces to cross the bridge and deploy on the south bank unopposed. The royal forces then surrounded the rebels with little armed opposition and thus the rebellion was easily suppressed.(1)

Figure 1: Bothwell Bridge (1679) - battlefield plan

Figure 2: Bothwell Bridge conservation boundary suggested by Martin (red line)

1.3 TROOPS

Numbers:

Covenanter: c.6000 'ill organised rabble'(1)

Government: 5000;(2) 15,000 claimed(1)

Losses:

Covenanter: 6-700 killed; 1200 prisoners.(2)

1.4 COMMEMORATION & INTERPRETATION

An obelisk commemorating the Covenanters who fell in the action stands just to the north of the bridge.

2 ASSESSMENT

2.1 LOCATION

The action is accurately located as the initial phase centred around the bridge itself, while the final action took place immediately to the south of the bridge.

Due to the considerable uncertainties and poor state of preservation of the battlefield no core area of search has been defined. However, a broader area for potential search has been given which could be refined by future research.

2.2 PRIMARY SOURCES

2.3 SECONDARY WORKS

No modern work has been identified which deals in detail with this action. It is discussed only briefly in the few 20th century works on military history in which it is mentioned. There are a handful of 19th century publications which discuss the 'battle' but these have not been consulted given the apparent very limited potential of the battlefield itself.

2.4 BATTLE ARCHAEOLOGY

No evidence of battle archaeology has been identified in the current work.

It is possible that the bridge may retain shot impact scars from the action as some of the 17th century structure still survives, but extensively rebuilding in the 19th century may have removed all trace of the action. A scatter of bullets from the initial action might survive on the open ground immediately north east of the bridge, if this has not been disturbed, but little of significance other than for interpretive purposes is likely to be recovered.

2.5 BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC TERRAIN

No work has been undertaken here on the reconstruction of the historic terrain.

The surviving Bothwell Bridge was in existence at the time of the battle but was extensively altered in the 19th century.¹

2.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE

This action suppressed the Covenanter rebellion of 1679 and is thus of some political and social significance in historical terms. The perceived cultural significance of the event is however far greater than its military significance and, despite being typically described as such, it can hardly be called a battle. It is likely to have very limited interest in terms of military history.

2.7 CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT

A bridge remains on the site but there is extensive modern development on either side of the river (the settlements of Bothwell and Hamilton) while the A725 crosses the Clyde just 100m upstream of the old bridge and skirts the southern bank of the Clyde. Immediately east of the A725 on the north side of the Clyde there is a small area of open water suggestive of quarrying. There are small areas of open ground remaining

¹ http://hsewsf.sedsh.gov.uk/hslive/portal.hsstart?P_HBNUM=5138

mainly to the north east of the bridge and a very narrow strip of steeply falling ground immediately adjacent to the Clyde.

2.8 CURRENT DESIGNATIONS

Both the bridge itself and the Covenanter memorial are listed. The bridge and the area of settlement along the road to the north is part of a Conservation Area for Bothwell. The land to the south of the bridge, though substantially built on is defined as a designed landscape, associated with Hamilton Palace. The eastern periphery of the area, on both sides of the Clyde is also an SSSI.

2.9 POTENTIAL

There are limited areas of land, particularly on the north side of the Clyde which may contain battle archaeology. However, given the apparent limited military significance of the action and the very poor state of survival of the battlefield, as a result of modern development, there would appear to be very little potential for the investigation of the archaeology of the battlefield terrain or of the battle archaeology. Only if the main action took place at some distance from the bridge itself is there significant open ground, to the south west (in Black Muir plantation) and south east (in the former Hamilton Park), which might preserve battle archaeology.

However, given the survival of the bridge and the political and social importance of the event, the site does have significant commemorative and interpretive potential which may justify conservation and interpretive action. In that context an attempt to reconstruct the historic terrain in order to better place the documented events and to thus better understand the action and particularly to place the final events on the south side of the Clyde more accurately may be worthwhile. The bridge should also be examined to determine if there are any shot impact scars and the potential of the land immediately north east of the bridge assessed on the ground to determine if bullets might survive in the area, if this has not already been done.

2.10 THREATS

Given the poor condition of the site it is unlikely that any changes, other than to the bridge itself and its setting, would be of relevance.

3 REFERENCES

- (1)Black, C. Stewart. *Scottish battles*. Glasgow: Brown Son & Ferguson, 1936.
- (2)Smurthwaite, David. *The Complete Guide to the Battlefields of Britain*. London: Michael Joseph, 1993. p.187.

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