

Battle Name:	Sheriffmuir	Council area: Stirling
Date:	13 <sup>th</sup> November 1715	
UKFOC number:	325	

## ***SHERIFFMUIR***

### **1 SUMMARY**

#### ***1.1 CONTEXT***

In 1707 the two kingdoms of Scotland and England had been united, a highly unpopular move across much of Scottish society. The Jacobites sought to exploit this not simply to reverse the union, but to gain the crown of both England and Scotland. An abortive rising took place in 1708. Then, in 1714, when the Elector of Hanover succeeded Queen Anne to the throne he alienated a range of former supporters of Anne. One of these, the Earl of Mar, threw in his lot with the Jacobites and in September began to raise forces to march south to join with English Jacobites, in an attempt to return a Stuart to the throne. To counter the uprising the government dispatched a combination of Scottish and English regiments under the command of the Duke of Argyle. During October there were various manoeuvres, including against Edinburgh. Then on the 10<sup>th</sup> November the Jacobite army marched south from Perth, reaching Kinbuick, just north east of Dunblane on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Argyll had marched north and was already at Dunblane, intending to intercept the Jacobite force. The government army may have been outnumbered by about 2:1, but it was made up of regulars fighting under an experienced commander.

#### ***1.2 ACTION***

The Jacobites drew up in battle formation on Kinbuick Muir, presumably in order to control the road north from Dunblane, but had to move more than two kilometres south east from here on to Sheriff Muir, to the east of Dunblane, to engage the government force. The manoeuvre proved difficult for the inexperienced Jacobite troops, disrupting their intended battle formation and putting them at a disadvantage in the coming action. Argyll's forces ascended the hill from the direction of Dunblane, but the Jacobites were on the field first and could choose their ground. The Jacobite forces deployed with boggy ground on their left flank; though Reid suggests this was unintentional and caused further disruption to the Jacobite deployment. However, it may be that they intentionally exploited this ground, unsuitable for cavalry action, to anchor their flank and enable the massing of their inexperienced cavalry on the right flank, giving them at least some advantage in numbers against their far more experienced adversaries.

Both armies outflanked each other on their right wings, frequently intentionally the stronger of the two cavalry wings in historic battles. The Jacobite attacks were somewhat disordered, but on the right they were successful and drove off the Hanoverian left who had still not fully deployed and seem to have been caught in the flank by the Highlanders' charge. These Jacobite forces of the right then continued in pursuit of the routed forces,

thus losing the opportunity to attack the exposed flank of the remaining forces of the government centre.

On the Jacobite left the Lowland forces also attacked but were met by well deployed government troops, who held the Jacobite attack. The frozen marsh seems to have enabled government foot though not cavalry to manoeuvre on the Jacobite left flank. The Jacobites were driven back in a fighting retreat as far as the River Allen east of Kinbuck, during which many were probably killed, particularly at the crossing of the Allen.

The returning troops from the Jacobite right seem to have stood on Kippendaive Hill but were not brought back into the action. Argyle, with perhaps 1000 troops of his right wing, comprising men returning from the pursuit towards the Allen, drew up in enclosures and mud walls for protection. Thus the original location of the action was largely abandoned and the forces in the final phase may have approached from almost opposite directions to where they originally deployed. The final Jacobite advance faltered within musket range and they withdrew as dusk approached. Though neither side could claim a genuine victory, the momentum of the rebellion had been broken and it soon then petered out. (2)(4)(5).

**Figure 1: Sheriffmuir (1715) - battlefield plan**

**Figure 2: Sheriffmuir conservation boundary suggested by Martin (red line)**

### **1.3 TROOPS**

The Highland forces of the Jacobites had a great advantage in numbers, but Mar was not an experienced military commander and needed James Stuart to join the army to take command. In contrast the government army, comprising both Scottish and English forces, were mainly well trained and experienced troops. Reid gives a summary of the composition of each army.

#### **Numbers:**

*Government:* 960 dragoons, 2200 infantry; (5)

*Jacobite:* 807 horse, 6290 foot (5).

#### **Losses:**

Government casualties: 700 (2).

Jacobite casualties 250 (2).

About 600 killed in all (5).

### **1.4 COMMEMORATION & INTERPRETATION**

An obelisk monument to the Clan Macrae, erected 1915, stands on the battlefield (3). The Gathering Stone is a block of grit, since 1840 enclosed in an iron cage, where the standard of the Scottish clans is said to have been placed. It is in reality a much earlier standing stone but one which has gained traditional association with the battle (6).

## **2 ASSESSMENT**

### **2.1 LOCATION**

Secondary accounts generally place the initial deployments and action about 1 mile to the SW of the Ordnance Survey and NMRS records for the battlefield. Unlike most other secondary accounts, Reid has the deployment east-west. The deployments shown by Smurthwaite appear far too extensive for the size of armies, while Seymour shows the deployments considerably further to the east than other authors, though still well to the west of the OS site.

With such a well documented battle, which includes contemporary plans as well as many written accounts, it should be possible to remove the confusion through a modern reworking from accounts once a detailed reconstruction of the historic terrain has been completed. For example, the presence, according to the accounts, of boggy ground on the left flank of the Jacobite force should enable the secure location of their deployments (4). There are also other key topographical details, such as the reference to the enclosures used by the government forces towards the end of the battle.

The 'area of search' defined here for the battlefield is in two parts: firstly the core area, intended to encompass the initial action; secondly a wider area intended to cover the prior manoeuvres and subsequent pursuits as well as take account of the current uncertainties over the exact positioning of the main action.

### **2.2 PRIMARY SOURCES**

This is a well documented battle. There are a large number of contemporary written accounts of the action, with information including eye witness accounts and from both sides. There are also several graphic depictions of the battle. A painting shows the armies deployed, though with little terrain detail, and this is reproduced in (5). A printed plan of the battle is in the National Library of Scotland. This gives the contemporary terrain, distinguishing field from open pastures, and shows the original rebel deployment the previous night and their advance to the battlefield. However the critical eastern half of the plan, showing the main battlefield with deployments and action, is apparently missing from the copy in the National Library of Scotland.

### **2.3 SECONDARY WORKS**

There are several late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century studies, which make extensive use of primary sources, but there is no detailed modern study of the battle. Reid considers the study by Baynes (1970) to be the best modern military discussion but criticises it as superficial where it deals with the battle. Reid's own work is a short but concise and useful account. The important difference between his and most other descriptions of the battle is in his placing of the deployments on an east-west rather than north-south orientation.

### **2.4 BATTLE ARCHAEOLOGY**

None has been identified in the research for this report.

## **2.5 BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC TERRAIN**

In this high moorland situation the geological mapping has proven of little assistance in determining the probable location of the boggy ground. NMRS records refer to the J Lesslie plan of Sheriffmuir, 1766. This has not been consulted for the present assessment.

## **2.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE**

Sheriffmuir was the key battle of the 1715 Jacobite rebellion. Though Mar might claim that he held the field, in reality it was a defeat and caused his forces to retreat back to Perth. Even the arrival of James Stuart in late December failed to enable a recovery of the momentum of the uprising.

## **2.7 CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT**

The greater part of the battlefield is covered by forestry plantations. It is uncertain what damage afforestation and associated management works may have done to the battle archaeology. In contrast, the area of the pursuits extends across agricultural land, highways and down to the river Allen. In the absence of information as to the exact location of this subsidiary action it is difficult to assess survival and condition.

## **2.8 CURRENT DESIGNATIONS**

There is a Scheduled area to the north east of the battlefield and Scheduled standing stones to east and northwest. A listed building lies on the eastern edge of battlefield. The clan monument on the battlefield is also listed.

The area suggested for battlefield conservation by Martin is inexplicably restricted in extent (3).

## **2.9 POTENTIAL**

The extensive contemporary accounts together with the pictorial representations of the battle and its preceding manoeuvres should allow for a more accurate and detailed mapping of the initial deployments and distribution of the action. This is essential to enable more effective management of the site. Soil pH needs to be assessed to determine likely survival of artefacts, but as lead bullets were the main projectile type so reasonable survival of these may be expected whatever the soil conditions.

The specific nature of the documentary evidence for the advance and the routs may mean that these areas will prove of research value, allowing detailed validation of the interpretation of battle archaeology. It may be possible to compare the character and density of the main action with that in the pursuits and in the potential concentration of action where the routed Jacobites reached the River Allan. It has not been established whether any comparable action related to the routed Government troops which should be considered to the south west of the battlefield.

## **2.10 THREATS**

The site is unlikely to be threatened by extensive development, but there are current proposals for a wind farm which may have a significant visual and limited archaeological impact on the site. The site is also potentially threatened by the Beaulieu – Denny power-line

proposal. The intrusion of pylons would have a significant visual impact as well as being a potential threat to battle and terrain archaeology. The potential also needs to be assessed for damage through future woodland management (machinery movement, road construction etc) and perhaps even any potential for the reduction of soil pH by the long term presence of the plantation woodland. For the area of the pursuits other threats may exist, though again there are no obvious development threats, but they cannot be adequately assessed unless the location of that element of the action is more accurately defined.

A level II assessment would be required to enable an effective assessment of the impact on the battlefield of the current development proposals.

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- (3) Matthews, Rupert. *England versus Scotland, The great British battles*. Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003.
- (4) Reid, Stuart. *Battles of the Scottish Lowlands, Battlefield Britain*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004.
- (5) Smurthwaite, David. *The Complete Guide to the Battlefields of Britain*. London: Michael Joseph, 1993.
- (6) NMRS

### **4 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

#### **4.1 PRIMARY SOURCES**

##### ***National Library of Scotland:***

Map of battle: 3 identical left hand part of a printed plan showing the contemporary terrain, distinguishing field from open pastures, and showing the original rebel deployment the previous night and their advance to the battlefield. The critical eastern half showing the main battlefield with deployments and action is missing. A brief description of the action is provided in the key.

##### ***National Archives:***

SP 54/10/45A Mar to the Governor of Perth. Giving an account of the events of the battle of Sheriffmuir: they attacked the enemy at noon and “carry’d the day entirely”. Also with a list of prisoners, including those wounded, and reporting the death of Strathmore and Macdonald of Clanranald 1715 Nov 13

SP 54/10/45B Account of the battle of Sheriffmuir by the Jacobite side undated

SP 54/10/47 Provost of Edinburgh, sending an account of the battle of Sheriffmuir 1715 Nov 14

SP 54/10/48 Argyll to Secretary Townshend. On the battle of Sheriffmuir, giving losses and prisoners; also asking when the Dutch reinforcements will arrive 1715 Nov 14

SP 54/10/49 Postmaster Anderson, on Sheriffmuir, “wherein bless’d be God we had the better, and hope soon to hear, that what remain of the rebels are intirely routed” 1715 Nov 14

SP 54/10/50 Rothes, reporting that Sheriffmuir was a considerable victory for government forces 1715 Nov 15

SP 54/10/51 Argyll to Secretary Townshend. On Sheriffmuir: inquiring into the retreat of some of the army; on those officers who deserve recognition for their actions; and reporting that the rebels are in the position they held before the advance, and are gathering their forces for another attack 1715 Nov 15

SP 54/10/95 Lord Torphichen: account of the battle of Sheriffmuir [1715 Nov]

SP 54/10/96C Andr[ew] Hume to Pringle. On the news from Edinburgh; desertions from the Jacobite army since Sheriffmuir and rumours of an offer of surrender; the ill health of Tweeddale and the hopes of Forfar’s recovery; also on the plight of a rebel prisoner 1715 Nov 29

SP 54/10/97 Gen Wightman, giving his account of the action at Sheriffmuir, and contradicting the report of the bad behaviour of Lord Stair’s regiment under the command of Major Otway during the battle; also recommending Col Lawrence, formerly a prisoner at Perth 1715 Dec 1

SP 54/10/104 Pollock, reporting that the clans are sending men to ensure the return of those men who deserted after Sheriffmuir, and he is in no position to stop them 1715 Dec 2

SP 54/10/115B Argyll to Secretary Townshend. Giving thanks for being granted leave; reporting that there is no news of the Pretender’s landing; and giving an account of the behaviour of the left wing of his forces at Sheriffmuir, some of whom did not do their duty 1715 Dec 6

SP 54/11/72A Sutherland, on the difficulties he faces and the lack of support he is given; he has spent all the money he has got or could borrow, in the king’s service; also recommending clemency for Sir Robert Gordon, who left the rebels before Sheriffmuir 1716 Jan 30

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*A true and particular account of the battle at Sheriff-Muir : with an exact list of all the nobility, general officers, chiefs of clans, and number of private men, in the King's army in Scotland; under the command of the Duke of Mar. To which is added, a form of prayer and thanksgiving us'd on Thursday, January 26, 1716, for the King's safe and happy landing.* 1716.

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#### 4.2 SECONDARY SOURCES

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