

Battle Name:	Dunbar II	Council area: E Lothian
Date:	3rd September 1650	
UKFOC number:	271	

## ***DUNBAR II***

### **1 SUMMARY**

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

Charles I had been executed in January 1649 and a Commonwealth declared in England. In June 1650 his son landed in Scotland where he was proclaimed King Charles II. In July the English Parliament, expecting Charles to initiate a Scottish led campaign for the English crown, launched a pre-emptive invasion of Scotland. A largely veteran force of 10,000 foot & 5000 horse from the New Model Army was sent north under the command of Oliver Cromwell. Scottish forces numbering some 25,000 were raised in response, under the highly experienced David Leslie, though the army was weakened by the exclusion of non-Presbyterians. Leslie fought a defensive campaign about Edinburgh, denying Cromwell the opportunity to fight a pitched battle. The New Model Army was supplied by sea via the port of Dunbar. Having failed to bring Leslie to battle they were forced by the weather, sickness and supply problems, to retire to Dunbar, first in early August and then again in late August. Leslie, outnumbering the New Model 2:1, saw his opportunity and marched around Dunbar to cut Cromwell's road connection to Berwick. Cromwell now finally had Leslie offering battle but he was at a severe disadvantage. Rather than evacuate by sea Cromwell met the challenge.(1)

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

The heavily outnumbered but experienced and well equipped professional soldiers of the New Model were pitted against a much larger number of Scots, but although the latter had a substantial core of experienced professional soldiers and a very capable commander, much of the army comprised raw recruits. The Scots had secured a strong position along the south side of the Brox Burn, on a narrow strip of land between it and Doon Hill to the south. In front of their left divisions the burn passed through a 'ravine' but further east the ground was more level and could be more easily crossed. Cromwell saw a major tactical flaw in the Scottish deployment: on this constricted ground the Scots could not turn their centre and left in support if he attacked their right flank. He therefore mounted a surprise early morning attack, taking the main road crossing of the burn, with supporting divisions also crossing both downstream and others, later, upstream (the exact locations of these attacks are not accurately identified, thus the arrows on the accompanying plan are only indicative. Action could have occurred at almost any point along this section of the burn). After fierce action, the New Model defeated the Scottish right wing of horse and then rolled up the whole army westward. The New Model infantry pushed the Scottish infantry back at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile before its battle formation disintegrated. Finally, after breaking the Scottish left wing of horse, Cromwell then pursued for some 8 miles, effectively destroying the Scottish army.

**Figure 1: Dunbar II (1650) - battlefield plan**

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

### **1.3 TROOPS**

Numbers:

*English:* 7500 foot, 3500 horse; total 11,000.(2)

*Scottish:* 16000 foot, 6000 horse; total: 22,000.(2)

Losses:

Captured: Scottish: 10,000

Killed: Scottish: 3000; English: 30.(3)

### **1.4 COMMEMORATION & INTERPRETATION**

Beside the former main road, in the area close to the main cavalry action, there is a monument to the battle. A funerary monument to Sir William Douglas lies in the gardens of Broxmouth House.

## **2 ASSESSMENT**

### **2.1 LOCATION**

There is agreement between all authors as to the general location of the action, although oddly Thomson's Atlas of Scotland (1832) shows the battle being fought on the south side of Doon Hill. Young & Adair, followed by various authors, show slightly more extensive action on the north east by Cromwell, than that shown by Reid. They also show four crossings of the stream by parliament forces, on either side of the main road.(3) Seymour gives idiosyncratic English deployment and shows attacks across a wide front, apparently contrary to the evidence of the primary accounts.(4)

Martin suggests an area for conservation that is extensive, encompassing probably more land, especially on the south, than may be necessary. It also combines on the west with the battlefield of Dunbar I, which ought to be assessed separately.(5)

### **2.2 PRIMARY SOURCES**

There is a substantial number of written sources, including eye witness accounts. There is also a contemporary prospect or battle 'plan' showing the general deployments and distribution of the action in relation to limited terrain detail. Unfortunately there is no secondary work which makes these accounts readily available although a copy of the battle 'plan' is reprinted by Ashley.(6)

### **2.3 SECONDARY WORKS**

The battle is dealt with in most of the main national battlefield books and various Civil War studies. However the first book devoted solely to this battle, by Reid, was not published until 2004. It is a useful study but its value is seriously compromised by the lack of referencing and its two battle plans are also difficult to use because of their 3D presentation, all typical of Osprey publications. Thanks to its specific referencing

therefore Robbins' single chapter is, in some respects, of greater use. However there is still the need for a major study of the battle which meets the standards set in works on other major civil war battles.<sup>1</sup>

#### **2.4 BATTLE ARCHAEOLOGY**

No battle archaeology has been identified in the current assessment. An extensive distribution pattern of unstratified artefacts, mainly lead bullets is to be expected.

#### **2.5 BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC TERRAIN**

The physical topography provides the major elements of the battlefield terrain. The course of the main road crossing the Brox burn, though now bypassed, is probably still on the line of the 17<sup>th</sup> century route. No reconstruction of the man-made elements of the terrain appears to have been undertaken from either documentary or archaeological evidence, but this is essential to determine whether any features such as enclosures are likely to have had a significant influence on the detail of the action.

The loss of the eastern part of the battlefield to mineral extraction before the production of the modern high resolution dtm (NEXTMap Britain) means that any fine detail of relief, which could not be revealed from the lower resolution Ordnance Survey contouring data, yet which may have had considerable military significance, will have been lost. There is a slight possibility that this may be reconstructable from pre mineral extraction stereo vertical photography, if adequate surviving control data can be retrieved.

#### **2.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE**

Dunbar was one of Cromwell's greatest victories. It played an important role in completing his rise to political power and, together with Inverkiething (UKFOC 407) and then most importantly Worcester in 1651 (UKFOC 6), resulted in the conquest of Scotland and destruction of any serious potential for the restoration of Charles II, who had been forced into exile, by force of arms. Dunbar was an action where tactical flair, exploiting key elements of the terrain with an army of highly experienced professional troops, was central to the victory against odds of about 2:1.

#### **2.7 CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT**

Extensive quarrying in very recent times, and which still continues today, has completely destroyed a substantial area on the critical eastern side of the battlefield, without apparently any form of archaeological recording of this important resource before destruction. This will also have affected the evidence for the historic terrain, even resulting in the diversion of the original main road. It also represents a remarkable destruction of the physical form of the land which is so critical to both the understanding of and interpretation to the public of any historic battle. The remaining part of the eastern end of the battlefield has also been damaged by the mainline railway and by the realignment of the A1. It would be instructive to chart the chronology of this destruction in order to understand the degree and reasons for the failure to protect or in the very least to ensure rescue recording of the evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Foard, Naseby: The Decisive Campaign. Peter Young, Edgehill 1642 : The Campaign & The Battle (Kington: The Roundwood Press, 1967).

A significant area about 400m wide along the south eastern side of the Brox burn does survive within the landscape park of Broxburn House. This area could be of very high importance in determining the detail of location of the critical initial action of the battle, when Cromwell secured the crossing of the burn and then defeated Leslie's right wing of cavalry. Detailed survey in this area may enable both the pattern of attack and provide some guide as to what may have been destroyed by the mineral extraction.

## **2.8 CURRENT DESIGNATIONS**

The Designed Landscape of Broxburn House encompasses the surviving part of the north eastern end of the battlefield. Its management and that of this area of the battlefield could usefully reinforce each other. There are several small scheduled areas on and immediately north of Doon Hill. There are several listed buildings in the battlefield area but none of the structures appear directly related to the action itself.

## **2.9 POTENTIAL**

Dunbar is one of the most important and well documented of battles in Scotland, being one of only a handful in 17<sup>th</sup> century Britain to have a contemporary 'plan' of the action. It was a battle which turned critically on the exploitation of terrain, yet it appears that no study has as yet attempted an effective reconstruction of the historic terrain.

The destruction through quarrying, without archaeological record, of at least part of the key area on the Scottish right wing, where the decisive action was fought, is a major loss. However it is unclear how much has been lost as it is not known how much of the critical action took place in the destroyed area. A substantial part of the battlefield, almost certainly containing the whole of the Scottish centre and left, as well as the key areas on either side of the Brox Burn (from west of the crossing of the burn through to the coast) where the first English bridgehead was achieved, remains as farmland or parkland. In these areas, constituting the majority of the battlefield, both the battle archaeology and historic terrain evidence should remain reasonably well preserved. Given the nature of the weapons of the period and the character of the action, it is likely that tens of thousands of lead bullets will remain on the battlefield, indicative of the distribution, character and intensity of the action. There is thus high potential for a detailed, systematic metal detecting survey. On the eastern side of the battlefield past losses mean that even the smallest of areas not so far disturbed could have a very high potential to enable the accurate placing of the action on this side of the field. Any further threats to the archaeology should be given the highest priority for evaluation, conservation or, failing that, then detailed investigation.

Reconstruction of the historic terrain using a combination of documentary and archaeological evidence should assist greatly in the accurate placing of the documented battle evidence, thus providing an important element in the definition and interpretation of the battlefield. It may even be possible to recover detail of the relief of the now quarried area using sophisticated computerised analysis of the 1940s vertical aerial photography, if sufficient controls survive. Such reconstruction of the historic terrain should also enable the identification of surviving historic features in the present landscape which were significant in the battle, thus enabling their conservation.

Sufficient of the battlefield seems to survive to enable interpretation of the battlefield to the visitor although a fully effective interpretive scheme cannot be defined until a detailed study of the battlefield has been undertaken.

## 2.10 THREATS

Mineral extraction continues on the eastern edge of the battlefield, without apparently any investigation to determine if battle archaeology extends this far to the east. The potential for destruction of archaeological evidence relevant to the reconstruction of the historic terrain of the battlefield should also be considered. Such evidence may not extend this far from the core of the action, but even so it would be important to demonstrate negative evidence.

There are likely to be large quantities of lead bullets on the battlefield and thus there is the potential for extensive loss to treasure hunting and poorly recorded metal detecting survey.

Given the losses already incurred as a result of mineral extraction, road and rail construction, it is particularly important that a detailed assessment is made of future threats and appropriate evaluation and mitigation measures taken to secure the surviving evidence. Particular focus should be given to the small areas of survival on the Scottish right wing. Even the smallest of areas of surviving battle archaeology in an area as severely damaged as the eastern part of Dunbar battlefield, could prove of great value in pinning down elements of the crucial attack on the Leslie's right wing of cavalry. (There is a current planning proposal affecting this area within Broxmouth Garden.<sup>2</sup> It mainly involves conversion of existing buildings and so other than any new services trenching to be undertaken it may prove to have a very limited impact on any surviving battle archaeology, but it should ideally be assessed).

## 3 REFERENCES

- (1) Reid, Stuart, and Colin Turner. *Dunbar 1650, Cromwell's Most Famous Victory*: Osprey, 2004.
- (2) Robbins, Simon. *God's General: Cromwell the Soldier*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1993.
- (3) Young Peter, and Adair John. *From Hastings to Culloden : battlefields in Britain*. New enlarged edn. ed. Kineton, 19
- (4) Seymour W. *Battles in Britain and their political background 1066-1746*. London: Book Club Associates, 1979
- (5) Martin, David E. "The Battlefields of Scotland: A report on their preservation for Historic Scotland." *Historic Scotland*, 1997.
- (6) Ashley, Maurice. *Oliver Cromwell and his world*, 1972.
- (7) Reid, Stuart. *Battles of the Scottish Lowlands, Battlefield Britain*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004.
- (8) Matthews, Rupert. *England versus Scotland, The great British battles*. Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003.

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<sup>2</sup> Information from the Heritage Officer of East Lothian Council.

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