

Battle Name:	Falkirk II	Council area: Falkirk
Date:	17 th January 1746	
UKFOC number:	272	

FALKIRK II

1 SUMMARY

1.1 CONTEXT

After their devastating victory at Prestonpans, the Jacobite army had marched into England. However, when the expected French invasion and English Jacobite uprising failed to materialise they retreated back into Scotland, fighting a rearguard action on Clifton Moor in Lancashire. At the same time the siege of the government forces in Stirling Castle continued. In response a government army under Lt General Hawley marched north and assembled his forces at Edinburgh, then moving north west to relieve Stirling. Lord George Murray's Jacobite army blocked Hawley's path at Falkirk.

1.2 ACTION

Hawley was caught out by the speed of the Jacobite manoeuvres. Murray took the initiative and deployed on commanding ground to the south west of Falkirk, on Falkirk Muir, which the Jacobites approached from the west. The ground was ideal for the Highland charge and had good flank protection. The government army responded, marching on to the Muir from the east but in such a hurry that the artillery was never brought up before the battle began. The two forces deployed roughly north-south, with a steep scarp defining the battlefield on the north side and marshy ground to the south. On the north a steep ravine separated the armies but in the centre and south it was open sloping ground.

The Jacobite army, under Murray, comprised a combination of Highland clan forces, which would depend on the Highland charge, together with Lowland infantry including a small body of professional French troops, trained according to contemporary European military practice. The Highlanders were placed in the front line and the Lowland infantry as support in the second line, together with a small infantry and a cavalry reserve. But the Highland charge that was so successful at Prestonpans had been against troops that had never seen action. At Falkirk the government army was made up largely of veterans trained to form up 3 deep and volley fire muskets at about 2 rounds a minute. Hawley believed this tactic, when employed by battle hardened troops, would be effective against the Highland charge. He therefore deployed in two lines of infantry, with the dragoons on the front left. He placed his inexperienced troops, the militias which were well trained but had no combat experience, as a left rear flank guard and on the slopes on the right.

The first engagement was with a left flank government dragoons attack on the Jacobite right, but this failed and some of the fleeing dragoons disordered government infantry regiments on the left, including the militia. These infantry were unable to reform in time to fire the intended volley before the Highlanders came in to hand to hand combat. Indeed Reid suggests that the government infantry were still advancing up hill when they were hit by the Highland charge. The Highlanders had supposedly attacked contrary to their commanders' intentions, forcing him to send the second line Lowland

infantry forward in support. Under this pressure the government regiments broke, carrying the militia reserve with them. Highlanders then rushed on in pursuit. Though it was important to keep the broken government troops from reforming, the success on the Jacobite right ought to have led to a flank attack on the hard pressed government right. Instead all the Highlanders pursued the government forces and pillaged their camp.

Meanwhile the regiments of the government right, which had not been disordered and had the added protection of a steep ravine to preclude enemy attack on the far right, held their line against the Jacobites. Just as Hawley had expected from all his infantry, the intense musket fire caused the Jacobite left to recoil and some fled. There is then some disagreement between several of the secondary accounts as to the detail of the action on the Jacobite left, but it would appear that the lack of effective command and control within the Jacobite forces put them at a severe disadvantage. The failing light and bad weather precluded a government offensive at such a late stage, even though so many of the Jacobite forces were disordered or had left the field, and Hawley therefore retreated back to his camp and then back towards Edinburgh.

The battle was relatively short and saw the Jacobites effectively left in command of the field but in reality the victory, though of important propaganda value, was a hollow one. The government forces certainly did not see Falkirk as a defeat. The Jacobites in contrast had seen their weaknesses exposed, having failed, particularly though ineffective command and control during the action, to capitalise fully on their initial success. Then, faced by the difficulties of a winter campaign, the Jacobites abandoned the Stirling siege and marched north, the Highlanders dispersing until a new muster in the spring. (1) (2) (4) (7).

Figure 1: Falkirk II (1746) - battlefield plan

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

1.3 TROOPS

Numbers:

Reid provides a detailed breakdown of the regiments and battalions (7)

Government:

Total: c.9000 (1); 8000 (4); 7800 (7)

6500 regulars including 700 dragoons (1).

1600 militia plus 2000 Highlanders, of which 1000 had been left to hold Edinburgh(4)

5488 regulars; 1500 militia (7)

Cavalry: 819 (7)

Artillery (not engaged)

Jacobite:

Total: c.8000 (1); c.6000

Infantry: c. 4000 Highlanders; c. 4000 Lowland militia (1); c.3800 Highlanders; c.2000 others (7)

Cavalry: several hundred (1); 360 (7)

Losses:

Government: 400 (1); 300 killed; 300 captured (4); 70 killed, many of them officers (7)

Jacobite: 50 killed; 80 wounded (4); 50 killed; 60-80 wounded (7).

1.4 COMMEMORATION & INTERPRETATION

There is a monument on the northern side of the battlefield at the southern end of the ravine.

2 ASSESSMENT**2.1 LOCATION**

All authors are in agreement as to the general location of the battlefield. However there are significant problems with the exact placing of the forces (2). The action was fought on Falkirk Muir and the extent of this area of moorland should be relatively easy to map for the mid 18th century. The ravine on the north, in front of the Jacobite left wing, and the marsh on the Jacobite right flank should then enable accurate positioning of the deployments. Smurthwaite is exceptional in showing the deployments further eastward than all others, with the ravine identified as an improbably small feature 300m eastward of the accepted location (4).

Unfortunately all the secondary works examined fail to adequately fix the location and extent of the key topographical features and hence to securely place the initial deployments and action. In particular most deployments, though using the clear ravine on the north to position the two armies, do not locate the marsh on the south, and most importantly almost all fail to position the armies so that the ground falls from a lightly wooded hill behind the Jacobite left to the south eastwards and then rises again behind the government left to an open hill, as the contemporary battle plan and accounts make clear (3). This is priority for resolution, using the contemporary plans and accounts of the battle, geological and detailed relief mapping and historic maps. Initial assessment suggests the possibility that the actual Jacobite deployment may have been some 300m or more to the west than is usually shown, while the geological evidence for the marsh might even indicate a location almost 1km to the north west.

The area defined by Martin for conservation covers most of the surviving undeveloped areas of the battlefield. However its exclusion of smaller undeveloped areas on the eastern side of the battlefield, within the housing development, may be excluding land where some battle archaeology survives, though the value of any such evidence remains uncertain. His boundary on the western side may prove to have been far too tightly defined. (5)

2.2 PRIMARY SOURCES

There are possibly as many as six separate plans of the battle, including plans from both sides, though some may prove to be identical or derivative when examined together. There are also large number of written accounts and related documents including accounts from both sides.

2.3 SECONDARY WORKS

Most of the main battlefields studies include Falkirk II, but there is just one modern study devoted solely to this battle, although several others from earlier in the 20th

century. The most useful and accessible short account of the battle is that by Reid, who includes various extracts from the primary accounts, though he places a somewhat different perspective on the outcome than some other authors. According to Reid the best modern study is that by Bailey, as it includes much local knowledge (6).

2.4 BATTLE ARCHAEOLOGY

There are local reports of burials in the area, but an association with the battle has not been verified (5).

2.5 BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC TERRAIN

The battle is also named Falkirk Muir, from the fact that it was fought on moor land to the south west of Falkirk. The moor has been enclosed subsequent to the battle. A steep scarp defines a boundary to the north, while to the south the ground sloped more gently to a marshy area somewhere along the Glen Burn, which was perhaps significant in precluding a government outflanking move on the Jacobite right wing.

Understanding the terrain as it was in 1746 is important both for the significant influence it had on the outcome of the action and to allow exact placing of the action. The geological evidence might indicate that the marsh in question was considerably further to the west than is usually suggested, but without further work it is impossible to determine whether there was also significant marsh, not clearly identified in the geological mapping, along the course of the burn on the left flank of the standard deployments.¹ The accurate definition of the moorland should also be possible.

2.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE

Falkirk II was the second of the Jacobite victories during the 1745-6 campaign. Unlike Prestonpans, where untested government troops had broken in the face of the Highland charge, here it was well trained veteran troops under an experienced commander. This was arguably the high point of the Jacobite campaign, but it was not the devastating victory that might have been achieved. It was a propaganda success but in reality it had revealed the great weaknesses of the Jacobite forces.

2.7 CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT

Modern development has encroached on the eastern part of the battlefield, though the true extent of loss depends on the exact placing of the deployments and action. The area of the pursuit is certainly built over. On the north the canal skirts the northern edge of the scarp while on the north west, probably but not certainly beyond the area of action, there has been extensive mineral extraction. The majority of the battlefield appears however to remain as enclosed agricultural fields with limited areas of woodland.

2.8 CURRENT DESIGNATIONS

The battlefield monument is Listed. The canal on the north and eastern periphery of the battlefield is Scheduled, as is the Roman fort on the north western edge of the battlefield.

¹ What is the significance of 'Tom Carr' marked on the Pont Map of 1783-96? (NLS Adv.MS.70.2.9 (Pont 32)).

2.9 *POTENTIAL*

The exact positioning of the initial deployments of the two armies is critical to the interpretation of the battle and for the definition of the conservation and any recording priorities for the battlefield. The detailed accounts and maps with their identification of distinct topographical features, not just the marsh and the ravine but also including buildings and enclosures, should enable this to be achieved with high accuracy.

A substantial part of the battlefield remains as open ground that has not been disturbed, especially if the action has to be repositioned westward from the usually identified location. Only if it is moved a substantial distance to the west would the former quarrying have affected the battlefield. There is therefore the potential for battle archaeology in the form of large numbers of unstratified lead bullets, the patterning reflecting the varying distribution and character of the action.

There would also seem to be a high potential for the interpretation of the battlefield on the ground as the topographical framework is very distinctive and played a key role in the location and course of the action. Enough of the battlefield seems to survive at present but it would appear to require active conservation to protect it from further destruction. If it is not to be conserved then detailed archaeological recording of the battle archaeology should be required. Any relevant archaeological evidence for the historic terrain, where this cannot be established from documentary records, should also be investigated.

A detailed study of the battlefield based on the documentary record of the battle and of the historic terrain is an essential precursor to conservation and interpretation of the battlefield. The hypotheses based on the analysis of the documentary evidence should be tested on the ground through sampling of the battle archaeology to confirm locations. Such sampling is also essential to establish the likely state of survival of the battle archaeology. Any such assessment should also include investigation as to what metal detecting has taken place on the site to date, attempting to compile a record of such material as has been recovered and from where. Only with such information can an effective conservation, or if necessary, intensive recording scheme be defined.

The documentary record for both the event and its terrain context may prove to be so good that the archaeology of the battle and of the battlefield terrain may have only a limited role to play in furthering understanding of the action. The archaeology is however likely to be essential for the confirmation of the interpretations based on the documentary record. In addition, given the quality of the documentary record, it may be that the detailed investigation of the battle archaeology at Falkirk will enable significant advances in the methodology of battlefield studies, particularly with regard to the interpretation of the signature of different types of action, such as the fighting retreat made by the government forces on the right compared to the rout of those on the left.

2.10 *THREATS*

The site is in close proximity to areas of recent development and may thus be under threat from development, part of the battlefield having already been lost in very recent times without archaeological record.

Although no artillery were apparently employed in the action, there was intense musket fire. This will have laid down large numbers of lead bullets, representing a battle

archaeology resource highly vulnerable to treasure hunting and poorly recorded metal detecting survey.

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