

Battle Name:	Killiecrankie	Council area: Perth & Kinross
Date:	27th July 1689	
UKFOC number:	332	

## ***KILLIECRANKIE***

### **1 SUMMARY**

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

In the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England the catholic James VII(II) was ousted and replaced by William of Orange and Queen Mary. In 1689 the Scottish parliament voted to give the crown of Scotland to William & Mary. In response Viscount Dundee raised mainly Highland forces under the standard of James VII(II) in the first Jacobite rebellion against the newly installed monarch. They were supported by a small force of Irish troops. A Scottish government army was raised to counter the rebellion. This army comprised Lowland Scottish, English and Dutch forces, under General Mackay. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1689 they intercepted the rebels just to the north west of the Killiecrankie Pass, on the key strategic communications route into the Highlands from Perth to Inverness.

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

The Jacobites gained the advantage of the high ground but Mackay took up a suitable position to meet a charge, on a terrace just to the north east of the then main road. Regimental positions in the deployment are listed in various secondary works (3) (6). Having doubled his files to provide a wider frontage and enable salvo fire from his whole force, the government army waited. After a period of desultory firing Dundee attacked late in the evening. The rebel force had limited numbers of muskets, the main weapon being sword, but the disordered Highland charge suffered substantial losses to the single musket volley. Despite perhaps as many as 600 being killed, the charge carried. Mackay's men had little time to reload or insert their plug bayonets before the rebels closed. In hand to hand fighting the Jacobites had considerable success against the extended government line. Mackay responded with a cavalry charge but this was countered by Dundee's horse. Though the Jacobites had the better of the action and various government regiments were routed, the firepower of the government right wing regiments allowed them to withdraw in good order, mortally wounding Dundee during one of the cavalry charges. The Highlanders pursued the retreating government forces but then contented themselves with the spoils of the baggage train. The government army had been severely mauled, losing a large numbers of troops killed or captured. However the Jacobites had lost their leader, a massive blow, and failed to follow through their success.(1) (2) (5).

**Figure 1: Killiecrankie (1689) - battlefield plan**

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

### **1.3 TROOPS**

#### **Numbers:**

*Government:* 5000, also 9 small artillery pieces (5)

*Jacobite:* 2500 foot; 1 troop of horse (5)

#### **Losses:**

*Government:* 1200 (5)

*Jacobite:* 1250 (5)

### **1.4 COMMEMORATION & INTERPRETATION**

The 'Claverhouse Stone' lies on the south west edge of the battlefield and is said to be where John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, was killed. This is actually a prehistoric standing stone and the only association with the battle is through local tradition. There is a plaque to the fallen on the Mount Clavers, the supposed mass grave site.(7) Kinross refers to a Balfour stone and a monument in the centre of the battlefield but both identifications seem to be in error.(3).

## **2 ASSESSMENT**

### **2.1 LOCATION**

The battle is fairly closely located. However there are differences in the various secondary accounts as to the exact width and position of the frontages. Most secondary works indicate a north-west/south-east alignment of troops. This fits well with the physical terrain of the battle, with two distinct slopes divided by a terrace, on which the main action appears to have occurred. Smurthwaite's depiction of troops at right angles across the valley is an exception and is difficult to reconcile with the physical terrain.

The areas identified by Martin for conservation is inexplicably restricted in extent to the north west, excluding a substantial area which most sources place within the battlefield. It also includes a significant area beyond the Girnaig stream, though the latter may be to encompass a presumed area of the Government baggage train, which no secondary work appears to locate.

The search area defined here is securely bounded on the south west by the river. To the north east the steep slopes provide a less definite boundary. To east and west the extent of deployment and action is far less certain, while the baggage train and any attack upon it is wholly unlocated.

### **2.2 PRIMARY SOURCES**

There are a number of primary accounts by eye witnesses to the battle.

### **2.3 SECONDARY WORKS**

One of the most accessible modern works providing a good overview of the battle is Pollard & Oliver (2003), particularly valuable for its account of the archaeological investigation, though the latter aspect will soon be superseded by the detailed archaeological report.

## **2.4 BATTLE ARCHAEOLOGY**

Archaeological investigation failed to locate a mass grave in the area close to the Tomb Clavers where human remains had been reported in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. However systematic metal detecting survey did recover a significant numbers of battle artefacts across the battlefield including lead bullets, buttons and a grenade fragment. This evidence appears to have tied down the action with far more certainty than ever before, but until a plan is published showing the distribution, type and density of the finds and the intensity of the survey it is difficult to assess results. What is has clearly demonstrated is the enormous potential on this site for a comprehensive battlefield survey.(6)

## **2.5 BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC TERRAIN**

The Historic Land Use mapping available from RCAHMS shows mainly 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century rectilinear fields with limited areas of woodland and designed landscape. No detailed reconstruction of the historic terrain of 1689 has been located during the research for this report.

## **2.6 SIGNIFICANCE**

This was the first and most significant of the battles of the first Jacobite rebellion. Although it was an important victory for the Jacobites, it also resulted in the death of the rebel leader, Viscount Dundee, a major factor in the subsequent collapse of the uprising.

This was also the first battle in Britain where the plug bayonet was used in place of pike, with all the infantry carrying muskets; the inability to fire the musket with the bayonet in place proved a contributory factor in the government defeat. A small number of grenadiers, carrying grenades as well as muskets were also present.

## **2.7 CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT**

The majority of the battlefield is agricultural fields with a limited area under woodland. The A9 bypass and a rail line, running close to the old road, both cross the battlefield. There is apparently no other substantial disturbance of the site, although according to Martin some land (unspecified) to the south of the A9 has been subjected to landfill and is now planted with trees. (4).

## **2.8 CURRENT DESIGNATIONS**

The monument to Viscount Dundee is scheduled, as is the Tomb Clavers.

The National Trust for Scotland owns property on the south east periphery of the battlefield, including the Soldier's Leap, where there is a Visitor Centre. This appears to be in the area of the retreat / rout but not in the centre of the battlefield itself.

There is said to be limited on site interpretation but access to the battlefield is restricted (4).

## **2.9 POTENTIAL**

The site appears to be largely in a good state of preservation although the scale of the impact of the new route of the A9 needs to be assessed in terms of impact on the battle archaeology of the main action.

Limited archaeological investigation has demonstrated a high potential for the study of battle archaeology.

## **2.10 THREATS**

No development threats have been reported or seem likely.

The presence of extensive non ferrous battle archaeology, particularly lead bullets, but also examples of other munitions and equipment renders the site particularly vulnerable to treasure hunting and unrecorded/poorly recorded metal detecting.

## **3 REFERENCES**

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- (3)Kinross, John. *Walking & Exploring the Battlefields of Britain*. Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1988.
- (4)Martin, David E. "The Battlefields of Scotland: A report on their preservation for Historic Scotland." Historic Scotland, 1997.
- (5)Matthews, Rupert. *England versus Scotland, The great British battles*. Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2003.
- (6)Pollard & Oliver, Tony & Neil. *Two Men in a Trench II: Uncovering the Secrets of British Battlefields*. London: Michael Joseph, 2003.
- (7)NMRS

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