

Battle Name:	Prestonpans	Council area: E Lothian
Date:	21 st September 1745	
UKFOC number:	273	

PRESTONPANS

1 SUMMARY

1.1 CONTEXT

The last Jacobite rising was initially intended to support a French led invasion of Britain in 1744, which it was hoped would lead English Jacobites to rise up in support, but this invasion was aborted. Finally, on the 25th July 1745, Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender, landed in Scotland to launch a Jacobite rebellion which proved to be wholly based in Scotland. As with many earlier campaigns fought in Scotland, the rising was able to exploit the weakness caused by the British (and in earlier centuries English) government army being stretched by a continental war with France; in this case the action was part of the War of the Austrian Succession. Mainly Highland forces were raised under the Jacobite colours and this army marched south to occupy Edinburgh. The government army in Scotland, under Sir John Cope, comprised just 3000 men. Having failed to intercept the Jacobites in their march south, Cope transported his troops south by sea from Aberdeen to Dunbar. Edinburgh fell to the Jacobites, without any fighting, and they then marched eastward along the coast to confront Cope.

1.2 ACTION

Cope's army landed at Dunbar on 17th & 18th September, then marched on the 19th to camp west of Haddington. On the 20th, on news of Jacobite army approach from the west, they marched to counter them, deploying in a cornfield immediately west of Seton, thus controlling the main coastal route running east from Edinburgh. Rather than attempt a frontal assault on such a well deployed enemy, the Jacobites marched around southward. They thus advanced to deploy on a hill to the west of Tranent. This forced the government army to redeploy, closer to Preston and facing south(1). But the Jacobites found a marsh (Tranent meadow) lay between the two armies, thus engaging would have been difficult if not impossible (2). A Jacobite detachment marched to the west and deployed beside Tranent church. Cope responded with redeployment and fired several roundshot at them. The Jacobites then sent detachments to secure their route of retreat westward and to cut Cope's route eastward.

To force the battle on their terms, early on the morning of the 21st September, the Jacobites descended the hill and marched east and then north, negotiating the marsh. They appeared in three columns immediately to the west of Seton at about 5.00am and deployed in two lines. But Cope had already been warned of the advance by his scouts. Cope deployed once more to counter them, leaving his army facing eastward. But in the early morning mist the Jacobites deployed too far to the north and also left a wide gap in their frontage (6) which also resulted in both armies outflanking the left of the other(1).

The government artillery pieces each had time to fire just one round, against the left of the Jacobite deployment, The government right attempted an attack on the left flank of the Jacobites but were repulsed and carried with them the artillerymen in their flight (2). Indeed significant numbers of the largely untested government troops on both flanks broke and fled, even before they came to hand to hand fighting, and in so doing they disordered some of their reserves. Though some of the Jacobite forces pursued the fleeing troops the majority seem to have turned on the government infantry's now exposed right flank. The Jacobites in their attack, after receiving a volley from the whole government army, came on, fired their muskets which they then threw down and drew swords and ran forward in attack. The government battle formation was immediately broken, with just a few units offering any further resistance. Within 7 or 8 minutes the Jacobites were in control of the field and had captured both the royal baggage and artillery. While Cope managed to retreat with some of his infantry, by a lane beside Bankton House, large numbers of his army were captured. Cope reached Berwick with only about 450 troops.(1) (6).

Figure 1: Prestonpans (1745) - battlefield plan

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

1.3 TROOPS

The Jacobite campaign was compromised by problems within their high command, between experienced and inexperienced commanders. In the government army the problem was the large number of raw recruits that lacked the experience and training to effectively implement the otherwise very effective contemporary European infantry tactics. The composition of the armies and the deployments are summarised in (6).

Numbers:

Government: 2500-2800 foot and dragoons, plus volunteers and reserve, probably 4000 total (1); 2300 (2);

1234 foot, 567 horse; artillery: 6 small pieces and 4 small mortars(6)

Jacobite: circa 1500 – 2000 of which only circa 1000 engaged.(1); 2500 (2);

more than 2200 foot, 36 horse (6).

Losses:

Jacobite: 30 killed; 70-80 wounded;

Government: 300 killed; 1400 captured.(1).

1.4 COMMEMORATION & INTERPRETATION

There is one monument on the southern edge of the battlefield. Another to the south west commemorates the government Colonel Gardiner, said to have been killed in his own gardens during the rout (6).

2 ASSESSMENT

2.1 LOCATION

The general area of the battlefield is located with a high degree of accuracy. Surprisingly however, Martin's proposal for conservation appears to exclude most of the area of deployment and initial engagement (4). Smurthwaite (2), followed by various authors, shows a deployment and action which seems to cover far too wide an area to the north, given the detail in the contemporary plans. The latter show the sequence of deployments by the government forces in response to the manoeuvres of the Jacobite army(1). Of the modern plans consulted, Reid shows what appears to be the most accurate deployment (6). However calculations of likely frontages based on known troop numbers and methods of deployment of the period provided by Chandler (3), as well as the deployments as shown on the contemporary plans (5), suggest a frontage of little over a quarter of a mile (circa 500m), which is what is depicted on the plan in this report.

2.2 PRIMARY SOURCES

This is a very well documented battle including a number of contemporary plans showing the deployment of the armies, the earlier manoeuvres and the contemporary terrain. It should be possible, with detailed research, to place such detail very accurately onto a modern digital map base, within its contemporary terrain.

2.3 SECONDARY WORKS

Although a substantial number of secondary works deal with Prestonpans, there does not appear to be a substantial modern study of the battle. A concise modern overview is given by Reid, who recommends Duffy (2003) as the most detailed study(6).

2.4 BATTLE ARCHAEOLOGY

Graves relating to the battle are recorded in the area of the Thorntree Field, apparently a short distance behind the royal army initial deployment, discovered at the end of the 18th century, when this field was being drained. The reports refer to a number of bodies with well-preserved clothing, a little NE of the farm steading at Thorntree Mains (8).

2.5 BATTLEFIELD HISTORIC TERRAIN

The action appears to have been fought in open ground, which appears from the primary accounts to have been an extensive area of open field arable about a mile square. Such open ground, normally considered ideal for cavalry, was also considered ideal for the typical Highland charge. It may have lain between two areas of marshy ground, on north and south, though contemporary plans of the battle only show a small area of marsh to the south. Unfortunately there is no evidence on the geological mapping to enable accurate mapping of the marsh, although the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:10,560 mapping does indicate the

location of an extensive marshy area on the south and a much smaller area on the north. There were also settlements (Preston and Seton) to the east and west, through, or by, which the main road passed, as shown on the contemporary battle plans (1). These marsh and settlement areas provided boundaries to the battlefield. In particular on the west the boundary of enclosed land appears to have proven a substantial barrier to the routed government troops and may, in part, account for why there were so many killed or captured in the rout and pursuit.

2.6 *SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BATTLE*

This was the first battle of the 1745 uprising and was a dramatic victory for the Jacobite army, though it was far from deciding the war. It was a dramatic demonstration of the effectiveness of a Highland charge in the face of well equipped troops using the current best military practice, but it was not lost on the commanders who faced the Jacobites in subsequent battles that the government forces at Prestonpans had been inexperienced and wholly untested in battle. The victory gave considerable momentum to the Jacobite cause and carried them forward with more confidence to their next military challenge, though important lessons were not learnt, particularly regarding the limitations within the high command.

2.7 *CURRENT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT*

There is extensive modern development to the north and to the south of the battlefield, while on the west development has extended over part of the area of the rout. Though there were some industrial installations in the area already by 1745, these have been extensively developed in later centuries. A large industrial area comprising a Coal Store has encroached on the battlefield, together with a rail line which serves the store, though it may have affected only a very small part of the area of the action. An extensive swathe of landscape has been destroyed by mineral extraction immediately to the south and south east, removing part of the probable area of the 1745 marsh, which lay on the southern edge of the field. A realignment of the 1745 east-west road and a more recent north south road cut across the heart of the action, while the A1 bypass lies a short distance to the south, crossing the areas of first Jacobite deployment and flank march. The mainline railway follows the southern edge of the battlefield. Remarkably, despite its location within such a heavily altered landscape, the core of the battlefield remains largely as agricultural fields and may have been little disturbed, depending on exactly where the frontage of the government army lay.

2.8 *CURRENT DESIGNATIONS*

There is one listed building on the battlefield but it post dates and thus is not relevant to the battle. The Colonel Gardiner monument to the west of the battlefield, in the area of the rout and pursuit, is listed as is Bankton House itself. A significant area of the battlefield is scheduled, because of the presence of much earlier cropmark enclosures, and so incidentally offers protection to a part of the battlefield which may prove to cover half of the main area of the initial government deployment and clash, although the exact location of the deployments is not yet confirmed. The conservation area in Preston encompasses the large garden which was one of the key areas of enclosures on the north side of the road impeding the government troops' flight.

2.9 POTENTIAL

Martin's assessment that there is little to save on the Prestonpans battlefield other than the two monuments would appear to be quite wrong. It is true that much of the landscape over which the preliminary manoeuvres took place has been dramatically altered by development and mineral extraction and so there may be relatively limited potential for the interpretation of the wider manoeuvres to the visitor. Even the centre of the battlefield, though it appears far better preserved, may not perhaps be easily interpreted for the public, given the loss of the surrounding topographical framework. However these conclusions would need to be confirmed by field examination.

Surprisingly the majority of the core of the battlefield appears to survive relatively undisturbed, compared to the surrounding landscape. There may be expected to be good survival of lead bullet distributions which should closely relate to the nature and extent of the action. A limited area of the rout, on the north side of the modern road, also probably remains under fields. A detached area, comprising the grounds of Bankton House and an area of former garden on the north side of the road, separated from the field by modern development, may yield further evidence of the rout, where government troops were funnelled through the narrow gap of the road between the boundaries of gardens on both sides. In this general area, as well as in the area of the initial engagement, where burials have been reported, there is the potential for mass graves.

A small area on the south side of the B1361 may yield limited surviving physical evidence for the extent of the marsh, which would be of value if the documentary record is insufficient to enable its accurately mapping. The same is true on the north east side of the battlefield, where a more extensive area of potential former marsh is identified on the OS 6" 1st edition mapping but not accurately defined.

Given the high quality of the primary sources for this battle there is the potential to place the action with the landscape to a high degree of accuracy. It is important that such reconstruction work based on the documentary record is undertaken in order both to enable effective conservation and to more clearly define any issues which could only be resolved, if at all, by recourse to the archaeological record. It is at present unclear whether the documentary record is so good, that detailed archaeological investigation of the battlefield will add relatively little to the understanding of the battle itself, other than perhaps confirming the width and exact location of the frontage of the government army. Even if this does prove to be the case, the potential for detailed comparison of the documented evidence with the archaeological evidence of the action may be expected to yield valuable understanding which will enable the more effective interpretation of the archaeology of less well documented battles of the 17th & 18th centuries.

2.10 THREATS

The site lies completely encircled by modern development, mineral extraction, road and rail routes and appears to be a landscape under severe pressure. Major development schemes are already in progress in Preston, on the north west limit of the battlefield, which might include some evidence of the action, especially if the northern extent of the action is not correctly defined or if some routed troops were pursued in this direction. Prestonpans is

potentially one of the more severely threatened battlefields in Scotland, though detailed discussion with the local authority is needed to more clearly define the timescale and nature of the threats.

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.

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SP 36/68 Dr. John Waugh, Chancellor of the diocese of Carlisle to Mr. Robinson, enclosing a copy of an account, dated 21 Sept., of the battle between H.M. forces and the rebels at Prestonpans as witnessed by one of two merchants of Dumfries who went to Sir John Cope's camp at Tranent for intelligence of the situation. 1745 Sept. 23

SP 36/68 Earl of Derby, at Knowsley, to [Newcastle], enclosing a letter from [Provost] George Bell of Dumfries, dated 21 Sept. informing him of the progress of the rebel Highland army; with a postscript that battle had taken place early that morning between General Cope's army (consisting of 2,300 regular foot soldiers and 500 Highlanders, together with 2 regiments of dragoons, Hamilton's and Gardiner's and 7,000 Highlanders near the village of Cockenzie near Prestonpans, and that Cope's army had been beaten. 1745 Sept. 23

SP 36/68 John Waugh, Chancellor of Carlisle, to Newcastle, enclosing 3 accounts of the battle between Sir John Cope's forces and the rebels near Prestonpan all dated 21 Sept., the first 2 sent to him by Mr. Goldie of Dumfries, the third by the Provost of Annan: 1) an

account by one of 2 merchants of Dumfries sent to Cope's camp to gain intelligence of the situation. 1745 Sept. 23

SP 36/69 John Nocks, Postmaster at Preston, to the Postmaster General, in London, with an account of the defeat of Sir John Cope's forces, near Prestonpans by 7,000 of the rebels, and advising that Lord Derby, the Lord Lieutenant, and Lord Strange are expected to arrive in the town shortly to organise its defence. 1745 Sept. 25

SP 36/69 [Major-General] James Oglethorpe to Newcastle, informing him that the Lord Lieutenant and archbishop had successfully raised 41 companies and £20,000 by their association in the county, and enclosing: 1) letter from General Guest, at Edinburgh Castle, to Major Brown, dated 24 Sept. 1745 Sept. 28

SP 36/70 George Shelvocke, at the General Post Office, to Andrew Stone, esq., enclosing: 1) a letter found near Poole from J.W. to Squire Welde (a member of a notorious papist family) in Purbeck, dated 22 Sept. 2) a letter from John McMillan, postmaster of Lancaster, to the Postmaster General, dated 31 Sept. 1745 Oct. 4

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