

Archaeological Investigation of the Site of the Battle of Culloden

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The **Scottish site of the Battle of Culloden** has undergone several archaeological investigations, using modern Battlefield Archaeology methods, which have altered the understanding of the events and layout of the battle. This shows how Battlefield Archaeology can build on existing historical knowledge. There follows an outline of the historical context of the Battle of Culloden, including, a description of the main protagonists. And a brief summary of the long term legacy of the conflict itself. Along with some details of how the battlefield topography, which became better understood through the archaeological investigations, influenced the fighting. It will also examine the archaeology finds, which have so far been recovered from the battlefield site, and how these have influenced understanding of the battle. It will go on to discuss, how the battlefield site is in certain ways under threat and consider the responses to these challenges, so that the site can be preserved for future generations, making it possible for them to reflect on the past conflict and ensure the site enables a dignified remembrance for the loss of life on both sides. Acting as a poignant reminder of the value of peace in the Scotland of today and as a potential tool for the promotion of future peace through understanding.

History of the Battle

The Battle of Culloden is famous for being the last battle ever to be fought on British soil. It was the conclusion to a civil war, known as, the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. There had been previous Jacobite Rebellions, under the leadership of James Stuart (the Old Pretender) which were aimed at installing him, as King of Britain. The Battle of Culloden, in 1746, was fought between the armies of King George II of Britain, under the leadership of the Duke of Cumberland (later known to history as the ‘Butcher Cumberland’) and the Jacobite forces of ‘Bonney Prince Charlie’ (Charles Stuart) and one of his senior commanders, Lord George Murray. Charles’s aim was to install his father James, as King of Britain. The Old Pretender’s father was King James II of England and VII of Scotland, who had been overthrown by William of Orange in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. The Battle of Culloden took place on the morning of 16th April 1746. It resulted in an overwhelming defeat for the Jacobite forces. The Government lost fifty officers and men whilst the Jacobite fatalities were between 1,200-1,500, on the day of the battle. More wounded would have died after the event, on both sides (Historic Scotland, 2012; 4).

Legacy of the Battle

The primary legacy of the Battle of Culloden, is it decisively ended any chance the House of Stuart had of retaking the British throne and brought about an end to any further Jacobite revolts. The defeat led to the complete repression of the Highland Clans, by the Duke of Cumberland. The bloody, heavy handed nature of this was what would earn him the nickname of, ‘the Butcher Cumberland’. The Battle has featured heavily in British culture, including, literature, art and theatre. From featuring in Doctor Who (1966), to artistically famous paintings, such as, ‘An incident in the Rebellion of 1745’, by French artist David Morier (Historic Scotland, 2012; 15), as seen below in figure 1. In terms of archaeology, the battle site has gain more interest in recent times, with the growth of current and modern Battlefield archaeology and its techniques.



Figure 1: An Incident in the rebellion of 1745- David Morier C.1740s (Royal College Collection, 2020)

In 1746, the moor was being used as rough grazing ground, with some arable and stone walled enclosures to the north and south (Historic Scotland, 2012; 9). ‘At the time of the battle, at least parts of these pastures would have been enclosed within turf and stone dykes’ (Pollard, T. 2006; 9). The topography of the land shows that there was a ridge of higher land running on the right hand side of the position of the Jacobite’s line, and across to the Government forces. The layout of the land allowed the Jacobites to block the Government Army’s approach to Inverness in the west, as they marched up from England. Despite this, the Government Army was still able to establish and control the scale of the arena of the battle (Historic Scotland, 2012; 9). In the landscape, at the time, there was a farmstead called Leanach, close to where the second Government line was located. This is the only farmstead on the moor to have survived from the time of the Battle (Historic Scotland, 2012; 9) and it is a preserved feature of the battle site today. The farmstead is one of the contenders for where a post-battle massacre of the Jacobite wounded is said to have taken place. To date there is no clear archaeological evidence to back up historical account of this.

A topographic survey in 2001, across the main area of the fighting identified a subtle undulation of the terrain, caused by the boggingness of the moor (Historic Scotland, 2012; 10). As Tony Pollard explains, ‘the outcome of the battle was influenced by location, location, location’, as is so often the case in battles (Two Men in a Trench: the Battle of Culloden, 2002). The benefit of the topographic surveys has been to highlight the importance of the subtle changes in topography and to challenge the view often represented in historical accounts that the battle took place on level ground (Pollard, 2009; 133).

Archaeology of the battle

Culloden is one of the most intensively investigated in both archaeologically and historically, battlefields in Scotland. A series of archaeological investigations has been undertaken over recent years.

In the 1990s geophysical surveys were carried out. Furthermore, in 2001 a program including geophysical, topographic, metal detecting and excavation took place. Then in 2005 a major survey was undertaken by Glasgow University commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland (Pollard, T. 2006; 9-10). All of these investigations have given valuable insights into the Battle of Culloden. For example, a survey in 2000 recovered evidence relating to at least three specific elements of the battle (Pollard, T. 2009; 143). Grapeshot and canister shot recovered from the Leanach enclosure suggested that rather than skirting the enclosure to the north, as suggested by most historical accounts and maps, the Jacobites did in fact charge through this area. The metal detector survey found a large amount of unstratified battle debris (see illustration below) including, artillery shot, musket shot and buttons etc. (Historic Scotland, 2012; 12). This was in the area surveyed in the Field of the English. (Historic Scotland, 2012; 12). The different types and spread of artillery found, enabled further analysis of the logistics and the intensity of the fighting. See figure 2, a graph of the distribution, over the battlefield site, of the finds discovered by systematic, metal detecting survey.

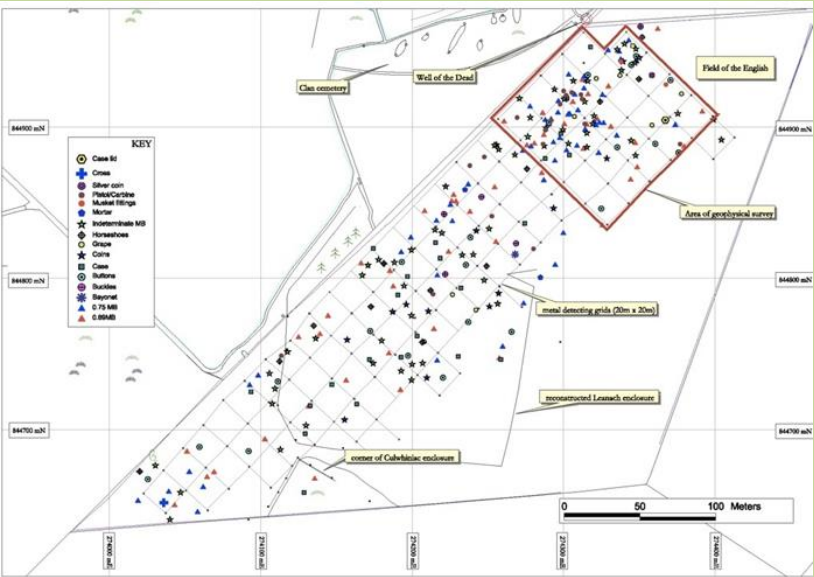


Figure 2: Metal Detector Findings, Culloden, ©Professor Tony Pollard (Pollard, 2006)

Another archaeological investigation was the Culloden Battlefield Memorial Project (CBMP) 2005 which had the important aim; ‘to establish as fully as possible the true extent of the battlefield and the location of various elements of the battle as understood from historical accounts and maps of the event.’ (Pollard, T. 2009; 130). This led to further revision in the understanding of the battle. In particular, the scale of the battlefield, finding it was significantly larger than previously thought. Evidence of debris; indicative of intense hand to hand fighting was discovered, on the Government left, where the Jacobite centre and right hit the Government line, after its charge across the moor. This included, buttons, musket and pistol balls and a ball impacted, trigger guard strap from a Brown Bess musket (Pollard, T;143). This investigation therefore demonstrated that the original, historical understanding of where the initial battle lines were thought to have been located, were in fact in the wrong place. The battle line was located 80 - 100m further south than originally thought. A map showing the change between the two interpretations of the location of the Jacobite line can be seen below, in figure 3.

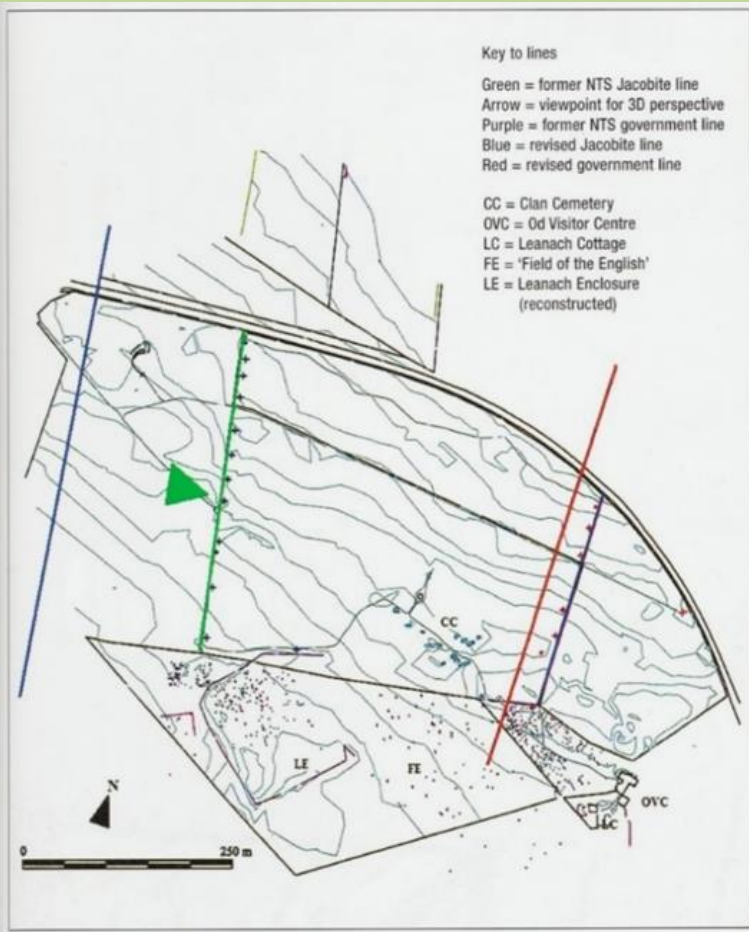


Figure 3: Contour survey plan with pre- and post -2008 Jacobite and government lines. © GUARD (Pollard, 2009)

The metal detecting in 2000, had recovered twenty-five musket balls, a further two hundred and three were recovered during the 2005 survey (Pollard, T. 2009; 144). Also along with ammunition recovered, were a number of other artefacts, including a Jacobite Celtic Cross which was located at the western end of the extended range of the battlefield, as seen in the image below. This was thought to have been worn by someone at the battle.



Figure 4: Jacobite amulet; a pewter cross (University for Glasgow- Centre for Battlefield Archaeology, 2020)

In theory, looking at the calibre of the pistol shot found, will enable the different types of the Jacobite and Government firearms used at the battle, to be identified. This analysis is yet to be carried out. It can be said, given the pistols relatively short range and the points where the finds were discovered, indicates areas of close quarter engagement (Pollard, T. 2009; 146). To understand which ballistics finds belonged to which army will deepen the understanding of the details of this fighting.

One of the areas regarded as being of tactical importance, particularly to the Jacobite’s, was the stoned walled enclosures at both the north and south sides of the battlefield (Pollard, T. 2006; 13). Jacobite forces were positioned in both of these enclosures. Traces of these enclosures were subsequently lost possibly in the 1840s (Pollard, T. 2006; 13). In order to establish what could be understood about these boundaries a walk-over survey was undertaken. Although the position of some of these enclosures can still be identified because remains of the original lines of the walls still exists (Pollard, T. 2006; 11). However, the position of the enclosure known as Culloden Parks is more disputed (Pollard, T. 2006; 14).

A further part of the 2005 program was to build upon the geophysical surveys undertaken in 2001. Part of the purpose of these was, to confirm anomalies found in the 2001 survey, as these results had not been fully processed. It is believed that these anomalies identify the location of mass graves, particularly in the Field of the English, which would have been government troops. The methodology used, was to survey the area in 20m X 20m grids using both resistivity and gradiometer, data points being taken at 1m intervals or 0.5m intervals (Pollard, T. 2006; 11).

Trial trenching evaluations were targeted at anomaly, identified through geophysics, in an area 40m west of Leanach Cottage. This area is of significance because in contemporary accounts buildings were known to have been present here at the time of the battle and in particular, accounts at the time referenced an atrocity, whereby Jacobite injured troops were locked in a structure that was then set on fire (Pollard, T. 2006; 11). A previous survey by Pollard & Oliver in 2002 had investigated an alternative structure which through trench investigations, proved, not to be related to this period of time (Eoin Mac’Freeman, 2002). Two trial trenches were excavated across this anomaly which provided evidence for a foundation slot, indicating the possible presence of a building which may have been part of the Leanach farmstead, that appears in many contemporary battlefield maps. However, caution is suggested, due to the geophysics indicating circular features below this which might indicate possible prehistoric activity (Pollard, T. 2006; 17).

In 2013, a further metal detecting survey was undertaken by Ross and Cromarty Archaeological Services and West Coast Archaeological Services, along a footpath on the south side of the road, B9006, on the western side of the battlefield (Ross and Cromarty, 2013). Of the forty-two finds recovered, only five were of archaeological significance. An example being, a copper alloy buckle, which could be dated to the time of the battle.

Preservation of the Battlefield site.

The Battle of Culloden site presents various challenges in terms of its preservation. As the archaeological investigation from 2000 onwards shows, the extent of the battle was larger than previously thought. This means that there is a real possibility of, yet undiscovered archaeology, having been disturbed and destroyed during the construction of the visitor centres which were built within the recently discovered boundary of the battlefield. A further possible compromise, was the relocation, in 1984, of the route of the B9006. This road which previously ran through the Clan Cemetery, was repositioned to the northern area of the site, within the modern boundary of the battlefield. (Historic Scotland, 2012; 12). Again, the construction involved, might have resulted in potential archaeological remains being destroyed. If this is the case, the understanding of the true context and nature of the battlefield site, may never be able to be realised.

Since 1935, a number of features on the site have been given Scheduled Monuments Status. This includes; the stones commemorating graves of the English, the Well of the Dead and Graves of the Clans, which under the 1979 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act were given Scheduled Monument Status in 2003 (Historic Scotland, 2003). Also Old Leanach Cottage and King’s Stables are listed buildings (Historic Scotland, 2012; 12). This means that the site has been awarded the highest protective status an important historical monument can be given in Scotland. All of which means that future archaeological investigations will have to navigate through this legislation. As MacSweeny (2001) highlights, The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 does not provide protection for battlefield sites, in general, through scheduling. Culloden forms only one of two Scottish battle sites that are protected in this way because there are physical structures from the battle that are still remaining, which can be scheduled by this act (MacSween 2001; 292). In Culloden’s case, this includes, graves and cairns.

Current threats to the site, come from developers and planning applications. There are several planning proposals affecting areas close to the site including, the development of Treetops Riding Centre into fourteen holiday lodges, with a restaurant, café and shop. Also there is a planning application for a housing development of sixteen homes at View Hill which is within the boundary of the Battlefield Conservation Area (Stop Culloden Development, 2020; 2-3).

Another factor affecting the preservation of the battle site, is the damage caused, in part, by the changing topography over time. There are plans by the Scottish Battlefield Trust and the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), who have owned and maintained parts of the site since 1945, to return the site to its original condition (Historic Scotland, 2012; 15). The aim of the Scottish Battlefield Trust regarding these sites is that; ‘They shall be protected, preserved and interpreted for the enduring benefit of current and future generations.’ (Scottish Battlefield Trust, 2014; 2).

Conclusion

Culloden is the Scottish battlefield, which has the greatest number of contemporary records and maps, providing a broad range of historical sources. The archaeology on this site, has significantly and importantly added to and changed, the knowledge and understanding of the nature and structure of the battle. The archaeological investigations on the site, have allowed archaeologists and historians to change their interpretation of the battlefield and its events. One of key archaeological interpretations, through surveying and excavations, has shown that the Jacobite line was much further back than had previously been believed. Another key understanding which followed on from the 2005 survey, was that the nature and direction of the charge, by the Jacobites, was different than had been suggested by the historical accounts and also discovered the largest of the battlefields.

Although significant steps have been made to enhance and preserve the current site of Culloden, this important site has many challenges, to ensure its ongoing preservation.

The sensitive nature and scheduling of this site means that it is likely to challenging to gain permissions, for future Battlefield Archaeological investigations of the site itself. including further analysis of artefacts, from previous surveys and digs would enrich understanding of this major conflict further (Pollard, 2009; 161). As Sutherland & Holist suggest, the importance of not ignoring the physical artefacts and remains of a site of conflict is that it can provide a more neutral account of, what can be seen as, the more aggressive and inhuman side of human character. In this, it can avoid what they term as the ‘over-glorification of wars and conflict.’ (Sutherland, T & Holst, M, 2005 ; 4)

‘What has been established beyond all doubt is that battlefield archaeology can make a valid contribution to our understanding of historic battles, some of which, as is definitely the case at Culloden, do not lack documentary accounts but are none the less distorted by both the fog of war and the sometimes less than impartial attentions of historians.’ (Pollard, T. 2009; 161).

The systematic and scientific methodology of Battlefield Archaeology can therefore enable a greater and more objective understanding of conflict, hence creating a picture of events which reaches closer to the truth. More accurate insights into past conflicts, such as the Battle of Culloden, are important not only for historical accuracy but can also be utilised, as part of an ethical framework, to promote peace and understanding, for current and future generations.

The United Nations Sustainable Development, Goals 16, were devised to ‘promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies’ (Un.org, 2020). These goals are necessary, as warfare and conflict are still prevalent around the globe and affect millions of people every year. ‘In 2019 the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 79.5 million, the highest level ever recorded.’ (Un.org, 2020). Target 16.1 aims to, ‘significantly reduce all forms of violence and related deaths everywhere’. (Un.org, 2020).

Seeking greater understanding of past conflicts enables societies to learn from past mistakes and in turn this can lead to an enhanced understanding. Understanding is key in order to educate people and societies to work towards using dialogue, as the primary tool for the resolution of conflict, thus bringing about a peaceful means for resolving differences. To this end, the Battle of the Culloden, marks an important point in time for the UK, as the last battle to be fought on British soil.

The archaeological projects undertaken at Culloden have had an important influence in the way that battlefield sites are now identified, listed and recorded within the UK. The relevance of archaeological potential, is now seen as, a significant factor when discussing the preservation of battlefield sites. This was not a major consideration when the English Battlefield Register was first drawn together in the 1990s. The origins of battlefield archaeology in Scotland can be seen as starting with the projects at Culloden in 2000 (Pollard, T., Banks, I, 2010; 436-437).

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