

THE BATTLE OF PRESTONPANS

207–212 of Volume I of the *Transactions*. On both occasions the thorn tree was visited. The first visit was made on 20th September 1924 under the leadership of the late W. B. Blaikie, LL.D., a well-known authority on the “Forty-five”. The second took place five years afterwards (on 21st September 1929) and included a visit to Preston Tower and Cross, Hamilton House and Northfield House under the leadership of Mr James S. Richardson. The visit to the thorn tree was under the guidance of Mr Richardson and Mr Alexander Burnett. On the first visit it was noted that only one of the three limbs of the tree remained and it was dead; on the second Mr Burnett “gave a clear and concise account of how the dead and blackened stump which the members saw before them, had a special interest in connection with the history of the battle”.

On the second visit a suggestion was considered that a Memorial be placed on the site of the thorn tree. The movement to erect a suitable Memorial Cairn gathered way. The tree was cut down by permission of the Earl of Wemyss as owner, the best portion of the trunk being presented to the Naval and Military Museum at Edinburgh Castle.

The thorn tree is mentioned in the verses on the “Battle of Prestonpans” by Adam Skirving, the East Lothian farmer who



Stemmed Tree
From photograph
by Mr John R.
Borrowman.

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wrote the song “Hey, Johnnie Cope are ye waukin yet”, which Sir Walter Scott in the *Tales of a Grandfather* says is “familiar in our mouths as household words over the whole length and breadth of Scotland”. “‘The Battle of Prestonpans’ has preserved also” (Sir Walter says) “for its author, a memorial of his name outlasting the period of his own day and generation.” The whole poem is given in Scott’s *Tales of a Grandfather* and is too long to be given (However, it appears as Annex 1 in this booklet pp. 32–34 above). The thorn tree stanza is:

At the thorn-tree, which you may see
Bewest the meadow mill, man,
There mony slain lay on the plain,
The Clans pursuing still, man;
Sic unco hacks and deadly whacks,
I never saw the like, man;
Lost hands and heads cost them their deads
That fell near Preston dyke, man.

Of the two illustrations of the tree, the first shows the tree as it originally stood with its three stems and represents the tree about 40 years ago laden with hawthorn blossom. It is from a chalk drawing, tinted in flat water colour, by Mr F. W. Mason which is in the possession of Mr James McNeill, Inveresk, youngest son of Mr Peter McNeill, the historian of Tranent and Prestonpans for whom the work was executed by Mr Mason. The editors tender their thanks to Mr James McNeill for his courtesy in allowing them to reproduce the drawing; and also to Mr John R. Borrowman for his courtesy in allowing them to reproduce the second illustration, which is from a fine photograph taken by him over 30 years ago after the tree had lost one of its main limbs. It should interest our members to know that in his garden at St. Michaels, Gilmerton, Mr Borrowman has a tall and sturdy thorn tree raised from a shoot of the battlefield thorn tree. Further illustrations of the thorn tree are to be found in the second edition of Mr Peter McNeill’s book on Tranent published in 1884, and in his book on Prestonpans published in 1902. Both are from pencil drawings by James Veitch. The first shows the three stemmed tree, and the second two stems and a stump, but they are not so satisfactory as the illustrations presented here.

The erection in February 1932 of the Memorial Cairn to commemorate the battle is duly chronicled in the

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Haddingtonshire Courier of the 12th of that month. It was erected by the Society for the Preservation of Rural Scotland, and our Society gave a substantial contribution to the cost. The leader in the movement was Sir Iain Colquhoun, Bart, of Luss, and associated with him and others were our President, Major W. A. Baird of Lennox-love. And our member Mr G. A. Connor.

The cairn has not been erected on the actual site of the tree, which was near a colliery siding and could not readily be seen from the main road. It was ultimately decided to erect it in a more prominent position. The site chosen and granted by East Lothian County Council is a triangular piece of ground at a fork in the Edinburgh/North Berwick road at Meadowmill. It is within sight of the position occupied so long by the venerable hawthorn tree, and is close to the position occupied by the guns of Sir John Cope's ill-fated army.

The cairn which is about ten feet high and is hammer dressed is a stepped pyramidal structure "concave in plan above a square base with bevelled angles, with corner stones and coming into the square at the apex". It is finished off at the summit with a heavy top stone. On a panel on the main face is the arresting date "1745" carved in bold letters. A casket is built into the cairn containing a paper narrating the circumstances, and that the thorn tree was situated about 400 yards, 35 degrees west of north from where the cairn stands. The casket contains other documents relating to the thorn tree, along with photographs of it, a piece of the thorn tree itself and a set of new coins. The cairn was designed by Mr William Davidson, F.R.I.B.A. The builder was Mr John Henderson of Edinburgh.

While the cairn is not built on the actual spot where the thorn tree weathered the battle and two centuries, the actual site will, it is hoped, be preserved for generations yet to come through the transplanting from a private garden of an offshoot from it. A metal plate recording the circumstances should in due course be affixed.

Hugh Hannah

THE BARON COURTS OF PRESTOUNGRANGE & DOLPHINSTOUN

Barons traditionally exercised their feudal rights and authority through Baron Courts until 1948, of which the main Officers were the Baron Bailie and the Baron Sergeant. Financial matters were attended to by the Baron's Procurator Fiscal, viz: "The Baron's Court" (1994) and "The Insignia of the Baronage of Scotland and Their Courts" (1989), published by the Convention of the Baronage of Scotland.

These Courts with these designated Officers were re-established for Prestoungrange and for Dolphinstoun in 1998 as a Company Limited by Guarantee. In 2002 they evolved to become a Scottish Charity [SC 033139] whose Objects are to advance the industrial and agricultural heritage of the Baronies in the new millennium working as may be appropriate with other community organisations. Myriad educational activities are in hand with the Prestoungrange Arts Festival involving pottery and historical murals. The 1908 Gothenburg is being restored for 21st Century use and as a heritage centre. The insignia and regalia of the Baronies have been invoked including Courts' Horns, Bailie's Badge and Chain, and Sergeant's Ellwand. Lord Lyon has granted Arms to current incumbents and the Prestoungrange tartan has been registered as shown on the rear cover here.

