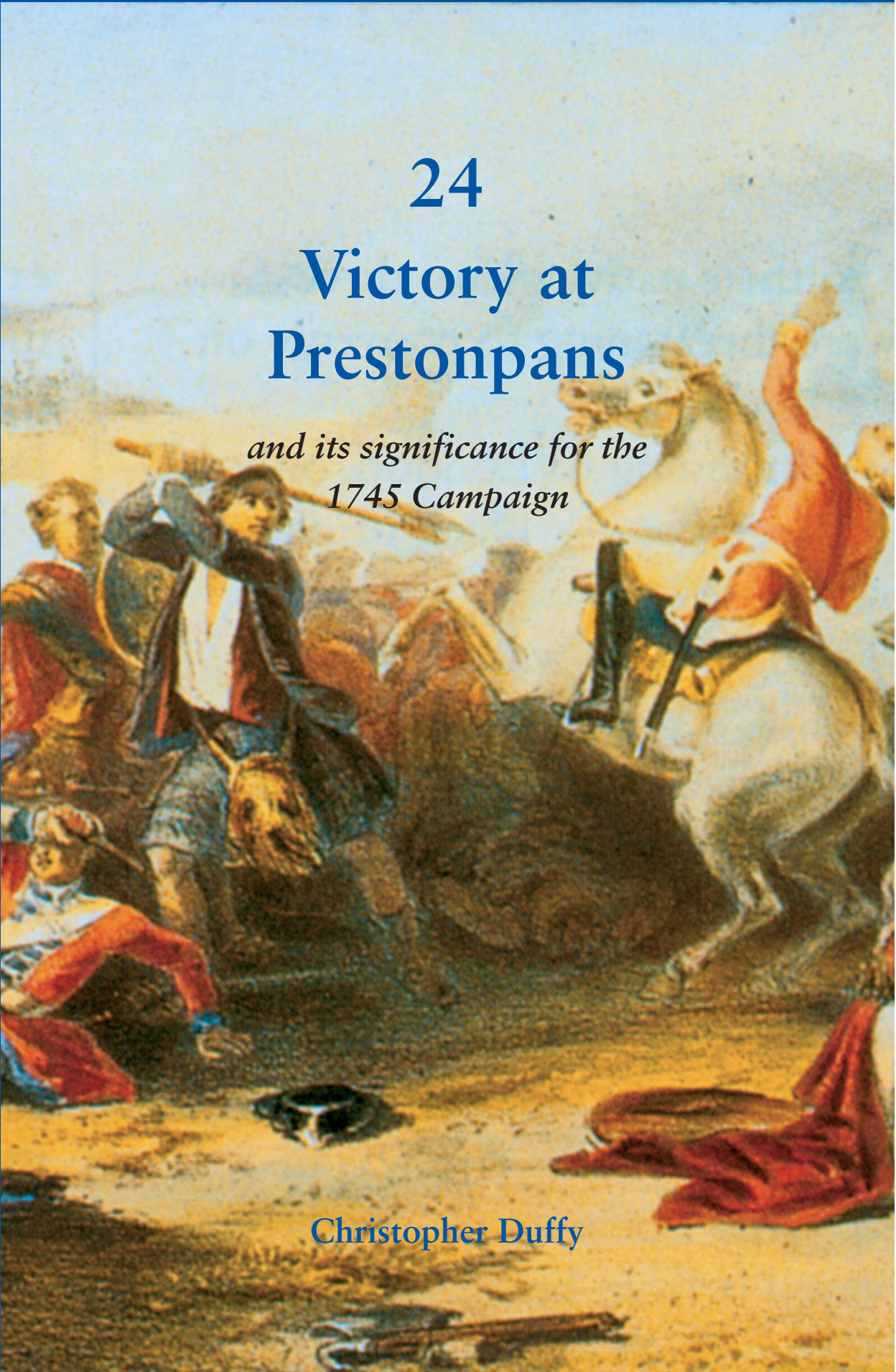


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# Victory at Prestonpans

*and its significance for the  
1745 Campaign*

Christopher Duffy



The Trustees of the Battle of Prestonpans [1745] Trust are indebted to the Council of the 1745 Association for inviting Dr Christopher Duffy to write this analysis, and of course to Dr Duffy for this excellent pro bono contribution to the Charity's goals

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### About the Author

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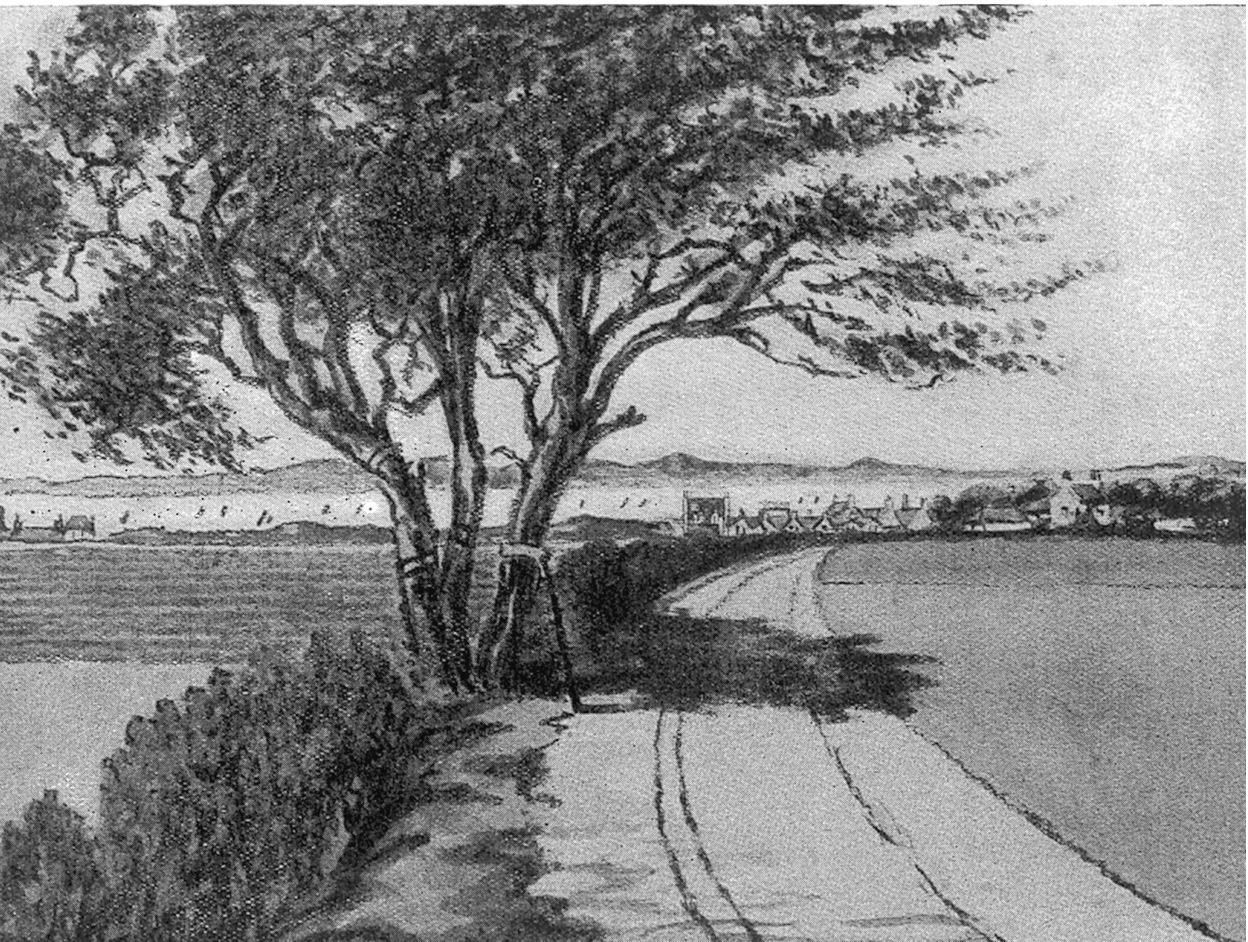


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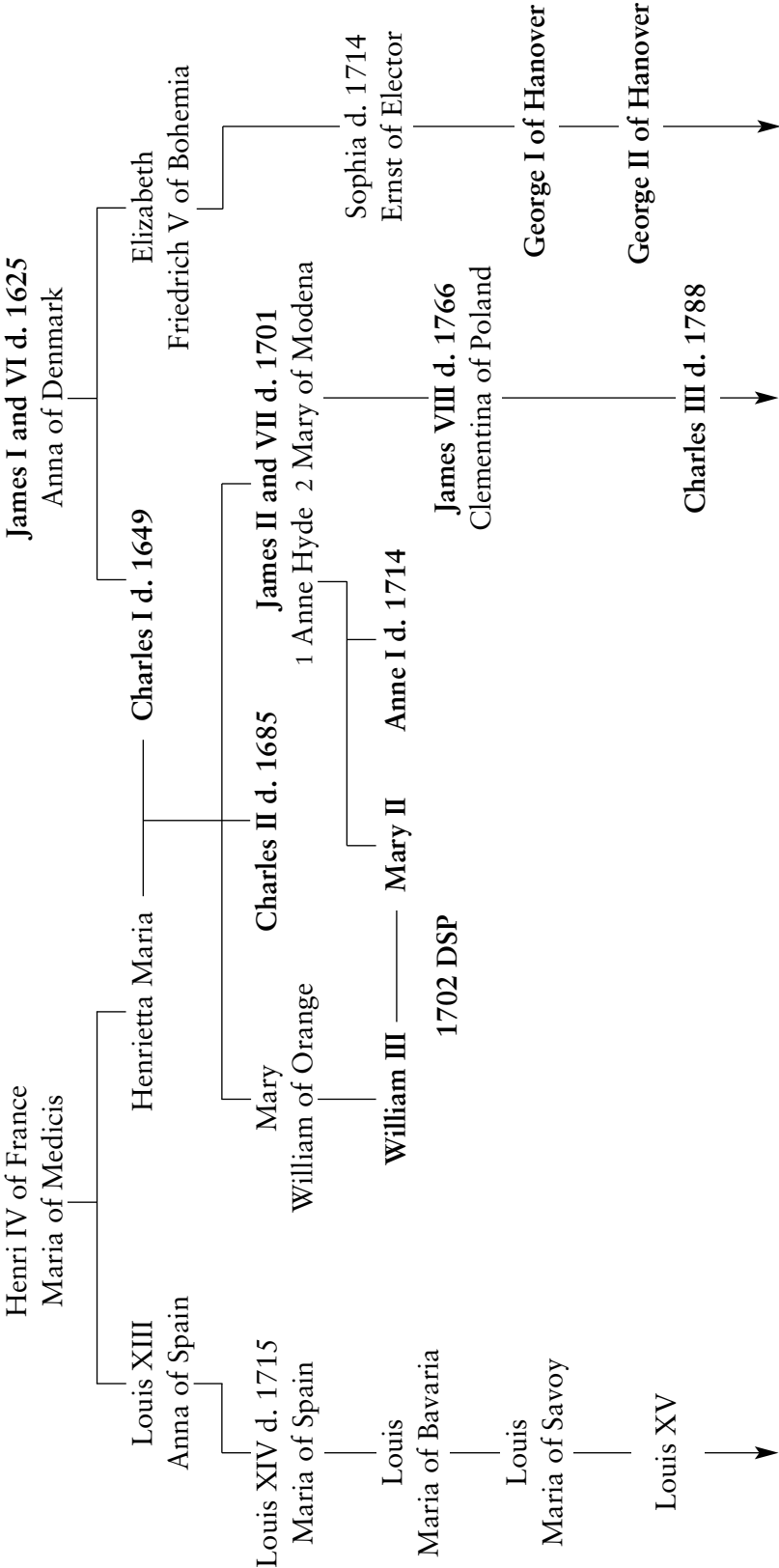
# Victory at Prestonpans

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# The ‘British’ Royal Succession 1625–1714



## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

“The defeat they gave the King’s troops at Prestonpans struck people with great surprise and made a strong impression on the minds of most men. Their force was now become formidable and their valour looked upon as invincible”

*“An Essay, 1747, on the Scottish Highlands”*<sup>1</sup>

Prestonpans lies just ten miles to the east of Edinburgh, and every day the facility of a high-speed railway and a multi-lane highway whisks thousands of travellers across the near-level ground in a matter of seconds. But people who pause here to observe and reflect will find it a site which connects us intimately with our Scottish and British past. The episodes of Jacobite uprisings and resistance extend, with long intervals, over the fifty-seven-odd years from 1689 to 1746, but no single passage compares with the bloody and brief – a question of minutes – action at Prestonpans on 21 September 1745 in its potential to carry the Jacobite cause to victory and so fashion an alternative future for the British Isles. The reasons claim our attention.

### 1. Prelude to the ‘45

By 1745 Britain had known decades of political and religious upsets, beginning in 1688 when the Stuart King James II (VII of Scotland), an ardent Catholic, was forced from his throne by the so called ‘Glorious Revolution.’ This usurpation existed in an international context for the Dutch Prince William of Orange, now installed in London as King William III, was motivated primarily by a desire to gather Britain into a league against Louis XIV of France. Catholics were actually in a minority among the Jacobites, the many men and women throughout the British Isles who concluded the Revolution had been a ‘fix’ engineered by small groups of powerful interests, and that the laws of God and man had thereby been set aside.

William III had married James’s daughter Mary, and a semblance of Stuart continuity was preserved when his second daughter Anne succeeded as Queen reigning from 1702 to 1714. The biggest fix of all then supervened to place on the throne a Protestant prince of north Germany, George of Hanover, who was no better than fifty-second in the line of lawful succession. Continental priorities, in this case the security of the Electorate of Hanover, were paramount in the

## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

concerns of this first of the Georges, and his son George II who came to the throne in 1727. George I failed to learn English, and his ungracious ways were perpetuated by his descendants.

Conversely the unrest in Britain every now and then served in the interests of France and Spain. The French first intervened on behalf of the Jacobites in March 1689 when they deposited James on the coast of Ireland together with a body of 4,000 French troops. The fight of the Irish Jacobites outlasted the resistance in Scotland and the departure of James, and came to an end only when the defenders of Limerick surrendered on favourable terms on 3 October 1691.

The celebrated Jacobite rising of 1715 was in measurable terms the largest of all, embracing much of northern England and Lowland Scotland, but it lacked cohesion and leadership. It was launched at a time of general European peace when neither France or Spain were inclined to intervene. In 1719 the Spanish indeed put a small force ashore in the Western Highlands, but the troops and their Scottish supporters made scarcely any progress inland before they were defeated at Glenshiel on 10 June. The Scots dispersed and the Spaniards were left to surrender.

In the longer term the Jacobite connections with Spain and more particularly with France proved to be a source of underlying strength, as was to be revealed in 1745. Exiled Irish Jacobite shipowners, rich from the profits of trade, slaving and privateering, proved willing to put their resources at the disposal of a new Stuart leader, Prince Charles Edward Stuart. He was more single-minded and energetic than anything his House had produced in recent generations. A Stuart army in exile had come into being in the French military service in the shape of the formidable Irish Brigade and the Regiment of Royal Ecossais. Meanwhile the circulation of clansmen and young Highland gentlemen between Scotland and France and Spain helped to build a fund of military expertise available to the Scots Jacobites in their homeland.

In 1743 a fresh war pitted France against Britain and her Austrian, Dutch and German allies at a time when a new generation was coming to the fore. On the theatre of war in the Austrian Netherlands (roughly corresponding with present day Belgium) the command of the British forces passed to King George's second and favourite son William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland. He was brave and enthusiastic but he

## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

was no match for the French under the Marshal de Saxe, and on 11 May 1745 he was defeated at Fontenoy. This set in train a run of reverses which opened the Channel coast as far as Ostend as a potential base for the invasion of Britain.

### The opportunity arrives

How well placed were the Jacobites to take advantage of their opportunities? Since 1701 their hopes had been vested in James II's son and heir, James Francis Edward, known as King James III to his supporters but The Old Pretender to his enemies. But over the course of time James III lost the credibility, will and energy to head an armed Jacobite restoration, and the lead in militant Jacobitism was taken by his son Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the Bonnie Prince Charlie of history and legend.

The Prince Charles Edward of 1745 was a world removed from the comatose Polish-Latin hermaphrodite as conveyed in caricatures like that in Tony Watkins' celebrated film *Culloden*. On the contrary the prince was clear-headed and determined, he was flexible enough to adapt himself to the most varied people and circumstances, and he had a rare gift for raising sunken spirits. Physically he had trained himself for this role by a taxing regime of hunting and exertion, showing a self-discipline which abandoned him entirely in his later years.

Anticipating a French invasion of Britain early in 1744, Prince Charles hastened from Rome to join such an expedition. The project, however, was cancelled at the last moment, which caused him to lose faith in official French help. He invested his hopes instead in his contacts among the Irish traders. On 4 June 1745 his privately-financed enterprise came together when the nimble privateer *Doutelle* met the ex-British battleship *Elisabeth* off the coast of Brittany and the two sailed together for Scotland bearing artillery, muskets, broadswords, cash and seven hundred troops of the Irish Brigade. This was well short of the invasion force of 6,000 which had been demanded by the Prince's potential supporters in England and Scotland and the expedition became even more of a gamble after it encountered a British warship on 9 July. The *Elisabeth* took such a battering in the consequent action that she had to turn back to France with all the troops. The *Doutelle* sailed on alone landing Prince Charles first on the

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little isle of Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides on 23 July, and then in the afternoon of the 25th at Arisaig on one of the most secluded coasts of the western Scottish mainland.

The Prince was putting his sympathisers to a very severe test when he came ashore with a tiny group of ill-assorted associates, the 'Seven Men of Moidart'. Some clan chiefs were hostile while others were uneasy about the lack of French assistance, but the Prince had working for him the ancient Scottish loyalties to the House of Stuart and the resentment which many Scots felt against the political Union with England in 1707. Deploying all his persuasive charm Charles made a valuable conquest in the form of Donald Cameron of Lochiel, who commanded much respect among the western clans. He also won over the old and bent John Gordon of Glenbucket, who was the first of the eastern lairds to declare himself. On 19 August the first sizeable force assembled at Glenfinann at the head of Loch Shiel, and the Jacobites raised their standard of red and white.

On the next day the Prince's men began their eastward march while the Hanoverian government's commander in Scotland, Lieutenant General Sir John Cope, set out from Stirling for the Highlands with a scratch force of about 1,500 troops. A battle seemed to be in the making for the rivals were converging from opposite sides on the great grey ridge of the Monadhliath Mountains which separated the Great Glen from Upper Strathspey. At this juncture, however, Cope lost his nerve. On 27 August he abandoned his attempt to gain the high Corrieyairack Pass and over the following two days he fled north-east to Inverness, convinced that the Jacobites were at his heels.

On 28 August, a day of blazing heat, Prince Charles and his men crossed the Corrieyairack unopposed and descended into Strathspey. Charles was playing for high stakes. He rightly rejected the opportunity to chase and beat Cope who by removing himself from the scene had opened the way to the Lowlands. On 29 August the Jacobites arrived at Dalwhinnie at the head of the new military road which led so conveniently to the south. They were at Blair Castle on Atholl on 1 September. Two days later they traversed the narrows of Killiecrankie and on the 4th reached Perth, where they rested and gathered strength until the 11th. They came to Dunkeld on the 12th September and the next day they reached the Lowlands where they passed the upper Forth at the Fords of Frew, a step of great symbolic and practical importance.



## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

The Jacobites were stepping out with some urgency for they knew that Cope had come to his senses, marching from Inverness to Aberdeen and taking ship there in the hope of reaching Edinburgh before Prince Charles. He was now moving with all possible speed, but he was delayed by adverse winds and tides and did not arrive at Dunbar on the Firth of Forth until after dark on September 16th. By that time Prince Charles and his 1,800 men were already outside the city.

Edinburgh, unlike the solidly 'Whig' (pro-Hanoverian) Glasgow, was divided between the partisans of the houses of Hanover and Stuart. The Whigs could put precious little trust in their primitive town walls, hardly any in the hastily-assembled trained bands, town guards and volunteers, and none at all in the only available regular troops, namely two regiments of dragoons who now fled the neighbourhood in panic. Early on the 17th a party of Highlanders gained entry by way of the Netherbow Port and Prince Charles arrived to an ecstatic welcome later in the day.

The Jacobite forces were known as 'The Highland Army' and Highland symbolism, above all the tartan, was sported as a token of solidarity by English, Welsh and Irish Jacobites as well as by the Scots. It is true that the clan society alone of the Highlands had generated armed support for the cause in the first weeks of the rising, and the Highlanders in the first line of battle remained the literal cutting edge of the cause until its final days. However it would be misleading to fall in with the London government's representation of the combatant Jacobites as a seething mob of indisciplined Highland Catholics. In fact Prince Charles structured his forces on the lines of a regular army, complete with military law, conventional designations of units and formations, regular pay and a complete hierarchy of ranks. The Jacobites were held to a tight discipline, and the celebrated Highland charge was not an expression of blind instinct but something to be conserved and unleashed as the battle-winner that it was.

The Highland Army accommodated a large, growing and ultimately predominant element of eastern Lowland Scots. Indeed the most consistent support for the cause resided not in the Highlands and Islands (most of which remained under Whig control) but in eastern Scotland between the Firths of Moray and Tay, where irreconcilable Protestant Episcopalians were outraged. The Glorious Revolution had violated the divine line of kingship as vested in the Stuarts, and the ecclesiastical settlement had ousted the 'Piskies' in favour of

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the Presbyterian 'Church of Scotland by law established'.

Prince Charles was a stickler for legal form. According to the usages of civilised war at the time he was sedulous in the care he took of the wounded enemy and other prisoners, and he released their officers upon their word of honour not to serve against him. In every place of any size which came under his control he had his father proclaimed as King in virtue of the authority invested in himself as Prince and Regent. Furthermore he set up an apparatus of civil control, complete with officers and tax collectors. What remained to be proved in the autumn of 1745 was whether he could get the better of them in open battle.

### **2. The Spell is Cast: Prestonpans 21 September 1745**

On 20 September two armies were moving to contact in the country to the east of Edinburgh. They numbered about 2,400 men each. The Hanoverians were under the command of General Sir John Cope. Coming by sea from Aberdeen he had landed his troops on the 17th and 18th at Dunbar, the nearest secure port to Edinburgh. On shore he met the two shaken regiments of dragoons which had so far failed even to put up a token resistance to the Jacobite advance. Cope had shrunk from doing battle with the Jacobites in the Highlands, but he was now determined to strike off the head of rebellion at a single stroke.

On the morning of the 20th Cope learned that the other army in question, that of Prince Charles, was on the move. Cope accordingly halted his westward progress on the open ground which extended from a morass north of Tranent towards the sea. He trusted that the flat and unobstructed terrain would act to the advantage of his troops, and his dragoons in particular.

Early the same morning Prince Charles and his troops set out from the east from their bivouacs at Duddinston. A local girl noted his 'graceful carriage and comely looks, his long hair straggling below his neck, and the flap of his tartan cloak thrown back by the wind, so as to make the jewelled St Andrew dangle for a moment clear in the air by its silken ribbon'.

The Jacobites continued through Fisherrow and crossed the Esk by the spectacular Roman bridge which gave onto Mussleburgh.

## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

Lord George Murray set the lead with the regiment of Lochiel and directed the march around the south side of the town and Pinkie Park. Learning that Cope was at or near Prestonpans, he at once made for what he judged to be the key ground, the long smooth grassy ridge of Falside Hill, rising to the south of that village. Early in the afternoon the Jacobites arrayed themselves in a north-facing line of battle from Birsley Brae along the high ground as far as the mining village of Tranent.

Cope had his troops well in hand, and adjusted his positions repeatedly to accord with what he could discover of the Jacobite movements. The day ended with his original west-facing line of battle changed to one fronting the marsh known as the 'Meadows' to the south. The morass stood between him and the Jacobites, and he was confident that he had covered the single passage which was known to him, a wooden waggonway which had been laid in 1721 to carry coal in carts from the pits at Tranent to Cockenzie harbour.

### The Riggonhead Defile

During the night Prince Charles and his principal officers debated what to do. To attack directly across the stretch of the Meadows directly in front of them was a physical impossibility. So the meeting adopted a proposal by the inventive Lord George Murray to take the army on a wide right-flanking move well out to the east of the line of the bogs and then successively north and west to fall on the unprotected left flank of Cope's army. Robert Anderson, the son of the owner of the Meadows, was in the habit of going wildfowling in the marshes, and after the meeting he happened to mention to a Jacobite officer that he knew of a difficult but practicable track that ran by way of Riggonhead Farm and across the far end of the Meadows. The Council reconvened and at once fell in with Anderson's suggestion, which would accomplish the same objective as Lord George's move but by a shorter route.

The long Jacobite column set off just before four in the morning of 21 September. The Duke of Perth made good progress with the Clan Donald regiments, which according to ancient custom made up the right wing and on this occasion had the lead. Lord George had the local command of the left wing, which came up behind and was accompanied by Prince

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Charles in person. In leaping one of the ditches the Prince fell to his knees, and had to be hauled to his feet. In spite of this bad omen both wings of the main force were clear of the marsh at dawn and formed up in line of battle.

Towards five o'clock the Hanoverian redcoats saw indistinct forms on the near side of the swamp, and in the half-light the Highlanders in their dark plaids looked like nothing so much as a line of bushes. Once he had grasped what was afoot Cope responded with some speed. He wheeled his main force of infantry to the left by platoons and marched them to form a 670-pace line of battle parallel to the advancing Jacobites, with two regiments of dragoons in support. His feeble artillery consisted of just four light mortars and six light cannon and was posted on the far right. There were just two officers to serve them, and the action opened when the pair ran along their line of pieces and touched them off one by one like pyrotechnicians at an old-fashioned firework display. After that, the dragoons opened a fire by volleys with their carbines.

### The Battle is Fought: Lost and Won

As commander of the Jacobite right wing, the Duke of Perth had been concerned to leave enough space to allow the left wing under Lord George to form up on the northern side of the marsh, with the result that his left wing outflanked the long line of the redcoats by a useful one hundred paces. This advantage gave added impetus to the three regiments of Clan Donald when they advanced in good order and closed with the enemy. Men and horses began to fall among Hamilton's regiment of dragoons (the 14th), and the sight of Lieutenant Colonel Wright being pinned beneath his horse helped to provoke a general flight which carried the reserve squadron along with it.

Cope's centre and right wing were already staggering under Lord George's attack. Among the redcoats the regiment of Colonel Lascelles (the 58th) managed to summon up a cheer, but the oncoming Highlanders raised a cheer of their own, and fired at such short range that it was almost impossible for them to miss (the wads of their loads flew among the enemy troops), 'which having done, immediately threw down their guns, and drawing their broadswords rushed in upon them like a torrent and carried all before them' (*Lockhart Papers*).

Cope's artillery was overrun, and the three squadrons of

## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

supporting dragoons (Gardiner's 13th) fled one by one. The line of redcoat infantry was now completely exposed, and the platoons disintegrated in succession from their right flank. Afterwards Lord Drummore tried to claim that Cope had been in no way to blame, but was 'persuaded that it was the uncouth manner in which the enemy formed and advanced with vast order and incredible celerity, which intimidated our men'.<sup>2</sup>

There were a few striking exceptions to the dismal story of collapse and flight. Colonel James Gardiner was a respected local figure having his residence in Bankton House just by the battlefield. He was remembered more generally as embodying the virtues of the best kind of Scottish Whig. 'He was a person not only of unshakeable loyalty, of courage and good understanding in his profession as a soldier, but he had contributed greatly from the time he had been in any special command to suppress all sort of impiety among the soldiers, and especially that ... swearing and blaspheming for which the British troops to a proverb are so notoriously infamous' (*Journal of Rev. Alexander Duncan*)<sup>3</sup>. He had been under no illusion as to the quality of his regiment of dragoons, raised in Ireland, under-strength, and recruited in haste in the emergency. At Prestonpans they acted true to form and deserted their leader. Gardiner snatched up a half-pike and put himself at the head of a party of leaderless infantry. He fought on until he was assailed from front and behind and fell mortally wounded at a thorn tree.

A young man of the locality confirms the general belief that the action was decided within an extraordinarily short time. He had spent the night in a neighbour's house, where he was awakened by artillery fire. He ran to a viewpoint in the garden, and even then, 'which could hardly be more than ten or fifteen minutes after firing the first cannon, the whole prospect was filled with runaways, and Highlanders pursuing them' (*Alexander Carlyle*)<sup>4</sup>.

The fleeing troops crowded towards Preston and Bankton parks and their panic was augmented when they lapped around the tall enclosing walls of stone. Some of the dragoons made off west towards Edinburgh, 'with their horses all fro' and foam'<sup>5</sup>, and a party actually galloped up the High Street and into the Castle. The rest of the fugitives made south by 'Johnny Cope's Road' past Bankton House. The flight continued almost without intermission all the way over the Lammermuir Hills, and on by way of Lauder to Coldstream

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and Cornhill where the runaways rested overnight. They made for Berwick the next day and Brigadier Thomas Fowke and Colonel Lascelles caused scandal by arriving ahead of their troops.

Between 150 and 300 of Cope's troops had been killed, most of them mutilated in the heat of action by broadswords and Lochaber axes, and the abandoned field looked as if a hurricane had spread the contents of a slaughterhouse over the ground. The number of redcoat prisoners was proportionately high, at probably more than 1,300, which indicated a collapse of morale. Prince Charles nevertheless forbade any gloating at the defeat of his father's subjects. He ordered all possible care to be taken of the wounded, though nothing could be done for Colonel Gardiner who died of his wounds reportedly at the minister's house in Tranent.

Conversely the report of the battle in the pro-Jacobite *Caledonian Mercury* on 23 September encouraged the malcontents, and was the cause of 'drawing people from the distant parts of Scotland to join the rebellion'.<sup>6</sup>

The beaten army was prey to recriminations, of officers against officers, officers against soldiers, soldiers against officers, infantry against dragoons, dragoons against infantry, and almost everybody against Cope. At the heart of the matter was the fact that an attack pressed home with cold steel had terrified the redcoats out of their wits. In the opinion of the Lord Advocate Robert Craigie 'one thing is certain, that this defeat will make it a dangerous experiment for His Majesty's troops to engage the rebels a second time without a visible superiority. This has raised their contempt of the regular troops and I own I have a great doubt but that His Majesty's troops will have a diffidence of one another, especially of their leaders'.<sup>7</sup>

### International Significance

In the international context, this brief battle at Prestonpans bears direct comparison with the achievement of George Washington in 1776, when he crossed the wintry River Delaware and surprised the Hessian auxiliaries of the British in their quarters on Christmas Day. It proved a turning point in the War of Independence, for it energised the anti-British party among the colonists, shook the British and persuaded potential allies that the revolutionary army was a force to be



## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

reckoned with. For the Jacobites in 1745 their victory at Prestonpans enabled them to argue their case with renewed conviction among the French, who so far had been content only to observe the progress of Prince Charles, and in the next month the French pledged their formal support in the Treaty of Fontainebleau.

The first news of Prestonpans had already prompted the French to renew their plans to invade England. In the event the difficulties of bringing troops and shipping together on the Channel coast repeatedly postponed the attempt until, by 26 December, the Royal Navy had been given time to redeploy its forces on the narrows. The diversionary effect was nevertheless significant, and it might have proved decisive if it had been possible to coordinate the threat with the Jacobite advance on London. More immediately the French began to ship support direct to Scotland by instalments. The first four vessels reached the eastern coast between 9 and 19 October bearing small arms, artillery, ammunition and specialist military personnel.

### **3. The Spell Holds: 22 September 1745 – 17 January 1746**

The conviction of the inherent superiority of Jacobite arms, as imprinted at Prestonpans, sustained the cause of Prince Charles through the months of disappointment which followed, and was going to carry him to his final victory at Falkirk in 1746.

After Prestonpans the Jacobites faced a choice. They could remain in Scotland and consolidate their grip on the country. They could march along the eastern coast to Newcastle and cut off London's source of coal. Instead, Prince Charles persuaded the Jacobite leaders into the boldest possible option, that of marching through the heart of England on London.

The leading Jacobite troops crossed the border on 8 November. The Highland Army then made rapid progress through the English north-west. The Scots were used to the severe weather, and morale was high even if outside Manchester few of the English who crowded to see them pass proved willing to join their ranks.

Reinforcements were summoned from the British army in Flanders to meet the threat, but the redcoats did not have the food, clothing or shelter they needed to withstand the frost

## VICTORY AT PRESTONPANS

and snow. Moving slowly and laboriously, they were unable to gain the initiative from the tough, fit and ingenious Jacobites.

In such a way the Highland Army was able to dodge between the forces of Field Marshal Wade, Cope's successor, stranded east of the snowy Pennines, and those of the newly-arrived Duke of Cumberland, freezing and miserable in the West Midlands.

On 4 December the Jacobites reached Derby, just 120 miles or six day's march from London, which was now in consternation. The spirits among the Scots rank and file and great regimental officers were as high as ever, but the same did not hold true in the Jacobite headquarters.

### Derby and the Return to Scotland

Prince Charles depended ultimately on the goodwill of a group of the most influential grandees and clan chiefs, and these in turn were inclined to take their lead from Lord George Murray who remains one of the most controversial figures of the '45. He was an extraordinarily able man and the author of many brilliant initiatives. He was at the same time moody, vindictive and headstrong to the point of irresponsibility. Prince Charles was almost certainly wrong when he came to believe that Lord George was a traitor but there was something about the man which undeniably attracted suspicion.

Lord George was now arguing that it was madness for the Jacobites to continue. There were the armies of Wade and Cumberland behind them, and he wrongly feared that a third army was lurking in front. At the same time English sympathisers had failed to declare themselves en masse and there was no sign of the promised French invasion.

The doubters carried the day in crucial meetings on 5 December, and on the next day baffled officers and men of the Highland Army were ordered to turn their noses to the north.

Historians have debated the rights and wrongs of the decision at Derby, but it is relevant to this analysis that the Jacobite forces had neither been outmanoeuvred nor outfought, and that the spell of Prestonpans was as potent as ever. The confidence of the Scots was upheld by a creditable rearguard action at Clifton on 18 December, which kept the pursuing Duke of Cumberland off their backs and enabled them to cross the Esk on the 20th and leave England unscathed.

# *Guide to the site of the Battle of Prestonpans*

The battle was fought on 21st September 1745 between the armies of Bonnie Prince Charlie and Gen Sir John Cope for the Hanoverians. The two armies were some 2000 men each.

The Jacobite army had no artillery, no cavalry and consisted almost entirely of Gaelic speaking Highlanders. Small as the armies were, they were effectively contesting for control of Scotland. The defeat of Cope's army was a huge shock to the government of George II and for two months after the battle Charles held court in Edinburgh. It was there that he was first called "the Bonnie Prince"!

From the top of the old Coal bing, now shaped as a grass covered pyramid you may look over to the north and across the fields approaching Cockenzie and with the aid of the bronze interpretation boards imaginatively reconstruct the scene. At the road entrance to the bing stands a small Remembrance Cairn.

This summary, however, will give you a taste of what happened on the days of 20th and 21st September viewed from four different vantage points which you may care to visit. You stand and look out over very different scenes today, and yet it does not take too much imagination to transport yourself back to September 1745 as the early morning mist rose from the stubble fields...

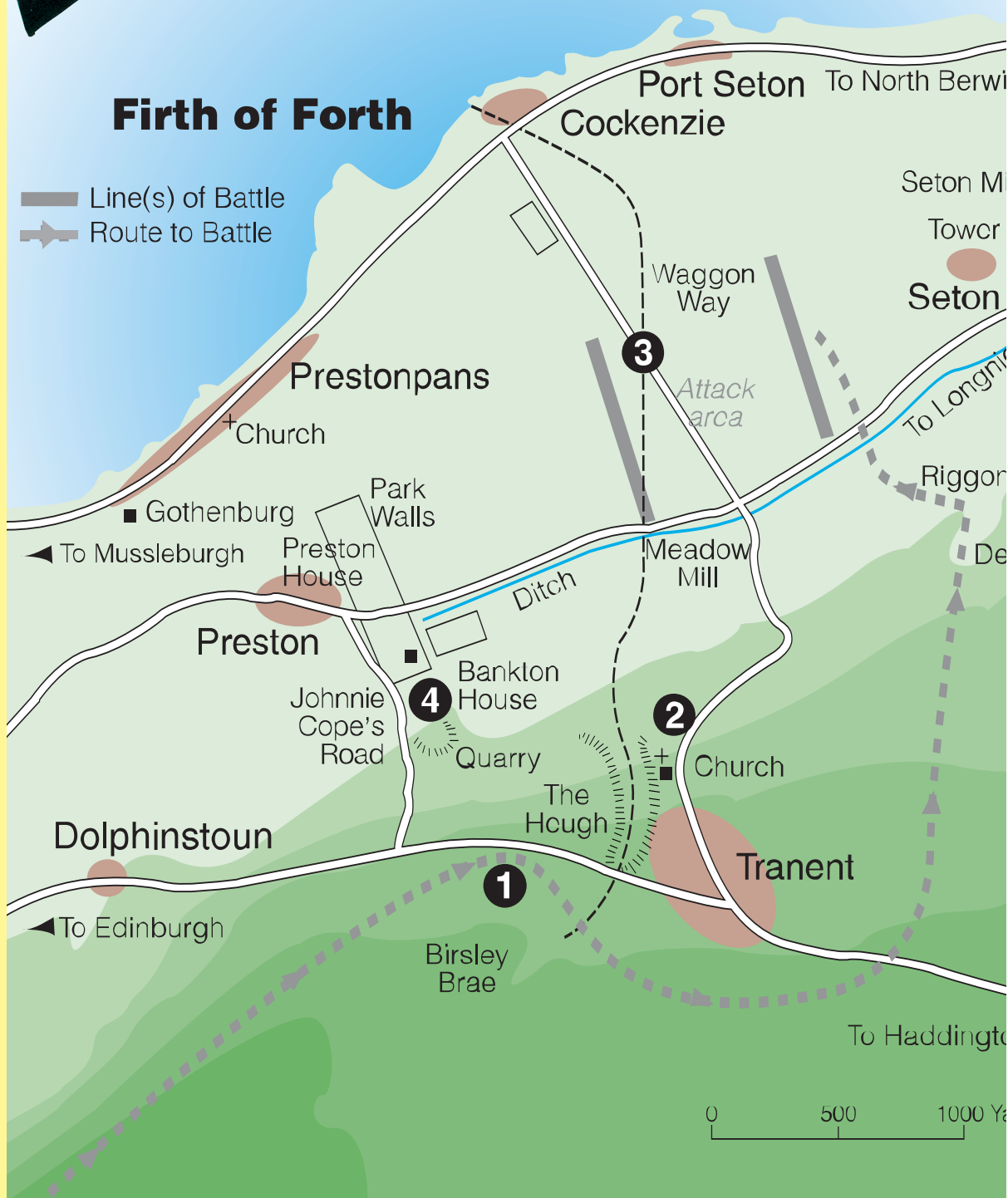
❶ *From Edinburgh (A199) at the entry to Tranent, pull in beside the Jet Petrol Station. Look north towards the Forth.*


You are standing at the point where the Highland army first caught sight of the Redcoats below on 20th Sept. Always seeking for the high ground in battle, the Highlanders had come over the summit of Birsley Brae and it was here that they saw the Redcoats lined up just to the right of Bankton House. (The large orange-ochre building below you.) Charlie sent an ADC Kerr of Graden forward to reconnoitre and the young man bravely led his horse down the slope. Musket balls flew up at him but he returned with the tidings that there was no possibility of a charge down the hill, so broken was the land with dry-stane dykes and old mine workings, not to mention a boggy ditch just in front of the Redcoat position. Cope had chosen his position well.



## Firth of Forth

- Line(s) of Battle
- Route to Battle



- 
- 2 Go down Church Street and at the foot of the hill on the left hand side before the roundabout (black sign for church). Go into the Churchyard of the Church of Scotland. Go over to the wall and again look towards the Forth.

Following the difficulty that had arisen for the Jacobites that morning ie. how could they get at the Redcoats? The Jacobite Officers spent the rest of the day reconnoitering the environs of Tranent and Prestonpans. You are now standing where the Cameron clan was positioned during that afternoon. They were part of a twofold Jacobite move to contain the Redcoats. The Camerons were to keep a close eye on the Redcoat army and report any movements back to Charles and Lord George Murray. The second initiative was to send the men from Atholl along to the road at Site 1 (but a little further west) in order to prevent any Redcoat dash for Edinburgh. Neither move met with much success. The Camerons soon drew attention to themselves and the Redcoats rained in musket fire and one and a half pounder cannon at them. There were a number of Cameron casualties and their chief, Lochiel asked permission to move back. The Atholl men were the cause of a heated quarrel among the Jacobite leaders inasmuch as Lord George did not even know about Charlie's order and in great ill-temper resigned his commission. It was with some difficulty that other chiefs prevailed upon the two men and Lord George resumed his responsibilities. (The men from Atholl were withdrawn.)

- 3 Continue north across the A1 and follow the road down towards Cockenzie, over two further roundabouts. Draw in after 500 yds at the gate leading south along a public right of way. (There is a green Public Path signpost.) Walk down the path approx. 300 yds and look towards the east.

Very early on the morning of the 21st, as the Redcoats perceived a circling motion by the Jacobites they drew up in line of battle immediately to the west of this track stretching right up to the top road and down to where you now stand. (The track is in fact the line of the old gravity waggonway, which was there in 1745, and along which coal was transported in trucks from Tranent to Cockenzie.) During the evening of the 20th the Jacobites had hit upon a plan of swinging east and behind Tranent in order to emerge just to the west of Seton Collegiate Church.

This opened up the possibility of a charge across the open stubble fields towards the Redcoat army. As you stand on the old Waggonway looking towards Longniddry you may imagine the Highland clans forming up at 6 that morning – a long line stretching through the MacDonalds at the extreme north through the Stewarts, Grants and MacGregors to the Camerons at the south (near the top road now) Both armies were inexperienced, the question was whose nerve would give first? The answer turned out to be the Redcoats! Had the Redcoats but realised that the Highlanders were scared of Cavalry and deployed their Dragoons imaginatively the result would have been very different. The Highlanders, as they approached the Redcoat lines, discarded their cumbersome *Feileadh Mor* (kilts) as they could wield the Basket-hilted broadswords much more easily dressed just in their *leine*, undershirt. The Camerons advanced first and upon receipt of

cannon fire seemed to hesitate. Then they gathered into groups and charged forward with broadswords drawn. They crashed into the Redcoat line and the slashes of the broadsword so shocked the Redcoats that few stayed to fight for more than a minute or two. Col. Whitefoord and Col. Gardiner (who by a strange freak of fate lived at Bankton House) tried to rally the men, but Gardiner was soon struck down by scythe blades, Lochaber axe and broadsword. He died later in the day at the Tranent manse. The fiercest part of the fight was round a "Thorntree" a hundred yards or so to the west of the Waggonway. Afterwards it was observed that scarcely a bayonet (of the Redcoats) bore any sign of blood.

- ④ *Retrace your route and turn right towards Prestonpans. Park your car at the Railway Station. Cross the footbridge and turn left, in through the hole in the wall, along to the Monument to Col. Gardiner and Bankton House.*

Here you come to the final mopping up scenes of the battle. At the close of the battle Cope found 450 of his Dragoons in the fields near the House. They were terrified men who could not be persuaded to rally against the Jacobites. All Cope could do was to lead them to safety up the road which now winds across the A1, and which has ever since the battle been called Johnny Cope's Road. As you pause at the Monument remember how history lives again in the telling. Colonel Gardiner, a deeply pious man and a product of the evangelical revival under Wesley and Whitefield, made a dramatic appearance in Scott's *Waverley* published in 1814.

His biography was written by Phillip Dodderidge the famous hymn writer. *Waverley* himself was a fictitious figure and appears in the book as a Redcoat officer who had deserted to join the Jacobites before the battle. In *Kidnapped* Stevenson uses the true story of Alan Breck Stewart who had deserted in the other direction. He had been a Redcoat, but after the battle joined the Highlanders and indeed his own clan, the Stewarts of Appin. One of the greatest of Gaelic poets Alastair MacMhaighstir Alastair was also at the battle serving with the MacDonalds. Some of his finest poetry is concerned with the Jacobite cause. Bankton House itself was used as a hospital/safe haven for Redcoat soldiers after the battle.

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The Scottish homeland had meanwhile been contested between Whigs and redcoats on the one hand, and on the other by the Jacobites who were building up their power base in the east. The Jacobites had also received a very significant accession of strength in the shape of a train of artillery and eight hundred regular troops who had been shipped from France. Early in the New Year all the disposable Jacobite troops came together and now numbered some 10,000 men, the largest and the best-balanced body the Prince had ever had under his direct command. With these resources at his disposal he laid siege to Stirling Castle, the key to the passage between the Lowlands and the Highlands.

Edinburgh had been sacrificed to the Hanoverian Whigs when the Highland Army had marched into England, and it was here that the much-outwitted army of Cope then Wade gathered under its third and possibly worst commander, Lieutenant General Henry Hawley. This gentleman declared that he was ‘resolved to strike while the iron is hot’, and he believed ‘with everything they (the Jacobites) have brought from the north they art now 7,000 men, but that’s nothing, they are Scotch, and only so many mouths which must be fed’<sup>8</sup>. Hawley and his generals feared only that the Jacobites might slip away before there was a chance to bring them to battle.

The rival forces clashed for the second time on a grand scale on high ground outside Falkirk on 17 January 1746. On the Jacobite left wing Lord George Murray threw back the redcoat cavalry which had been flung against him, then responded with a devastating counter attack which carried as far as the horrified spectators who had gathered to watch the excitement. The issue was longer in contention elsewhere for the Jacobites, but was resolved in their favour when Prince Charles committed the regulars from France. In such a way the unbeaten record of the Highland Army was carried convincingly into the early days of 1746.

### 4. The Spell is broken: 18 January – 16 April 1746

Great and possibly irreparable damage was done to the Jacobite cause in the brief span of time before winter arrived in full force to close down major operations. The Jacobites mounted no proper pursuit of Hawley’s routed army after Falkirk. The redcoats were allowed to come to their senses

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and look forward to the arrival of the Duke of Cumberland who reached Edinburgh on 30 January. Early the next day he set off to relieve Stirling Castle which was running short of provisions.

Prince Charles had meanwhile lost the initiative by continuing his mismanaged siege of the castle, but he came to life again when he saw that he had the opportunity to bring the enemy into a fresh battle. He was dumbfounded when Lord George Murray and the clan chiefs insisted that the army must withdraw all the way to Inverness and the Highlands, abandoning in the process the irreplaceable resources of the eastern littoral together with Montrose, Aberdeen and the smaller ports by which alone substantial French help could still arrive.

On 1 February 1746 the Jacobites abandoned the siege of Stirling Castle in some confusion which was a portent of a decline of their hitherto excellent staff work. Prince Charles and the Highland Division now made for Inverness by an inland path while Lord George Murray and the Lowland Division followed a route which skirted the coast. Lord George abandoned town after town in his haste, to the extent that his march resembled a flight rather than a retreat.

On 27 February a French convoy arrived off Aberdeen with a reinforcement of some 700 precious troops, but the ships had to stand off again when a party went ashore and discovered that the Jacobites had left the place and that the Duke of Cumberland's army was only a matter of hours away.

### Cumberland Prepares his Forces

Pending the start of the new campaigning season the Duke established his army in and about Aberdeen which he ruled like a conquered city. Prince Charles made his headquarters in Inverness but the greater part of his forces dispersed to conduct minor operations or to gather strength in familiar Highland recruiting grounds.

The feuds in the Jacobite high command continued unabated. Prince Charles's health gave cause for concern, and the work of gathering in provisions began to suffer when his experienced secretary Murray of Broughton fell ill as well. For their day to day support the officers and men looked to their pay, which was getting into arrears and hopes of an improvement were dashed when a sloop, *Le Prince Charles*,

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bearing a cargo of French gold, was driven ashore in the far north by a British flotilla and the treasure was taken by hostile MacKay clansmen under Lord Reay. A rescue party under Lord Cromartie was itself captured at Dunrobin. Another of the Jacobite enterprises, a vain siege of Fort Augustus, proved to be a damaging diversion of force and cost the Jacobites their skilled chief gunner, Colonel James Grant, who was disabled by a wound.

These same weeks were being put to very good use by the Duke of Cumberland. Unlike Cope or Hawley he took the Jacobites seriously as enemies, and he made elaborate preparations to destroy them in eventual battle. Aberdeen offered him an excellent base for seaborne logistics and enabled him to keep his men well fed, clothed and paid. He was on affable terms with the rank and file. His new drills not only held out the prospect of beating the Highland charge but built up the troops' confidence in themselves and one another. When the army moved it would be after due reconnaissance and precaution. No longer would it be flung into combat in the old style.

The coming of the spring enabled Cumberland to take the field on 8 April at a time when Prince Charles was in no position to regroup his scattered forces to full strength. Cumberland forded the Spey on 12 April, and on the 15th the redcoats encamped about Nairn, a single days march from Inverness where the Jacobites had their one sizeable store of oatmeal.

By the morning of 16 April the Jacobites had contrived to do much of Cumberland's work for him. Lord George Murray was at odds with Prince Charles and his chief of staff Colonel John William O'Sullivan over a decision to make a stand on Drum Mossie Moor. Donald Cameron of Lochiel blamed Lord George for having undertaken, then abandoned, an overnight march against the enemy camp at Nairn which left the available Jacobite forces hungry and exhausted. Clan Donald, which formed the prime shock force of the Highland army, was further disgruntled against Lord George for having removed it from their traditional place of honour on the right wing.

Early on that morning Cumberland's army came within full view of the Jacobites drawn up on the moor at Culloden. The redcoats then did something which they had never done before. They waited calmly in their ranks while their artillery exacted a remorseless toll of the Jacobites, and the government

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cavalry began to work around the enemy flanks. At last Prince Charles saw that his enemy was not going to act according to type, and rather than see his troops continue to absorb punishment to no purpose he released the army in a charge relying even now on the spell of Prestonpans. This time the old magic had to contend with a storm of canister as the attackers closed the distance. The Jacobite right centre broke into, though not cleanly through, the enemy array. It was impossible to exploit further for all the rest of the redcoats stood their ground. The Jacobite wedge came under counterattack on its right flank and the precious reserve of 'French' regulars was not at hand since it was being committed to ward off the developing threat to the Jacobite army's wider flanks.

Before the morning was out the surviving Jacobites had been beaten from the field and the Duke of Cumberland had begun his remorseless pursuit. It was rare at that period for a victory to be exploited so vigorously and rarer still, as in the present case, for the victors to ravage their enemies' homelands, and then proceed over the coming years to destroy the basis of their society.

### 5. The Spell in Perspective

The spell of Prestonpans had been cast in those minutes of scrambled fighting in half light of the early morning of 21 September 1745. What are we to make of this phenomenon in the wider view?

In part it was an outcome of the ebullience which had been growing in Prince Charles's forces over the previous weeks. It was also unmistakably the product of the Highland military culture. In the conventional European warfare of that time the combat of infantry against infantry had been reduced to a process of attrition, whereby the rival forces faced each other at a range of about one hundred yards and fired blindly into the smoke. On 21 September 1745 Cope had no reason to suppose that he was dealing with an enemy who would close the distance at a run and with raised broadswords. These weapons inflicted gaping, gushing wounds that on the whole were less lethal than those made by bullets but were endowed with a horror of their own. It was a combination of physical and mental effect which gave the Highland charge its power, and made Prestonpans the pivotal battle that it was, pivotal in

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the sense that it imprinted on the Highland Army a potent sense of its tactical superiority.

Something as potent as the spell of Prestonpans was not to be banished by a single misfortune or by a device as simple as new battle tactics. Its destruction was rather the result of two processes which made themselves felt over a period of time.

An unmistakeable self-destructiveness became evident among the Jacobites after their final victory at Falkirk. The quality of decision-making was declining at every level. The unspectacular but vital support offered by the Jacobite staff and supply system began to fall away, while at the same time the strategic focus was lost when the Jacobite forces abandoned the eastern coastlands and dispersed over the Highlands. A unified and energetic direction might still have rallied the Jacobites in a purposeful way before the opening of the spring campaign but the high command was faction-ridden and depleted by ill-health.

The Jacobites, even below their best, might still have had the measure of a Cope or a Hawley. It was a different matter once the Duke of Cumberland took command of the Hanoverian government forces. He grasped that the 'spell of Prestonpans' had to be broken at both the physical and moral level. He laid solid foundations of staff work and logistics, which not only met the demands of campaigning in the Highlands but reinforced his efforts to persuade his troops that he was concerned for their welfare. In the same way he understood that bayonets, unlike broadswords, were effective only when employed by troops working in total concert and so his celebrated new bayonet drill was designed above all to enhance the solidarity of his men.

When Cumberland advanced it was only when he was satisfied that his army was ready in every respect, and just when the final Jacobite options were closing down. He reached his enemies at Culloden on 16 April 1746 and beat them in one of the enduringly decisive battles of British history.

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*Memorial cairn on B1361*





## **The Battle of Prestonpans 1745 Heritage Trust**

The Battle of Prestonpans 1745 Heritage Trust was established in 2006 on the initiative of the Prestoungrange Arts Festival with the support of Prestonpans Community Council and a wide range of other interested parties. Quite simply, the aim of the Trust is to ensure that the famous victory at Prestonpans on September 21st 1745 is better understood and remembered in the community and presented much more effectively to the many visitors to the battle site.

In 1995 the town presented a most significant re-enactment spectacle which attracted many visitors. And over the past 250 years a number of specific memorials have been created – there is a Battle Cairn, an obelisk to Colonel Gardiner, a remembrance marker for the Thorntree under which that same Colonel was mortally wounded in 1745 and a vantage point bing at Meadowmill at the top of which interpretation boards enable visitors to comprehend the battle sequence.

It was the general opinion in the community that these existing memorials did not do justice to the battle's role in Scottish history. As importantly, there had never been an in depth evaluation either of the battlefield itself or of the Hope and Ambition that the Victory aroused.

### **Creating a year round 'Living History' presentation**

The Trustees undertook further widespread consultation in the community, explored exemplars across Scotland and

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internationally, met with Jacobite societies and Clan Chiefs, politicians, archaeologists, ethnographers and many more interested parties. And from almost every consultation the advice was the same: create a year-round 'Living History' presentation since this approach has been demonstrated again and again to be most powerful.

Further unanimous advice suggested that to be sustainable the project must be grounded in thoroughly professional research and an understanding of what is being 'conserved' and then presented. Whilst historical records from the Hanoverian Enquiry after the battle told much and it is recounted in Dr Christopher Duffy's analysis in this booklet, much more research was needed.

And if such a need was apparent in respect of the battlefield itself, the requirement was that much greater for the manifestations of Hope and Ambition to which Victory gave rise. The songs, the poetry, the art and literature not least from Scott and Stevenson that flowered inspired by the victory should properly be conserved, interpreted and widely presented.

Finally, the good advice went further. The Battle of Prestonpans is perhaps the only major battle in Scotland to have been fought in an 18th century industrial setting. Prestonpans was an important centre for salt making, coal mining, fishing and their associated activities. The medieval Mercat Cross is Scotland's finest, the village of Old Preston contains many fine properties of the period and Prestongrange Kirk was built by Rev John Davidson at the end of the 16th century. At the time of the battle, the fields over which it was fought had just been harvested and were strewn with coal heughs. Scotland's first gravity waggon-way ran across that farmland carrying coal from Tranent to Cockenzie Harbour where Sir John Cope's captured baggage train lay in 1745. All these contextual aspects of the battle should be included in the battle presentation so that visitors to the town can gain insight into the town itself as well as the battle.

### **The Battle's role in the area's regeneration**

Since the 1960s the town of Prestonpans has seen the decimation of its entire industrial base, most notably with the closure of its mines. Over the last decade the arts and heritage have played a key role in the continuing regeneration of the

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town, not least through the work of the Prestoungrange Arts Festival.

The Arts Festival has documented the history of the town and painted it on the walls as murals. Tens of thousands of visitors have since come to share in that history and to join in its outgrowth, the Three Harbours Festival. New housing developments are bringing new families to the town and all are enjoying new facilities such as the swimming pool, Carnegie Library extension, educational developments, the Pennypit Community Centre, outdoor and indoor playing fields – and the civic twinning with Barga in Tuscany.

The Trust is determined that the interpretation of the battle will complement this activity and generate further prosperity for the community. The self-esteem of the community and its individuals is crucial and implies community involvement in all stages of this heritage initiative.

### **A ‘Grand’ Design Prepared**

What is being attempted is deliberately ambitious. It is the Trustees hope that substantial employment can be created and high levels of community participation achieved in the conservation and the continuing presentation through the arts and all other aspects of the Living History.

It is intended that the Waggon Way shall be reconstructed in part; that a major centre for interpretation shall be created; that the battlefield shall be accessible for visitors at all times and marked to show the course of the battle with the contemporary agricultural patterns restored; that Birsley Brae, Tranent churchyard and the Riggonhead Defile be suitably marked; that each year the Battle shall be re-enacted; that a hotel facility be created that can provide conference and concert facilities for the arts ... and much more besides.

### **Website for Communications**

The internet provides a key element in the campaign for appropriate recognition for the battle and individuals can register there – both as a supporter and to receive regular e-mail updates on the initiative’s progress. Regular face to face briefing meetings also take place in Prestonpans every quarter and the whole community and all who have registered

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as supporters are invited. Full details are also given at the website after each such update.

**IF YOU ARE NOT ALREADY REGISTERED  
AS A SUPPORTER AND FEEL YOU WISH TO  
BE KEPT INFORMED PLEASE GO AS SOON AS  
POSSIBLE TO THE WEBSITE  
[WWW.BATTLEOFPRESTONPANS1745.ORG](http://WWW.BATTLEOFPRESTONPANS1745.ORG)**



*Prince Charles Edward (from a contemporary engraving)*



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