

The battle is important for by winning it Charles had won back Scotland. There were no more government armies to be defeated in Scotland, although garrisons still hung on in Edinburgh and Stirling Castles as well as Ruthven. So many eddies and currents of Scottish life and tradition cut across the battlefield – the industrial revolution (the Waggonway), the evangelical revival (Colonel Gardiner), and three of our greatest Scottish writers Scott, Stevenson and MacMhaighstir Alastair. At the end of the battle Charlie believed that the Highlanders were invincible. Given a fair choice of battlefield they were invincible – the speed of their charge was unbelievable to 18th Century troops and the savagery of their onslaught truly shocking to them. Honour their memory "till the White Rose blooms again!"



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THEN and NOW!
BATTLE FOR PRESTONPANS
September 21st
1745 & 2006

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 byng, 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 byng stands a small Remembrance Cairn.

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

Below: "The Battle of Prestonpans" by Sir William Allan.



Above: Looking from the top of Coal byng towards the monument.



1 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 ground well!

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 *Felleadh Mor* (kilts) as they could wield the Basket-hilted broadswords much more

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.

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

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. Whiteford 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 "Thorn tree" 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.

Text by Peter MacKenzie

His biography was written by Philip 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.



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 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.

Above, Left to Right: Memorial cairn on B1361; Colonel Gardiner Memorial at Bankton; Bankton House from the south; The Waggonway just south of Cockenzie; Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Below: The Thorn Tree at Prestonpans, where Col. Gardiner was slain.

