

Bonnie Prince Charlie in Kilsyth

Battle of Falkirk 17 January 1746



"To accelerate a junction with the forces at Perth, the prince marched his army from Glasgow on the 4th of January, 1746, in two divisions; one of which, commanded by the prince, took the road to Kilsyth, where it passed the night. Charles himself took up his quarters in a Kilsyth house, then belonging to Mr. Campbell of Shawfield. Mr. Campbell's steward, it is said, was ordered to provide every thing necessary for the comfort of the prince, under a promise of payment, but was told next morning that the bill should be allowed o his master at accounting for the rents of Kilsyth, which was a forfeited estate". <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/falkirk/falkirk7.html>

Between the raising of the Young Pretender's standard at Glenfinnan on 19th August 1745 to the humiliating and total defeat at Culloden on 16th April 1746, the rebellion of the supporters of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his cause left deep and searing scars in every part of Scotland. Kilsyth, a single days march from Stirling and Falkirk, was not to escape lightly from this murderous civil strife.



Picture: Charles Stuart

Since the Jacobite victory at Prestonpans much of Central Scotland lay at the mercy of foraging Highland clans. Robert Adam of Kilsyth Parish wrote: "about a fortnight after ye battle of Preston Pans last Peter Stewart of Col. Roy Stewarts Regt come to his mod. house with several of his men and pressed one of his masters horses & carried him to Falkirk & promised to send him back again, & the Ex-am's master sent to fetch back ye Horse & he went with yr horse which was loaded with baggages to Falkirk & when here at them he desired Capt Stewart to let him have yr horse back again but he was told he should have it at ye next Town and so on...."

On the 19th December 1745, orders were issued to "get all Stirlingshire in arms immediately". Not all were loyal to the crown: a sweeping warrant was issued to "arrest and detain anyone suspected of Jacobite sympathies". Some 200 men from Kilsyth - a large part of the adult male population - joined the Government as loyal volunteers. Many were fated never to return to their homes and families.

Just a few days later, on January 3rd, the main Jacobite army, marching out of Glasgow, passed through Kilsyth en route to Falkirk. One column, led by Lord George, stopped overnight at Cumbernauld. The other, with Prince Charles Stuart, the Young Pretender to the Crown, at its head, stayed overnight in Kilsyth. With their menfolk gone, it is not hard to imagine the terror of the remaining Kilsyth wives and bairns as these wild and undisciplined Highlanders walked boldly and unchallenged into their homes demanding shelter, horses, money and food.

For the following fortnight the whole countryside was alive with foraging troop movements, spies and rumours. When battle became imminent, a small party of curious day-trippers from Kilsyth, consisting of the son of the innkeeper, Alexander Forester and three other local youths, seized one of Lord Pitsligo's less vigilant hussars on their way and carried him to Falkirk as a prisoner. The town was awash with soldiers, curious civilians, and vendors keen to make money out of the crowds. They were shortly to witness one of the most bloody, confused and terrifying events in the history of Scotland.

Battle of Falkirk - painting by Chris Collingwood

"The Jacobite army led by Lord George Murray having fired their first devastating volley, cast down their muskets and pistols to engage Cobham's Dragoons in fierce close quarter combat".



FALKIRK OR PARADISE, by Geoff B Bailey, publishers John Donald 1996 ISBN 0 85976 431 1

Order online at: [Falkirk or Paradise!](#) ~ Geoff B. Bailey (Paperback - 1995)

is the definitive modern account of the events surrounding the Battle of Falkirk Muir. The Battle was a victory for Lord George Murray, commander of the Jacobite Highland forces of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, over the Hanoverian forces - over 18,000 combatants were involved altogether.

Brutal, hand to hand attack and counter attack continued in appalling weather conditions throughout the afternoon, and the closing stages of the battle was greatly confused by the dark, so much so that large numbers of troops on both sides were left to wander around with no clear orders. Desertions, murder and treachery were common, and the demoralised Government forces retreated in chaos to Linlithgow, where their General, Hawley, penned a letter to the Duke of Cumberland that began: "Sir, My heart is broke...."

One of the local inhabitants, surveying the battlefield the next day, remarked how the naked bodies of the dead and dying, stripped of all their clothes and valuables, resembled a flock of white sheep at rest on the hillside. One Jacobite commented that "there were a great many officers killed, for Gold watches were at a cheap rate".

Some locals were happy to join the plunder, and worse:

"The plundering wives, and savage boy

Did many wounded men destroy!

With dirks and skians they fell a sticking,

For which they well deserved a kicking"

(Graham, D, Impartial History, 1812)

One contemporary estimate of the dead was that around 600 Government and possibly 40 Jacobite soldiers were killed, but this is largely conjectural. Notable amongst these were Captain William Edmonstone of Blakeney's Foot, a local Kilsyth man, and some six or eight slain Presbyterian Ministers with more courage than sense. Several hundred prisoners were taken, and some unfortunate bystanders were certainly killed in the confusion and mayhem.

The Jacobite army of around 8,000 spent 24 days in Falkirk from the 4th to the 28th January.