

Exploring the 1715 Jacobite Rising

Battle of Sheriffmuir



Graeme Young
Malcolm Wilson

Leighton Library, Dunblane

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Background



King George I was the great-grandson of King James VI of Scotland and I of England and Ireland. He inherited the British throne following the deaths in 1714 of both his mother, Sophia, and his second cousin, Queen Anne within months of each other. He was the senior Protestant descendant to the throne of Britain.

The Jacobites had tried, but failed, to have George replaced with James Francis Edward Stuart, who was Queen Anne's Catholic half-brother. Jacobites believed James Francis Edward Stuart to be the true King of Scots, instead of King George I, who had been crowned just the year beforehand. He was the first British monarch of the House of Hanover.

The Act of Settlement passed in 1701 in the English Parliament had settled that the succession to the crowns of England and Ireland could only be to Protestants. Anyone who was Roman Catholic, or who was married to a Roman Catholic, was not allowed to inherit the throne.

In 1707 the Acts of Union, one by the Parliament of England and one by the Parliament of Scotland, had come into effect. Part of this defined the succession to the throne of Great Britain. As a result, the Act of Settlement became part of Scots law as well.

The Acts, bringing Scotland and England together, did not go down well with many in Scotland. The 1715 Jacobite Rebellion was seen as a chance by some to regain independence. Supporters of King James VII and II saw a chance to bring back a Scottish, Catholic king. James had been exiled in France when William and Mary, who were Protestant, became king and queen in 1688 (known as “The Glorious Revolution”). Supporters of James were called ‘Jacobites’ after the Latin name for James. They took up arms in Scotland in support of James, whom they called ‘The King Across The Water’. Their wish was for the Catholic James to become king.

King George I - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_I_of_Great_Britain

James Francis Edward Stuart -

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Francis_Edward_Stuart

Glorious Revolution - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glorious_Revolution_in_Scotland

Act of Settlement 1701 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_of_Settlement_1701

Acts of Union 1707 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Union_1707

Some starting points

Find out more

Battle of Sheriffmuir

The Battle



On the 13th November in the year 1715 a battle took place on Sheriffmuir, to the east of Dunblane. This was between the Jacobite soldiers led by John Erskine, the 6th Earl of Mar, and the Hanoverian Government army led by John Campbell, the 2nd Duke of Argyll.

Just one week before the battle, the Earl of Mar had gathered Highland chiefs together. They declared James Francis Edward Stuart as the true King of Scots, instead of King George I, who had been crowned just the year beforehand.

The Earl of Mar led an Army of about 7,000 to Sheriffmuir, on the hills to the east of Dunblane. The Duke of Argyll, on hearing about this, led the Government army of about 4,000 to meet them. Accounts vary about the numbers, but it's generally agreed that the Earl of Mar led a greater number of soldiers than the Duke of Argyll.

The battle was chaotic and inconclusive. The right wing of Argyll's army attacked, pushing back the Jacobites on that side. But Jacobites on the other wing attacked the left wing of Argyll's army and overwhelmed them.

Both sides claimed victory, but strategically, Argyll succeeded in stopping the Jacobites from reaching Stirling or Edinburgh.

Although the battle lacked a decisive winner, it effectively ended the 1715 Jacobite rising, with Mar retreating to Perth.

Historic Environment Scotland -

<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/BTL17>

Wikipedia - Battle of Sheriffmuir - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Sheriffmuir

National Archives - education resources for Jacobite Rebellion of 1715 -

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/jacobite-1715/>

National Library of Scotland - 1715 Jacobite Rising -

<https://www.nls.uk/exhibitions/jacobites/1715/>

<https://digital.nls.uk/1715-rising/index.html>

Video about the Battle of Sheriffmuir by the Yellow Duke -

<https://youtu.be/y7gUjSrHv2g>

Some starting points

Find out more

Battle of Sheriffmuir

James Francis Edward Stuart



I am James Francis Edward Stuart, the Chevalier de St. George. Since the death of my father, King James II & VII in 1701, I have been the rightful heir to the thrones of England, Ireland and Scotland.

My enemies call me “The Old Pretender”, a title I neither acknowledge nor agree with.

My supporters, called Jacobites, in memory of my father, refer to me as “The King Over the Water” as I am now obliged to live in exile in France.

The King, my father, followed the one true religion, Roman Catholicism, and my birth in 1688 and the fact that I was also to be brought up in that faith provoked the rebellion which saw my father driven from the throne.

We have already attempted to restore our rightful line to the throne in 1689 and 1708. A confounded attack of measles prevented me from leading this second venture in person. Now we have launched a fresh attempt in this year of 1715.

I have just been informed of the outcome of a Battle at Sheriffmuir, near Dunblane in Scotland where our forces led by John Erskine, Earl of Mar engaged with the Whig forces under the Duke of Argyll.

I am informed that despite our forces driving the right wing of the Hanoverians from the field, we did not pursue our advantage and Mar has decided to retreat north again.

I have always had reservations about Mar as he was previously Secretary of State for Scotland under Queen Anne.

I have also been informed that our rising in Preston has failed. I see that I shall require to lead the struggle in person and I intend to return to Scotland later this year of 1715.



Part of engraving, in Dunblane Museum, commemorating the Battle of Dunblane at Sheriffmuir

Battle of Sheriffmuir

John Erskine 6th Earl of Mar



I am John Erskine, 6th Earl of Mar. I come from a long line of distinguished aristocrats of Scotland with a proud history of loyalty to the crown.

Ancestors of mine have included Regents to the monarch in time past.

I served as Secretary of State for Scotland to her majesty Queen Anne and, like many others wondered what would happen to the crown on her death.

I was given no office under the incoming George I which I deemed an insult and so I threw my weight behind King James III and VIII. This has caused some of my scurrilous detractors to nickname me “Bobbing John”, saying that I float with the tide and have no true loyalties, a charge which I wholeheartedly refute.

I proclaimed King James as monarch in Braemar on September 6th 1715 and gathered an army to restore him to the throne. I marched my troops south and we encamped at the old Roman Camp at Ardoch, north of Dunblane on the 12th of November.

My intelligence informed me that the crossing of the Forth at Stirling was protected by the Duke of Argyll and we sought to engage him in battle.

On the 13th we marched from Ardoch by way of Kinbuck, where I met with Rob Roy Macgregor, and on to Sheriffmuir.

Our army numbered 10000, larger than Argyll’s but, wary of his cavalry, I sought to engage him on the higher ground of Sheriffmuir, away from the boggy lands near the Forth.

We took up position without sight of the government troops and found soon that our right wing outflanked their left wing.

Consequently we drove them from the field of battle and pursued some of them as far as the hamlet of Cornton near to Stirling and others we drove to near Dunblane.

Alas our own left wing suffered considerable loss, particularly of the gallant Clan Macrae and I deemed it prudent to withdraw northwards after the battle. I proclaim this day to have been a victory but need to be cautious and await events, not least of the uprising in England. God Save King James.



Battle of Sheriffmuir

John Campbell 2nd Duke of Argyll



I am John Campbell, 2nd Duke of Argyll, from a family with a proud lineage stretching back centuries with a history of loyalty to the crown and to the Protestant religion.

At the Battle of Sheriffmuir I commanded the Hanoverian army of around 4000 troops based at Stirling. I am pleased to say that the town remained loyal to our cause.

My aim was to prevent the Jacobite forces from crossing the Forth and marching south to join up with another treasonable uprising in the north of England.

I marched my troops north and took possession of Dunblane on the 12th of November, 1715. We then moved to an encampment on the heights above Kippenross House.

Numerically disadvantaged, I cautioned my men to withstand the ferocious charge we should expect from the savage Highlanders.

They overlapped our left wing, as we did theirs, and so we drove that part of their army from the field, chasing them as far as the Allan Water at Kinbuck.

We sustained considerable losses but retreated in order, kept them from crossing the Forth and captured a number of their supporters.

Mar, true to the name "Bobbing John", retreated north and so I proclaim a victory and state that the day was ours.

Commemorative medal (in Dunblane Museum) for the Battle of Dunblane at Sheriffmuir.



Battle of Sheriffmuir

Soldier in Mar's Army



“ My name is Hamish Macrae, proud member of the clan of that name.

I fought at Sheriffmuir under my clan chief and was lucky to escape with my life. I come from near Eilean Donan Castle in what you Sassenachs would call the Highlands.

We marched south in support of James Stuart and the one true religion.

We were on the left flank of the army at Sheriffmuir but the Earl of Mar, our leader, left us exposed by moving the cavalry over to the right.

Consequently we were exposed and driven back by the Hanoverian forces. We had to flee and were pursued as far as the Allan Water at Kinbuck.

58 of my clansmen were killed that day, a woeful day for us and for Scotland.

I believe we could have regrouped and pressed south again but Mar was over-cautious.

He was a Lowlander at heart.

At best they don't understand the Gaidhealtachd and at worse they hate us as much as the English do and respect neither our culture nor our religion.

We will live to fight another day when the King over the Water comes to lead us.



Drawings, of weapons found on the site of the Battle of Sheriffmuir, from the book in Dunblane's historic Leighton Library "The Battle of Sheriffmuir" by John E Shearer, published in 1898

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Soldier in Argyll's Regiment



My name is Robert Kerr. I hail from Kilmarnock in Scotland and am proud to be a private in King George's Army under the leadership of the Duke of Argyll.

As a Lowlander I am a staunch Presbyterian and haud nae truck wi' Papists and followers o' Rome.

At Sheriffmuir we were oot-nummered by mair than 2 to 1 by thae Catholic savages fae the north and tae see them chargin' at ye wis indeed an awfu' sicht.

Ah fought in Argyll's right wing and we drove the Hielanders back ver' near tae a place ca'd Kinbuck.

I lost some guid friends and comrades that day but we held the ground and the crossing at Stirling. I believe we've seen the last o' the Auld Pretender and thae Hieland savages who cannae even speak English nor worship God in a civilised way.



Gunpower flask in Dunblane Museum, with trigger-style release of type used at Sheriffmuir, along with lead bullets found at the site of the Battle of Sheriffmuir. Soldiers had to load bullets and powder into their their guns separately so were vulnerable to attack when doing so



Battle of Sheriffmuir

Rob Roy MacGregor



My name is Rob Roy MacGregor. My lands and my people stretch across the Menteith and Lennox areas of Scotland.

My father and myself joined the rising to preserve King James VII and II in 1689 and fought at the Battle of Killiecrankie.

We defeated the usurpers there but our gallant leader, Viscount Dundee, was killed and my father was taken and imprisoned.

I earn my living watching over the cattle herds of the Lowland gentry, for which they reward me.

Due to a misunderstanding I was branded an outlaw.

My mother was a Campbell. My grandmother a Macdonald. I walk a fine line among these powerful clans and the neighbouring Grahams, Dukes of Montrose.

In 1715 I debated which side to join in the new rising to put James Stuart on the throne. I mustered a force of 500 men, kinsmen from my clan. We made a forced march by way of Callander in a heavy fall of snow.

I had communication with both the Duke of Argyll and the Earl of Mar; Argyll by way of Dunblane Bridge and Mar at Kinbuck Ford.

Each alike promised me favour and reward if I would assist them. To the one I stressed my Campbell connections; to the other my history of supporting the Stuarts.

In the event I deemed it prudent to withhold my support not least because I had little faith in Mar as a commander although my heart favoured his cause.

I believe, with hindsight, that if we had fought on his side the day would have been ours.



Drawing, of gunpowder horn from the site of the Battle of Sheriffmuir, from the book in Dunblane's historic Leighton Library "The Battle of Sheriffmuir" by John E Shearer, published in 1898

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Eye-Witness at Linns



“
My name is Agnes Lambie. I hae worked se'en years at the House O' Linns on Sheriffmuir.

On the 13th November 1715 the battle atwixt the Hielanders and the Army raged a' roon the hoose and grund o'Linns and we thocht we were done for.

A pairtie o' the Ridcoats had crossed o'er oor land and placed themselves near oor middenheid ahint the barn.

There they were caught unawares by the wild Hielanders and I saw wi' ma ain e'en eleven o' thae government sodgers killed there as they tried tae protect themselves and their comrades.

Ha'en feenished their bluidy work, the Hielanders then cam intae our hoose and demandit food.

Their swords were dripping wi' bluid and they plundered a' they could get their hauns on.

The Maister speir'd at them why they supported King James. Yin o' thaim spake up. “We fecht no' for “King Shordy” [King George] nor “King Hamish” [King James] but fur “King Spulzie” [i.e. for the spoils of war].”

Shamefu' Ah call it but we were jist gled tae see the back o' thaim as they hightailed o'er the hill ga'en north.

Whit's it a' cumin' tae when guid Christian fowk arnae safe in their ain beds at nicht!



“
Drawing, of Lower Bridge, Wharry, from the book in Dunblane's historic Leighton Library “The Battle of Sheriffmuir” by John E Shearer, published in 1898

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Activities



Choose one of the characters and write a series of three journal or diary entries from their viewpoint.

These entries should show how the character's thoughts, feelings, and experiences change over time.

Use sensory details (sights, sounds, smells) to make it vivid.

Organise a debate between two groups: "Who Really Won the Battle of Sheriffmuir?"

Assign roles (Jacobites, Government Forces, historians, people living in Dunblane at the time).

Research and prepare arguments based on historical evidence.

Let everyone present their viewpoints. Some may take on an advocacy role, and defend the position of one character and go on to challenge and debate with those with other views.

Create a comic strip showing some element of what happened before, during or after the battle

Divide into two teams: Jacobites and Government Forces.

Use model figures or paper cutouts to re-enact the Battle of Sheriffmuir on a large map. Mark the positions of the Jacobite and government forces.

Take turns being the Earl of Mar and the Duke of Argyll, moving their troops strategically, according to historical descriptions of the battle.

Discuss tactics and consequences, the challenges faced by each side, the terrain, and the strategies employed.

Write a short article, perhaps for a newsletter, about your favourite character from the Battle of Sheriffmuir and explain why you admire that particular character.

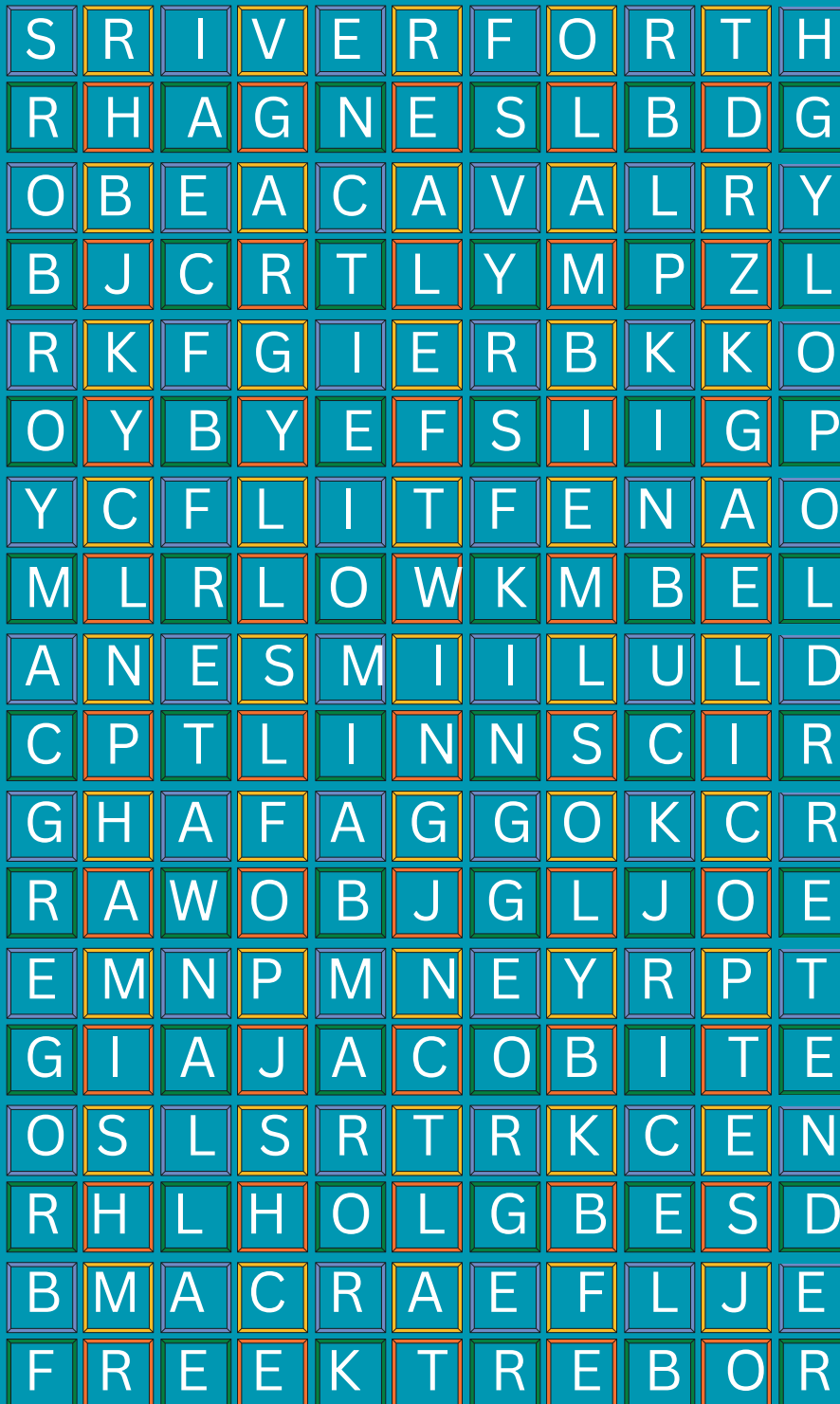
Divide into groups and assign each group a character. Have each group create short a drama or dialogues based on their character's perspective during the battle. Be sure to use historical details and emotions.

Robert, the private in Argyll's army, misses his family. Write heartfelt letters as if you are Robert, describing the battle, your feelings, and hopes for the future.

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Wordsearch

EASY

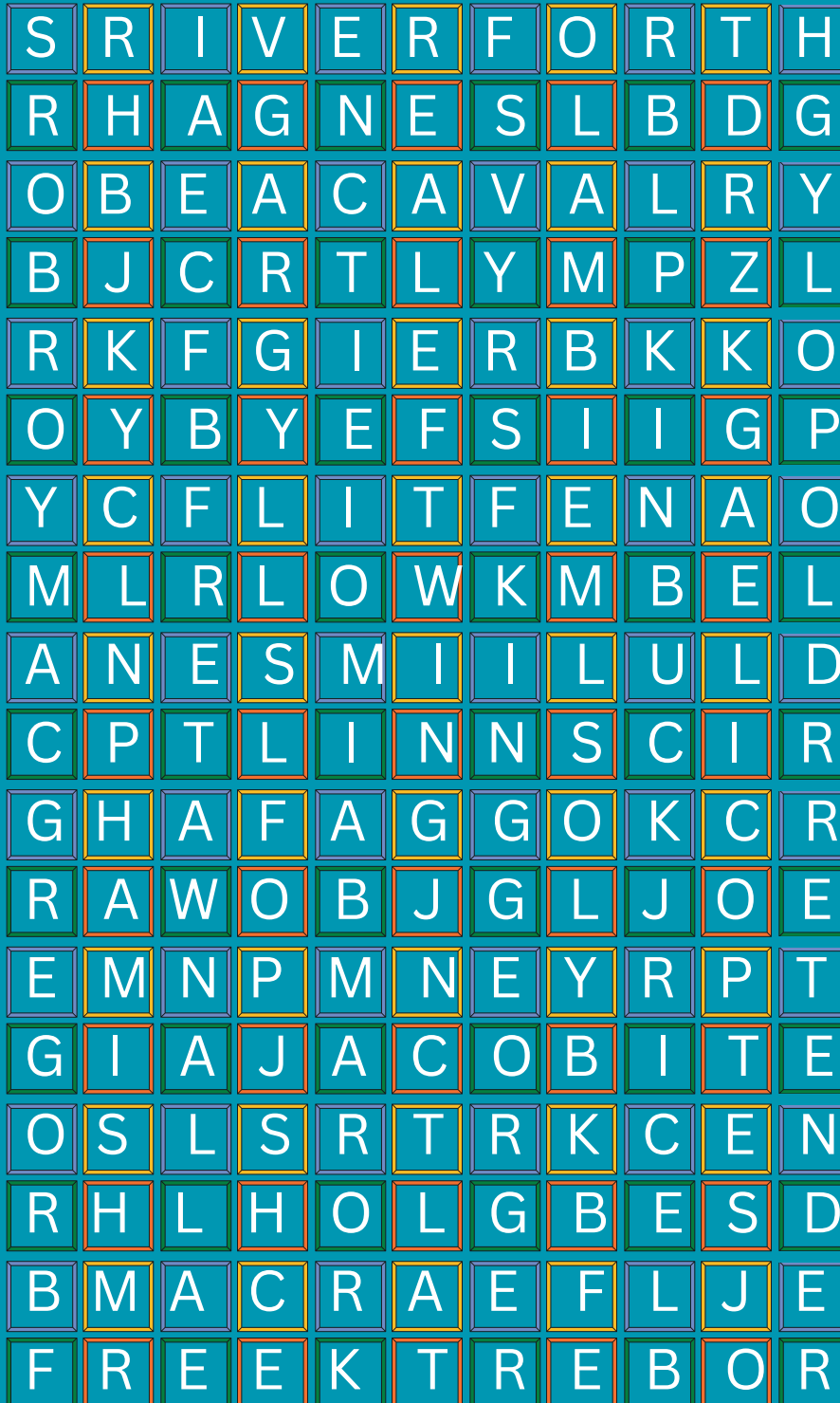


SHERIFFMUIR
OLD PRETENDER
ARGYLL
MAR
JACOBITE
KING GEORGE
HAMISH MACRAE
ROB ROY MACGREGOR
LINNS
LEFT WING
RIVER FORTH
ALLAN WATER
KINBUCK
CAVALRY
ROBERT KERR
AGNES LAMBIE
GAELIC

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Wordsearch

ADVANCED



- 1) Name of the battle fought near Dunblane in 1715.
- 2) Nickname given to James Stuart.
- 3) He led the government forces.
- 4) He led the rebel forces.
- 5) Nickname of a supporter of James Stuart.
- 6) On the throne of Britain in 1715.
- 7) Highland soldier who fought in the battle.
- 8) Famous outlaw who decided not to fight.
- 9) Farmhouse in the middle of the battle.
- 10) This part of each army was driven from the battlefield.
- 11) Government troops were guarding the crossing of this.
- 12) Some Highland troops were driven back as far as this river.
- 13) A crossing of this river existed here.
- 14) Horse Soldiers.

START



1 LAST STEWART MONARCH QUEEN ANNE DIES 1714

2 MOVE ON ONE



3 ROMAN CATHOLIC HEIR: JAMES EDWARD STEWART DEBARRED FROM THRONE EXILED IN FRANCE

4 MISS ONE TURN



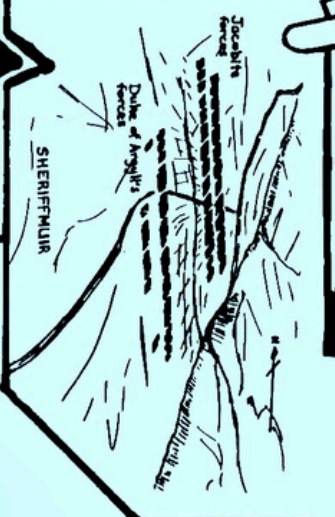
5 PROTESTANT HEIR ELECTOR OF HANOVER PROCLAIMED KING GEORGE I

6



7 EARL OF MAR LEADS JACOBITES AFTER DISMISSAL BY KING GEORGE I

25 THE BATTLE OF SHERIFFMUIR



ARMIES FACE EACH OTHER AT SHERIFFMUIR 15 NOV. 1715

26 MOVE ON THREE



27 JACOBITE RIGHT FLANK ROUTS GOVERNMENT LEFT FLANK: GOVERNMENT RIGHT FLANK ROUTS JACOBITE LEFT FLANK

28



29 JACOBITES IN ENGLAND DEFEATED AT PRESTON ON SAME DAY AS THE BATTLE OF SHERIFFMUIR

8

9 STANDARD RAISED FOR JAMES IN BRAEMAR 6 SEPT. 1715 BY HIGHLAND CHIEFS

10 TAKE ONE MORE GO



11 LOUIS XIV DIES FRENCH AID LOST

12

13 JACOBITES MAKE PERTH THEIR HEAD-QUARTERS

24 ARGYLL MARCHES ONLY 3,300 SOLDIERS TO DUNBLANE



22



35 JAMES LANDS IN PETERHEAD TOO LATE FOR BATTLES

36



37 JAMES AND MAR FLEE TO FRANCE FROM MOUNTROSE 4 FEBRUARY 1716

38 MOVE BACK THREE

15 BROUGHT TO AN END OF PARDON PASSED IN MAY 1717 WHEN SCOTLAND WAS THOUGHT TO BE PACIFIED

THE FIRST JACOBITE REBELLION - 1715

© MALCOLM C. WILSON 1985

THE GAME : EACH PLAYER IS A MESSENGER . THE FIRST MESSENGER TO FINISH WINS THE GAME . YOU WILL NEED COUNTERS AND A DIE .

33 ARGYLL'S ARMY IS STRENGTHENED: MARCHES ON PERTH

32 MOVE ON ONE

31 Some say we won... SHERIFFMUIR: INDECISIVE BATTLE; DEFEAT AT PRESTON: JACOBITES FORCED TO RETREAT

21 THREE WEEKS PASS: MAR DELAYS UNTIL 10,000 JACOBITES ARRIVE IN ANCISTERBARDER



20 GO BACK TO ELEVEN

19 MAR MARCHES JACOBITES TO DUNBLANE: NO REINFORCEMENTS RETURN TO PERTH

18

17 PART OF JACOBITE ARMY FAILS TO TAKE EDINBURGH CASTLE ON WAY TO JOIN ENGLISH JACOBITES

16

15 DUKE OF ARGYLL GATHERS GOVERNMENT FORCES IN STRILING

14 MOVE BACK ONE

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Song by Murdoch MacLennan

There's some say that we wan,
And some say that they wan,
And some say that nane wan at a', man ;
But one thing I'm sure,
That at Shirramuir,
A battle there was, that I saw, man.
And we ran and they ran,
And they ran and we ran,
And we ran and they ran awa', man.—*Old Song.*

Dunblane's historic Leighton Library has a 1898 edition of *The battle of Sheriffmuir* by John Elliot Shearer

This includes this often-quoted extract from the song by Murdoch MacLennan about the Battle of Sheriffmuir

1. Who do you think are the "we" and "they" mentioned in the poem?

We:

They:

2. What do you think "wan" means in this poem?

- A) won
- B) one
- C) shouted

3. What does "nane wan at a" mean?

- A) Three hundred horses
- B) None won at all
- C) A very high hill

4. What do you think the speaker wants the reader to understand about the battle?

5. What do you think "awa" means in this poem?

- A) sword
- B) shield
- C) away

6. Why might the speaker be unsure about who won the battle?

Sheriffmuir, song, by Murdoch MacLennan - https://en.m.wikisource.org/wiki/Two_Favourite_Songs/Sheriff-Muir

Find the full poem here

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Anecdote from Dunblane Traditions book

1st.—On the day of this memorable battle almost every Highlander bore a “wallet” of oatmeal on his back for subsistence. The meal-bags of those that were slain being collected after the battle, they were emptied on a carpeting of tartan plaids, spread for the purpose, and tradition records that the whole amounted to many bolls—such was the number of the hardy sons of the north who were this day sacrificed.

Dunblane's historic Leighton Library has a 1887 edition of “Dunblane traditions; being a series of warlike and legendary narratives, biographical sketches of eccentric characters, &c.” by John Monteith. This includes this extract of an anecdote from the Battle of Sheriffmuir

1) What is meant by having oatmeal “for subsistence”?

- A) Lots to spare for selling
- B) Enough food to survive, but no more
- C) To add extra warmth in place of a thick jacket

2) What is meant by “slain”?

- A) Chased
- B) Fed
- C) Killed

3) What is meant by “bolls”?

- A) An old Scottish measure of volume
- B) A black cat
- C) Loud singing

4) What is meant by “tartan plaids”?

- A) Sticky toy
- B) Cake on a plate
- C) Large pieces of tartan cloth

5) What is meant by “tradition records”?

- A) Stories mostly passed on by people telling others, not written down
- B) Old songs
- C) Dancing to the sound of fiddles, drums or pipes

Dunblane traditions; being a series of warlike and legendary narratives, biographical sketches of eccentric characters, &c. -

<https://archive.org/details/dunblanetraditio00montuoft/page/n5/mode/1up>

Read the full text of this book

Battle of Sheriffmuir

Activities to Explore Further



1) Both James Stuart and King George I were descendants of which previous King of Britain?

2) In all, there were five so-called Jacobite Rebellions. What were their dates and the principal battles in each?

3) King James VII+II believed in the "Divine Right of Kings". What do you understand by this?

4) King Louis XIV of France's death in 1715 was a blow to the Jacobite cause. What two or more reasons can you think of as to why the French King would support the Stuarts?

5) Find out what happened to the main characters after the Battle of Sheriffmuir:

King George I

James Stuart - The Old Pretender

The Duke of Argyll

The Earl of Mar

Rob Roy MacGregor

6) Visit the site of the battle and write an imaginative account of it from one side or the other.