

# Heritage case Studies: Scotland

## Battlefields as heritage sites

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The heritage traditions of Scotland are unique in comparison to the rest of Britain.

We'll use case studies to demonstrate how heritage sites have helped to forge the Scottish national identity and history.

- The case study introduces various typologies of heritage and the methods used to study them.
- The case studies help to draw attention to the fact that the heritage traditions in England, Scotland and Wales are not the same and are enshrined in slightly different legislation.
- Every study of heritage requires an understanding of the legal context and the traditions and history governing the object of heritage



‘Battlefields as heritage sites’, by Mary-Catherine Garden, involves public memories of two significant historical events, the battles of Bannockburn and Culloden.

They have helped to forge national consciousness in Scotland but have little visible archaeological evidence to inform the viewer.

Intangible heritage, linked to a physical site, presents problems of its own.

# Battlefields as heritage sites

Heritage sites have particular and significant roles in our personal and national identity.

They operate as fundamental building blocks in the construction of a sense of self and of 'pastness'.

They are key elements that enable individuals to locate themselves within a larger group past and identity.

There are any number of sites – from great house to open-air museum to ancient monument, and to any of the many other places that mark aspects of the past – but together they provide the most common means that many people have of accessing ‘the past’.

Battlefields are often emotionally charged spaces that tend to be grouped by scholars in their own category of heritage site, located within 'a subset of sites of commemorative activities'.

Battlefields are 'increasingly being taken up as part of a nation's "official" heritage' so it is essential to consider their role in the construction of individual and group identity, and in developing a sense of nationhood.



As heritage sites, battlefields are a paradox: on the one hand, their qualities as deeply experiential places have long been recognised and are well documented; on the other hand, battlefield sites are often unprepossessing places.

Moreover, as many battlefields are not marked in an obvious or particular way, they may be 'invisible' to a large proportion of the population.

Battlefields, by their nature, also raise sensitive issues of identity and are likely to occupy a role as contested heritage. This means that their role in the construction of identity is complex and variable.

As with all marked heritage spaces, the decision to preserve a battlefield and the way in which it is marked say much about its role in the present.

Similarly, ignoring or 'forgetting' a battlefield site is an indicator of how that site is remembered and/or exploited in the present.

We will return to the role of the tangible landscape of the battlefield during the discussion on Culloden Battlefield as a heritage site.

## **Bannockburn and Culloden**

In Scotland, two battlefields, Culloden (1746) and Bannockburn (1314), stand out as iconic spaces, recognized not only by Scots but also by visitors.

These two battles are not the most important battles in Scotland's past; however, over time both have gained a particular place in the 'remembered' past of Scotland, and both figure highly in the myth and memory making of Scots at home and abroad.

The historical significance of the Battle of Both well Bridge (1679) – the site of a critical defeat for the nonconformist Covenanters at the hands of the English – equals that of either Bannockburn or Culloden, yet Both well Bridge does not figure as strongly on the landscape of memory, and it is heavily encroached by suburban development (Sunday Herald, 26 November 2006).

Furthermore, although both Bannockburn and Culloden are under the aegis of the National Trust for Scotland, each is remembered in quite a different manner. Both Bannockburn and Culloden have come to represent much more than individual events.

Over time, both have contributed to a sense of self among Scots and are often seen as markers of 'Scottishness' for those without Scots ancestry.

We will focus on Culloden Battlefield as a heritage place and will consider how it is that it and Bannockburn figure so differently in the myth making of Scots at home and abroad and why it is that the two sites are remembered, perceived and experienced in very different ways.

Some of the explanation for this phenomenon lies in the nature and outcome of the battles themselves. There is one essential difference in the two battles from a Scottish perspective: Bannockburn has long been seen as a victory, Culloden a defeat. As such, Culloden speaks strongly to the Celtic imagination and the 'Glorification of sorrow'. It also sets Culloden into a category of 'Remember the fallen' sites where lives were lost in defense of national principles.

The Battle of Culloden took place on Culloden Moor, near Inverness, Scotland, in April 1746.

For many years Styled as a defeat at the hand of the English, Culloden was the culmination of the Jacobite uprising during Which Prince Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) attempted to gain the throne of Scotland, thus Restoring the Stuarts to their rightful role as 'god-kings' of Scotland.

According to the Culloden website, the battle, which was fought in just 40 minutes, set in motion a series of events that saw the repression of a 'distinctive way of life and culture' and the removal of Highlanders from their homes during the Highland Clearances, in turn leading to mass emigration to Canada, the United States and other parts of the world.



Bruce monument, Bannockburn, 2007



By contrast, the Battle of [Bannockburn](#), which took place in June 1314 near the modern-day city of Stirling, was a Scottish victory. English troops under Edward II were routed by Robert Bruce, signalling a turning point in the Wars of Independence (beginning 1296) and marking the end of English rule over Scotland.

Although this battle ensured Robert Bruce's role as king of Scotland, this tended to be recognised only within Scotland, and despite the decisiveness of Bannockburn, battles continued to be waged for many years to come.

It was in the aftermath of Bannockburn that the Declaration of Arbroath (1320), widely recognised as the 'most important document in Scottish history', was signed.

## **Bannockburn and Culloden as heritage sites**

Although the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) website offers similar descriptions of each site, there are notable differences in the treatment of each one.

On the pages of the website devoted to Bannockburn, the NTS identifies the battle as ‘one of the greatest and most important pitched battles ever fought in the British Isles’ that could ‘rightly be claimed as the most famous battle to be fought and won by the Scots’.

Furthermore, Bannockburn, says the NTS, has 'long been at the core of the Scottish national identity' and 'is synonymous in the Scottish psyche with ideas of liberty, freedom, independence, patriotism, heroism, perseverance and triumph against overwhelming odds'.



View of the battlefield from the Bruce monument, Bannockburn, 2007

The section of the NTS 'Places to Visit' website devoted to [Culloden](#) describes it as the 'scene of the last pitched battle in Britain' which, today, is one of the 'most iconic and emotive sites in Scotland'. Unlike the description of Bannockburn, here the text focuses on the physical space, for example, 'Walk the battlefield where the memorials and the clan graves lie and reflect on the human cost of "one man's dream".'

Although Bannockburn has figured recently as a mark of 'Scottishness' (in part because of the 1995 film ***Brave heart***, which popularised William Wallace and was prominent in nationalist discourse in the years leading to Scottish devolution), Culloden has had a place in the minds and memories of Scots for over two centuries.

In that time it has become a signifier of an invented Scotland of mountain scenery, castles and tartan. It is closely tied to the evocative tale of Bonnie Prince Charlie, his epic defeat and the legends and stories surrounding his flight.

Along with the Clearances, Culloden has done much to contribute to a lack of rootedness that has haunted the descendants of these Highlanders and has forever influenced and shaped the identity of the Scottish diaspora. The narratives that have grown up around Culloden since 1746 are closely tied to the notions of nationhood that took hold and evolved during the rise of the Scottish Romantic movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For decades, centuries even, the battle of Culloden has been a contentious event.



Widely regarded as a defeat suffered at the hands of the English, Culloden has been used as a form of shorthand justifying nationalist and anti-English sentiment: 'Few nationalisms do not incorporate a wound' says journalist and Scot Neil Ascherson, and so it is that Culloden allows Scotland 'to finger such scars'.

The year 2007 was designated as the Year of Highland Culture, which Scotland's first minister, Jack McConnell, claimed would see the Highlands and Islands 'held up as an exemplar to others [*e.g.*, the rest of Scotland]'.

Culturally, looking to the north to lead the way is of great significance to Scots.

The ***Highland Clearances*** (Scottish Gaelic: *Fuadach nan Gàidheal*, the "expulsion of the Gael") was the forced displacement during the 18th and 19th centuries of a significant number of people from traditional land tenancies in the Scottish Highlands, where they had practised small-scale agriculture. It resulted from enclosures of common lands and a change from farming to sheep raising, an agricultural revolution largely carried out by hereditary aristocratic landowners. A Highland Clearance has been defined as "an enforced simultaneous eviction of all families living in a given area such as an entire glen".

The clearances are particularly notorious as a result of the brutality of many evictions at short notice (year-by-year tenants had almost no protection under Scots law), and the abruptness of the change from the traditional clan system, in which reciprocal obligations between the population and their leaders were well-recognized. The cumulative effect of the Clearances devastated the cultural landscape of Scotland in a way that did not happen in other areas of Britain; the effect of the Clearances was to destroy much of the Gaelic culture. The Clearances resulted in significant emigration of Highlanders to the sea coast, the Scottish Lowlands, and further afield to North America and Australasia. In the early 21st century, more descendants of Highlanders are found in these diaspora destinations than in Scotland.

In November 2006, BBC Scotland surveyed a panel of experts and members of the public, asking each group to choose the top ten most important events or people in Scottish history.

Although both groups included the Wars of Independence (including Bannockburn) in their shortlist, neither selected Culloden.

Yet Culloden is by far Scotland's most visited attraction, drawing over 200,000 visitors each year. Clearly there is a dissonance in the various roles of Culloden as a historical event, as an element in personal and national myth making and as a heritage place.

In the light of recent reinterpretation of the site, which includes more and different voices to the portrayal of the battlefield, Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) undertook a preliminary visitor survey in April 2006 in order to begin to understand how the site figured in the construction of identity for Scots and other visitors.

When questioned about their motives for visiting the site, many cited educational reasons; however, a large number also came as part of a 'pilgrimage'.

Interestingly, this response came, almost without exception, from international visitors.

***Well it was this good reputation about its great history, about the Highlands. We ... wanted to see the battle, the battlefield. We've been told it's a very important place for the Scottish people.***

*(Greek male, 30)*

***We have decided we have read very much about this battle and so we said, ok, if we visit Scotland and we don't visit Culloden it won't go together.***

*(German female, 35–59)*

For Scots, the site held a different role.

Respondents to the GCU survey did not seem to be using the site to 'experience a deep sense of nationhood and experience an increased level of patriotism'.

Instead, it appeared that home visitors were coming for personal or family reasons: one couple even transferring traits seen in a current generation to their ancestors.

***A: It was good, interesting weren't it? Cause it told about your mother's clan didn't it ... [we] learnt a bit about the battle that you were late.***

***B: It's a family trait ... I wanted to know if the McPherson clan was involved in it but they weren't, they were a day late. That's my mother's name, McPherson.***

*(English couple, 35–59)*

There is also a very strong sense of place at Culloden. Although this is not unique to Culloden, we see that the NTS recognises this as a distinguishing feature.

The description found on the Culloden pages of the NTS 'Places to Visit' website urges visitors to 'walk the battlefield' and to move among the cairns and graves; with an implied emphasis on the experiential quality of the place.

This is not found in the description of Bannockburn, since the site is more difficult to see, being partially covered by modern houses. Culloden is widely perceived, at least by its visitors, to be an 'authentic' site, largely unchanged since 1746, and its 'haunting' and 'poignant' qualities have long been acknowledged.



**Cairn, Culloden battlefield, 2005**



Although the moorland landscape is reminiscent of that existing at the time of the battle, the site has been considerably altered by the managed plantings of the Forestry Commission. The National Trust for Scotland embarked on a process of restoring the battlefield to its eighteenth-century appearance. This involves removing many of the trees (including those that surround the cairn). John and Margaret Gold (2003), who for a long time have chronicled the site in its progression from battle site to war graves to place of pilgrimage to heritage site, have noted this trend. Again, the GCU survey identified visitors, both foreign and domestic, noting an 'eeriness' or a 'sadness'

***There was an atmosphere like you feel as though you are actually there ... Yes, I feel sadness really. You asked us, had we Scottish relatives, I wished I had, 'cos I would have fought for the Jacobites.***

*(English couple, 45)*

***It just gave you goosebumps.***

*(Scottish female, 18–34)*

***I'll tell you, it's very eerie, you can just about visualise what it must have been like when it happened ... you do get a sense of realism ... there's a sadness about it, you know.***

*(British male, 35–59)*

Indeed, in one of the many appearances of Culloden in popular fiction, Swedish author **Henning Mankell** locates the denouement of one of his detective novels at Culloden.

***My Mother's not at home ... She's at Culloden today ... [she] likes to wander around the battlefield. She goes there three or four times a year. She goes to the museum first, they sometimes show films. She says she likes to listen to the voices of the dead coming from under the ground. She says it prepares her for her own death.***

*(Mankell, 2004, p. 509)*

However, this phenomenon – a strong sense of place and mood – has also been noted at other iconic battlefields. For example, the site of Gettysburg has been accorded sacred qualities. Is there anything at Culloden that distinguishes it from other battlefields?

Although Culloden is largely empty space, the physical landscape is a key agent in creating a sense of place and a sense of the past.

Culloden exists today as a visitor centre (with interpretative area), a reconstructed cottage and a substantial part of the main battlefield.

The battlefield itself consists of moorland through which gravel paths wind, guiding visitors.

Along the way, wooden signs mark the positions of the clans, regiments and munitions on the field.

More obviously red and yellow flags denote the locations of the battle lines.

Also prominent on the landscape is the memorial cairn erected in 1881, at a time when both the Scottish Romantic movement and memorialisation of Culloden were at their height.



**Mixed clans gravestone, Culloden battlefield, 2005**

Unlike Gettysburg, where the markers link the dead to their home state, Culloden markers link to family and to a name. This is a highly personalised encounter with the past.

Even if a descendant can't find their ancestor on one of the memorial stones, they can look to a more recent set of signs that mark the battle positions of the clans and the government forces.

That all of these markers and stones continue to hold meaning for individuals may be seen in the comments offered by visitors, who often tied them to their own heritage – some even seeing Culloden as a kind of family history.

A series of large rounded boulders, the first of which were erected in the 1850s, are clan gravestones, marking the places where members of the various clans are said to have fallen during the battle.

While most denote specific clans (*e.g.*, McLean or McPherson), some simply read 'mixed clans'; these were erected when the identities of the dead were very uncertain.

A very few, such as the memorial to Alexander McGillivray at the 'Well of the Dead', remember an individual.

That all of these markers and stones continue to hold meaning for individuals may be seen in the comments offered by visitors, who often tied them to their own heritage – some even seeing Culloden as a kind of family history.

***When you're going through the site, people are being very respectful of that it's a graveyard, so there's been that feel about it, and the Clan McPherson and the Clan McDonald you sort of orientate towards there because they've got that bit more significance because of my clan background.***

***(Scottish couple)***

***It is not just the named memorial markers that figure in identity construction; the mixed clans also are remembered with flowers, wreaths or other small items – they too capture the imagination of the visitors. It's interesting for fans who leave wreaths and flowers because they're all so involved with it and I was just thinking back, ooh, if my Granddad was here, which one would it have been, em, my great-great-great-great Granddad.***

***(English couple, 45)***



This power of the markers also extends outside Scotland. Each year a large number of letters arrive at Culloden petitioning the NTS for a tangible representation of their clan, suggesting that, for many individuals in Scotland and around the world, Culloden still has an active role in their individual past.

A recent fundraising campaign capitalises on this phenomenon, offering for sale personalised 'memorial stones which will form a walkway – an important feature of the new visitor centre', thus offering people who feel a personal connection with the site the chance to locate themselves tangibly within the ongoing heritage of Culloden Battlefield. So, the meanings generated at Culloden are tied to the very ground itself; and yet, at the same time, they reach out beyond the physical confines of the site to the rest of the Highlands, the rest of Scotland and around the world.

There is an intensity and immediacy of the experience of this site as a place, and the landscape and the stones are key agents in the creation of memory, identity and myth.

Within the 'empty' space of Culloden Battlefield there is a perceived authenticity that stands in high contrast to the landscape of the equally iconic Bannockburn.

As such, Culloden has a quality of naturalness. It is a space in which meanings are constantly evolving and are continually being negotiated, giving a sense of the space as a 'real place' that changes and evolves rather than being a static isolated site.

Moving back out to look at Culloden in its wider context, what can we say that we have learned about the site and its meanings?

For international visitors with few or no connections to the battle or to Scotland, it appears to be a site of pilgrimage that is functioning as a place to begin to decode the Scottish identity and the Scottish nation.

At home, the major narrative of Culloden for Scots for more than two centuries has been one of tragedy, grief and loss. Once a signifier for the stateless nationhood of Scotland, it offered a tangible place on which to build a personal and group heritage, allowing Scots to construct a sense of self and of Scottishness.

Now, in a twenty-first century Scotland that is now no longer stateless, Culloden is assuming new roles.

The discourse of loss is still there – and indeed the landscape of the site is one of loss and mourning – but it appears that it is no longer the dominant one for Scots. Elements of family and personal identity seem to be emerging as more important narratives.

Significantly, these narratives also transcend the boundaries of the site.

For the Scottish diaspora, the landscape of the battle, the myth making and the tangible remains (including the monuments) are important.

In a small town in Nova Scotia, Canadians commemorate the battle of Culloden each April at a site marked by a replica of the memorial cairn at Culloden, which, according to the Culloden Memorial website ‘contains stones from the battlefield’.

This sense of connectedness and attribution of a memory to an almost wholly unrelated site is notable and obviously figures prominently in the construction of a Scottish identity for the participants.

Culloden as a preserved site speaks to the larger Scottish diaspora, where the discourses tend to be those of the clans and of the Highlands.

Focusing these more abstract notions of Scottish identity offers a rootedness and begins to address what Paul Basu calls the 'problematic nature of belonging' and allows the 'essentially homeless' Scots of the diaspora to construct an 'indigenous identity'.

Finally, international visitors with no particular links to the battle – many of whom come to Culloden as a pilgrimage – appear to be using the site as place to begin to decode the Scottish nation; for them, site and country seem to be closely linked.

So, are these sentiments specific to Culloden and to the development of a larger Scottish identity, or are the sentiments, the reactions and the exploitation of Culloden as a place, as an event and as a memory simply part and parcel of a set of experiences common to battlefields and other sites of conflict and commemoration?

In some ways this doesn't matter; what matters is that this site figures in the collective memory of the Scots and has key roles in developing and defining identity.