

**STIRLING BEFORE PYLONS**

**acting with**

**FRIENDS OF THE OCHILS**

**as a Relevant Person Group**

**for the purposes of the**

**STIRLING SESSION**

**of the Public Inquiry into  
Scottish & Southern Energy's proposals for the  
Beauly to Denny 400 KV Steel Tower Double Circuit  
Overhead Electricity Transmission Line**

**SUMMARY PRECOGNITION**

**Virginia Wills**

**The battlefield of Sheriffmuir**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1 QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE**

#### 1.1

My name is Virginia Wills. I have a B.A. degree in History from The American University, Washington, D.C. As a U.S. Fulbright Scholar for two years and an American Association of University Women for one year, I undertook research in Scottish history at the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, working in archives throughout the U.K. My particular research has been in the Forfeited Estates Papers, which I catalogued for the National Archives of Scotland. One of the largest collections in the Archives, it is concerned with the forfeiture of Jacobite families after Culloden and represents one of the richest sources for the history of the Highlands in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. From this I have prepared two works for publication.

#### 1.2.

I have studied Scottish history, Scottish archaeology and Scots law at Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities and have worked in these fields. A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, I have also taught 18<sup>th</sup> century history at universities in the U.S. and U.K. I am presently completing a major work on the social and economic development of the Highlands in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2. AIM**

#### 2.1.

The proposed Beaully to Denny pylon line would run through the heart of the battlefield of Sheriffmuir, a historic landscape of national significance. My aim is to emphasise its significance to the history of both Scotland and Great Britain, the importance of preserving the site to commemorate this event and the memory of the men who fought and died there, and to demonstrate the value of this historic landscape to the economy in terms of tourism.

#### 2.2.

It will be my intention to analyse the shortcomings of the archaeological report of the battle site, which was funded by the applicants, the negative presentation by Historic Scotland and the precognition by the applicants' representative, Dr. Alan Leslie of GUARD, which is largely an echo of Historic Scotland's response to the proposed development.

## **3. SOURCES**

#### 3.1.

There is a wealth of information about the '15 Rising and the central event, the Battle of Sheriffmuir. I have presented a number of these accounts of participants and eye-witnesses in copies of the original manuscripts with transcriptions, drawn from archives throughout the U.K.

3.2.

I have also presented a number of the many printed secondary sources, including two recently published works, which illustrate the considerable and continuing interest in Jacobite history.

3.3.

Among literary sources are the well-known ballads about the Battle of Sheriffmuir, the most famous, of course, by Robert Burns, and also the stirring, epic-like poems in Gaelic which recite the feats of the clansmen in the battle. All of these provide detailed information about the participants in these historic events which are not always provided by other sources

3.4.

All of these continue to be recited and sung in our own time, and are part of the rich cultural heritage arising out of the events of 1715.

#### **4. THE BATTLE OF SHERIFFMUIR**

4.1.

It is important to consider, if only briefly, the events surrounding the Battle of Sheriffmuir, its significance and, of particular concern, its location. Over a period of sixty years there were five Jacobite Risings in support of the return of the Stuart kings and, after 1707, as a powerful protest by a large number of the people of Scotland, against the implications of the Act of Union. The '15 Rising, the third of these, is regarded as 'the Great Rising', as it had by far the greatest support and posed the most significant threat to the British state. There were at the time risings in other parts of Scotland and in the north of England, but the Battle of Sheriffmuir was the central event of the '15.

4.2.

The Battle took place on Sunday, the 13<sup>th</sup> November 1715, between a Government army of only 3300, commanded by the Duke of Argyll and a Jacobite army of over 9000, led by the Earl of Mar. The first encounter took place on the great moor indicated on the maps presented., but in the course of the day the fighting continued over a wide area as far as Stonehill and Pendreich and down to Kinbuck on the River Allan.

4.3.

The Battle of Sheriffmuir famously ended in a draw, with the right wing of the Jacobite army overcoming the left wing of the Government army and Argyll's right wing driving off the Jacobite left. The Government army suffered much the greater casualties, but because Mar did not press his advantage, Argyll claimed a rather uncertain victory. Many of those who were killed were buried on the battlefield and as a burial ground it should not be further disturbed.

#### 4.4.

Although the battle was not an outright victory for either side, the final outcome for the British state was of considerable significance, as many historians have emphasised. While the battle of Culloden was fought by a sadly depleted Jacobite army in retreat. Sheriffmuir saw a strong and aggressive army on the advance. That they had been halted and had turned back from this advance was of immense relief to the government and the new monarch, George I, who realised almost too late how serious the situation had been.

#### 4.5.

Among the men who fought at Sheriffmuir, many were already distinguished when they came to the fight, whilst others were to gain fame in Scotland's history as well as the history of other countries. The battle was not simply a skirmish between unknown soldiers, but a large scale encounter, with Scots on both sides, involving some of the most prominent men of that generation. This, too, is certainly part of our cultural heritage.

#### 4.6.

There are two monuments on the battlefield and these are sought out by visitors. A large cairn with a commemorative inscription in Gaelic, with an English translation, was erected by the Clan MacRae in 1915, the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle. The MacRaes, a small clan, saw their fighting force almost obliterated in the conflict. A small monument nearby was erected just a few years ago by the '45 Association. On the moor behind the MacRae Monument, along a well-worn path, is the Gathering Stone. Now under a protective grill, its significance in the past is uncertain, but it is now where the White Cockade Society, in 18<sup>th</sup> century dress, gather to commemorate the Battle on the Sunday nearest to the 13<sup>th</sup> November. Others commemorate the battle with a torchlight procession the evening before. The battle is certainly a well-remembered event from Scotland's past.

## **5. SITE OF THE BATTLE**

### **5.1. MAPS AND PLANS OF THE BATTLEFIELD**

#### 5.1.1.

Controversy over the location of the battlefield was obviously of concern to the applicants, largely because of the great protest over its possible destruction, but the many accounts left by the participants,

including Argyll and Mar themselves, leave little doubt regarding the route which the armies followed in what was to be an encounter battle.

#### 5.1.2.

The prime source, however, is the contemporary Board of Ordnance plan of the battlefield in the Map Library of the National Library of Scotland. Only the left hand portion remains, in three copies, the right hand portion having been missing for some years. However, the remaining plan, along with the manuscript accounts written on the day of the battle or shortly afterwards, plus familiarity with the terrain of Sheriffmuir, and this is of particular importance, allows an extrapolation to be made. Three copies of plans of the battlefield from or based on the Board of Ordnance plan are presented.

#### 5.1.3.

Confirmation of the site comes from John Leslie's Plan of the Division of the Commony of Sheriffmuir of 1766 (presented) and James Stobie's great map of Perthshire and Clackmannanshire of 1783. It is worth noting that the military historians cited agree on this location. It is clear from all these sources that the proposed pylon line will run right through the heart of the battlefield.

## **5.2. PAINTING OF THE BATTLE OF SHERIFFMUIR**

#### 5.2.1.

The large, splendid oil painting of the Battle of Sheriffmuir (copy presented) was painted only a few years after the event, probably by Peter Tillemans, the Flemish artist who came to live in Britain in 1708 and who is known to have painted 'The Battle of Glenshiel' (1719), the principal event of the '19 Jacobite rising.. The latter painting is in the collection of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery and the curator has expressed an interest in purchasing 'The Battle of Sheriffmuir'.

#### 5.2.2.

It is clear that the artist of the painting of 'The Battle of Sheriffmuir' visited the battlefield as it includes detail of a number of recognisable features. He was also familiar with the regiments involved in the battle and may have met some of the men who had taken part or local people who witnessed the event. Although the artist presents a traditional battle formation, what is clear is that the first encounter of the armies is portrayed as having occurred in the same part of Sheriffmuir as indicated by the other sources already mentioned.

## **6. ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BATTLEFIELD**

#### 6.1.

When the applicants planned the route of the proposed pylon line they obviously considered that there could be no possible objection to running it through what they thought was nothing but a remote moorland where there were few houses, some standing stones and a monument or two. They were clearly taken aback at the protest against the destruction of the battlefield of Sheriffmuir and the surrounding landscape. No doubt to mollify the protesters, who clearly knew their history, the applicants sought the help of Historic Scotland and the archaeologists of GUARD were commissioned to carry out an archaeological survey of some part of the site.

#### 6.2.

The report of the archaeologists, working with metal detectors, is in Addendum 2, Annex 3A of the application, clearly something of an afterthought. A part of the battle site is now under plantation and could not be surveyed. More significantly, the unplanted great field, where I have indicated the first encounter took place, could not be properly surveyed because it is covered with rough vegetation. This is precisely where the proposed pylon line would run. GUARD, thus produced only a partial survey of an extensive battlefield and omitted the most critical area.

#### 6.3.

GUARD's indication, though uncertain, of the site of the first encounter between the armies is an unlikely choice and suggests an unfamiliarity with the wider Sheriffmuir terrain or possibly a failure to undertake a closer study of the detail of the documents, but in any case it too would be destroyed by a future pylon line. Confronted with GUARD's findings, or perhaps satisfied that they had recovered from the battlefield what was worth saving, the applicants ignored the significance of these findings and came to the final decision that there was no alternative but to run the line as originally planned, in fact through the heart of the battlefield of Sheriffmuir.

## **7. PROTECTING BATTLEFIELDS**

### 7.1.

For some years staff at Historic Scotland have indicated their interest in preserving and protecting Scotland's historic landscape, including battlefields, while National Planning Policy Guidelines (5 and 18) have urged this policy. Now Historic Scotland have announced the aim to manage and promote battlefields within the Scottish Environment Policy series, but this is far in the future, and could well come too late for Sheriffmuir. The applicants certainly intend to take advantage of the current situation.

### 7.2.

Considering the mentioned Guidelines and the further proposals expressed, it came as great surprise and a considerable disappointment to see Historic Scotland's response to the application: "...we are satisfied that the applicants have demonstrated that they have had regard to

the protection of nationally important elements of the historic environment and have taken all reasonable measures to mitigate adverse impacts”. What these measures are is not demonstrated, but what is clear is that Historic Scotland, protector of Scotland’s heritage, seems in no way concerned about the destruction of this and other important historic sites.

## **8. PRECOGNITION FOR THE APPLICANTS**

### 8.1.

Historic Scotland’s acceptance of the applicants’ assurance that steps were or would be taken to mitigate the disastrous impact which the pylon line and accompanying access road would have on our historic landscape is beyond belief and does not merit examination. Dr. Alan Leslie, archaeologist and non-executive director of GUARD, acting on behalf of the applicants, largely echoes this view. It is clear throughout that that in their concern with archaeology they give little indication that they value or even understand the importance of our history, our cultural heritage.

### 8.2.

Throughout his precognition Dr. Leslie speaks much of archaeology and cultural heritage without ever addressing what is encompassed in this second term. The preoccupation with archaeology leaves no room for consideration of the human element in the historic landscape. Without this a battlefield gives up simply a collection of artefacts and then, apparently, according to the contention, it matters little if the site is destroyed. As Dr. Leslie states: “...I consider that it is a significant achievement that the worst impacts, i.e. potential direct impacts, have been successfully reduced to an almost negligible level with respect to known archaeological remains through a combination of carefully considered route planning and appropriate mitigation proposals.” (14.2) In view of all the evidence it is impossible to understand how anyone could come to such a conclusion in relation to the battlefield of Sheriffmuir.

### 8.3.

Like Historic Scotland, Dr. Leslie, having expressed initial concerns about the threat to the battlefield, was reassured by the further assessment reported in Addendum No. 2, namely the archaeological survey, and felt that this demonstrated “...that the proposed route will not have a significant adverse impact on the site of the Battle of Sheriffmuir, nor add significantly to the impact on its setting”. (12.2.). This is an incredible statement, which is, of course, simply not true. With the applicants now ignoring the survey in their decision making, it is difficult to see where this leaves Historic Scotland or indeed Dr. Leslie.

### 8.4

In their responses to the application both Historic Scotland and Dr. Leslie indulge in convoluted verbiage intended to impress and convince that what is proposed for our historic landscape would be of enormous benefit, or at least not the disaster we envisage. The reason for this betrayal is not yet clear. What is clear, however, is that those responsible for the exploration, preservation and protection of our historic landscape would rather connive at its destruction.

## **9. TOURISM**

### 9.1.

Hundreds visit the battlefield, about 800 per month. Many come as ancestor-hunters as a large number of the clans were involved and the men in both armies who were killed or taken prisoner are known.

### 9.2.

Many more come to Sheriffmuir to walk, cycle, to visit the popular Sheriffmuir Inn, or simply to drive through the area. It is a wonderful green space with its glen and rivers, a superb amenity for visitors from home and overseas.

### 9.3.

Sheriffmuir is unspoiled but for plantations and there would be little difficulty in removing these, as was done at Culloden, to restore the landscape to its former open appearance. Although, unlike Culloden, the lands of Sheriffmuir are privately owned, much more could be done to attract visitors and to inform them of the significance of the place. Why drive away visitors by destroying the landscape when there is every reason to encourage tourism?

## **10. CONCLUSION**

A major historical site like the battlefield of Sheriffmuir should have been restored and protected long ago, with much more done to present it to the public as the scene of important events in Scotland's history. It should not be necessary for the public to have to defend this landscape against those who speak, without knowledge or understanding, about our cultural heritage and propose its destruction. The applicants must think again about the route they have chosen for the Beaulay to Denny power line. The obvious solution, which should satisfy every concern, is to underground it, not across Sheriffmuir and the Ochils, but in the carseland to the west of Stirling.