

This account of the events surrounding Battle of Bonnymuir is adapted from a presentation made by members of the Falkirk U3A Scottish History Group at the Open meeting in Falkirk in February 2020. It concentrates on the Bonnymuir aspect of the Radical Rising and includes information from various contacts and published material. Anne Paterson has added a description of her research into the lives of the men from the Falkirk area who were transported to Australia. The photographs were taken by Charles Colliar. The illustration of the hangman's cloak and axe are with permission of The Smith Art Gallery and Museum. The map of the battlefield was drawn on an acetate sheet overlaying an Ordnance Survey map of the area. It forms part of the research into Bonnymuir done by the late Mr. John Beveridge a descendant of the Baird family. It is lodged in the archives at Callendar House in Falkirk.

Elizabeth Sutherland

The Battle of Bonnymuir

With the French Revolution fresh in the minds of the British establishment, it was determined to stamp out any form of organised protests. Thirteen years before the three men from Tolpuddle were transported for their attempts to achieve better wages and conditions for their families and one year after Peterloo, King George IV's army in Scotland was alert to rumours of an uprising in the South West of Scotland and in the Central Belt. These Radical Reformers had to be kept under surveillance and their plans thwarted.

The men taking part in the rising were not un-educated as can be seen from the speeches they made and the letters they wrote – especially those that Baird and Hardie wrote from prison. Their aim was to better the conditions in which they lived and worked and to be able to vote.

At this time the Industrial Revolution was in full swing in Scotland. Many people had moved from agricultural areas where work was less available, to work in the growing industries based on ironfounding. Though there were exceptions, the majority of the foundry owners were only interested in profit and had a disregard for the health and safety of their workforce. Women and children were also employed as cheap labour. Even by the standards of the time the working conditions in Falkirk were appalling. The working day was typically 12 hours for 6 days a week. There were no paid holidays. All family members, including children, had to work to help make ends meet.

The weavers had recently had their rates of pay reduced while costs had risen. The nailers mainly worked for Carron Company. They bought their iron rods from the Company, wrought it into nails to the orders of Carron and were paid at the rates decided by the Company.

With no vote, no representation, it was from this background that men from the Falkirk area became involved in the Radical Rising

The Falkirk weavers and nailers were represented at the public meetings held in Glasgow and relayed the aims of the Radicals to their neighbours and workmates.

At the beginning of April 1820 there was word of an uprising in Glasgow. The Paisley weavers were at the heart of the unrest and word had gone out for others to join them. In the Falkirk area plans had been made. A force would gather and march to Glasgow. The Radicals consisted of weavers, nailers from Camelon, and others from the district who wanted to act in an attempt to gain better conditions and wages and the vote for every man.

Carron Company

Then radicals had been assured that Carron Company would be the source of all the armaments they would need in order to defend themselves against the Government troops in Glasgow. They were told that the Carron workers had gone on strike and would help them to raid the works and carry off a large amount of munitions as well as two cannon. In fact, the management were aware of the threat and a detachment of the 80th Regiment of Foot had already been installed in the Works and further troops were on their way to reinforce the defences.

Hardie, Baird and King

Andrew Hardie was a weaver who had served as a soldier in the King's army. He led a group of men intent on reaching Carron Company. They were mainly armed with home-made pikes and a few muskets.

At 5am on April 5th he met with John Baird at Baird's brother's house in Condorrat. John Baird was also a weaver and he had seven year's army service with the Rifle Brigade fighting at Waterloo. Also in Robert Baird's house was a man who introduced himself as John Andrews. They were satisfied with Andrew's credentials and planned together to march their Radical troops to Carron Company. 24 men set off with John Baird in command and Andrew Hardie his Second in Command. They paused at an inn at Castlecary for a breakfast of porter and bread for which Baird paid 7shillings and sixpence. Baird then suggested splitting the men into two groups, one to continue along the road and the other to take the route along the Forth and Clyde Canal towpath. This was to make sure that they did not miss any potential recruits to their case.

Hardie's men took the turnpike and, on the road, they met an English traveller *en route* to Glasgow. Hardie warned him of the potential trouble in Glasgow and he went on his way. Soon the man met Private Nicol Hugh Baird, a Trooper of the Kilsyth Yeomanry and relayed what he had seen and been told. The Trooper turned his horse and rode quickly to Kilsyth to warn of the armed troop of men. He embellished the tale and told of being attacked and fighting off the Radicals before riding west with his news.



The Forth & Clyde Canal at Bonnybridge

Bonnymuir

The two groups met near Bonnybridge and there 'Andrews' told them that he would go to Camelon and bring the Radical supporters from there to join them. They decided to lead the men onto the muir to rest. They reached the open ground through the Ironstone Pend, a narrow tunnel under the canal.

A detachment of the 10th Hussars supported by men of the Yeomanry were riding to Falkirk having been alerted by Trooper Nicol Baird's story that armed men were marching to Carron. On the road they met a man who told them that the Radical troops were assembled on Bonnymuir and were commanded by a man called Baird. Only one man knew of the plan to wait on the muir and the name of the man in charge. John Andrews was in fact an *agent provocateur* named King. Having done his duty of betrayal, King vanished and was not heard of again.



The muir today

There were between 25 and 30 Radicals on Bonnymuir that day. Some were armed with muskets Others carried homemade pikes and other makeshift arms. They waited for 'Andrews' to return from Camelon with additional men, planning their advance to Carron. The muir was a bare expanse except for a wall with a single opening. The Government Troops, having been told of the Radical's whereabouts, rode through a larger pend under the canal, suitable then, as now, for horses, and onto the muir.



The Radical Pend today

When the Radicals saw them approach, they took up positions behind the wall. As a newspaper subsequently reported, "On observing this force the radicals cheered and advanced to a wall over which they commenced firing at the military. Some shots were then fired by the soldiers in return, and after some time the cavalry got through an opening in the wall and attacked the party who resisted till overpowered by the troops who succeeded in taking nineteen of them prisoners Four of the radicals were wounded".

It was over quite quickly; the Radical were no match for well-armed and mounted troops. The prisoners and wounded were taken from the muir through the pend which the troops had used, and on to Stirling for imprisonment in the Castle to await trial. The Radicals were treated reasonably well on this journey. A cart was found for the wounded and the men were given water.



The modern Memorial at Bonnymuir

Controversially the trial was held under English law which had more severe penalties. Any objections to this arrangement were overruled. The charge was treason and Hardie and Baird were found guilty and sentenced to death. While in prison Hardie and Baird wrote letters describing their aims, the betrayal and the battle. These were smuggled out of the prison, probably by Granny Duncan, an old woman who took the prisoners their porridge. The letters are poignant when personal and seemingly sincere in the aims expressed.

Here is an extract from one of Hardie's letters.:

'I now write you my long and last farewell letter, as I am in a short time to fall a victim beneath the stroke of the tyrant, for seeking those rights for which our forefathers bled, and for which I shall lay down my life without the least reluctance, knowing it is for the cause of truth and justice. I have wronged no person; I have hurt no person and formerly been of an easy temper. I bless God, who has the hearts of every man in his hand, that it never entered into mine to hurt any of my fellow-creatures. No person could have induced me to take up arms in the same manner to rob or plunder. No, my dear friends, I took them for the good of my suffering country; and although we were outwitted, yet I protest, as a dying man, that it was with a good intention on my part.

The Execution

Friday September 8th was set for the execution of Baird and Hardie at Stirling. The scaffold was erected in Broad Street and troops sent from Falkirk to keep order. A service was held that morning and Hardie led the people in singing part of the 51st Psalm. Both Baird and Hardie addressed the crowd from the scaffold. At one point the nervous troops presented arms which caused the crowd to panic. Hardie spoke to them and calmed them saying that when the execution was over, they should go quietly to their homes and read their Bibles remembering the fate of Baird and Hardie.

Both men stepped calmly to the scaffold and the deed was done. Half an hour later the bodies were taken down and beheaded. Though they had been led to believe that their bodies would be released to their families for burial, this was not done. They were that evening buried in common ground near The Church of the Holy Rude.

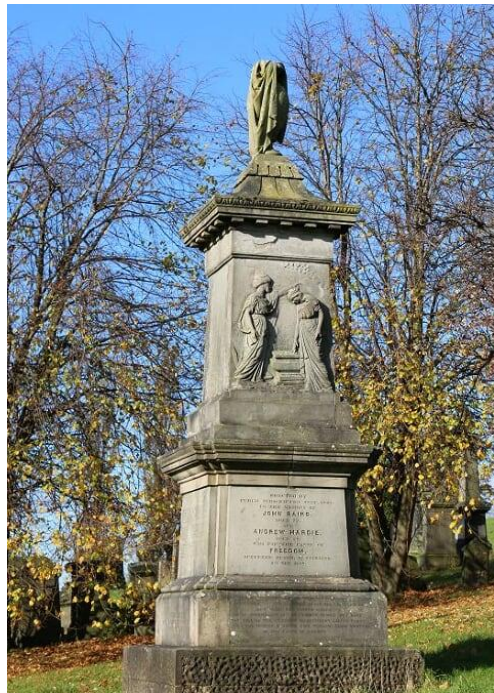


Broad Street, Stirling



19 others were also found guilty and sentenced to transportation to Australia. They were housed in a prison hulk before sailing to their fate on the other side of the world.

Events moved on from Bonnymuir and unrest in Glasgow and Paisley was put down by force by Government troops. Those arrested were tried and those found guilty were transported. James Wilson, one of their leaders was tried for treason and was hanged in Glasgow and later buried with Hardie and Baird in Sighthill Cemetery.



The memorial in Sighthill Cemetery

Here are the stories of several local men who were transported to Australia...

Andrew Dawson

Well ye've a' heard hoo we wer duped into jining this 'radical' lot – naebody listening tae oor problems o' starvation wages an' no even allowed to vote ane o' oor sympathisers into parliament. Ma name is **Andrew Dawson**, born in Camelon June 1792. Ma job in Camelon was a nailer, sometimes blacksmith, for the paltry sum every week.

Ye've already herd about the terrible journey we had comin' here but the worst thing was haein' to leave my wife and fower bairns behind. God knows hoo they managed. Twa yrs efter a gote here a did try to persuade Janet to come ower but wi' 4 weans it just wisnae possible. So a jist had tae mak the best o' it.

A had gotten a job wi' the government here as a blacksmith payin' no bad wages an' they even mad me 'principal overseer o' works' at Newcastle – Newcastle, New South Wales that is. I goat ma freedom in 1827 (freedom 'within the limits of this government but not at liberty to leave it') an' by 1830 wis earnin' £54.15shillings a year (sterling becos this was a British colony then) **and** ma livin' quarters.

Well, a'm gonna draw a veil o'er the next couple o' years– jist let's say a blotted ma copybook and ended up in Newcastle jail.

But eventually things goat better – I was free an' free to tak a wife again so in 1835 a married Agnes Mercer. A wis 43; this wis the same year the British King gave us radicals a 'pardon' – no much good to Wilson, Baird, Hardie though!

Epitaph: Andrew Dawson died 15 April 1839 aged just 47; he died intestate, his widow, Agnes, refused to administer his estate. In 1845 a Mr. Weller, who had previously loaned Andrew some money, was appointed as the estate administrator. – his assets were nil.

John Anderson

I'm John Anderson an' I wis a Camelon **weaver**; I was born in 1793, 27 years jist when the first meetings were held in the spring o' 1820. A was niver near Bonnymuir but A still got picked up and sent for trial at Stirling – transportation for life!

I gote a bit lucky when a cam here for a got sent tae work for Simeon Lord, the same that some years afore had bin sent oot frae Yorkshire for stealin' some cloth but noo **he** wis a free man an' doin' very well thank-you. In fact when he deed Simeon Lord wis wan o' Austral'a's richest - so he wis a great help tae me , gettin' me tae meet 'people wi' influence' – I'm share that wis hoo I cam' by the job o' schoolmaister at Portland Head Presbyterian School jist twa years efter I gote here.

Weel the first thing I had tae dae was gie up ma mither tongue and speak 'proper English!' It was a busy time for me – as well as learnin' to be a teacher I was the precentor in the Ebenezer Church which used the same building. Like the other 'radicals' I got my 'freedom paper' in 1827 but to tell the truth it didna make a lot of difference. I was doin' a job I liked and well enough paid for it. For 28 students I got paid £40 a year and another £40 for expenses – an awfu' lot mair than I would have gotten had I still been weavin' back in Camelon.

My sister thought she would like the life here wi' me so in 1834 she came out to be my housekeeper – that was before she got herself a better job wi' the Wilson family at Port McQuarrie. While she was here though it meant the school could take boarders.

Another 20 years passed before I finally decided to take a wife - Lucy Watson was the lady, that was in 1854, 29 years after I started as headteacher in Portland Head and just 1 year before the folks there gave me a special presentation for 30 years service – twenty-eight and a half sovereigns and some nice things said. No bad at all for a humble Camelon weaver.

Epilogue: John Anderson died just 3 years after his presentation in July 1858; he was 65 years of age.

He is buried in the Ebenezer Church graveyard where his grave is marked by a large stone slab, inscribed, and within a wrought-iron railing.

He also has a mention in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

John MacMillan

And noo tae tell ye ma story. Ma name is John MacMillan, an' like Andra, a wis a Camelon nailer and blacksmith. a wis born on 14 March 1793; an' like Andra I wis naewhaur near Bonnymuir; we wir baith picked up in Camelon so wha telt them aboot us – that's whit ad like fine to ken? We twa even goat tried efter the rest but the sentence wis the same – transportation to the colonies. Fir life!

The worst thing aboot that wis haein' to leave Jean and the lassies behind.

I did awricht tho' wi' government work; goat ma certificate o' freedom in 1827. Five years efter that an' I wis doin' so well a wis even employing 3 free men an' 2 convicts. I wrote Jean and telt her I wouldna have gone back hame even if they'd offered to mak me Sheriff o' Stirling!

But it wis high time Jean an' the girls cam oot and jined me an' thank God they did altho' the journey and the heat did for Cathie and she died within the year o' her comin'. That wis 1833.

Twa years later the English King granted oor pairdon.

From bein' **jist a blacksmith** a becam a 'ship an' anchor smith', an 'edge tool an' scale beam maker' an' even held the publican's license fir the 'Blacksmiths Arms' in Windmill Street, Sydney.

We wir doin' ok. By 1839 I had even managed to put by enough siller to buy twa plots o' land, first wan wis 25 acres we called 'Thrushgrove' efter the first meetin' place o' the Radicals in 1816. An' then another 60 acres we called 'Comely Park' – that wis ma orange farm.

I becam a respected member of Sydney society and got involved in church and education affairs.

Transportation wis the best thing that ever happened tae me.

Epilogue: Jean MacMillan died in 1856 but John lived on until 1877; he was 84 when he died- at Comely Bank- and was the last survivor of the 19 radicals.

In his will he left Thrushgrove to a friend and Comely Bank to his grandson John Brazier.

So, the destinies of those men arrested and tried for being at Bonnymuir were varied. For some it was an opportunity to be grasped, an opportunity to gain a new life in a new land and realise some of the aims which led them to Bonnymuir in the first place. For others who came back after their pardon, it was a return to the life and conditions they had always known.

Thus ends the story of Bonnymuir as part of 1820 Radical Rising, of some of the men who were willing to risk life and liberty in the cause of improving their lives and gaining a vote.

Elizabeth Sutherland

Research into The Falkirk Radicals of 1820

After the so-called 'Battle of Bonnymuir' 19 radicals were imprisoned at Stirling Castle and charged with treason (not all of them were even at Bonnymuir). They were tried on 25 August 1820, by English not Scottish Law, and sentenced to be transported to New South Wales for life.

Their ages ranged from 17 to 45.

Of these nineteen three were from the Falkirk area. They were –

Andrew Dawson, a nailer from Camelon, aged 28

John Anderson, a weaver from Camelon, aged 27

John MacMillan, a nailer from Camelon, aged 27

My mission was, if possible, to find out what had happened to those three local men.

To my great delight I discovered that descendants of Thomas McFarlane from Condorrat, the oldest of the 19 radicals transported, had researched the fortunes of all 19 Bonnymuir radicals in Australia. Their findings are published in a book 'The Scottish Radicals Tried and Transported to Australia for treason in 1820' by Margaret and Alastair MacFarlane pub 1975, Sydney.

The National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh has a copy which was my source for most of the information which follows.

The 19 Radicals sentenced to transportation to Australia were taken first from Stirling Castle to Sheerness where they spent some time on the prison hulk 'Bellerophon'; conditions on the prison hulk were described as worse than in prison; men chained to their bed at night and forced into hard labour by day. On 22 Dec 1820 they sailed on 'Speke 2', captained by Peter MacPherson, for New South Wales, Australia. There was also a surgeon Mr. Edward Coates on board. Not all the passengers were convicts and prisoners.

On the 23rd January, a letter was written at Tenerife from on board the Speke. It was received in Glasgow from '*one of the poor deluded radicals who were*

taken in arms at Bonnymuir. It mentioned that nothing of consequence had happened on the voyage. All the convicts had their irons taken off a few days before Tenerife which made their condition more comfortable. There was a gentleman on board going out to settle who had promised to do as much as he could for the benefit of those who conduct themselves with decency and decorum. He and a clergyman were teaching felons to read and giving them religious instruction.'

The *Speke* arrived in Port Jackson on 18 May 1821 after a voyage of some 21 weeks. One can only imagine what a trial that would have been - cramped conditions, little food, and sea sickness too no doubt.

The Sydney Gazette reported that the prisoners were landed on Wednesday morning 23rd May (5 days after they arrived) and had a healthy and satisfactory appearance - they could not have left their native land in better health. They were inspected by His Honor the Lieutenant Governor (Erskine), who was pleased to enquire into the treatment and usage experienced by them on the voyage, when they, simultaneously, expressed their grateful acknowledgments to Captain McPherson and **Edward Coates**, with which His Honor was much gratified. They were afterwards distributed, as usual, to their various departments and employments.

Speke). Really?

In 1835 all 19 radicals were pardoned They had many sympathisers back home including one Peter Mackenzie who worked hard to expose the spy system that had operated in 1820.

He recalls his success in his book 'Reminiscences of Glasgow'. After John Macmillan was pardoned, he sent to Peter Mackenzie "the actual irons which chained his legs from Stirling Castle to Botany Bay" – 20lbs weight!

Anne Paterson



The hangman's cloak and axe

