

THE STIRLINGSHIRE YEOMANRY CAVALRY AND THE SCOTTISH RADICAL DISTURBANCES OF APRIL 1820

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*"Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason?
For if it prosper, none dare call it treason."
Sir John Harrington 1561-1612*

The executions of James Wilson, Andrew Hardie and John Baird for High Treason marked the end of the so-called Scottish insurrection of 1820. Like many Radicals, the leaders of the disturbances which broke out into open defiance and violence against authority, were probably well-intentioned men. But such was the temper of the times, with the Brandreth riots in the Midlands in 1817, and the 'Peterloo Massacre' in Manchester in 1819 still in the public mind, one principle clearly had to predominate. The authority of the Sovereign in Parliament had to be asserted vigorously or there could be no law and no justice.

Any modification to the Constitution and parliamentary representation, or interference in the protection of the interests of landowners and entrepreneurs, indeed any change in the status quo, was believed to be dangerous. Twelve years later during the passage of the Reform Act, the climate was even more dangerous. Fear of popular violence certainly provokes an aggressive attitude by authority; it is a natural human reaction. The lessons of minimum force and deterrence, still to be fully learnt in our century, were barely understood in the early 19th Century, and military measures were usually heavy-handed with the political considerations not always taken into full account. Fortunately in most instances it was the good sense of the commanders on the spot which prevented excessive reaction when the military were called out in aid of the Civil Power.

The most recent detailed investigation into the Radical disturbances in Central and Western Scotland in 1820 treats the whole affair as an adjunct of the rise² of Scottish nationalism one hundred and fifty years later. The insurrection was entirely working class in origin, was politically naive, and militarily uncoordinated. It was betrayed by the working class who, despite brave talk, had not the nerve or will to follow the small number of leaders. There is no proper evidence that the insurrection was carefully instigated by government agents, and this suggestion is improbable for a number of reasons, if for none better than that it would have been a highly dangerous thing to do. The widespread discontent in the manufacturing parts of Britain was caused by acute economic problems as a result of war, although this was not really understood at the time. There was no broadly based political will for constitutional reform, wider suffrage or the restoration of a Scottish Parliament. "Freedom, Truth and Justice" would scarcely have been served by the disruption, anarchy and distress following even a partial success of the insurrection, had it been better led, co-ordinated and militarily effective.

There is no doubt that the autumn of 1819 saw growing Radical activity throughout the manufacturing areas of Britain, and many meetings were held, some spontaneous and others more or less co-ordinated. In Scotland, some of these meetings attracted many thousands and there were violent incidents in Glasgow, Ayr and Paisley. In the early part of 1820 word got around that there was to be a general strike of all manufacturing operatives, and preparations were to be made to acquire whatever arms were available and manufacture others locally. Secret drilling took place. On the night of Saturday 1st April a printed 'Proclamation', under the imprimatur of the "Committee of organisation for forming a PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT", was posted in Glasgow³ and a number of towns and villages in the

counties of Dunbartonshire, Stirlingshire, Renfrewshire, Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. During the next few days 60,000 people struck work, a remarkable number, and certainly an indication of the distressed state of workers in these counties.

That part of the Country was heavily garrisoned with regular troops both cavalry and infantry. The Yeomanry Cavalry, Volunteers and Militia were well used to being called out to pre-empt violence. Once the 'Proclamation' had been brought to the notice of the authorities on Sunday 2nd April, orders went out for the embodiment of 3000 volunteers and 2000 Yeomanry Cavalry. Of the Yeomanry in Ayrshire there were 10 troops divided into two regiments, whilst the Glasgow Yeomanry comprised 2 squadrons. The Lanarkshire Yeomanry had 5 troops,⁴ the Renfrewshire Yeomanry 4 troops, the Dunbartonshire Yeomanry 3 troops and the Stirlingshire Yeomanry 5 troops.

This latter regiment is the subject of this article, and, with the help of documents in the Murray of Polmaise Manuscripts in the Scottish Record Office, the events of April 1820 which involved the Stirlingshire Yeomanry Cavalry can be traced.⁵

The documents and letters in the Murray of Polmaise collection admirably demonstrate the military, social, legal and economic problems of serving in the Yeomanry Cavalry at the time, particularly in times of unrest when the yeomen were frequently called out. As men of some standing they had to defend the interests of the property-holding classes. As farmers, they could be subject to pressures and threats from malcontents close at hand, since they represented military authority in their locality whether or not they were in uniform. They had their own business to conduct and the seasons and weather did not wait on their military duties. The extent of training in military arts and techniques varied considerably between individual and troops. Added to this their legal position was far from clear. Yeomen could find themselves facing prosecution in Court for injuring rioters while on duty.⁶ This happened to the Manchester Yeomanry after Peterloo, although the yeomen were exonerated. Aid to the Civil Power meant that once the Yeomanry Cavalry, Volunteers or Militia had been called out and embodied by the Civil Authority (Lord Lieutenant, Magistrates, civic authorities) they were duty bound to use military force if other methods were ineffective to suppress civil violence. The extent of force was a matter of judgement.

THE STIRLINGSHIRE YEOMANRY

The Duke of Montrose was the Lord Lieutenant of Stirlingshire. At this time he was resident in London and his duties devolved on the Vice Lieutenant and Justice of the Peace, William Murray of Polmaise and Touchadam. Major Murray commanded the Stirlingshire Yeomanry which consisted of five troops-Stirling, Falkirk, Fintry, Campsie and Kilsyth.

The officers of the Stirlingshire Yeomanry cavalry at the time, with dates of their seniority, were as follows:⁷

Major: William Murray of Polmaise (captain on formation in 1798, later Lieutenant Colonel Commandant 13 July 1820)

Captains Peter Speirs (Captain on formation in 1798 and Major on 14th July 1820)-Fintry Troop

David Monro Binning (1804)-Stirling Troop Michael Stewart Nicholson (Captain 1819: he later succeeded to the title and name of Sir Michael Shaw Stewart, 6th Baronet of Greenock and Blackhall)-Falkirk Troop

Archibald Edmonstone (1819, later Sir A Edmonstone of Duntreath).

Sir Samuel Stirling of Glorat (March 1828)-Campsie Troop

Lieutenants: Henry Fletcher Campbell (Capt July 1820)-Falkirk Troop

John McVicar (1817)

Matthew Finlayson (1817)-Fintry Troop

Campbell Riddell (1819)

John James Davidson (1819)-Kilsyth Troop

James Smith (1820)

Comets William Galbraith (1817)-Fintry Troop

James Smith (1819)

John Corbet (1819)

Michael Bruce (1820)

Alexander Dunlop (1820)-Falkirk Troop

Adjutant: John Murray (1804)

(The name John Kincaid appears on a letter, indicating his active participation in 1820. There was a Captain John Kincaid serving as a Captain in the Stirling West Legion in 1803, who might have been the same man.)

Lieutenants:

Warnings

A member of the Kilsyth troop received the following threatening note dated December 1819-

"The day is not far of (sic) when we will have the pleasure of running you through with more of your friends (of the) yeomanry".

Major William Murray of Polmaise received a letter dated 26th February 1820 "at the risk of my life" from one Alexander Junkin, nailmaker of St Ninians by Stirling, warning the vice lieutenant that:

"The spirit of rebellion has raised so much in our 3 United Kingdoms that they have carried on the business in secret by Delegates from every quarter. . . . a rumour of a plan that on 1st March the 3 Kingdoms are to rise 'in mass' and overthrow the Government."

Another letter was received naming Radicals who were making pikes in the district. There would have been nothing extraordinary about these warnings since they would be sent and received frequently. These threats, however, did materialise.

Stirlingshire Yeomanry Cavalry Called Out

The request for calling out the Stirlingshire Yeomanry Cavalry was received by Major Murray via Colonel Northcote, on 2nd April, the day that the 'Proclamations' were noted by the authorities. Murray reported on the same day to the Major General commanding the troops in Scotland Sir Thomas Bradford-

"I have ordered out the yeomanry in this country to assemble tomorrow at their respective alarm posts, being Falkirk, Kilsyth, Stirling and Fintry and have ordered them to march on Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch as requested. But I must as my duty bounds represent to you the great loss the farmers must sustain from leaving home just now and the great danger of disgusting them with the service altogether, if they are frequently called upon . .

From this one assumes that there had been a number of false alarms or instances when they had been called out in the past, when the reason for their being embodied had subsequently evaporated. The Campsie Troop was not called out. Whether it was ineffective or there were differences between Murray and Sir Samuel Stirling of Glorat, or both, is not clear. Sir Samuel Stirling was a known complainer and resigned from the Yeomanry in 1821. Murray goes on-

"I am convinced that they are ready at all times to turn out in aid of the Civil Power . . . I would be obliged to you to inform me by the bearer if I am to move the Yeomanry as requested, for I consider the peace of this County as particularly under my charge as Vice Lieutenant and therefore unless an absolute necessity occurs for moving on Glasgow, I am unwilling to leave it; at the same time I shall be guided by your information and directions

Major General Sir Thomas Bradford was by this time in Glasgow with his cavalry advisor Major General Sir Richard Hussey Vivian, having hurried there during the day. Murray's request that the Stirlingshire troops should not be sent to Glasgow indicated the dilemma that faced a volunteer commander, since the right of a superior commander to issue such an order and for it to be obeyed was not clearly established. In the event the Stirlingshire Yeomanry Cavalry were not sent outside the County boundaries and a message of thanks was sent by Sir Thomas Bradford through his staff "for the promptitude with which the Stirlingshire Yeomanry have assembled;" no mention was made about the difficulties of the farmers or service away from home.

Troops of cavalry, whether regular or auxiliary were well used to working in an independent role, dominating and patrolling specific areas in times of civil unrest. The military authorities believed that the rebels were unlikely to be able to form into anything more than small groups, and that sufficient warning would be given for the assembly of large crowds or armed columns bent on taking on the military.

The deluded and simple-minded Radicals certainly thought that, as if by magic, they could be transformed into an army sufficiently strong to do battle with the forces of the Crown. But then if the talk and rumour, 'Proclamations' and strikes were only half-believed by the authorities, they did take them seriously. Reconnaissance and intelligence was vital then, as now, in an internal security setting and credit must be given to the volunteer cavalymen for helping to contain the trouble by maintaining an active presence in their area during the ensuing days.

It is unfortunate that Murray's instructions to his subordinate commanders are not extant; but from the correspondence he received it is possible to deduce his plans and orders. He himself remained at Stirling, his estate being only four miles from the County town. He allowed the troops to operate from their own home towns, presumably for two purposes, so, that they could protect their own homes and dominate the nearby industrialised areas of the County. The map shows Stirlingshire with the central moorland hills, to the north of which lies farmland alongside the River Forth and old military road. To the west, lay Balfron with its weaving factory, the nearest troop being located at Fintry, and commanded from Culcreuch House by Captain Peter Speirs. To the south alongside the high road from Glasgow and the Glasgow/Edinburgh Canal, lay a series of manufacturing villages and townships- Bishopbriggs, Kirkintilloch, Kilsyth, Condorrat, Cumbernauld, Denny, Bonnybridge, Camelon and Falkirk. To the north of Falkirk lay the Carron iron works. The troops at Kilsyth and Falkirk had a large area to cover: Murray kept the Stirling troop to guard the County town and provide a reserve.

Sunday 2nd April

Falkirk Troop

At 6.30. pm Captain Michael Stewart Nicholson, writing from Carnock⁸ the same day the 'proclamations' had been first seen, reported that orders had been issued to his troop to assemble at Falkirk. The timing of this letter gives some idea of the time it took for orders to be delivered and repeated along the chain of command. Messages had in this instance passed from Glasgow to Polmaise House during the forenoon and been repeated to the four troops during the afternoon.

Monday 3rd April

Kilsyth Troop

A letter dated 2.30 pm was sent from Lieutenant James Davidson (an Edinburgh lawyer) in command of the Kilsyth Troop. He had based himself at Kilsyth Inn and stated that although people were "going about in a cluster" there had been no outbreak of violence.

Falkirk Troop

The first letter from Nicholson of this day reported that all was quiet in the town and that some Radical handbills had been seized. In his second letter, after thanking his commanding officer for "three kind notices of today," he said he did not envisage there would be any disturbance during the night, but

"I mean to sit up and keep ten of them up till after the arrival of the Glasgow Mail . . . and leave five up and ready till five in the mg (morning). I divide them thus as I wish to have a horse drill tomorrow before going home (I hope) I have seen one of the handbills and certainly nothing can be more mischievous, it is *simple treason* which simplifies the matter".

(Nicholson was a Justice of the Peace).

"I worked the men for 1/2 an hour on Callendar Riggs-at wheeling by 3 and marching by files in line... we were hissed and hooted at a good deal while at exercise today, but chiefly by boys. They say that the infantry Regt in Edin Castle and all the disposable (sic) Hussars marched from Edinburgh very early this mg for Glasgow, so I think we shall not be wanted after today".

He added that opinion was that the fear of "local danger" could be treated with great contempt. He was soon to be of a different mind. They remained under arms for at least 10 days.

Tuesday 4th April

Fintry Troop

Writing from Culcreuch house, half a mile from the village of Fintry, Captain Peter Speirs reported that when he himself arrived during the previous evening that he "found very few of the troop assembled and I hear still fewer in preparation at Balfron." He goes on to give reasons.

"Firstly the season of the year, and their unwillingness to stop the plough and horses, as owing to the wet weather the field operations have of late been a good deal interrupted in this high district of (the) County. *2ndly* a number of the Yeomen have been intimidated by the bold language of the disaffected in the manufacturing districts. The malevolents have threatened violence, in the event of their moving from home and they are afraid should they attempt doing it, that their familys (sic) during their absence would be insulted, and their property abused".

Turning to the actual activities of the local people, he informed Murray that they had been parading and playing musical instruments

" and held out that if the Yeomanry attempted marching on Glasgow, they would prevent them.

They have also obliged two or three people to deliver up their fire arms, and went to the house of Ballikinrain (one mile S East of Balfron) to know if Mr Cranstone would deliver to them his fowling pieces. His reply was 'with the contents, whenever they wished it'!

Written inducements to strike had been circulated but all had been quiet at Balfron Mill.

"Previous to searching the village about a mile from this, I met two strangers accompanied by about twenty of the villagers going towards Glasgow. A few minutes thereafter Mr Galbraith joined me, and informed me that these two men (he was told) had been in the morning circulating seditious Proclamations. I ordered the post boy to turn the carriage. Accompanied

by Mr Galbraith I soon overtook them, and with the aid of some of the Yeomanry seized them, and took them into a neighbouring house for examination. They were two brothers of the name of Cameron and had been in the vicinity of Kippen (to the north) purchasing Butter and Bread, as one of them is a Grocer at the Town of Campsay (Campsie). The other a weaver and a great field Orator. He gave himself not a few unaccountable airs, said he was a whig and a reformer, said that we had no right to arrest him without a warrant, acknowledged he had delivered a letter to one John Buchanan, that he had stopped at the village, going north in the morning to take a gin and a bottle of ale, but refused to subscribe his declaration," (presumably sign a statement).

"His brother, who signed has said he did not know of any letters or papers being left by this brother, as they had not had any communication with anybody in the village. We then interrogated John Buchanan who is a wright at the Mill. He said that he had received the letter, that it was not of a political nature, being from his brother in relation to family matters and that he had tore it up." They were then dismissed for want of evidence. When they went off a vast multitude of men, women and children had assembled, cheered them with other symptoms of approbation. From what I hear today I have no doubt of their guilt, tho' I cannot lend a satisfactory proof to substantiate it. Perhaps it would be better while for the Civil power to examine into the motive of Donald and Duncan Cameron crossing into this neighbourhood."

Speirs concluded his letter lamenting that he had had several more resignations and found it difficult to maintain the troop up to the establishment.

Falkirk Troop

Captain Nicholson wrote two letters on Tuesday, one at 11.30 pm and one at 7 pm.

"All is quiet here and I hope likely to continue . . . The Fiscal has told me that he saw a good many strangers, suspicious looking fellows here yesterday. Dr Wilson told me that six men entered his washing house swaggered and talked *terrible* things. One had a *sword* and was drunk. . . . The Camelon people have struck work, but the Carron and Falkirk people are all at work-I do not think you need send the carbines here, but should we move towards Glasgow, be so good as to take them forward I am glad the Hussars are to come to Kilsyth. I hope to hear from you in the course of the day. I am just going to take the troop to the moors and practise them and myself a bit".

From his next letter written that evening, it appears that his troop drills during the day were not performed satisfactorily.

"Many thanks for your letter. I have given out the orders about the Carbine Belts and Buckets, both for my own and Kilsyth troops. All is perfectly quiet here. My troop have not turned out well and I should be ashamed to show ourselves in Glasgow. I must have a reform in the troop. I hope however there will be no occasion for our going to Glasgow, or Kilsyth or anywhere-as these must be an overwhelming force in the neighbourhood of Glasgow-I trust in God that the military will have an opportunity of acting and striking a final blow at this troublesome mischief. My father told me positively that *every Yeoman* was entitled to *two guineas* from (the) Govt. I apply therefore officially to *you* Major for *six guineas* per man for all the troop who have turned out in February and March. . ." (A letter to Major Murray from

Cornet Dunlop dated 10 November 1821 pointed out that not all the yeomen had been paid for turning out in 1820).

He ended the letter by saying that they had had a drill of 3 hours and that he intended to leave Campbell in command and go home to see his blind wife, but that he could return in a very short time to Falkirk. A post-script to the letter was added-"I wish we had some blank cartridge to accustom our horses to

hand fire. I don't mean so much *our fire* as that from our opponents, whoever they may be."

Wednesday 5th April

Fintry Troop

Captain Speirs reported that all was quiet in Fintry. When writing he had not heard that Cornet Galbraith was busy in the Balfron area that day gathering intelligence.

Falkirk Troop

At 10.30 am Captain Nicholson wrote

"There was a meeting of Radicals on the Callendar Riggs here at 4 o'clock. Mr Spottiswoode has just given me positive information of 6 men having passed his way at 5 this morning armed with pikes... .2 hours ago 30 men armed with pike and Camelon people being about to join them to make an attack here. I wish you would send up some muskets, some of the Militia or come up yourself with Stirling Troop for mine is not strong. The (Procurator Fiscal and all expect an immediate attack here) so send us a reinforcement. (Here the writing becomes highly excited and barely legible) I shall retire upon Stirling if I cannot face them."

The postscript reiterates the plea, "lose no time in sending up a reinforcement."

He wrote again at 11.30 and mentioned reinforcements, again stating that he expected "the Carron Works to be attacked."

Kilsyth Troop and the Battle of Bonnymuir

The Hussars that Nicholson had referred to were a troop of the 10th Hussars who had been moved to the area during the night from Perth. They reached Kilsyth Inn in the morning and were resting. At the same time the 35 Radicals, led by Baird (aged 27) and Hardie (aged 31), were on their way from Glasgow in the direction of Edinburgh. It appears that most of them were Glasgow men; a handful, including Baird, had joined them at Condorrat. They had been informed that Carron, Camelon and Falkirk radicals would support them. Whether their intention was really to attack the Carron works is not proven. Hardie does not declare what the military aim was, and his own political aims were certainly naive. It follows that they had probably few political and military plans and no programme of action at all.

The action that the 10th Hussars, and Kilsyth Yeomanry troops fought this day-the "Battle of Bonnymuir"-is not actually recorded in the Murray of Polmaise documents.⁰

The best account is that of Andrew Hardie who, like his co-leader John Baird, had served in the regular Army, and would have taken the oath of allegiance to the Monarch.

News of the progress of the rebels reached Kilsyth Inn by way of Yeoman Nichol Baird and Sgt. Thomas Cook of the 10th Hussars and Lieutenant Ellis Hodgson commanding the 10th Hussars conferred with Lieutenant James Davidson. The establishment of the Yeomanry troop was thirty, and sixteen of them rode out with a similar number of regular cavalrymen mounted on borrowed Yeomanry horses in the direction of Falkirk in an attempt to head off the rebels.

The rebels had by this time passed through the village of Bonnybridge and moved onto open moorland, there to await the expected Radicals from Camelon and Falkirk. The joint regular and yeomanry cavalry troop was warned of the whereabouts of the rebels when they themselves reached Bonnybridge. It was clearly the intention of the 10th Hussars and Kilsyth Yeomanry to make arrests and not get involved in skirmishing. The rebels, however formed quickly behind a dyke (wall), which gave them a good degree of cover from fire and served to discourage the cavalry from riding over it and onto the pikes.

The cavalry moved right-flanking past a small wood. There was an exchange of fire. Hodgson called for the surrender of the rebels, but it was not until the cavalry charged for the second time and got amongst the rebels through a gap in the dyke, that they threw down their weapons. Most tried to escape and were pursued by the Yeomen and Hussars with the sword. Clearly the cavalry had not expected the rebels to resist and had been probably as much unnerved themselves by the experience as had the rebels, hence some heavy handed treatment in the pursuit. Five rebels had received incapacitating wounds but none were killed. Of the troops three were wounded and one horse killed.

The "Battle of Bonnymuir" was hailed as a decisive action by the Government Forces; by the Radicals it was an act of betrayal and military oppression." For the Stirlingshire Yeomanry, the capture of 18 rebels, caught in the act of armed rebellion and later to be found guilty of High Treason, it was a triumph. The prisoners were swiftly moved to Stirling Castle and the number of weapons taken from the rebels were five muskets, two pistols, a hundred rounds of ball cartridge and eighteen pikes.

Falkirk Troop

News of the skirmish reached Falkirk and at 1.30 pm Captain Nicholson was writing his comments on the nearby "Battle when 19 Radicals had been taken prisoner."² When marching through Camelon in the morning they had been insulted and

"pelted a little upon which I halted the troop, primed and loaded pistols and said a few words which had the effect desired. We marched through again and all was profound silence

I have just forwarded a dispatch to the Lord Advocate from the Officer of the Hussars at Kilsyth saying that they had an attack with a body of Radicals about 30 in number that they had attacked the Hussars and Kilsyth Troop and the result was 19 Radicals were taken prisoner. Baird of my troop was in the affray. He said the Radicals fired many pistol shots at them-that one sergeant of Hussars and 3 of the Yeomanry were badly wounded."

Thursday 6th April

Fintry Troop

Enclosing Galbraith's report of the previous day, Captain Speirs pointed out to Major Murray that there were "no acting magistrates in this neighbourhood. I wish therefore you could prevail upon one or two to attend (on) Saturday."

He asked for "a few more cartridges" and that the Clackmannanshire Yeomanry and any other troops be in readiness to support them. (Clackmannanshire had two troops of Yeomanry Cavalry).

Falkirk Troop

Captain Nicholson reported in his letter written to Murray at 10 pm that there had been movements of regular troops in his area and expected another decisive encounter that evening. His nerve was obviously restored since he reported taking his troop "out of the town towards Camelon and gave them a little preparatory exercise for any night work that may occur. We returned here a little before 8." He also reported the state of his patrols between Carron and Stenhouse Moor (Muir) during the night. There was a threat that 100 Radicals armed with guns were to attack and fire the house of William Grinley, the man responsible for notifying the troops of the Radicals' whereabouts on Bonnymuir the previous day. (There is no record of this threat being carried out). More arms were being fashioned in Falkirk, albeit the town remained quiet.

Friday 7th April

Kilsyth Troop

A letter written on this day and signed by James Davidson and John Kincaid said that they were doing everything in their power to maintain the peace at Kilsyth and suggested that the Campsie troop should be called out, advice which was not followed.

Falkirk Troop

Nicholson reported on this day at 9 am and 8 pm. In his second letter he gave Murray information that the latter had asked to be supplied, viz, the number of cannons in the area of Carron and Grangemouth.⁴ Nicholson believed the number to be "*~ear thirty-will* be shipped this night or very early tomorrow morning on board one of his (Captain Hamilton RN) sloops". He also reported that "great quantities of ball ammunition was being made at Falkirk" and that-

with a body of Radicals about 30 in number that they had attacked the Hussars and Kilsyth Troop and the result was 19 Radicals were taken prisoner. Baird of my troop was in the affray. He said the Radicals fired many pistol shots at them-that one sergeant of Hussars and 3 of the Yeomanry were badly wounded."

At 4 pm Nicholson was writing again to Murray reporting that-"The dashing and successful business near Bonnybridge has acted

as a great damper here, but still a part of the population all around here are not to be depended on for a day or two to come. I shall be glad of the infantry and shall feel much more at my ease then."

He then admitted to being "very uneasy" during his first two despatches "and particularly so when I saw Hamilton apprehensive (about) an attack upon Carron Works." Cavalry were of course not highly effective in a static guard role, particularly, as it appeared, without firearms (other than pistols). he went on to inform his Commanding Officer that large crowds were expected in Falkirk. The following day was "Fee Thursday", a day for the hiring of hands; and he was trying to persuade the Fiscal and principal inhabitants to set up a 'watch and ward'. "It will show that it is not the Yeomanry alone that can and will resist the seditious villains." He continued-"I do think that now that blood has been shed and the business

begun by the Radicals themselves that here and at Camelon and at St. Ninians for the principal blackguards and most notorious characters should at least be taken up. I am sure from what I have seen today that it would have an excellent effect to take up at least 6 fellows here and as many at Camelon, no matter whether anything eventually be actually proved. The fright of being taken to Stirling Castle should have great effect."³

Although Murray's answer is not extant, apparently he did not authorise preventative or exemplary detention for known Radicals.

Fintry Troop

Cornet Galbraith with members of the Fintry Troop had not been idle and he submitted his report to Captain Speirs at Culcreuch about the activities around Balfron since Sunday night. Large crowds had been around searching for weapons and had seized sporting guns in five separate incidents, the owners not showing the same spirit as Mr Cranstone of Ballikinrain. Two hundred Radicals had assembled during the morning and had practised their drills; some of the Radicals named in this report were amongst the total of eight Balfron men later arrested and found guilty of High Treason.

Saturday 8th April

Kilsyth Troop

Davidson reported that "this Radical business is drawing to a close, and, no doubt still feeling flushed with his military success on Wednesday at Bonnymuir enquired whether any steps had been taken to bring the wounded persons to trial.

Falkirk Troop

Captain Nicholson, writing at 1 pm, was also feeling more secure. He cheerfully reported the request of a committee of inhabitants of Falkirk-a great number of inhabitants are willing to bear arms, and,

suggest the following to who fifty stand of arms may be safely entrusted-sixty names here follow-Be so good as to send fifty stand of arms with Ball Cartridge under an escort. I wish you could send the escorts all the way as there are some colliers to be taken up at Parkhill. (This he does not explain). If however you wish an escort from my Troop to meet you, send

an express (letter) here and I will send out the men to wherever you appoint. My men are at their Bridles," (presumably ready).

He continued that he believed he had evidence against James Aitken and two other men and meant to arrest them the following day, although he was still not sure whether he should arrest on suspicion and requested Murray to "send some instructions here to act-or not."

Writing nine hours later at 10 pm in response to Major Murray's letter (not extant) which informed him that arms could not be supplied until Monday (10th April).

"But I hope" says Nicholson "there is no doubt that on that day they will be sent, were any delay in the delivery of them to the inhabitants . . . it would be attended with the worst effect in my opinion. They are still sore about their services having been refused, and I got over the coolness that the rejection had occasioned and now they had in hand the business. (Note: There seems to be a contradiction. Perhaps Murray's instructions were themselves not clear). I shall not have James Aitken & Bruce taken up at present, but the Fiscal has got deposition upon oath of five notorious Radicals in Camelon having been seen making pikes on Wednesday. A warrant has been granted for their apprehension and tomorrow at 6 o'clock I mean to go with a party and assist in putting it in force. I shall have the prisoners conveyed directly to Stirling Castle in two Post Chaises. I have also received information of the Villain that was wounded on Bonny Moor-and that was taken out of a house at Bonny Bridge being now at Larbert. The Fiscal and I mean to search for him and if found convey him to Stirling Castle". (Note: This man, called Black, was not found and evaded capture completely). "The escort will arrive at Stirling before 8 o'clock and the post boy has promised to deliver this to you a little after 6 in the mg (morning) . .

One pike was brought to the Fiscal today by a weaver of this town who trembled from head to foot while he delivered it. He told some rigmarole about it but the simple fact is it was his own and he was terrified to keep (it) a search being expected. All quiet and great consternation is spread here and at Camelon by even the few arrests already made".

Fintry Troop

Captain Speirs began his report this day, completed and despatched it on the following. He reported that everything was quiet at Balfron and that the "Yeomanry are in high spirits with the idea of meeting with the Radicals". This refers presumably to the imminent arrest of Balfron ringleaders. On the subsequent day (10 April), according to the records of the trials, 4 weavers were committed for trial by John Fraser the Sheriff Substitute at Stirling, "there being no Justice of the Peace or magistrate that will act within miles of us". Later 7 more Balfron men were arrested and found guilty of High Treason, the names of four having been reported as being recognised by James Macadam who received "a great number" of visitors at midnight on Sunday 2nd.

(See Summary of Galbraith's report dated 5 April).

Sunday 9th April

There were no further troop reports on this day, the Sabbath. But it was certainly an opportunity for the authorities to begin to consider collecting evidence against others of whom an example could be made, and the exact legal charges and procedures that should be

invoked. Murray had earlier sought the Lord Advocate's advice. Formal legal instructions were not immediately forthcoming, but there are in the Murray Papers, letters from a number of people supplying gratuitous military and legal advice as well as lists of names of Radicals against whom sufficient evidence existed.

On the legal position, Murray was to receive a letter written by Henry Home Drummond (Advocate Depute) from Ayr on that day which suggested that he did "not think it advisable to have any use made of the Arms Bill but rather to proceed at Common Law-This is the Lord Advocate's decided opinion." The plan for the military to make arrests at Balfron had obviously been widely discussed since he adds "If the proceedings at Balfron be attended with good consequences tonight . . . we can be at no loss to adopt the same at Camelon or others elsewhere." Reporting two days later, Lieutenant Matthew Finlayson indicates the success of the operation and the subdued atmosphere in the area.

Legal Proceedings

Murray received a letter from John Hope Advocate Depute dated Monday 10th April which gave the following advice pending the Lord Advocate's formal instructions-"The Commander in Chief is now acting on the general plan in consequence of the information which we have recently acquired. It is earnestly wished that at a distance from the military and (I may say) the civil headquarters so much movements should be made as might tend to alarm and frighten the ringleaders in the particular districts, to which due attention will be paid without delay, and lead them to escape, unless the information is extremely accurate and can be confidently acted on and unless the necessity of acting on such information is very pressing."

On 15th April Finlayson named a further 11 Balfron weavers, 4 of whom were subsequently arrested and found guilty of High Treason at Stirling. Although the Fintry troop still was active in the area of the Ballindalloch works and Balfron on 15th April, it was probably about two days earlier that the other troops were dismissed, and returned to their homes. Subsequent military operations by the Stirlingshire Yeomanry Cavalry seem to have been conducted by parties made up to arrest specified Radicals:

Captain Nicholson from Dunmore Park (on the River Forth nearby Polmaise) on April 28th stated-

"I shall act at Camelon from some *positive* and singular information received last night-between 3 and 4 o'clock tomorrow mg (morning). But I should *much prefer* a company of infantry from the Castle . . . I shall require 30 or 35 soldiers. I arranged the plan last night All I want is 35 infantry to be at my disposal after 12 o'clock tonight-I shall be in Stirling by one o'clock."

It is uncertain whether this action was carried out. There is no record of arrests and committals close to this date.

The 'Calendar of Prisoners charged with High Treason' lists 41 prisoners in the County awaiting trial on 23 June 1820. Eighteen were those arrested at Bonnymuir and Committed on 5th April by John Fraser, Sheriff Substitute of Stirlingshire. Two of the Camelon nailers were committed on 7th April by Alexander Dow and Charles Moir, Sheriff Substitute and Justice of the Peace respectively.

Three more nailers of Camelon were arrested and committed for trial on 9th April by Captain Michael Nicholson and Thomas Spottiswood as Justices of the Peace. Nicholson committed a further three Camelon nailers for trial on 11th May. During May and June, 7 more Camelon and Falkirk men were arrested and committed for trial including the two with the name of James Aitken. James Davidson also acted as a Justice of the Peace in committing a Kilsyth 'changekeeper' to Stirling Castle.¹⁶ The Duke of Montrose had been kept informed of the situation in the County and the military activities, and the latter part of his letter from London of 11th April 1820, probably correctly assesses the reality of the situation at the time and the true extent of the danger.

"Lt Hodgson of the 10th Hussars seems to have conducted himself with great promptitude, judgement and gallantry, whilst the Kilsyth Troop of Yeomanry showed great zeal by requesting leave to accompany the Hussars and by offering their horses to the Regulars. Those Yeomen who accompanied Lt Davidson having conducted themselves with so much soldier like conduct and resolution, deserve, and will receive from you, in my name. thanks and high commendation. But I must desire that Lt Davidson, Corporal Davidson and the Falkirk Trooper be particularly distinguished, on account (of) their marked good conduct and gallant bearing, in the attack of the Armed Body, which has fired on the King's Troops, from their position behind the wall in Bonnymuir. The precautions you had taken, by supporting Captain Nicholson, moving forward yourself to Kilsyth and checking any movement about Fintry and Balfron, by the assembling (of) Captain Speir's Troop, seem to have been very judicious and demand my approbation and thanks.

Indeed had the efforts of the revolutionists been much more formidable than they proved to be, when brought to the test, I am persuaded you would have given a good account of them. I shall be glad to receive a further account of the state of the Country, and particularly of Stirlingshire; but should the Agitators in England move, I think the dissatisfied will again show themselves in Scotland, though not otherwise I should conceive, seeing how ready we are to put them down and from the dread which the examples the law will make."¹⁷

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sir Houston and Lady Shaw Stewart, for information on their antecedent Michael Stewart Nicholson and family matters, and permission to reproduce the portrait. The family was connected with the Renfrewshire Yeomanry and whilst the article was being prepared, Sir Houston was appointed Honorary Colonel of the Ayrshire Squadron of the Queen's Own Yeomanry.

Lieutenant Commander G. A. Hamilton D. S. C. R. N., whose mother was the last Murray of Polmaise, for permission to make extensive use of the Murray of Polmaise MSS and for information on family matters.

J. D. Galbraith Esq. of the Scottish Record Office and an unnamed research assistant who catalogued the letters and helped with 'deciphering' some of the handwriting in the MSS.

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The owner of the portrait of Murray of Polmaise, whose name is unknown to the Author. The portrait was last known about in 1956 when it was sold at Dowell's, Edinburgh.

REFERENCES

1. The use of a capital R throughout this article is according to contemporary usage and found in the letters quoted. Radicals could be of many different shades of opinion; some were highly respectable members of Society who distanced themselves from any treasonable stigma. The Radicals in this account were all involved in seditious or treasonable activities.

2 "The Scottish Insurrection of 1820" by P. Berresford Ellis and S. MacA'Ghobhainn published V. Gollancz, 1970. The Foreword is by Hugh MacDiarmid, the well known grinder of axes. "Threats of Revolution in Britain 1789-1848" by M. I. Thomis and P. Holt, published Macmillan 1977, is a much more balanced view.

3. The "proclamation" urged readers "to take up arms for the redress of our Common grievances . . . LIBERTY or DEATH is our motto, and we have sworn to return home, in triumph-or return home no more!" So anyone who armed himself against the civil or military authorities was technically committing a treasonable offence.

4. "Records of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry 1819-1910" R. F. Wood published privately.

5. .Murray of Polmaise MSS, GD 189/1/44-85 in the possession of the Scottish Record Office.

6. "Making Life Possible-A Study of Military Aid to the Civil Power in Regency England" by K. O. Fox, published privately 1982.

7. Army Museum Ogilby Trust files.

8. Carnock, 5 miles SE of Stirling, was Nicholson's seat. Although his patronymic was Shaw Stewart, the estate was entailed and he had assumed the name Nicholson pro tern

10. Most of the written records of the time are accounts by the Radicals themselves, showing their side in the best light. The accounts of the Authorities are usually only the court records. This was certainly the case of the accounts of the "Peterloo Massacre" as well as the "Battle of Bonnymuir".

11. Contemporary sources indicate that the Radicals expected about 70,000 "effective" men to flock to their cause. The fact that nearly this number struck work indicated that, despite brave talk, the vast majority were not prepared to support an armed insurrection *actively*. In a situation where revolution is possible, human nature usually prompts the populace to wait until the chances of revolution can be judged before rising in armed revolt. In this case the insurrection had no chance. Had 70,000 men turned out, armed as best they could, it is unlikely that they would have prevailed even against a much smaller number of regular troops who were disciplined, trained, properly armed and with good mobility and communications.

12. Some accounts state 18 and others 19 prisoners. Only 18 names appear on the lists of prisoners awaiting trial as having been taken prisoner on that day. Likewise three different figures have been found for the joint Regular Cavalry and Yeomanry force which was present on Bonnymuir. The rebel and loyal forces may have been more evenly matched in numbers and weaponry than is stated in "The Scottish Insurrection of 1820", although being mounted

13. Habeas Corpus Suspension Act had been passed on 24 February 1820

14. Apart from the iron foundry, it is difficult to establish exactly what comprised the

Carron Works. Lord Sidmouth (Home Secretary) had "been informed that there are, laying about throughout the Kingdom, especially in the maritime parts of it, a great number of cannons, which are private property" (Home Office Paper 1819). These guns were probably in store, either being the property of the Government, or waiting to be melted down. Whether gunpowder and shot was stored there as well is not recorded. A rumour that a company of regular infantry was stationed there is most unlikely. Nicholson would have been the first to know and his letters indicate no such knowledge.

15. There are two printed lists amongst the Murray of Polmaise documents. One is an alphabetical list, the other in order according to the dates of the prisoners' committal, by whom they were committed, their trades and their home towns. The trials were held by special commission, Baird and Hardie were executed and the remainder transported to Botany Bay. Wilson, the third man to be executed, was connected with the Strathaven disturbance, which occurred on 5/6 April 1820, near Glasgow.

16. Keeper of change-horses

17. To end on a family note, the Duke of Montrose's granddaughter, Lady Agnes Graham, was married in 1859 to Lieutenant Colonel John Murray of Polmaise-the grandson of Lieutenant Colonel William Murray of Polmaise.