



Prestonpans shore many years later – still no sign of the breaks

# Memoirs of the Horsbrugh Family

Annemarie Allan enjoys a grand day out 18th century style

**A handwritten memoir of the Horsbrugh family of Pittenweem has recently come to light. It offers a fascinating – and at times highly amusing – insight into the response of ordinary citizens to the national crisis of 1745, when Bonnie Prince Charlie’s army of Highlanders threatened the Hanoverian monarchy.**

The Horsbrugh family were long standing supporters of the Stuart monarchy: their ancestor, James Cook, a shipmaster from Pittenweem, is alleged to have transported King Charles II to safety in France following the battle of Worcester in 1651. After the restoration, Cook was rewarded with a piece of land in the Langlands on which to dry his nets: this land, the ‘King’s Grant’, was still in the family in the late 19th century.

After the defeat and exile of King James III of England (VIII of Scotland) in 1715, opponents of the Hanoverian King George I were obliged to conceal their support for the Jacobite cause, but nevertheless, by the time of Charles Stuart’s attempt to reclaim the throne in 1745, the Horsbrugh family were still loyal to the Stuart succession. On 21 September – the day of the battle between Charles Stuart and General Sir John Cope at Prestonpans – James

Horsbrugh, accompanied by his three year old daughter Christian, visited his land at Taft Hill on 21 September 1745 to check the work of the shearers:

**‘While at work they constantly heard the Guns from Prestonpans. He got behind the shearers and, hidden by the stooks, fell on his knees and prayed for “ye ken wha”.’**

While James was praying in Fife, a number of his neighbours were a great deal closer to the action:

**‘It was announced in Pittenweem that Sir John Cope had arrived in Dunbar with a large army and was to give battle to the Jacobites. Whereupon a party went over the night before in a boat belonging to Sanders Donaldson, a Jacobite and landed on the sands at Prestonpans.’**

The memoir names those who undertook this expedition as: Sanders Donaldson, The ‘Gudeman’ Martin, his brother and one Colin Fowler, but adds that there may have been others, in which case their overnight accommodation must have been somewhat overcrowded:

**‘They slept at a Cottar’s house. They rose early next morning before the battle began and The Gudeman and his brother got up upon a outside**

**stair with a parapet that led up to a tower to see the battle.’**

This tower can be none other than Preston Tower, which still stands today and was home to the Hamiltons of Preston until 1663, when the tower was abandoned in favour of a more modern dwelling. A little over 50 years later, it appears that the tower still had its uses, offering both locals and tourists a grand view of that day’s action:

**‘It was a little misty but they saw the whole affair. The Highlanders came on at a run and the Hanoverian troops fled at once.’**

Clearly, this was an unexpected result:

**‘When this band of Whigs saw the result so contrary to what they expected, they were filled with consternation and endeavoured to flee too, but the lower point of the steps was crowded with people so that they could not get down. “Let me doon, let me doon”, cried the Gudeman, but an old wife immediately below him abused him for a Whig and would not budge, so, said the Gudeman, “I just lap o’er her head and got doon”. They made at once for the coast, but found to their dismay that the boat was aground and the shore there being very level, the water was far out.’**

It is interesting to note that the Pittenweem expeditionary force was made up of individuals with opposing political affiliations, a fact which does not seem to

have any significant impact on their relationship as neighbours. But one can easily imagine the Gudeman Martin's reaction to the excitement of Sanders Donaldson, the Jacobite, at the triumph of the Highland army. The memoir does not mention what Colin Fowler's affiliations were but, if he, like Sanders Donaldson, was a Jacobite, then his jubilation was shortly to become dismay:

**'They set about launching her and while they were doing so an English soldier with his son, a boy about 12 years of age, a fugitive from the battle came down to them. Colin Fowler, having on his best breeks, did not want to dirty them so he took them off and laid them on the beach above high water mark before he began, and then they all went at it with a will and got her afloat. But when she was afloat she was so far from the breeks that Colin was afraid to go back for them and they sailed away without them.'**

Presumably Colin Fowler, breeless, returned home in disgrace and no doubt the breeks represented a lucky find for someone, since Colin was obliging enough to lay them out above the high water mark. The mention of the soldier's boy is a fascinating comment on the way war was waged at this time. The majority of Cope's troops were foreign mercenaries and therefore professional soldiers, but unlike today, their family life apparently continued even while on duty.

The return of the intrepid adventurers was met with great excitement, since they were the first to arrive with news of the battle:

**'They brought over the soldier and his boy, but when they told the astonishing news of the defeat of the King's troops and the victory of the Highlanders, all the good people of Pittenweem were terrified and none of them would take in the unfortunate fugitives.'**

It seems, though, that at least some of the Jacobite supporters were magnanimous in victory:

**'my Grandmother (Christian Lothian, Mrs. James Horsbrugh b.1717, m.1738, d. 1803, a great Jacobite) said that she was not afraid of the Prince so she took them in, kept them a few days and then gave them something and sent them away.'**

One wonders what this boy's fate might have been had his father been one of the many Hanoverian dead, and had Christian Horsbrugh refused him the shelter which the rest of the family, most particularly the pet dog, appear to have resented:

**'My Grandmother and Grandfather had a little dog called Beau which was a great favourite of the children, but when the soldier's boy attempted to make much of him, he bit his leg very severely. Grandfather said "It must be his ill bluid".'**

What was probably the Horsbrugh family's final farewell to the Jacobite cause is included in the description of Uncle Thomas and his encounter with a number of exiled Jacobites at Rouen, shortly after the disastrous battle of Culloden in April 1746, when the power of the Highland clans was crushed and Charles Stuart fled the country.

**'My Uncle Thomas was the mate of a vessel that sailed from Leith soon after the 45 and a baillie, Sandy Byster from Anster [the local name for Anstruther] was the skipper. She went to Rouen for wines. Now it happened that at that town were a number of Jacobite Gentlemen who were obliged to leave Scotland at the 45 and when they saw a vessel belonging to their own country in the port they came to see her. The mate was superintending the wines being put on board and the skipper invited the gentlemen down to the cabin to taste some of the wine. They gave for their toast "May the Scotch Thistle choke the Hanoverian horse". The skipper said he "could not drink to that toast as he was a Magistrate of the town of**

**Anster but he would send some one to them who would do so", whereupon he went up on deck and sent Uncle Thomas down, who was only too glad to join them in their toast.'**



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## a-z OUR TOWN'S ALPHABET

**A**misfield Park with its golf course so fine a perfect layout on the banks of the Tyne.  
**B**ridges, the Nungate one is quite old spanning the Tyne where there once was a ford.  
**C**ourt Street with banks, the setting is grand County Buildings now where a Palace did stand.  
**D**eluge can come so we must be aware the river can flood bringing grief and despair.  
**E**legant buildings in which we delight, St. Mary's floodlit, a wonderful sight.  
**F**ields surround our town that is known for rich land where good crops are grown.  
**G**arleton Hills where the road wound its way in times that were quieter, not like today.  
**H**aughs by the river so pleasant and green Hardgate widened where old houses had been.  
**I**nspiration we hope the planners will use to preserve our town, that will be good news.  
**J**olly were the old days of markets and fairs crowds and stalls displaying their wares.  
**K**nox, a famous man who lived here others walked our streets in a distant year.  
**L**etham has holdings and we don't want to see houses crammed where green fields should be.  
**M**ills that were busy, now all have gone supermarkets take over, time marches on.  
**N**eilson Park with beautiful floral displays playground where wee ones spend their days.  
**O**ther places not mentioned, there are quite a few like the Sports centre where there's plenty to do.  
**P**laying fields for rugby and football you'll find carefully laid out at the end of Mill Wynd.  
**Q**ueens and Kings have all passed this way our town was a famous one in its day.  
**R**oodlands Hospital we hope to maintain a service for all, the best we must gain.  
**S**treets in our town are all fine and wide but difficult to get to the other side.  
**T**raffic's our problem in our modern days we've too many cars going too many ways.  
**U**pkeep of pavements, bridges and walls keeps the Council busy when that duty calls.  
**V**iews of the hills we don't want to lose, Lammermuir or Garleton, whichever you choose.  
**W**aterloo Bridge marks a historic date, too narrow now, what will be its fate?  
**X**traordinary planning we've questioned before our protests they all choose to ignore.  
**Y**outh Centre where many youngsters spend their leisure time and classes attend.  
**Z**ealous we are and we all agree the planners must listen to you and to me.

N. Gell