

It is particularly difficult to corroborate anything said by witnesses of the 1745 Uprising but the following text shows that Bishop Forbes took some care in making sure that any information he received was corroborated by one or more persons. That is not to say that such statements were true as even though Bishop Forbes questioned other witnesses of events they still gave differing views, such as to dates and places for example. In the following text Bishop Forbes received 15 hand written pages from the Rev. James Hay of Inverness relating to the cruel treatment of Jacobite prisoners detained in Inverness after the battle of Culloden. Hay related to the case of Bellfindlay, mentioned below, and Bishop Forbes corroborated the facts given by Hay when he personally met with Ronald MacDonald of Bellfindlay in Edinburgh some three years after Culloden. Even in that short period time it is possible to see slight differences in these texts that could well be exaggerated over time as these stories passed from person to person.

AJW

Part of the original text relating to Bellfindlay

“Orders were given on the Fryday to ane officer, Hobbie, or such a name, that he should go to the field of batle and cause carry there all the wounded in the neighbouring houses at a miles distance, smile more, some less, and kill them upon the field, which orders were obeyed accordingly. When the orders were given at the levie, an officer who was well pleased told it to his comrades. One of them replyd, ‘D_m him who had taken that order.’ He could not do ane inhumane thing, tho no mercy should be shewn to the rebels.

An officer who heard more than once say that he saw that day seventy-two killed, or, as he termed it, knocked in the head. He was a young captain.

An officer upon his return seeing the field of battle told he saw a beautiful young man quite naked and mortally wounded, who begged of him that he might shoot him, which shocked the officer who said, ‘God forbid, how could you imagine that?’ He replyd that he had seen seventeen shot by an officer and those who were ordered by him. The officer gave him a dram, which he greedily took, and no wonder, and put [him] like a sack upon a horse and carried him to a house where there were wounded redcoats, who were most disagreeable neighbours to him. From that he was carried to a hospital, and thereafter to Anna M’Kays house where there were very poor intertainment, but she did all she possibly could for him. By her care he was preserved, and is now healthy and strong.”

Source: Lyon in Mourning volume III, 1746-75, by the Rev. Robert Forbes, A.M. Bishop of Ross & Caithness. Edited from his manuscript by Henry Paton, M.A for the Scottish History Society and published by University Press, Edinburgh, 1895, pages 302 & 303

Bishop Forbes footnote on page 303, Lyon in Mourning, volume II

Upon reading this paragraph I plainly saw that MacDonald of Bellfinlay behoved to be the person meant in it [see ff. 707, 1171, 1212, 1234], and, there-fore, I waited upon Bellfinlay, (*Ronald MacDonald of Bellfindlay*), in the Canongate (he being still confined with the sore leg), at 12 o’clock on Tuesday, May 23d, 1749, when I read in his hearing the above paragraph, and asked him particular questions about all the circumstances contained in it, to which he gave me plain and distinct answers. Bellfinlay said that he himself behoved certainly to be the wounded person meant in the said paragraph, but that it was not literally true that he (Bellfinlay) desired the officer (Hamilton) positively to shoot him, for that he earnestly begged Hamilton *to have pity upon him or to dispatch him*. To which Hamilton answered, ‘Be not afraid. I don’t believe the sogers will shoot you,’ To this Bellfinlay replied, ‘How can I expect that they will spare me more than those whom they are now dispatching?’ But Bellfinlay mentioned not seventeen or any particular number. Then it was that Hamilton gave Bellfinlay a cordial dram (as Bellfinlay himself termed it), and interposed for his preservation. After this Bellfinlay was put upon a horse (not like a sack, but) astraddle, and was carried to a tenant’s house in the neighbourhood where, there were wounded redcoats, etc. From this house he was taken next day in a cart, and on his way to Inverness he fell ill with Robert Nairn in another cart, and both of them were thus driven to the door of the Church in Inverness, where there were many prisoners confined.

But the sentry would not allow them access, telling that his orders were ‘to allow access to no person whatsoever.’ Then they wore driven (being still quite naked) to the hospital, where the nurse received them with great tenderness making a bed for them near the fire, as she looked upon them to be of Cumberland’s army; but next day when the surgeons came their round and took a note of their names, then the nurse became very surly and ill-natured, mid repented of her kindness to them. The surgeons reported them to some principal officer, who immediately gave orders to remove them out of the hospital (where they had been only one night), and one, Captain Sinclair, of General Ruth’s regiment, who had been in the hospital before them. All the three were carried to a cellar below Anne Mackay’s house, and orders given to take the blankets from them which they had gotten in the hospital. In three weeks Sinclair was removed to a room, having only a slight flesh wound. - ROBERT FORBES, A.M.

Notes:

The church mention in the text was the Old English Church on St. Michaels Mound, close to the banks of the River Ness. The church is now called the Old High Church. Prisoners were crowded into the church after Culloden and many were shot in the attached graveyard attached to the church. There is a gravestone with a groove on the top of the stone where a soldier rested his musket before shooting wounded Jacobites.

The hospital where Bellfindlay was taken to after being refused entry to the church is situated on the opposite bank of the River Ness and almost in line with the church. There is a plaque stating that the building was used as a hospital for Cumberland’s wounded soldiers.