



The Spire Sentinel



**The Newsletter
of The
Branch of The
Front**



**& Magazine
Chesterfield
Western
Association**

Special Edition 2026

Quintinshill

***A journey of Commemoration and Remembrance by
Mark and Jean Macartney***

Our aims are 'Remembrance and Sharing the History of the
Great War'.

Quintinshill – Rail Disaster 22 May 1915

(the worst accident in the history of Britain's railways)

QUINTINSHILL

Britain's
Greatest
Rail Disaster

QUINTINSHILL
1915



Report by Mark Macartney WFA Trustee & Branch Publicity
Administrator

July 2026 (111 years on)

This disaster, the worst rail disaster in British history, has been covered extensively over the years not least by Grant Cullen and myself, so here in my report this year is a brief recap.

To remember this awful incident, I, with my wife Jean, undertook the journey of Remembrance as part of our annual holiday in Scotland

- (1) Larbert Station which was the starting point of the Ill Fated Journey of 1/7th Battalion Royal Scots
- (2) Bridge at the Crash Site
- (3) Memorial at the Cairn at Gretna Blacksmiths Shop Car Park
- (4) Rosebank Cemetery (Edinburgh) Where casualties were buried)
- (5) Leith Community Treatment Centre, where a plaque exists that was dedicated to a bed at Leith Hospital.

We visited the five locations on behalf of The Western Front Association, commemorating 111 years since the accident, although not exactly to the date 22nd May 1915.

I actually lived at Kirkpatrick (the next Station up the track) from Quintinshill, some 2 miles (see map under in part 2) although my visit was on behalf of The Western Front Association. .

I was assisted by Jean who was at times required as a photographer, we carried out the Commemoration at each of the five locations. This completed our plan of the following “memory route” of the 1/7th Battalion Royal Scots on their ill-fated journey.

(a) A WFA plaque (Personalised Metal Sign, with Metallic finish) was affixed to the railings at the bridge close to where the “incident” happened., this replacing original one affixed last year)

(b) A wreath was laid at the cairn at the **Blacksmiths Shop Visitor Centre car park** where there is a WFA Plaque on top of the cairn formed of stones) taken from near the site of the accident. It was erected and dedicated on 21st May 1995 by Scotland “South” Branch of the WFA to commemorate the 80 years since the on 22nd May 1915 Dedicatory bronze plaque, headed by The Western Front Association logo as it was then, on a sandstone slab placed on top of the cairn. Badge of the Royal Scots on two sides of the cairn),

(c) Larbert Station was visited (where the Troop Train set out from. On this visit photos were taken with me next to the memorial. The polished granite plaque is mounted in the main station building and can be viewed on platform 1. Badge of Royal Scots above the inscription. The tablet states that it had been erected by Cllr W Buchanan. The 1/7th Royal Scots departed on route to Gallipoli - The battalion was to proceed to Liverpool and then board the HMT Aquitania but never made it past Quintinshill.

(d) Rosebank Cemetery (Edinburgh) here the memorial journey finished and a wreath was laid. This is where the majority of the fatalities from the ill fated Troop Train are buried. The wreath was laid at the Memorial, TO THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY

(e) Leith Community Treatment Centre, where a plaque exists that was dedicated to a bed at Leith Hospital which is now closed

We remember the Quintinshill Rail Disaster 22nd May 1915- 111 years ago
RIP ALL, you were doing your duty, for the Country and the War Effort,
The 7th Royal Scots - The Royal Regiment, and all those lost here in what is now the peace and tranquility of Quintinshill)

WFA Wreath



Label on Wreath



WFA Plaque fixed to Bridge



Council Plaque on bridge





Mark placing the plaque on the railings at the bridge overlooking the crash site

The crash site as seen on 10th July 2026



The Memorial Cairn 10th July 2026



The WFA Plaque on the cairn





Laying of the Wreath at the Memorial Cairn

Larbert Station 24th July 2026





Memorial Plaque at Larbert Station with Mark preparing to position the WFA Commemorative plaque



The Celtic Cross and the Memorial Wall with the names of all the Royal Scots soldiers who perished at Quintinshill and find eternal rest in Rosebank Cemetery, Edinburgh



The Celtic Cross Memorial at Rosebank Cemetery with Mark Macartney about to lay the WFA Wreath

The Story of the Quintinshill Disaster

Events leading to the crash

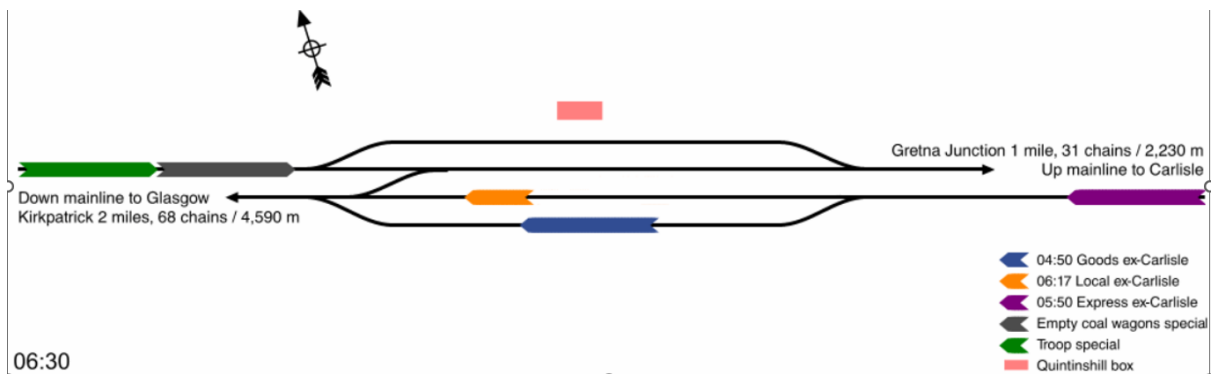
Express trains travelling the whole length of the line could easily suffer delays, and that was the case with the train that had left London Euston shortly before midnight. It was half an hour late when it reached Carlisle and so the decision was made to allow a local train to run ahead of it, rather than behind, and to stop in the loop at Quintinshill to allow the express to pass. Quintinshill had two such loops, on the up and down lines, which were in full view of the signal box. At 6.45am on the morning of 22 May 1915, a troop train carrying soldiers of the 1/7th Battalion Royal Scots crashed into a stationary local passenger train. The accident took place at Quintinshill, near Gretna, and the Royal Scots soldiers on board were mostly from in and around Leith - but they had begun their journey at Larbert railway station.

Casualties to the 1/7 Royal Scots The Royal Regiment, Of those who set off from Larbert (a small town in Central Scotland near Falkirk and Edinburgh), three Officers, 29 Non Commissioned Officers and 182 men were killed or burned to death. All but ten of the **214** fatalities are buried at Edinburgh (Rosebank) Cemetery. The grassed area in front of the wall with the bronze plaques is where the soldiers were buried together in a mass grave in Edinburgh's Rosebank Cemetery. The coffins were laid three deep, with each on the top row covered in the Union Flag. The public were excluded from the cemetery, although 50 wounded servicemen who were convalescing at a nearby military hospital were allowed to attend. The ceremony lasted three hours, at the end of which a volley of three shots was fired, and the Last Post was sounded. The Quintinshill rail disaster was a multi-train rail crash (involving 5 trains) which occurred on 22 May 1915 outside the Quintinshill signal box near Gretna Green in Dumfriesshire, Scotland. In total it resulted in the deaths of 227 people and remains the worst rail disaster in British history.

Up Route is south from Quintinshill to Carlisle

Down Route is north from Quintinshill to Kirkpatrick/Glasgow





The five trains involved were:

Troop train carrying soldiers from the Leith Battalion of the Royal Scots,
Local passenger train, (ex Carlisle)
Glasgow express (ex Carlisle)
Goods train. **Ex Carlisle** & train with empty coal wagons

The situation (on the day)

- a **troop train** carrying soldiers from the Leith Battalion of the Royal Scots, (collided with **local train**)
- a local **passenger train**, hit by **troop train**
- a Glasgow **express** ran into **passenger train**
- wagons (a) The wreckage also included the goods train in the down loop
- wagons. The wreckage also included the wagons of the empty coal train in the up loop



Kirkpatrick signal Box (original)



26th July 2026. Site of Kirkpatrick signal Box, crossing and station buildings



Quintinshill Signal Box (before removal during modernisation)



Gretna Junction Signal Box (before removal during modernisation)

Kirkpatrick railway station was a station which served the rural area around Kirkpatrick Fleming, north of Gretna in the Scottish county of Dumfries and Galloway. It was served by local trains on what is now known as the West Coast Main Line. The nearest station for Kirkpatrick Fleming is now at Gretna Green., Opened by the Caledonian Railway, it became part of the London Midland and Scottish Railway during the Grouping of 1923 and was then closed by British Railways in 1960. The station had a number of sidings, a signal box on the western side controlling the level crossing, a pedestrian overbridge, weighing machine, and goods yard. Today Trains pass at speed on the electrified West Coast Main Line. The station platforms have been demolished, the pedestrian overbridge is still present and the main station buildings survive as private dwellings. The Station (Inn) still stands nearby. (now “The Station”)

The **Quintinshill signal box** controlled two passing loops, one on each side of the double-track Caledonian Main Line linking Glasgow and Carlisle (part of the West Coast Main Line). At the time of the accident, both passing loops were occupied with goods trains, and a northbound local passenger train was standing on the southbound main line.

Gretna railway station was a railway station close to Gretna Green in Scotland. The Caledonian Railway, however, built the station just south of Gretna Junction and the England/Scotland border, in Cumberland (now Cumbria).**History**

The station opened on 9 September 1847. It closed on 10 September 1951. Very little remains of the station now.

The Caledonian Railway station was one of three serving Gretna, The others being: Gretna built by Glasgow, Dumfries and Carlisle Railway in 1848 subsequently taken over by the Glasgow and South Western, which was grouped, along with the Caledonian into the London, Midland and Scottish Railway in 1923. (successor station open)
Gretna built by the Border Union Railway in 1861, subsequently absorbed into the North British Railway before being closed in 1915.

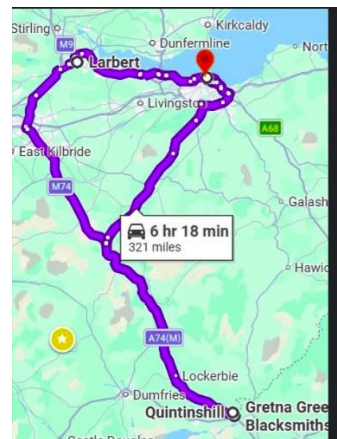


Former Caledonian Station, Gretna , now a private house



Site of former Kirkpatrick Station

Quintinshill to Kirkpatrick (2 Miles) -Gretna (2 Miles)



Note; (Above right) Locations visited by Jean and myself, re-tracing the route taken by this ill-fated troop train casualties ((a) Larbert (b) Quintinshill (c) Blacksmiths shop (d) Rosebank Cemetery (Edinburgh) (e) Leith Treatment Centre (This will follow the chain of Events.)



This map on the left shows the anticipated route that it was thought that the Ill Fated Troop Train took, Larbert (between Falkirk and Stirling) Where the Troop train commenced it's journey at. Maryhill Central Station. (Caledonian Railways) The train diverted via here and picked up Battalion Officers from this station, plus it was thought four (4) children as their skeleton remains were found under the remains of the Troop Train at "Quintinshill disaster site". Quintinshill Siding The Ill Fated "Troop Train" departed Larbert Railway Station en route to Liverpool (via Carlisle)-but unfortunately never made it past Quintinshill.

The remains of the four victims mentioned above thought to be children, were never claimed or identified

In conclusion,

In the early part of the 20th century, managing the movement of trains was simple in theory: one signal box would contact the next signal box to ask permission to send (or 'offer') a train; the principle being that only one train was allowed on the stretch of track between signal boxes at a time. If clear, then the train could proceed uninterrupted. If the track was not clear, or if there was a faster or higher priority train coming behind the current one, then the train could wait in a loop until the line ahead was clear. There were occasions when it was necessary, such as when the loops were occupied, to perform 'wrong line' shunting (transferring a train onto the opposite running line to permit another to pass).

But in this instance - At 6.42am the Kirkpatrick signal box telegraphed Quintinshill Signal Box, offering the troop train on the southbound line, this was accepted. At the same time the Gretna signal box offered him the northbound Glasgow Express again this was accepted. The signaller had failed to look out of the window at the local train just outside. The Signaller stepped out onto the signal box at 6:50am and saw the troop train hurtling down the line.

Crash Site



A WFA plaque (Personalised Sign, with Metallic finish) was affixed to the railings at the **Bridge which overlooks where the "incident" happened**. This replaced the original one affixed last year. The original one did not really require replacing but I decided to use a larger Font



Original font (2025)

larger font (2026)



The Cairn at Gretna Green Blacksmiths Shop Visitor Centre Car Park,



On this year`s visit I noticed that railings had been erected around the cairn Memorial since my last year`s visit., it looks great, and a big improvement, but

in my opinion the plaque and Royal Scots emblems after being weathered over the years could possibly do with some attention (overall the memorial is beginning to look a bit sad) (I have contacted the Blacksmiths Shop Visitor Centre plus Scotland South Branch of the WFA) of my thoughts. I have given the following a little clean, (the WFA plaque looks good but the old WFA Logo needs looking at, I have cleaned one of the Royal Scots symbols but I could not do anything with the one that is directly embossed into the sandstone block, I decided not to touch the sandstone block parts of the cairn as I think that should remain showing the weathered over the years history.

But what must be remembered as stated above, (the memorial Cairn is formed of stones taken from the accident site.). With the plaque placed on a sandstone slab placed on top of the cairn. Badge of the Royal Scots on two sides of the cairn), (Erected by the Scottish Area of The Western Front Association). The WFA (Western Front Association) memorial cairn is a commemorative monument rather than a piece of commercial property although it stands on the grounds of the Famous Blacksmiths Shop Visitor Centre.

Memorial Cairn Ownership and Details

Erected by; The Western Front Association (specifically the South of Scotland Branch in 1995)

Location : The Car Park/Visitor Grounds of The Famous Blacksmiths Shop built using stones salvaged directly from the nearby crash site

Significance: Commemorates the 227 lives lost predominantly soldiers of 1/7 Battalion - Royal Scots- in Britain's worst rail disaster on May 22 1915. I have notified Scotland South Branch of my comments.





Picture of Royal Scots Badge on sandstone block which looks damaged. The metal badges after some cleaning are much improved
The metal badge fixed to sandstone block looking better after cleaning.

While visiting a couple of visitors saw me cleaning it up and suggested it should be pointing towards crash site, an impractical idea in my opinion,

The other suggestion was to have top of cairn angled and not flat., a good idea as rainwater could run off. There is also new fencing round cairn area which certainly is an improvement. Mainly I think is the top of the plaque but I realise the old WFA logo will still need to be used whether it could be repaired on site or a complete new plate may be required.

Larbert Railway Station

A small two platform Station. As usual we visited Larbert Station At dawn on 22nd May, 1915, some 500 officers and men of the Leith Battalion of the Royal Scots Regiment marched, to the sound of pipes, into the Stirlingshire station of Larbert, where a troop train was waiting for them. The First World War was in its tenth month and these new soldiers were on their way to Gallipoli, a peninsula of modern day Turkey, via Liverpool



Maryhill Central

Maryhill Central railway station was a four-platform railway station located in the Maryhill district of Dumbartonshire Railway. Opened for goods traffic in December 1894 and to passengers on 10 August 1896. Maryhill Central railway station was managed by the Caledonian Railway (CR), which had absorbed the Glasgow Central Railway (GCR) Glasgow, Scotland, serving as a key terminus on the Glasgow Central Railway and the Lanarkshire and Dumbartonshire Railways, Maryhill's railway station in 1915 operated during World War 1 to serve local passenger routes and military traffic from the nearby Maryhill Barrack indeed was originally opened as Maryhill Barracks Station on Garrioch Road.

Remains of Maryhill Central today





Map-Maryhill Bks area



Maryhill Central - as it was during WW1

Rosebank Cemetery

The cemetery was developed by the Edinburgh and Leith Cemetery Company. It opened on 20 September 1846 and was extended around 1880. In private ownership until about 1980, it was taken over by the City of Edinburgh Council. Within the grounds, is the Gretna (Quintinshill) Memorial which marks the mass grave of the 215 soldiers killed in the Quintinshill rail disaster in 1915.

Other than what is mentioned above I'm sure that you will find the following snippets very interesting.

As I was laying the wreath on behalf of the WFA a couple of CWGC lads appeared and made themselves known to me, the CWGC lads were so informative - massive chat with them appreciating our association, as I did them (gave them my business card,) they were also full of questions about the Quintinshill Rail line at Gretna (I explained it was actually at Gretna Green) as I lived there, they also asked if I knew that there were Zeppelin raids on Edinburgh, they were very keen to show me a ground plaque of a baby death

as a result of one of these raids.They were keen to help in taking photos of Jean and me, and Jean recepitated. The images under explain this. The CWGC lads did mention that the Monument was commissioned by the Royal Scots but was taken over by the CWGC.



2 young children -same family



CWGC Staff + me at Mass Grave



Mark and Jean at the Celtic Cross Memorial



Plaque on Monument

1/7th



Royal Scots Marker

Leith Community Treatment Centre



The **Leith Community Treatment Centre** is a community Hospital. The centre replaced various outpatient services previously based at the Leith Hospital, (now closed), Mill Lane Medical centre, the Eastern General Hospital and others, opened in June 2004

Once we found the Treatment Centre we had a fantastic informative chat with the receptionist. Helpful does not hit her cooperation, after showing us the specific plaque dedicated to 7th Royal Scots (Leith Territorial Regiment (and other plaques) she even took a photo of Jean and myself in front of all the plaques (including the dedicated one from a bed for Leith Hospital (now closed) there are quite a few plaques on the Reception wall.

Finally, (last but not least)

Let us Remember:

The 7th Royal Scots, "Leith's Own"

And all those lost in this Disaster, in the peace and tranquility of Quintinshill on 22nd May 1915

**"AT THE GOING DOWN OF THE SUN
AND IN THE MORNING
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM"**

As the wording on the WFA plaque reads:

**Remembering the Quintinshill Rail Disaster of May 22nd 1915
(the worst accident in the history of Britain's railways)
(we remember 7th Royal Scots) (The Royal Regiment)
(Always in our thoughts) The Western Front Association**

Some very important literature well worth a read, I found it very informative, as they give you more detail than my report here.

- (a) The Caledonian Railway in the Great War 1914-1919 1 Part 4 The Disaster at Quintinshill May 22nd 1915 by Grant Cullen -
file:///E:/WFA%202)/(8)%20QUINTINSHILL/Report%20(Grant%20Cullen)/TTL165%20Great%20War%20Part%204%20v3%20(6).pdf

(b) The 1/7th Royal Scots and the Quintinshill Rail Disaster : 22 May 1915
by David Tattersfield -

<https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/the-1-7th-royal-scots-and-the-quintinshill-rail-disaster-22-may-1915/>

(c) WFA YouTube by David Carter -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MI6ZjE1SYLk>