

Remembering the Quintinshill Rail Disaster

At 6.45 on the morning of 22 May 1915 disaster struck.

A troop train, carrying soldiers from the 7th Battalion Royal Scots, crashed into a stationary local passenger train near Quintinshill Junction, on the Glasgow to Carlisle railway line, near Gretna in Dumfriesshire.



Gretna Quintinshill Memorial. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com

Minutes after the initial collision a northbound express train ploughed into the wreckage.

Between the crash and the fire, and as a result of subsequent injuries, a total of 216 all ranks of the 7th Battalion Royal Scots died. Twelve others including railway staff and passengers also perished.

The 7th Royal Scots was a territorial battalion recruited mostly from Leith, then a separate Burgh from Edinburgh.

In April 1915 the battalion moved to Larbert, near Falkirk, to train with 52nd Lowland Division before deploying to France. Orders were revised at the last minute which changed the Division's deployment to Gallipoli (Gelibolu in modern Turkey). The Battalion was meant to leave Larbert on 21 May to board the troopship Aquitania in Liverpool, but she ran aground in the Mersey, and the move was delayed for twenty

four hours.



Gretna Quintinshill Memorial. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
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The accident was devastating to the people of Leith and Edinburgh – and hundreds of families were directly affected by the tragedy. Many of those who died are buried in a communal grave in Rosebank Cemetery. The cemetery is located at the junction of Broughton Road and Pilrig Street, where the entrance is.



Gretna Quintinshill Memorial. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
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On 12 May 1916, a Memorial was unveiled by the Earl of Rosebery, Honorary Colonel of the Battalion in the cemetery. It takes the form of a Celtic cross, standing 15ft 6ins, made from Peterhead granite with an inscription and an explanatory plaque to the front, and shields, bearing the Regimental Badge and Leith Burgh Coat-of-Arms.

On either side to the rear, against the cemetery wall, are tablets each with five bronze plaques. On these plaques are the names of 216 who died in, or immediately after the disaster, arranged by rank, and in alphabetical order. The memorial is well sign-posted and is located in the north west corner of the cemetery.



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The Quintinshill Rail Disaster remains, to this day, the worst rail disaster in British history. A more complete history of the disaster and the unfolding events was written by our

colleague Mike Smith for the [100th anniversary of the tragedy](#).