

# Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## KILSYTH

15 August 1645

Local Authority: North Lanarkshire

NGR centred: NS 739 786

### Overview

The battle of Kilsyth was the largest battle to be fought between Scottish Royalist and Government Troops during the Civil War period. It was the sixth battle of the campaign of the Marquis of Montrose on behalf of Charles I and was to be his last victory.

The battle was a crushing defeat for the Covenanters (Scottish Presbyterians opposed to interference by the Stuart Kings in the affairs of the Church of Scotland) who reportedly lost of more than half of their army. This loss left no effective Covenanter force in Scotland and resulted in the Scottish Parliament recalling a Scottish Regiment from the fighting in England. However, their dramatic victory at Kilsyth had little long term effect for the Royalist cause, and Montrose, unable to raise much support in the Lowlands, was defeated at Philiphaugh in September 1645. The victory at Kilsyth had already come too late for Charles 1, whose defeat at Naseby in June had effectively ended his ability to continue his campaign.

### The Battle

In the morning of 15 August 1645, the armies marched towards each other, the Covenanters under Lieutenant-General William Baillie from the north-east and Montrose's Royalist army from their overnight billet in Kilsyth to the west. The Covenanter army probably numbered some 3,500 foot compared to about 3,000 Royalists under Montrose and Alistair Mac Colla. However, Montrose probably had an advantage in cavalry, with perhaps 600 to Baillie's 300.

Wary of the enemy after his defeat at Alford in July, Baillie drew up his army in a strong defensive position while the Royalist army was still on the march. He seems to have been on the southern side of the Kelvin valley on Giral Hill near Kelvinhead and Ruchill. He was reluctant to engage Montrose and the previous day had deliberately not come close enough to Montrose to risk coming to battle. However, he was under the direction of the Committee of Estates, who represented the theocracy that ran Covenanter Scotland. They had no intention of giving Montrose an opportunity to escape and ordered an advance towards Kilsyth. Then, unsatisfied with Baillie's initial defensive deployment, they directed Baillie to run his deployment to an adjacent hill on their right hand side (i.e. to the north), but this placed his forces at a great disadvantage as they could not make the move in battle formation. As Baillie attempted this difficult move, and before either army was fully deployed, they were drawn into action by the precipitate engagement of vanguard commanders on both sides. A fire-fight developed for control of cottages and enclosed gardens as Montrose's vanguard advanced in loose order up the glen. As the fight developed with an ill-disciplined counter-attack against the Covenanter vanguard, Montrose was forced to commit more troops as both the infantry and his supporting cavalry came under severe threat. With Baillie still desperately trying to deploy from line of march, his vanguard was driven back and the whole army collapsed into rout while Baillie himself tried unsuccessfully to bring in his reserves to hold the line. The whole Royal

## Inventory of Historic Battlefields

army, horse and foot, now pursued the enemy, the pursuit and execution extending for some 14 miles. Baillie himself nearly came to grief in the rout as he became mired in Dullatur Bog; he was able to escape to Stirling Castle, although few of his cavalry escort did.

### Events & Participants

Victory over the Covenanters at Alford in July had opened the way into the Lowlands for Montrose, who now moved south unopposed. However, his hope that he would now have supporters flocking to him was not to be realised. Despite all of his successes, Montrose was attracting few new supporters and the Covenanter government appeared to be as secure as ever. As he advanced on Glasgow, he had two Covenanter armies in pursuit: one under the Earl of Lanark and the other under William Baillie, who Montrose had defeated at Alford in July. As Baillie caught up at Kilsyth, Montrose decided to turn and fight.

The historically significant figures in the battle were Montrose, Mac Colla and Baillie. Montrose was the leader of the Royalist cause in Scotland and had fought a series of battles across the Highlands as he attempted to rally Scotland to the king's cause and also to relieve pressure on the king by forcing the Parliamentarians to send troops north to deal with him.

Alistair Mac Colla was a MacDonald fighting against the Campbells of Argyll and the Protestant Covenant as a Catholic. He fought in Ireland against the Protestant settlers, and was sent to Scotland to aid the Royalist cause in 1644, leading an army of Ulstermen and MacDonalds. He joined Montrose and had been with him in all of the battles from Tippermuir onwards.

William Baillie was a veteran soldier who had led a regiment under Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden on the Continent in the 1630s. He commanded the Scottish vanguard at Marston Moor, and had commanded the Covenanter army in the defeat at Alford in July 1645.

### Physical Remains & Potential

Numerous antiquarian discoveries have been made in the general area of the battlefield, although none were accurately located. Large amounts of musket balls were recorded in the *Old Statistical Account* in 1791 (an account of each parish compiled by the local minister in the 1790s) as being found in the ground at Bullet Knowe, while a cannon ball was discovered in the grounds of Colzium House. Coins, a sword hilt and part of a saddle were recorded from an unspecified location in the *New Statistical Account* in 1841 (a similar account produced in the 1830s).

Human remains were apparently encountered during the 18<sup>th</sup> century construction of the Forth-Clyde canal, including a man mounted on his horse found during the draining of Dullatur Bog. There is also a tradition of Covenanter burials at Craigstone, while in 1829 there was the accidental discovery of what was described as the burials of drummers and fifers at Auchincloach.

Apart from the 19<sup>th</sup> century construction of Banton Loch, the majority of the area of the battle appears to have remained undisturbed and the potential for surviving in-situ evidence associated with the battle is high. Due to the reported heavy fire-fights throughout the battle, a large amount of musket balls could be located across the battlefield. There may also be cannon shot, either round shot (a spherical solid projectile without explosive charge, fired from a cannon) such as the Colzium House example or case shot (a thin metal case containing a large number of bullets or other

## **Inventory of Historic Battlefields**

small projectiles) and the rout may have contributed to the deposition of personal items such as buttons and coins. Given the high mortality reported amongst the Covenanter troops, there is also great potential for further burials to lie within the battlefield.

### **Cultural Association**

The Battle of Kilsyth has drawn little popular attention and has left no trace in popular culture through ballads or verse. There are two modern monuments within the designated area; one within the grounds of Colzium House commemorating the battleground and one on the south side of Banton Loch erected by the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Montrose Society in 2003. There is no on-site interpretation. A battlefield memorial to Francis Gordon (one of Baille's cavalry) was apparently removed from the battlefield to Kilsyth parish churchyard.

Local traditions are positioned in the landscape through a number of place names, most notably Baggage Knowe, Slaughter Howe, Bullet Knowes and Drum Burn.

### **Battlefield Landscape**

The general location of the battle is well established, but within this broad area the exact location of the preliminary deployments and action is open to considerable dispute as the landscape descriptions within primary sources are extremely vague. These sources are further confused due to the battle beginning whilst both armies were still manoeuvring. As there are numerous interpretations of the location of the fighting and deployments in the different secondary works on the battle, the debate is only likely to be resolved through archaeological field work.

The Covenanters seem to have initially taken up position on higher ground on the south side of the valley, perhaps on or close to Giral Hill. Baille was then told to move north to deploy across the line of the valley by the Committee of the Estates.

An important landscape feature of the battle was an area of cottages and gardens that saw the initial exchanges of fire. Unfortunately, there is insufficient detail in the primary sources to locate these structures in the landscape, but physical elements may have survived which could be recovered through fieldwork.

Some of the secondary works place the Royalist advance and the initial deployment at the bottom of the valley, meaning that part of the battlefield may lie under Banton Loch. However, Roy's 18<sup>th</sup> century map shows the bottom of the valley as marshland and it is likely that this was the case in 1645. It is also possible that the marsh was dry given the summer date of the battle.

The battle was fought across the north side of the valley of the River Kelvin, on the lower slopes of the Kilsyth Hills. While the exact location of the battle and the initial deployments of the armies may be unclear, the broad landscape of the battleground survives largely as open countryside with areas of farmland and forestry plantations. Extensive areas have been dramatically transformed with the drainage of marshland for the construction of Banton Loch, field enclosure and the development of Banton village. Giral, Ruchill and Shawend hills appear to be the high ground which the Covenanter army stood overlooking the glen of the Shaw End Burn to the west and the low marshland to the north are still open ground and these important views are intact. This high ground was key to the outcome of the battle, as the Covenanter army made its ill judged movements from one hill to another causing the discipline of the battle array to dissolve. The complex broken terrain of houses and enclosures which formed the battleground has not been located, but the spatial relationships

## Inventory of Historic Battlefields

between the hill summits to the south, the location of the former marshland at Banton Loch and the approach of the Royalist army east from Kilsyth are clear.

Apart from the loch, the main alteration to the landscape in the proximity of the battlefield is the construction of the Forth-Clyde canal. Kilsyth has expanded considerably eastward since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but it has not impinged on the battlefield, and the presence of Colzium House has acted as a barrier to the urban growth.

### Inventory Boundary

The Inventory boundary defines the area in which the main events of the battle are considered to have taken place (landscape context) and where associated physical remains and archaeological evidence occur or may be expected (specific qualities). The landscape context is described under *battlefield landscape*: it encompasses areas of fighting, key movements of troops across the landscape and other important locations, such the position of camps or vantage points. Although the landscape has changed to some extent since the time of the battle, key characteristics of the terrain at the time of the battle can still be identified, enabling events to be more fully understood and interpreted in their landscape context. Specific qualities are described in under *physical remains and potential*: these include landscape features that played a significant role in the battle, other physical remains, such as enclosures or built structures, and areas of known or potential archaeological evidence.

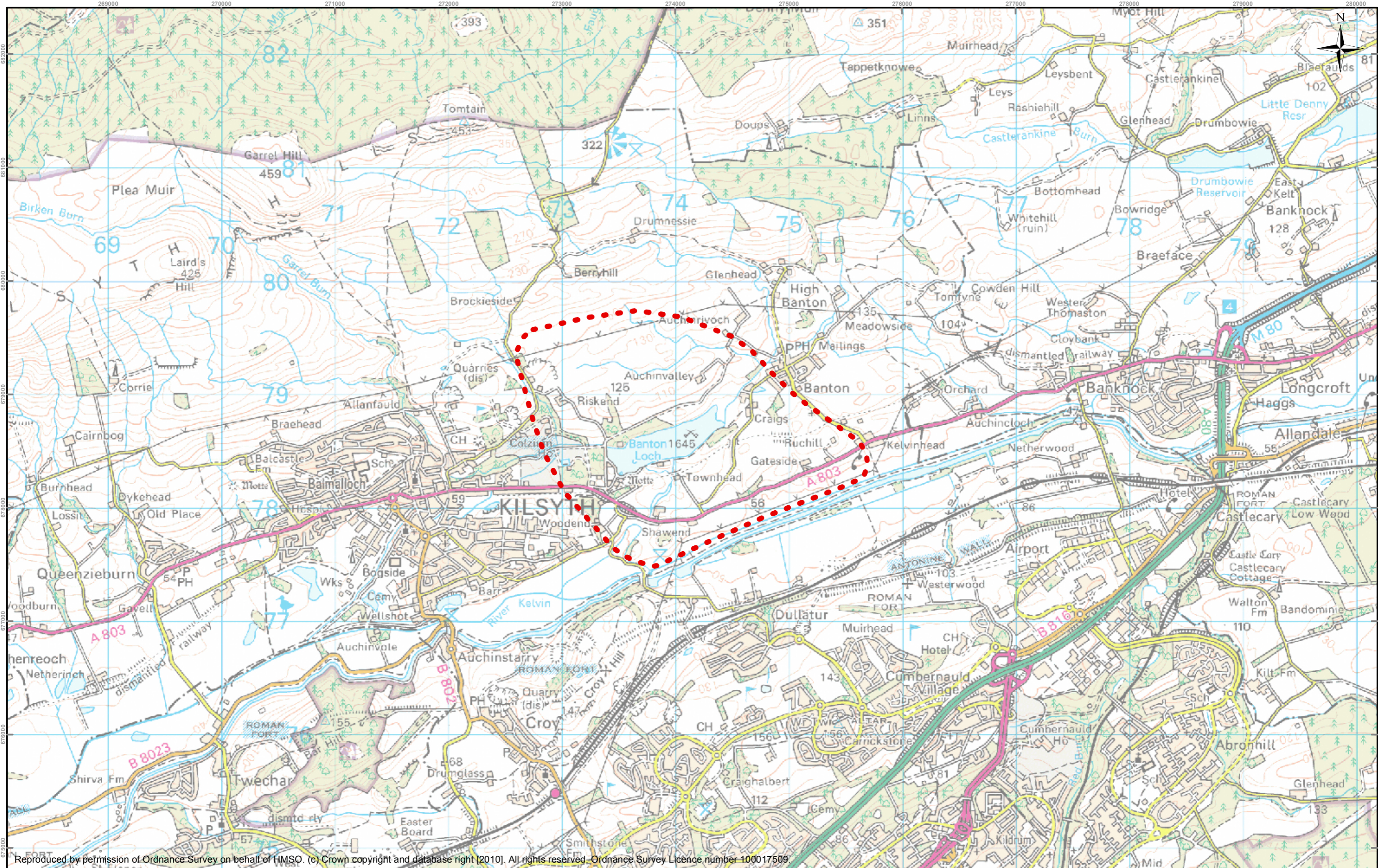
The Inventory boundary for the Battle of Kilsyth is defined on the accompanying map and includes the following areas:

- The modern A803 from Ruchill to Shawend and lands adjacent to the north and south. The probable approach line of the Covenanter army and their initial deployment on a hill overlooking the glen. The identification of the hill is unknown but the likely candidates are to be Ruchill, Giral Hill or Shawend.
- Military findspots including Bullet Knowes where musket balls were common at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and reports of discoveries of human remains throughout the defined area.
- Local traditions positioned in the landscape through place names, notably Baggage Know, Slaughter Howe, Bullet Knowes and Drum Brae.
- The modern A803 from Shawend to North Barrwood and the minor Coach Road to the south. The probable approach of the Royalists from Kilysth.
- The settlements of Shawend and Wester Auchinrivoch. Farm buildings and enclosures are shown on Roy's 18<sup>th</sup> century map close to these locations. Primary sources indicate that main battle took place around houses and enclosures.
- The well preserved landscape characteristics of the battlefield including the views across the valley from the hills of Giral and Ruchill, the glen of the Shaw End Burn and the lower hill slopes to the west of Banton.

### Relevant Publications

Gardiner, S. R. 1893 *History of the Great Civil War: 1644-45*. Longman, London.

Reid, S. 1990 *The Campaigns of Montrose: a military history of the Civil War in Scotland 1639 to 1646*. Mercat Press, Edinburgh.



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•••• Inventory Boundary

0 250 500 Metres

# BATTLE OF KILSYTH

15th August 1645

North Lanarkshire  
NGR: NS739786

HISTORIC SCOTLAND ALBA AOSMHOR

