

# **The Inventory of Historic Battlefields**

## **The Battle of Kilsyth**

### **Designation Record and Summary Report**

**The Inventory of Historic Battlefields is a list of nationally important battlefields in Scotland.** A battlefield is of national importance if it makes a contribution to the understanding of the archaeology and history of the nation as a whole, or has the potential to do so, or holds a particularly significant place in the national consciousness. For a battlefield to be included in the Inventory, it must be considered to be of national importance either for its association with key historical events or figures; or for the physical remains and/or archaeological potential it contains; or for its landscape context. In addition, it must be possible to define the site on a modern map with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

**The aim of the Inventory is to raise awareness of the significance of these nationally important battlefield sites and to assist in their protection and management for the future.** Inventory battlefields are a material consideration in the planning process. The Inventory is also a major resource for enhancing the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of historic battlefields, for promoting education and stimulating further research, and for developing their potential as attractions for visitors.

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# Inventory of Historic Battlefields

## KILSYTH

Alternative Names: None

15 August 1645

Local Authority: North Lanarkshire

NGR centred: NS 739 786

Date of Addition to Inventory: 21 March 2011

Date of last update: 14 December 2012

## Overview and Statement of Significance

Kilsyth is significant as the largest battle fought within Scotland during the period of the Civil Wars. It is the last battle in which the Marquis of Montrose would be victorious for the Royalist cause, and destroys the last Covenanter army remaining within Scotland. Although it left the Royalists effectively in military control of Scotland, this proved to be short lived, as they were heavily defeated at Philiphaugh soon after, by a Covenanter force recalled from England under Leslie. Kilsyth is also significant as it is a very rare example of a 17<sup>th</sup> century battle fought within a substantially enclosed landscape, rather than the open ground generally favoured by armies at the time.

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, who reportedly lost 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 I, whose defeat at Naseby in June had effectively ended his ability to continue his campaign.

## 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 as the positions of camps or vantage points. Although the landscape has changed since the time of the battle, key characteristics of the terrain at the time of the battle can normally still be identified, enabling events to be more fully understood and interpreted in their landscape context. Specific qualities are described under *physical remains and potential*: these include landscape features that played a significant role in the battle, other physical remains,

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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 Ruchill, Giral Hill or Shawend.
- Artefact 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 Kilsyth.
- 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 in and around houses and enclosures.
- The well preserved overall 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.

## **Historical Background to 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 Alasdair 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

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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 Royalist 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 eventually able to escape to Stirling Castle, although few of his cavalry escort were so lucky.

## **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.

James Graham was the fifth Earl of Montrose and the first Marquis of Montrose. He was the chief of Clan Graham. Montrose had been a supporter and signatory of the National Covenant in 1638, but had then become a Royalist, although he was driven by motives other than a desire to impose the Divine Right of Kings upon Scotland. He and Archibald Campbell, the eighth Earl of Argyll, were bitter rivals, and Montrose believed that the Covenant had become nothing more than a vehicle for Argyll's ambition. Always a moderate among the Covenanters, Montrose considered that the agreement in 1641 with Charles that had removed episcopacy from Scotland had fulfilled the demands of the Covenant and that to continue in opposition to him would be breaking that agreement. Following the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant in September 1643, Montrose presented himself to Charles I service at his headquarters in Oxford. On behalf of the King, he then fought a campaign intended to draw Covenanter forces away from supporting the Parliamentarians in England, and in this it was a success. Montrose fought a series of seven battles against Covenanter armies across the Highlands in 1644 and 1645, beginning with Tippermuir and ending at Philiphaugh, where he suffered his only defeat. He attempted to do the same on behalf of Charles II in 1650, but on this occasion fought only a single battle at Carbisdale. After his defeat there, he was captured and brought to Edinburgh for trial. On 21 May 1650, he was hanged and then beheaded. His head was fixed to a spike on Edinburgh's Tollbooth, his body quartered, and his limbs were displayed in

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Stirling, Glasgow, Perth and Aberdeen. Following the Restoration of Charles II as king in 1660, Montrose's remains were collected together once more and were interred in the High Kirk of St Giles in Edinburgh in May 1661.

Alasdair Mac Colla was the son of Coll "Colkitto" MacDonald. He is widely credited with the creation of the "Highland Charge", a tactic used with such devastating effect by Highlanders throughout the subsequent century, although some of the credit should likely also go to his compatriot Manus O' Cahan. He had fled to Ireland in 1638 to escape Campbell depredations in MacDonald territory within Scotland, and he fought for the MacDonnell Earl of Antrim in the Irish Rebellion of 1641. In 1644, he was dispatched to Scotland with between 1500 and 2000 Ulster and MacDonald troops to support Royalist efforts there, and to attempt to draw Covenanter forces out of Ireland and relieve pressure on the Irish Confederacy. Mac Colla gladly accepted the task, as Archibald Campbell, the Earl of Argyll, was not only the leading Covenanter in Scotland, he was also the clan chief of the Campbells, giving Mac Colla a chance to strike back against his hated foe. He landed in Argyll lands in July, immediately seizing the castle at Mingary. He continued to build his support in the north-west until he finally moved to Blair Atholl, where he joined his forces with Montrose at the end of August. This was the beginning of an immensely successful partnership, with Mac Colla present at the Royalist victories at Tippermuir, Aberdeen, Inverlochy, Auldearn and Kilsyth. However, Mac Colla's focus remained in his homelands in the north-west, so when Montrose moved south towards England, Mac Colla dispatched Manus O' Cahan with 700 of the Irish troops to go with Montrose while he returned to the north-west. After Montrose's defeat at Philiphaugh, Mac Colla continued to fight against the Campbells and the Covenanters in Scotland, with particular brutality displayed to any Campbells he encountered, until a concerted effort to defeat him in 1647 forced him to withdraw back to Ireland in May 1647. Later that year Mac Colla was serving in the Confederate Army of Munster when he was captured and shot at the Battle of Knocknanuss on 13 November.

William Baillie was the commander of the Covenanter army recalled to Scotland after the destruction of Sir John Hurry's army at Auldearn. Baillie was a veteran soldier who had led a regiment under Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden on the Continent in the 1630s. He had also commanded the Scottish vanguard at Marston Moor. He spent May and June manoeuvring after Montrose and trying to bring him to battle, only to be defeated by the Royalists at Alford. Baillie continued to pursue Montrose after this, however, facing him a second time at Kilsyth, although he had actually tendered his resignation to Parliament on 4 August 1645 as a result of the earlier defeat. By the time of Kilsyth, Baillie was still in command of the army because his successor had not yet been appointed. He was therefore in the difficult position of being both in command of the army but with all of his officers aware that he had already resigned under a cloud.

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## 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. Baillie 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 on 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 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.

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### Archaeological and Physical Remains and Potential

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 such as the Colzium House example or case shot 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.

The physical remains of the battle, where not already out of reach due to the construction of the Banton Loch in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, should be extensive because of the intensity of the fire-fights. There is one record of bullet distribution, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, on Bullet Knowes

‘In the Bullet Knowe and neighbourhood, bullets are found every year; and in some places so thick, that you may lift three or four without moving a step.’ (Sinclair 1791)

Coins are also reported to be most commonly found in the battlefield area, though no specific location is given. This raises problems for the Auchinrivoch interpretation of the battle, and would suggest substantial action close to where the main road crosses the Shaw End Burn. A traditional site of Covenanter burial lies even closer to Kilsyth, to the west of Craigstone Wood, but in the absence of firm evidence of association with the battle the attribution appears improbable as it seems to lie too far to the west (WoSAS SMR number 48,798). Other reports of finds of human remains are equally widely scattered, from Slaughter Howe in the north to Dullatur Bog in the south, indeed it was said that

‘bones and skeletons maybe dug up everywhere; and in every little bog or marsh for 3 miles’ (Sinclair, 1791).

In 1841, further reports were made of burial discoveries

‘on the land of Wester Auchincloach, north-east of Kelvinhead, human bones have been frequently dug up. About twelve years ago, a quantity of human bones, mostly of a small size, were found in a corner of a field, north of Wester Auchincloach. The tradition that the drummers and fifers were buried there, was thus confirmed.’

As this is in the line of the pursuit, it has perhaps has more likelihood of a link to the action. Other references include discoveries of the hilt of a sword and part of a saddle, and various coins (Anon 1841), but no locations are given and even the discovery of several bodies when the Firth/Clyde canal was dug through Dullatur Bog in c.1770 is vague and gives no real locational information. Even recent finds have no sure association, such as the ‘well rusted cannonball’ of 1.5 pounds which was reported in 1980 as ‘recently’ found in the House policies, now a public park, and given to the museum (Millar 1980).

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## 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 Baillie'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.

## Select Bibliography

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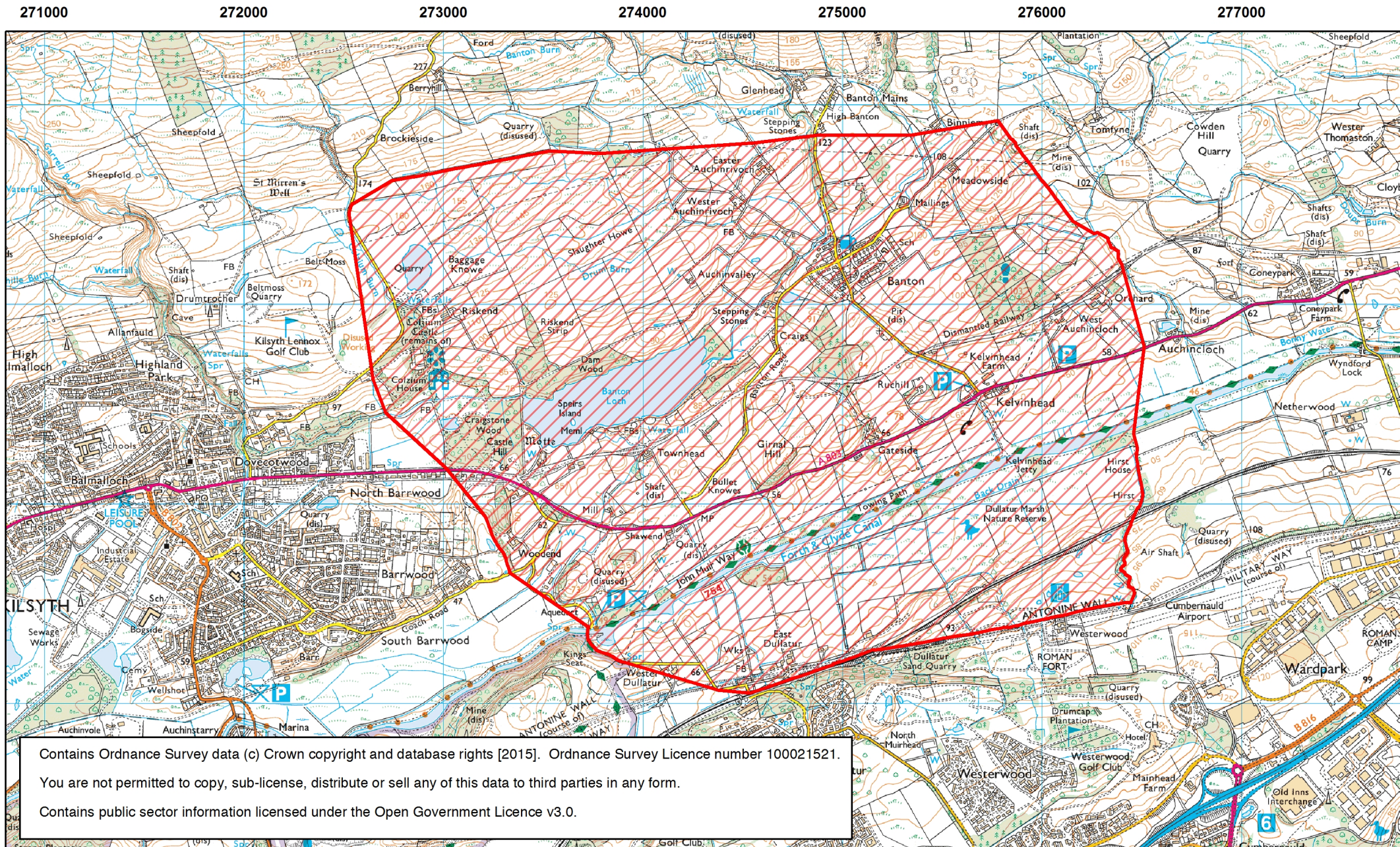
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# The Inventory of Historic Battlefields - Boundary


Kilsyth

15 August 1645

Local Authority: North Lanarkshire



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