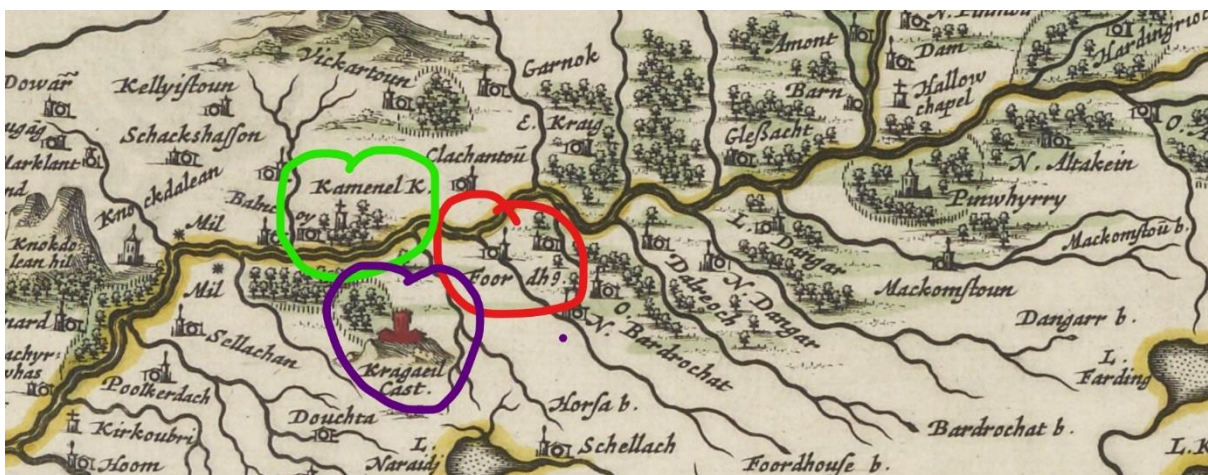


Colmonell – a brief history using maps

In the past a safe river crossing point was an important location where routes converged and a focus for the development of a settlement and this seems to be the case with the development at Colmonell. The earliest river crossings were fords and often provided a meeting point for routes crisscrossing the landscape and a place where an inn or Fordhouse was built perhaps providing somewhere for travellers to stay if the river was in spate.

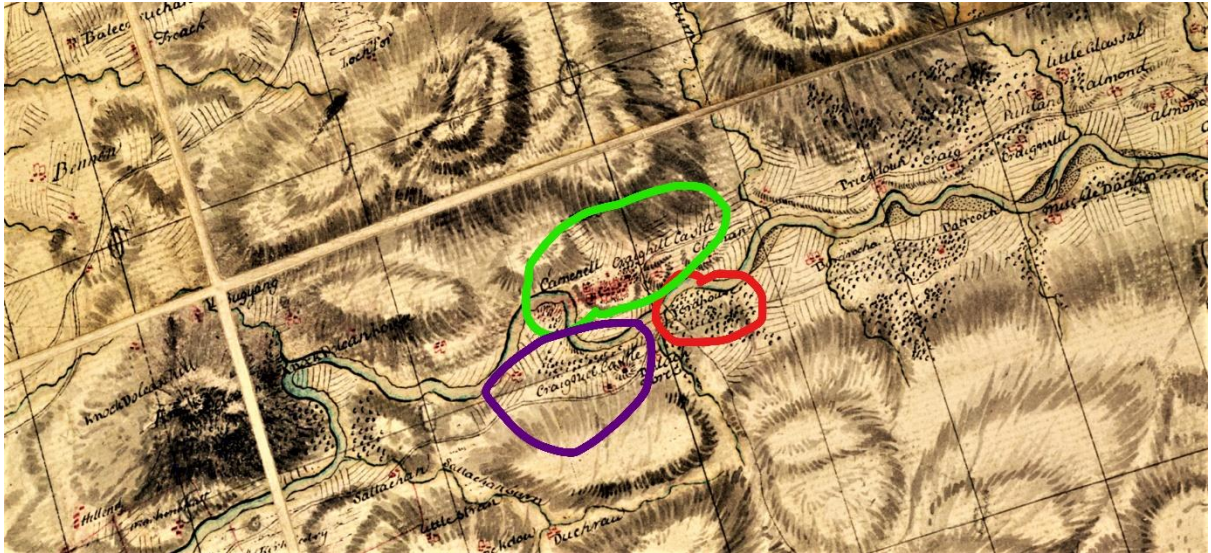
High ground on both sides of the river provided good strategic locations to see and be seen, a land form that is easy to defend, where use of the ford may be controlled or simply a convenient place to access. Whatever the reason it was an attractive place to settle and there is evidence of ancient people living in the area with a number of ancient cairns nearby and the development of a castle on high ground to the south.

Churches were often built in the centre of medieval parish so that the place of worship was accessible to all. However, it would appear that the lower reaches of the valley were more densely populated than the higher ground and the association with an existing castle and a crossing point resulted in the Parish Church being built in the western end of the parish. The high ground overlooking the ford was an ideal place to locate a parish church because it offered a central location from which routes radiated out across both sides of the valley providing a convenient place for worship.



Blaeu map printed in 1654 based on a survey by Pont in the 1590s shows the church as Kamenel K (Kirk), Kragaeil Cast. (Castle) and Foordhe (Fordhouse)

As the population grew and became more prosperous so the need to travel increased. Routes were formalised and roads linked settlements to the south, east and west converging at the crossing point. A settlement grew in an organic way on the north side of the river along the route between the ford and the church. The growing village would have been a centre providing services and a draw for merchants and tradesmen serving the castles and surrounding rural population.



Roy's Military map of 1750 illustrates the settlement pattern named Camenell adjacent to Craighill Castle with Craighuel Castle across the river to the south and Fordhouse at the river crossing.

The population also grew in the remoter parts of the parish so it became desirable to provide more convenient places to worship. Chapels were constructed that were out posts from the mother church at Colmonell. A chapel was built at Barrhill in the 1750s and the minister held services there every 4th Sunday.



A map hung in the Parish Church dated 1814 shows a snapshot of a time of great change when the village of Colmonell, as we know it today, was formed. As agricultural improvements changed the way land was farmed landowners also became aware of the potential to create new or improve existing settlements.

The map appears to show a planned settlement with new plots on the northside of the road that were to replace the old houses that once lined the track (shown to the west of the new road) down to the old ford. A straight road joins the village to the new bridge. Each plot was feued out with additional plots of land for gardens and conditions were probably included to control the quality of construction of new buildings within a set time limit. The map includes the names of people who had purchased the feus.

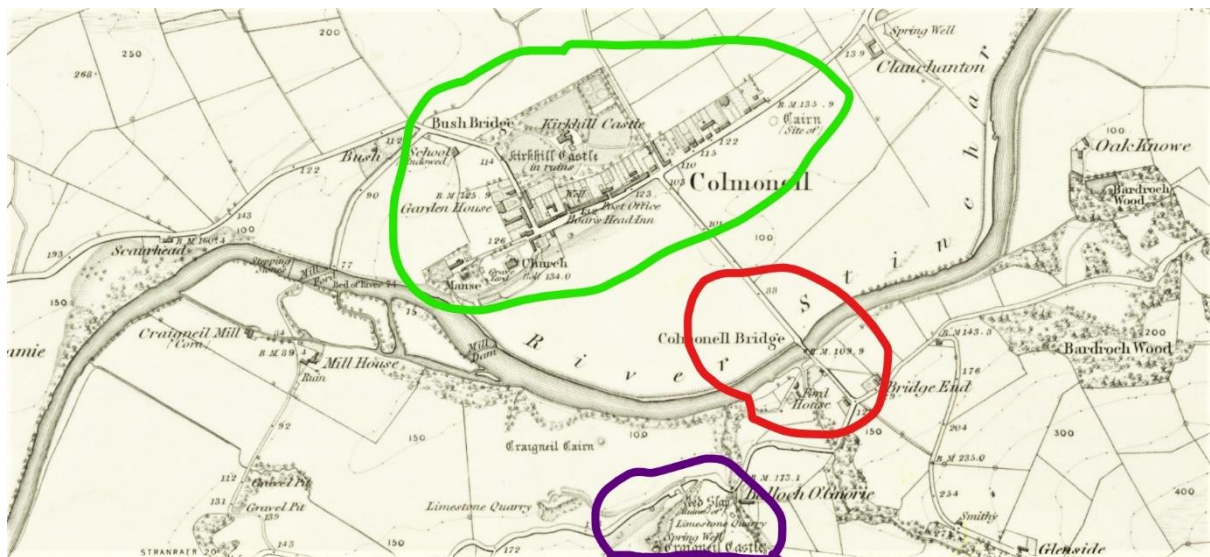
A dam in the river and mill race is shown on the map down stream of the bridge.

Pencilled in to the right side of the map is a revised line of the road and a mansion and offices near the farm buildings (mains). The road was been realigned however no mansion was built in this location. The island in the river also shows a pencil line reclaiming land and creating a bend in the river.

A 1841 plan of Knockdolian Estate immediately to the west of Colmonell provides details of place names, field names and land use;

https://www.ballantrae.org.uk/timeline_slider_post/1840s/

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map published in 1858 shows that the full extent of the feu plots were not developed. The mansion of Kirkhill Castle had been erected adjacent to the old castle and the manse has been relocated. The old track down to the ford is no longer shown but Fordhouse remains on the south side of the river. Craigneil Castle is shown as a ruin. Mill dam, race and mill are shown down stream of the bridge.



All maps can be accessed on the National Library of Scotland website;

<https://maps.nls.uk/>